

One Therapist's Travelogue

Prologue

This piece is an attempt to share my life as a therapist in a form that is true to the principles of experiential life. The text is a manifestation of the lawful natural principles of experiencing, as articulated by Eugene Gendlin in his philosophy and methodology. In other words, the medium is my message. A central purpose of this paper is to show how the experiential level - Gendlin's bodily felt sensing- is the substrate for meaning-making. This realm, of "unseparated multiplicity," can be entered at any point where the complex bodily-sensed meets the poetic possibilities of language. I give many clinical instances of how this process moves from the inchoate to vivid specificity, creating sessions that find their own level of depth, vitality and beauty.

I have other aims as well. I want to show not only how the implicit springs to life when we touch into the experiential level but how this response permeates and reconstellates the ongoing nature of our relatedness. The intricacy of this double process is often lost in the forms our profession has used to "discuss cases". To be true to these theories we may have to develop a new way of communicating the texture of our work. My travelogue is one attempt to do this.

The travelogue occurs over the course of 24 hours. It moves through the living substance of my work, how I integrate (or do not integrate) notions of theory and practice, personal and professional, and inside and outside. Each of these domains is language in a way that makes them appear as separate entities, again, at the experiential level, they are flowing streams of awareness. Through verbatim accounts of significant moments in clinical process, I show how both therapist and client access the experiential dimension and how this moves the process forward. Life wants to move itself forward.

I also struggle with uncertainties – philosophical, clinical, and even financial – as they arise inevitably in my work. Yet I suggest that experiential process and its natural laws can lend a kind of compass to the twists and turns of the psychotherapy. I have learned to trust this miraculous human capacity, its rhythms and its life forward motion, and, at the end of a long day, am calmed by the knowledge of its abiding presence and promise.

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It is 8:00AM and I am in my office preparing for the day. Sipping tea, I start the transition from the personal life (of a civilian) into therapist. Soothed by the fuzzy fabric of my chair and the muted glow of the office walls, I pause to take a few last moments for myself.

My work as a therapist is never far from my awareness. Often it works silently, intermingling with the events of my personal life. At other times I am clearly in the grip of a difficult multi-layered creative process. This morning, insides hovering, I notice what is developing underneath the concerns I am already aware of. In order to work well, I need the right balance of intactness and permeability. Will I have it now?

I recognize an urgent last minute wish to sleep. I know this one; I am not truly tired. It's my shyness; in some way I am afraid of the hours of intimacy ahead of me. I know that this will go away, as will my last urges to goof off. And there is a heaviness suffused with dread and concern; I am worried about Tina and what will happen in her session today.

Then something unexpected coalesces. It starts as I attend to a distinctly physical sensation which becomes a visual image of me as a somber kid. Something was wrong in my family and I needed to help. But no one seemed to realize how wrong things were, and I was just a kid. Yet I sensed all this, somehow, and the situation lodged in me producing a strong feature of my personality -a muted beleaguered quality. Now, decades later, I can still feel that silent cry, and becoming the one who wants to...no....needs to help. So much is contained in this complexity - essence of Joan. My drive and ability to help people now blends with my futility back then. All this comes to me and as I acknowledge it, it settles itself into the background. Then there is that odd pinched feeling immediately followed by the knowledge that I am ready. I hear the office door slam. Here I go.

9AM: Barbara has been living a life of emotional isolation amid family and friends. She is shy and would have never entered a therapist's office; she did so to save her son's life. She has sobbed through every session and yet dared me to make it stop. The crying has changed. It is not about her grief and pain. It is the sign of her ability to find herself.

Right now as her session is ending Barbara tells me that I am the first person in her life- ever- who has shared the immediate emotional impact she has (on me). She is speaking from her inner sense, and tears form as she is struck by the significance of what she finds herself saying. She looks at me, as if to say do you realize what is happening for me here? My position and face convey that I am with her.

The session is ending. Barbara, with a lifelong history of cringing at displays of affection, prepares to leave my office. We are standing, listing toward each other. I hear her say, "Can I have a..." and we are pressed together in a long hug.

10AM: George states that he is in anguish but his flat tone and weak gestures have deadened him. He is yanking tufts of hair out of his scalp. He cannot find a way to convey the misery that

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is paralyzing him. He is pleading for me to help him. He needs to find his way to the vitality of the experiential dimension.

J: (observing closely) Can you go inside for a while, finding the place right underneath your breathing... right around there...your sense....of what it's really like to be you right now? (G. knows what I mean.)

G:I don't feel anything.

J: Ok. Is there a place inside you where you notice the not feeling anything?

G: ...(he is quietly sensing, listening to his inside sense. I can see that his process has already begun to revive itself) ... I think there is somethingit is in my heart....yes! (gently, with specificity) .. there is something in, no, near my heart (his face reflects a nuance of relief)....like.... I've been stabbed. An image goes with this....of a huge knife...(minutes pass in silence as G keeps close to his immediate nuanced inner awareness. He is breathing more easily and his physical presence softens.)

J: (George is clearly in touch with the experiential dimension. Watching close I help him stay there).

George:the worst part of this is the feeling of not being able to communicate....(his eyes are closed, but I am nodding anyway, it just happens.)...It's lighter in there now...some energy...but the stabbing is more intense at the same time? (he is checking the fit of words with immediate experiencing. For a moment, he looks as if he will cry, but this passes swiftly. There is more there that wants to be said. George's voice is firmer now, as he states with a dawning awareness)...It feels like I should go on...but that is just what I always do...I always go on. Now I can feel this! That's my head talking now. My mind is telling me to go on. I am always pushing against this mind. I didn't notice this before. My body wants to rest, then it will be able to go on....this is the piece I have missed....this "pushing against" feeling. I'm tired now, but I feel eased up too.

George's eyes glisten as he goes on to wonder if he hasn't taken enough time to mourn important personal losses. I think to myself, this man is emerging from a deep depression requiring a hospitalization.

11PM: Tina is furious with me, yet has agreed to come in for a last session before quitting therapy. She has been involved in this therapeutic adventure beyond her expectations, her symptoms are fading and we have been hopeful for her. But now I make a mistake, putting our delicate process on the rocks.

She is not the only one mad at me; I am distraught and unforgiving, too. The story of our relationship flashes through me: Tina's distant history includes some serious suicide attempts. Last week I got a sudden unsolicited call from her mother. She thought Tina had become suicidal again. I was in the midst of a migraine when I got the call. Unable to think straight I was alarmed. Instead of waiting and trusting that Tina would share this with me at her next visit

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I jumped the gun and called her. She took this as the betrayal it was, and, for the first and possibly last time, flared up at me. "It's over! I told you that words don't help!!!"

On the phone, I am trying hard to just listen. Damn that migraine, why don't I just tell her that I wasn't thinking straight! I actually do trust Tina, but now, well, here we are in this tough place. I also note to myself that this kind of crisis/betrayal between Tina, mother and me seems inevitable, but now we are in it, living it.

On the phone, sensing my openness to her side of things, Tina reluctantly agrees to come in. Sitting across from me, she is watching me very closely as I struggle to follow her. I am in two places at the same time, sensing how she is watching me and trying to stay in touch with my own insides. My felt sense informs me that Tina is watching to see how I am with all of this very real difficulty between us. She is getting something out of this mess. She tells me sternly that she expects me to be real with her, as always. This means that I share the impact she is having on me in the moment. She refuses any response that hints of her definition of a staid therapeutic stance; she wants the living substance! Right now I am her therapist facing her imminent departure.

I continue in the experiential mode that we have cultivated and both grown to trust:

J: (sensing inward) I'm asking myself what I am notice inside myself, as I sit here with you, knowing you are leaving.. I understand what you are saying about betrayal..... if I tell you exactly what I notice, one thing is feelinghonored, no ...relieved.....that you have come in, but just now I feel more apathetic feeling.....like I am right now.....(checking words with bodily felt sensing) pathetic. (Yes, that really fits, I note to myself, where is this going? ...I am reaching out to you, as someone who does not want to be here, really. (I can feel the pathetic in my chest, caved in, my arms reaching out, pathetically, hunched over.)And I noticed myself feeling..... reduced, it's kind of...agonizing.....helpless, yes, that's the way it seems to some part of me, ...helpless, agonized, pathetic...yes, that seems right.

Tina: (watching and listening closely). You feel pathetic!? (She smiles slightly and I can feel a shift in the atmosphere between us. I still don't know where this is going.)

J: Yes, that's it... like you are dragging your body to be here, but you don't really want to be here with me. And that there is absolutely nothing I can do about it.

Tina: (giggles), you really do look pathetic. Oh, (she moves into her own deeper level).....like I am almost(trying out words to felt sensing) enjoying see you this way?..... Like there's a pleasure in seeing you like this. I'm the one who can leave, but you have to be left! Poor therapist. You have no choice!.....I could almost feel sorry for you....(her mood darkens)...take my father.....he always promised to come..... I would wait..... he would never come..... it made me feel.....oh! Pathetic.

J: Pathetic? You too?

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Tina has never spoken from her direct experience about the pain of feeling pathetic around her tantalizing father. She has talked around it, but never been able to speak from it. My experiential dimension, our shared dimension, has brought her to this.

On dry land, I can feel my insides still wrenching. How awful, if she were to have left just then; awful for each of us, for us together. How fragile all this is.

I have thought of Tina as perched in life, always ready to take flight before “pathetic” can find her, hence her unavailability for the vicissitudes of an enduring relationship. Tina decides to stay in therapy for now. A month later an interesting complicated guy enters the scene and she has her first long relationship.

Noon: Lunch and window shopping

Shot with adrenalin from Tina, I now need to drift, to reclaim myself. Lunch and window shopping create a mildly pleasant effect; I ignore the social obligation to greet others with the perfunctory social smile. I have zoned out.

Very close call with Tina who is not leaving, at least not today. Relief, about fording this difficult passage and (guilt-ridden) about my income too. If she had left without us going through this, we would be missing something essential that she needs to know and I would feel dreadful.

Barbara, her hug, our hug really. Perhaps the first real hug she has ever initiated. It spoke volumes and yet was eloquent in its simplicity. Her lifetime of loneliness, my tuning into this, feeling it deeply through my own lonelinesses. Her gratitude for being received, understood, and told of her impact on me. The spontaneous burst of a new step, the hug. And then, my gratitude for being able to be so helpful at her time of crisis. I could sense now, in a moment of privacy, the pleasure of giving her what I had needed myself, a long time ago.

I am struck by the precision and breadth of George's session. Carefully placing words near his immediate experiencing George identifies a desperate need to communicate. He finds “this pushing-against feeling” and an array of implicit meanings are illuminated. Contained within the “pushing-against” is the life problem and the spontaneous birth of its solution. This occurs over the course of a single session. I find it breath-taking and it gives us hope.

After all these years, I am still astonished. Living right beneath our everyday mode of operating and communicating is this miraculous experiential dimension (Preston 2005). Barbara, George, Tina and me. Speaking from this dimension, in raw poetry (Gendlin date) always makes meaning. We all sound beautiful when we speak from this place....no, we all are beautiful. Not usually a zealot, I am adamant about this.

Yet, its cultivation can be a fragile process.

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Afternoon

2PM: Kumiko has trouble climbing the three stairs to my office. Survivor of a devastating stroke at age 51, Kumiko is not succumbing to the life of an invalid. Physically active, she is in the process of restoring her role of devoted mother and grandmother. She has had a complex and interesting life.

Words do not come easily to Kumiko for many reasons; the neurological sequelae of the stroke have affected her access to language, memory and vision. It has taken its toll on every aspect of her life but it has not destroyed her wish to make meaning. Perhaps it has even increased her resolve to put all the pieces of her story together.

Over the next two years, we work on a series of paradoxes that arise out of her life situation. She wants her children to realize what the stroke has done to her, but she must never be treated in an infantilizing manner. Part of her strength lies in acknowledging her very real limitations; her children and grandchildren need to know this. Often Kumiko states emphatically that no one can ever truly grasp what she has been through. I nod in agreement, "including me".

Now she is working on a memoir about the actual experience of the stroke event. She speaks carefully, making certain that her phrases do justice to her immediate experience. I love the jumbled sequence of her phrases that convey how she actually survived the events of that day. She wants to make sure her grammar and syntax are correct. I write, she carefully crafts words, memories, images, I read it back, and she gives it thumbs up. We cry and then we laugh. She says I am her advocate.

Evening

The sky is getting dark now and I am homesick. I feel far away. I am embarrassed by this homesickness. Sitting quietly, I notice that this is a particular kind of homesickness and get interested to stay with it for a few minutes more. My handsome fragile father is teaching me to swim and I sense that I must please him. But I am nervous; I can't put my head under water. Head under water....that's right! I need a snorkel. Staying close to the palpable sense of all this, it says no, not a snorkel. Something more is coming, just wait. It is scuba gear, emotional scuba gear. Remarkable. Now I can stay underwater for a long time without struggling or gasping emotionally. Yes, my body says, there will be enough for me. I'm homesick but I will be okay.

4 PM: Jordan has returned to therapy for no reason he can articulate. A young man with severe and diagnostically perplexing problems, Jordan is a study in quirky utterances, abrupt disavowals, rants and stunning shifts into silence. While appearing to be almost mute, his face is contorted with an array of expressions ranging from perplexity to abandonment. Is this psychosis? But my gentle inquiry gives me the eerie realization that it is not psychotic; yet, he isn't "behind" his face. I, too, am empty; empty of clinical hypotheses.

Earlier in my professional life, I would not have been able to tolerate sitting with Jordan. I would be compelled do something, anything, to make a process happen. I would have to do

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something, for me, if not for him. Now I sit astonished at the utter lack of experiential or relational coordinates. Is this the relationality of non-relationality?

5PM: Patient cancels without giving a reason. We have been working well, she is lively and optimistic. Did her insurance change when her job changed? Have friends been telling her to quit therapy and find a coach? Cancellations alarm me. It's me, I am frightening people off with that somber side. (My mother was right, that part of me was/is too much to expect her to bear.) I am usually wrong, but do you ever really know?

6PM: Helen arrives late, radically "in her head", sprinting from concept to abstraction, bypassing my beloved experiential realm. Her references and allusions are colorful and brilliant, crossing the continental divide of her encyclopedic knowledge.

We have worked together for three years. This luminous woman entered therapy after nearly dying of strange diets, exotic disease and malnutrition and a paralyzing depression. The details of this prolonged period are still vague. Through our painstaking work, we were shocked to realize that she survived a history of severe emotional and physical neglect. To say she is self-made is an understatement. Helen has survived by living "in her mind" and has great difficulty accessing her experiential self. Only in longer sessions can she come down into her bodily sense of things. Instead, she watches me closely as I receive her words, stories, opinions, etc. She is not yet able to locate upsetness in herself.

What does matter to Helen is that I am making the effort to help her. Someone is taking the time and making the effort to understand her and at least attempt to give her something.

This extraordinary voyage hasn't been easy. It has evoked the best that I have to give as well as an intense inner struggle on my side. I am working hard – perhaps too hard- to put an experiential process into motion inside her while struggling with the complexities of her world in me. There are maddening aspects to this and at times this shows. The intensity of her concerns, the awesome nature of the discovery of her history, the synergy of our combined intelligence, the endless demands of each of our relentless schedules, as well as my flagging energy.....

Tonight I am rallying to rise above my listening fatigue and know that she is watching me with this effort. But I am about to be surprised. Helen is nostalgic, about us, and is recounting.

Helen: So how long has it been going on, that you've been trying so hard to get through to me?

JL: Hmmm....well, let's piece it together....

Helen: Yeah, when did we go through our thing together?

JL: Our thing? (I'm not sure which thing she is referring to, but I hear myself respond.) Like when I realized that the reason that you keep tooting your own horn is to keep yourself company? ... Cause no one ever made the effort to talk with you, so you had to keep talking to and about yourself?

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Helen: Yeah! ... I don't really expect anyone to be there, so I have to do that....

JL:and so the problem now is that it takes up all the air in the room (her phrase) and who can get through that to reach you?....

This seemingly matter-of-fact statement took me years of struggle, and then it just came out that way..... And I had no idea what I was about to say and felt almost off the deep end. Having said it, I pause.....

Helen: (Smiling, a little awkward). Would you mind my saying something to you?

JL: What? (Taken off guard, I have become accustomed to her not addressing me about me directly. I sense of blush of emotion.) Sure...

Helen: You, ...you're like a tree in an Amazon forest, where every part is used for something – the bark, the roots, and even at a cellular level...and don't think I am talking about mere efficiency here, it's not that!It's generosity. God, you must be exhausted!!

JL: Yes!!! Yes, I am. But thrilled too, but yeah, exhausted.

Helen: and you have more feelers, more pads, than the average tree, we all have 8 or 10, but you have, maybe, 400 (she is laughing now),it's like certain insects....gee, you don't mind? My comparing you to an insect? I think insects are amazing....

JL: No, its fine, I can do insects. It's great!

Helen: (she launches into a list of insect esoterica)...
(We are both laughing, but there is a shyness coming in as well. Inside, I am sobbing).

JL: What a beautiful thing to say, to me, and the way you're saying it makes me feel so understood...

Helen: It's amazing. I guess you just couldn't get through to me before.....

JL: Well, I didn't want to hurt you, even though you say you're tough. And I couldn't find a way to say it. (I was afraid of how it would come out.)

Helen: Hey, I'm not that tough – anymore. And about us....

JL: (I cut her off, maybe afraid of any more closeness) we have something in common, something.....comprehensive....passionate.

Helen: Dogged. (She has heard about my dogs. The story, of precious foundlings, has had implicit meaning for her).

JL: Dogged – such a good word.

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We sit gazing at each other as the session ends. Knowing she is my last patient, Helen scrambles to leave.

Exhilarated, exhausted, I turn off the lights and lock up for the night.

Three blocks uphill, and I am home. I can feel my day going underground to work its way through my guts to my dreamlife and so on. I push myself beyond the stirring moments with Helen because I am so troubled by Jordan: There is no indication that I am helping him, nor can I think of anyone who might. I would gladly send him to someone else for help but I cannot come up with a good idea. Yet Kumiko's therapy reminds me weekly that life wants to move itself forward. So what then is going to happen to Jordan?

Resting

8:00PM: Curled up on our couch, I am consumed with tonight's events on Dancing with the Stars. The show's mission is to discover America's new dancing talent from the amateur dance contestants. The subtext is yet another American form of coliseum. The judges are vicious, the professional performers remarkably honed sex machines and the amateur contestants appear as naifs thrown to the lions.

Jerry Springer, now in his seventies, has finally (and compassionately) been eliminated from the competition. He will be missed. Jerry's own show has been critiqued as exploiting the sufferings of the human condition for purposes of "infotainment". Yet, as a contestant in the amateur dance competition, he is the opposite.

The departing Jerry has warmth, shyness, dignity, recognition of his age and physical limits, respect for his partner, a sense of propriety and some talent for dance. He has gotten into something over his head (this competition) and is going to make the best of it. His erratic lip-licking and eyebrow raising reveal his awkwardness, which serves to make me love him more. Jerry is open to his own insides, has more "pads". A nervous tiny figure on a 15' flat screen, he is becoming my inspiration. What accounts for his transformation?

The judges' tones have changed; they ring out with the compassion of devoted parents. The professional dance partners have risen above their arduous craft and are more inventive and softer. I think "here it is again, the presence of the experiential dimension!". The dancer's grit and sincerity have elicited the best in the judges and touched Jerry, creating a fading of his usually stylized façade.

He is moved by his own experience as a contestant and his heart has opened to the experience. The amateur dancers are speaking to the striving in each performer as well as to the performance itself.

The finalists are deeply involved in personal transformation. Their faces are open to the critique of the judges because they sincerely wish to grow. They hope to hear constructive criticism, but are willing to receive even the debasing and self-serving formulaic criticism to

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glean its value. The cringe factor has diminished and I feel the presence of an emergent process affecting each of them.

They are growing; this is what it looks like. Their dances convey “something more” (Stern, 1998, p. 904), coming from underneath (Gendlin, 1993, p. 2) The dancers know that they must please the judges and the public audience in order to win. But to do so they must perform out of their love of dance. This is what takes them beyond formula and technique. They must be true to both. They are grappling with this creative dilemma (Lyons-Ruth, 2000, p. 85) as we watch.

I identify with Jerry and love him for the transparency of his struggle. Trying hard to stay afloat in a difficult moment, not looking one's best, neither dissembling nor manipulating, he stays open to seize a creative moment. No mere pretender, bystander, voyeur or commentator, he is truly on stage. And must proceed with ultimate respect for the rules of engagement. Yes, I am transfixed.

Evening Howl

The patient who did not show has quit. Her insurance did change, and she must find a provider “in-network” who will see her for twenty visits. What bothers me more is that, in listening closely to her final message, I hear that she sees herself as a symptom disembedded from her person. Person remote from symptom, therapeutic intervention remote from therapist.

My line of work is an endangered species. In this era of cell phones, blackberries and iPods, we are all busily in comunicado. In comunicado indeed i.e. out of touch. This theme spirals into my molten core. When is the last time you (each of us, everyone) spent some quality time with your Self! Furious, I want to know what is the point, what is the cash value of seasoned self-awareness?!

Barbara's hug, a singular sweeping movement, contains the story of her past and takes a first step into a future when she can go beyond her shyness. Tina went on to have her first real romantic relationship, pausing to become available, instead of taking flight. And, within the safe haven of our relationship George consulted his “insides” – the way he actually “held” the problem inside himself. As he put into words this “pushing against” feeling, the problem itself began to change and he was already living differently in relation to it. Helen tells me that world used to be “in black and white”; now, it is “in color”.

Good or great psychotherapy is worth the time, cost and effort. It is a life-altering experience.

But right now I would just like to know that today I did well, that I helped someone, so that I can get some sleep.

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Rhapsody

I am thinking about my own therapists. While trying to absorb their psychological explanations, often evoking dusky imagery from my past, I scanned them for what I urgently needed to know. What was I looking for? Uncertain, searching for steady ground, I looked for incongruencies in the credibility of their demeanor. Were they comfortable within themselves while sitting with me? Did they want to be with me? What might they want from me?

My ability to articulate my deepest dreads came much later on in my therapy and strikes me now as an achievement. What a paradox: I could articulate my most fragile parts with increasing specificity only later on, when I had become steady enough to tolerate what I could hear coming from my felt sensing. A specific image - of my last therapist's engagement in her own experiential process as it formed itself - had the natural effect of bringing me down into my own. And coming down into myself enriched the development of our relationship. What made this possible?

I needed to sense a certain kind of process transparency in my therapist. I didn't care that much to learn details of her personal life; I cared that she trusted herself enough to have a "process intimacy" with me. I needed to count on her steadiness, intelligence, credibility, and yes, even her sanity, at times. She was listening to herself, deeply, while she was listening to me. No longer hovering above myself, I could ease into my own experiential realm. The more I spoke poised at the point where the complex bodily sensed meets the poetic possibilities of language I started to sound - no - to be beautiful. My life experience moving itself forward, history and all.

When you step into this stream, you realize that, problems and all, your life wants to move itself forward.

Short-term, long-term, cognitive, behavioral, emotional, neurological are all coming together these days, a marvelous time in our profession, yet the fact remains that we are fragile complex beings who have the capacity to touch each other and ourselves in ways we are only beginning to comprehend. This work is beautiful, perilous, expensive, and, yes, of great practical value. It is worth the time, money and effort.

It strikes me that the human tropism to actualize oneself is a mission both resilient and fragile. In this day of fast-food quick fixes, we do not unfurl on schedule with deadlines. We are made in time-release form.

And I am fascinated by our sheer capacity to make meaning. Yet where is this gift located within us? You go inside your own psychic sensing apparatus (let's call it that) to findthe nuanced coordinates ofrelationality?

My sense of you, the listener, affects my experiencing as I speak, and your response partly determines my experiencing a moment later. What occurs to me, and how I live as we speak

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and interact, is vitally affected by every word and motion you make, and by every facial expression and attitude you show....

...It is not merely a matter of what I think you feel about me. Much more, I am affected even without stopping to notice it yet every response you give me, I experience your responses. ...Thus is it not the case that I tell you about me, and then we figure out how I should change, and then somehow, I do it. Rather, I am changing as I talk, and think and feel, for your responses are every moment part of my experiencing, and partly affect, produce, symbolize and interact with it. (Gendlin, 1962, pp. 38-39)

Are we living vehicles for this responsive implicate order? (Gendlin, 1997) If I start with his notion that human beings are interaction (not in interaction), this takes us way beyond Winnicott's (1965) "no such thing as a baby". We are all doing this together, in different rhythms, under different circumstances, for different purposes, but we all have access to this unfolding complexity. I must read more complexity theory! But now I am exhausted.

And there is no way, no wish even, to separate oneself from the uncertainties of this profoundly human therapeutic engagement. There is no medication, no technical intervention, or technical manual that isn't delivered through the nuances of a complex human relationship. Sophisticated clinicians study theories of improvisation, and realize that our errors may lead to our greatest opportunities. With painstaking reflection, our clinical skill grows over time, hopefully, making us seasoned yet humble. The days of arguing whether it's the therapist or the technique are over. It's not the relationship versus the technique: it cannot be. We are not made that way.

Slumber

A recent session with Helen comes to mind now, settling me down for the night. It is a rare moment. She enters the office and starts like this:

Helen: What a timeless phenomenon! And there you are!

JL: What's timeless? Where am I? (I smile.)

Helen: A person sitting in a chair available to be related to!

JL: Oh....

Helen: No cubicle, no clock, no desk, no apparatus.....no equipment, nothing mediated....just us.....at work the doors to the building are built to make it impossible for visitors to approach....here everything is soft....Dr. Melfi's office is made of hard edges....here ...hey; did you choose it all to be safe? It's amazing....a person, filled with levels and pads of all kinds, listening and responding....."

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The childlike pleasure of soft cotton sheets wrapped around clean toes. The sleeping presence of my lively husband. The quiet breathing and occasional yips from our beloved dog, as he races through his dreamlife. The familiar rumble of the city I love, with its own quirky rhythms, comforts me as I drift off.

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