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You Can Inspire Me To Live Further: Explicating Pre-reflexive Bridges to the Other

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Abstract: This purpose of this paper is to provide an exploration of how one can affect the other to live further. The theoretical articulations of Carl Rogers and Eugene Gendlin are examined on the concept of presence; Gendlin's terminologies of felt meaning and felt sense are examined; the understanding of the other is viewed from Gendlin's articulation of crossing. Throughout this paper, the discussion of these person-centered and experiential concepts is staged on the interplay of the pre-reflexive and reflexive modes of consciousness. From these theoretical considerations and examples from Rogers' and the author's sessions, the paper concludes that explications from the felt sense of the other can inspire the other to live further.

Keywords: Presence, Felt Meaning, Felt Sense, Crossing, Pre-reflexive/Reflexive Mode of Consciousness, Eugene Gendlin, Carl Rogers.

1 PRESENCE

Let me start with my favorite story.

One summer day, I was washing my car. I showered the car with the hose from the faucet and I had a sponge in my hand as I was

spreading the car wash on the roof of my car. Just as I started to spread the foams on the roof of the car, I felt that someone was watching me.

To be more precise, I felt that my body was being pulled towards the right side, and that someone was watching me from across the street to the right side of me. I did not have to *think* of what I was to do next. My neck and torso "automatically" turned slowly towards the right, in the direction from which my body felt the gaze.

There! A dog! A dog was sitting attentively on the other side of the street, looking at me intensely. The dog was not barking, as it made no sound. Nor did the dog wag its tail. The dog was gazing at me with full attention. I did not *think* of what to do next,

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"automatically" there was a smile on my face. It felt like there was suddenly, a warm glow in my body. I don't know if this is fantasy or reality, but it felt as if the dog had also smiled at me.

The dog was on a leash. The lady who was walking the dog pulled the leash and said, "let's go now, let's go!" The dog got up and took a step and then flipped around and sat again, looking straight at me, again. I did not have to *think* of what to do next. My body already put down the sponge and turned the water faucet off and started to walk across the street to greet the dog. Once I squatted down next to the dog, the dog was all over me, licking my face, brushing its fur all over my body and showing its tummy to me. The dog was so happy and excited. The lady who was walking the dog said to me: "sorry to interrupt what you were doing. This dog can identify people who love dogs". I greatly enjoyed the few

minutes of our encounter.

After I parted with the dog, and finished washing the car, I sat inside the room with the glow still felt in my body¹. What was this glow all about? I didn't *know*. But much of life is like this anyway. Things happen and change you *before* you know about it. In other words, much happens *pre-reflexively*. Now, I decided to sit down and *reflect* on this experience. As I *re-experienced* the event, several interesting theoretical points came up in me.

First of all, what struck me as I reflected was the power this dog had. The dog did not say anything, not even a bark. The dog's gaze was so powerful that it made me stop whatever I was doing. The dog's gaze literally "took me" across the street. Another way of saying this is that the *presence* of the dog instantly affected me in a very powerful way. As I thought of this, I recalled many situations in which the presence of the other affects me. A smile a certain person has, already puts a smile on my face, before I know why, for example. The presence of the other affects you, before you know about it.

Let us now turn to Carl Rogers, to see what he wrote about presence.

I find that when I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then, simply my *presence* is releasing and helpful to the other. There is nothing I can do to force this experience, but when I can relax and be close to the transcendental core of me, then I may behave in strange and impulsive ways in the relationship, ways which I cannot justify rationally, which have nothing to do with my thought processes. But these strange behaviors turn out to be *right* in some odd way: it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. (Rogers 1980, p.129)

¹ I thank Michael Lux for referring me to an article by Nagasawa,

M. et al (2009) that shows that a dog's gaze can increase the levels of the neuropeptide oxytocin in its owner. Physiological changes such as these occur pre-reflexively, and can later be 'explained' by scientific findings.

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I must beg your pardon, Dr. Carl Rogers, to compare you with a dog. However there are some parallels here between my experience with this dog and the quote. Yes, it does seem like the dog's inner spirit has reached out and touched my inner spirit. And "simply my (the dog's) presence is releasing and helpful to the other (to me)." Also, the dog must have been behaving in "strange and impulsive ways", to sit down and intently watch a man washing his car, and this must have been interpreted as a particularly impulsive move from the viewpoint of the lady who wanted to continue the walk.

Rogers wrote that he cannot justify rationally these behaviors and that they have nothing to do with his thought processes. As in my example of the dog, my act of crossing the street to greet the dog had nothing to do with my thought process. I did not reason that this course of action was most appropriate. Probably the dog also had no conceptual reason to be watching a man wash his car.

Rather than rational thought, my *body* turned to the direction from which I felt the gaze. Without any thought process, my body had crossed the street and squatted in front of this dog "automatically", as if were. The body responds to the situation *pre-reflexively*.

Eugene Gendlin (1992) articulated how our bodies interact with the situation before perception. The unity of the world cannot be

broken up by percepts, such that there is a perceived dog there and a perceiving subject here, and the percept in between. Our bodies do not have percepts and then think about them, inducing a logically correct next set of actions to be executed by our bodies. Rather, the body already interacts with the situation (environment) before we have percepts and thoughts.

The dog had affected my body before I perceived the dog. My body felt that "someone was watching me," before I found the dog sitting across the street. My body had crossed the street to greet the dog, before I could perceive if the dog was friendly or hostile. The dog was not barking, nor wagging its tail. The dog sat very still, just watching me. I had no clue to perceive if the dog was friendly. Yet, my *body* was sure that it was pulled towards the dog in a friendly manner. My body and the dog were already interacting in a pre-reflexive bodily way, before percepts, thoughts, words (barks), or gestures (tail-wagging).

My body responded to the dog before perceiving the attitude of the dog or before making any judgments. We can also say that the dog affected me *pre-reflexively*, before I reflected on whether this dog was friendly or not, or before I could think of how I *should* act towards this dog.

Eugene Gendlin does not write much about presence. In a short lovely passage, however, he describes presence as an essential condition of therapy. Clearly, he does not regard it as a special, "slightly altered state of consciousness" as Rogers did.

I want to start with the most important thing I have to say: The essence of working with another person is *to be present* as a living being. And that is lucky, because if we had to be smart, or good, or mature, or wise, then we would probably be in trouble. But what matters is not that. What matters is to be a human being with another human being, to recognize the other person as another being in there. Even if it is a cat or a bird

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the first thing you have to know is that there is somebody in there That seems to me to be the most important thing. (Gendlin 1990, p.205, italics added)

Again, “to be present as a living being” is not something that we should do, or some set of logically induced behaviors. It is to be open to the “otherness of the Other” (M.Buber, cited in Gendlin 1973, p.318), whether the other is a human person, a dog, a cat or a bird. The *Otherness* of the dog pulled me across the street. The dog was not some machine I could control or manipulate. It wouldn’t move, it just continued to gaze at me. It had a will of its own, as a living being, and the lady could not manipulate it to continue the walk. Just as the dog was fully present to me, I was also present to the dog, struck by an overwhelming otherness of the dog.

Just as the dog’s presence affected me pre-reflexively, people’s presences affect each other, and particularly therapists’ presences affects their clients. Rogers’ great discovery was that the *relationship* was therapeutic, and that the helping relationship could be characterized by therapists’ congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy (Rogers 1957), and possibly “one more characteristic” (Rogers 1986, p.137), which was *presence* in the way that he described it (see quote above).

The whole body of literature in psychotherapy, particularly in client-centered therapy, supports the importance of Rogers’ claim. However, there is an interesting subtle discrepancy between these characteristics of the relationship with the discussion above. That is, if the other affects us *pre-reflexively*, and we know what affected us only later upon reflection, how can we know beforehand that these three or four conditions are the essential

characteristics of the helping relationship?

Gendlin presents this problem eloquently in the passage below. ...one wrinkle that I do not remember succeeding in selling him (Carl Rogers) was my argument that the three conditions are sufficient without the proviso that the client has to *perceivethem.....I know that perception is not necessary, because my clients are convinced for a year or two that nobody could possibly like them or understand them, and the process works anyway and eventually changes their perception.....I know, because I was that kind of client. I always knew that this nice man could not possibly understand my stuff. It took me a long time before I noticed that when I walked into the room, I was already different. The interaction affects you, long before you can think about it. (Gendlin 1990, p.203)*

In the passage above, Gendlin emphasizes that the relationship changes the person before perception. This is entirely in line with his philosophical position as shown above (Gendlin 1992), which is that the body interacts with the situation before perception. I would like to stretch this argument a little further than Gendlin intended. By asserting that the relationship (“interaction” in Gendlin’s passage) affects us pre-reflexively, I am emphasizing that we do not know what affected us until we reflect on the relationship, and

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a possible consequence of such a reflection is that we may discover other characteristics of the relationship that had been affecting us.

In my view, (and I believe this view is agreeable with Gendlin’s philosophy) the three conditions as presented by Rogers were

Rogers' reflective *explications* of the therapeutically effective relationship. Once explicated, these concepts of congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy are empowered to serve as helpful guides with which we can think about therapy as well as use them in training therapists to maximize their therapeutic potentials.

However, these explications are not the absolute final say on the therapeutic relationship. The therapeutic relationship is not *defined by*, nor *composed of* these three and only three "elements". They can always be exceeded when explicated freshly.

Indeed, each therapy session has a different "flavor", so to speak. The therapist is affected, just as the client is affected by the flavor of the relationship in a particular session. Hence, it is always enriching to *reflect* on a particular session, or on the entire case, and explicate what seems to be working or not working in the relationship. Often, when reflecting on a particular case, therapists find felt senses unique to the client or to the session. For example, a beginning therapist working with a teenager discovered that she felt like she was "turned into a wooden cube by some magical spell the client has" (Ikemi and Kawata 2006). Noticing such a unique way in which the client's presence affect the therapist, and to reflect on it, are helpful to therapists. Now the therapist is able to detect when the "spell" is coming into the therapy session and the therapist can wonder about the "magic spell" the client is casting on her and others.

In Japan, Professor Yasuyuki Kira (Kyushu University) has published a book (Kira 2010) entitled *Therapist Focusing [in Japanese]* which is an accumulation of his work with his collaborators, including Professors Kenichi Itoh (Gakkushuin University) and myself on the benefits of Therapist Focusing on psychotherapists of various orientations. Since the client affects the therapist pre-reflexively, it is worthwhile to reflect on, or Focus on, the therapy sessions and explicate from the *felt sense* of the therapy sessions. I will elaborate further on this throughout this article.

While congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy are valuable general aspects of the therapeutic relationship, the particular ways in which therapists and clients are affected can be explicated freshly, bringing out case specific understandings. Similarly, in everyday life, the other always affects us before we know it, and reflecting on the ways we are affected bring out fresh new understandings of our interactions with the other.

2 FELT MEANING AND FELT SENSE

Eugene Gendlin, a close co-researcher of Carl Rogers, is a philosopher, as well as a psychotherapist. His philosophy investigates the nature of how we have experiencing [*Erleben*] (or “consciousness” in Husserl’s sense, if you prefer that term). His philosophy deals with the explication of the implicit aspects of experiencing, which is a process central to any thought, philosophy, therapy, art, and almost any human endeavor.

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One of the central terms used by Gendlin is *felt meaning*. As a general trend, Gendlin tends to use the term *felt meaning* more often until he developed Focusing, thereafter using the term *felt sense* more frequently. After a close look at these two seemingly interchangeable terms, however, I have come to think of these two terms as pointing to different phenomena. I believe these two terms do not mean the same. Perhaps the distinction I am making here is roughly in agreement with Gendlin’s thinking (personal conversation) but I would like to emphasize this more than he seems to do.

I see felt meaning as functioning *pre-reflexively*. Gendlin writes that “felt meaning functions as an ever-present experienced parallel

of all concepts, observations, actions --- whatever is meaningful to us” (Gendlin, 1962/1997, p.65.) Felt meaning is “ever-present” whether we reflect on it or not. Every sentence is already imbued with a sense of meaning that is already functioning in our experiencing. Thus, we understand the meaning of the other’s speech, without having to think of the definitions of each of the words used in the speech. Gendlin gives this sentence as an example: “Democracy is government by the people” (p.66). The sentence shows that there is a sense of meaning here, a felt meaning, which is not given by the explication of each of the symbols used in this sentence, such as “government” or “democracy” or “by” or “people”.

In exploring about the felt meaning and felt sense, I have referred to a Japanese haiku written in 1686 by the famous haiku poet, *Matsuo Basho* (Ikemi 2011).

Furuike ya Kawazu tobikomu Mizu no Oto

[Ancient pond(s)]

[(A) frog(s) jump(s) in] [The sound(s) of water]

Translating Japanese to English is difficult, particularly since the Japanese language does not have a singular/plural distinction. Thus, there can be no exact translation of this Japanese poem, since all Indo-European languages require the singular/plural distinction. Although clumsy, the haiku may be translated as the above.

Since the Japanese language does not have a singular/plural distinction, you don’t even know if there are one or more of the *furuike* (ancient pond[s]). But to prevent matters from becoming unnecessarily complicated, let us arbitrarily assume that there is only one ancient pond described here. Whether the sound of water is singular or plural, would depend on the number of frogs. So let us make two versions of this haiku; version X assumes that there is one frog in this poem while version Z assumes that there are more

than one frog in this poem.

Version X: Ancient pond/ a frog jumps in/ the sound of water

Version Z: Ancient pond/ frogs jump in/ the sounds of water

Then, let me pose a question. How many frogs are in this haiku? Which of the two versions above (version X or version Z) would you believe to be the vision that the poet had when he wrote this poem?

I have asked this question in many places, not only in Japan, where the haiku originates, but also in Athens, in Rome, and in New York. Most people across the globe, and almost

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everyone in Japan, see only one frog in this haiku. They believe that version X is what *Bassho* had in mind when he wrote this haiku.

Let me now pose a second question. How did you know that there was only one frog here?

I believe that a *felt meaning* is operating implicitly here. From "ancient pond", a sense of stillness emanates. It is a quiet place. No one has touched this ancient pond for ages. There is a felt meaning of stillness, which is temporality disturbed by a "blop" sound of a frog that jumps into the water. Then stillness prevails again. The felt meaning here says of stillness, so it cannot be a whole group of frogs diving and dancing in the water! The beauty of this haiku is that it sings of silence through the use of words.

We understand that there is only one frog here, from the implicitly functioning felt meaning. It cannot be understood grammatically,

because Japanese grammar does not differentiate singular and plural. Moreover, almost anyone who understands Japanese does not have to reflect on this haiku to come to the conclusion that it is one frog. They can instantly "visualize", so to speak, the scene of a single frog jumping into the stillness of an ancient pond. Through this, I am demonstrating that the felt meaning is functioning before we are aware of it, in other words, it functions *pre-reflexively*.

Let me give you an English sentence to show that the felt meaning functions pre-reflexively. A person may say, "My mood started *sinking* after talking to Tom." In this case, we do not have to reflect on the meaning of the verb *to sink*, to understand the complexity of her situation with Tom, and that the speaker is starting to feel depressed or feeling dark or hopeless. All this comes to us pre-reflexively. However, if we were to look up the dictionary for the meaning of the verb *to sink*, we would be puzzled because the verb means immersing in water or some fluid and descending inside the fluid towards the bottom. For someone for whom English is not a native language and who did look up the word *to sink*, the sentence may not be understandable, for moods are not ships and therefore they cannot sink. Felt meaning comes to us pre-reflexively, before reflecting on the explicit meaning of each word, and hence it enables us to understand the other.

Now, we can choose to *reflect* on how we are experiencing a certain situation, a poem or the utterance of the other. We will then be intentionally feeling the situation and seeing what might arise. We are then trying to get a *felt sense* of the situation. Gendlin writes about finding the felt sense:

"...sense how it makes you feel in your body when you think of it [a problem] as a whole just for a moment. Ask "what does this whole problem feel like?" But don't answer in words. Feel the problem *whole*, the sense of *all that*" (Gendlin 1981, p.53).

Now "sensing", "asking" and "feeling" in the quote above, are *intentional acts of reflection*. The felt sense comes to form in

reflexive activity.

We can return to the two versions of the haiku, version X and Z. If you read them again and *sense* it, *ask* your body what this whole haiku feels like, and *feel* the whole haiku, you will notice that the two versions give rise to different felt senses. For example, from the former, I get a felt sense of 'tranquility', 'clearness', while from the latter, I get a felt

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sense of 'liveliness', a "jumbled-chaotic-sense". The *felt meaning* which functions *pre-reflexively* can thus be differentiated from the *felt sense*, which comes *reflexively*.

We can thus interact on two levels; the pre-reflexive and the reflexive. We can listen to a piece of music, for example, and be affected by the felt meaning. In this way, the music affects us before we are aware of it, for felt meaning is already functioning implicitly. Before we are aware of it, our legs may be stomping in rhythm with the tune, our moods can be affected by the key of the melody or by the bits of lyrics reverbing in the background of our consciousness. We can also appreciate the music on the reflexive level by letting a felt sense form from the piece of music. We are then aware of the quality of this music piece and may be wondering about the relevance of this musical quality to our situations.

Interactions with others happen on both the pre-reflexive and reflexive levels.

3 UNDERSTANDING

In the preceding, I have already asserted that the presence of the

other, their utterances, in fact the totality of their interactions with us are already affecting us pre-reflexively. There is a pre-reflexive understanding of the other, as the interaction goes on. What is implicit in the other becomes implicit in us.

For example, the fascination of the dog as it watches me wash the car, becomes implicit in me, too. So although I have not reflected on it or thought of the word "fascination", I realize that the fascination is shared between the dog and me. The stillness that was implicit in Basho's poem becomes implicit in me as well. Although not perceived as such, an implicit sense of stillness is shared between Basho and me, as I read his explicit words. In a conversation with the other, the other's excitement about a certain situation stirs in me, and my sense of wonder as I hear the other's story becomes implicit in the other

as well.

We *cross*, to use Gendlin's terminology.

Dilthey said that we can understand the authors only if we understand them better than they understood themselves, and this happens only if we carry their experiencing forward with our further understanding, when the author's experiencing is reconstituted by our experiencing --- accurately but enriched by ours, as ours is enriched by theirs. Or, as I would say it: these cross so that each becomes implicit in the other. (Gendlin, 1997, p.41)

In therapy, therapists can reflect on the felt meanings they are experiencing.

get a felt sense of their clients and explicate the meanings implied. Then, although these are explications of the therapists' felt senses, they do, in fact, explicate clients' experiencing, since therapists have already crossed into clients. We see that Carl Rogers was doing this in his interview with Jan, for example. He calls it *presence*, and as such, it is "intuitive". But we can now understand it as his explication of his own felt sense of Jan, which turns out to be an explication of that which is implicit in Jan.

They can

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CARL: Somebody you can relate to. And I guess that --- this may seem like a silly idea, but --- I wish that one of those friends could be that naughty little girl. I don't know whether that makes any sense to you or not, but if that kind of sprightly, naughty little girl that lives inside could accompany you from the light into the dark --- as I say, that may not make any sense to you at all.

JAN: (*In a puzzled voice*) Can you elaborate on that a little more for me?

CARL: Simply that maybe one of your best friends is the you that you hide inside, the fearful little girl, the naughtily little girl, the real you that doesn't come out very much in the open.

JAN: (*Pause*) In fact, over the last eighteen months, that naughty little girl has disappeared. (Rogers 1989 p.148)

Rogers writes about his "intuitive responses" that "they occur infrequently, but they are almost always helpful in advancing therapy." He writes further that: "I know much more than my conscious mind is aware of. I do not form my responses consciously, they simply arise in me, from my nonconscious *sensing of the world of the other.*" (Rogers 1989, p.148, italics added.)

Here, we see that Carl Rogers is *crossing* into Jan. He is aware of the felt meanings coming from the other (Jan). It is "nonconscious" in that it is pre-reflexive, to use my terminology, and thus it is not conceptual thought. I would like to replace Rogers' terminology in this particular instance, from "conscious/nonconscious" to

"conceptual/ pre-conceptual", because apparently Rogers is conscious, i.e., not asleep, at the time he is interacting with Jan, and therefore he cannot be "nonconscious" in the literal sense of the word. When we thus replace just these particular words, we have Rogers writing: "I do not form my responses *conceptually*, they simply arise in me, from my *pre-conceptual* sensing of the other".

Now we can see that in the interaction preceding the citation above, felt meanings implicit in Jan's statements was carried into Rogers pre-reflectively. Rogers was not explicitly aware of these felt meanings until he started to reflect on some aspects of the felt meaning. With this reflection, Rogers had a felt sense of Jan. Then from the pre-conceptual felt sense, one aspect was explicated, that is, that the "naughty little girl" is needing to "come out in the open". Thus, Jan's naughty little girl came to attention and spoke through Rogers "sensing of the other".

We can now see what Rogers meant by "intuitive". We can see his description of presence in a new light. We can now assure Carl Rogers that it is not the case that he "may behave in strange and impulsive ways" which he "cannot justify rationally" (Rogers 1989, p.137). We now see Carl Rogers *crossing* into his clients.

Once in a Focusing workshop in Japan, a person who was very new to Focusing came up for a demonstration. After the session, when we shared our experiences of the session with the whole group, she said: "You know, this person (me) is a total stranger! I only met him a couple of hours ago. How can it be that he knows so much about me!"

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During the session, I had used one of the standard Focusing responses: "What does this felt sense need?" While I waited for her to answer, I was also asking my felt sense of her the same question. Since she could not come up with an answer, I told her what came to me. As she listened to what I said, her eyes looked startled at first, then tears welled up and laughter came as well. "How did you know that?" she said. "I've closed myself to this, many years ago, but there is that carefree side of me which I valued so much years ago". It was as if I understood the work (the person) better than the authors (the client) did themselves (see Gendlin's articulation of Dilthey's elaboration of understanding quoted above).

This session shows many similarities with Rogers' session with Jan. Jan can live further with the "naughtily little girl" aspect of her, which Carl Rogers explicated. My client can live further with the carefree aspect of her that I explicated. This paper has attempted to show how one can inspire the other to live further. Saying from the felt sense of the other, which has pre-reflexively crossed into each other, can inspire the other to live further.

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