

HOW GENE GENDLIN HAS CARRIED CARL ROGERS' WORK FORWARD

Talk given by Lynn Preston at the WAPCEPC conference in New York, where Gendlin received a lifetime award

1 – INTRODUCTION

Carl Rogers is in some way my grandfather. He was the father of Gene Gendlin's clinical work and Gene has been a father for mine. Gene loved Carl's way of being with people and modeled his responsiveness after him, and I have loved Gene's way of being and modeled my responsiveness to a great extent after him.

I met Gendlin in the early 70's when I was a young clinician looking for a way to integrate the approaches I was studying. I, almost by accident, went to a workshop Gene was giving in New York. I was immediately captivated by his way of engaging with people. He was not reflecting back the words that people said (except what he called "fire engine words," the ones that captured just what was clearly, immediately felt). He was intensely present to the particularity of the other and engaged with what the person was *trying to get at*, - what was "coming from underneath" as he put it. Like a laser pointer he followed and welcomed the tiny steps of felt meaning that unfolded in those he was demonstrating with. There was something compelling that almost seemed magical to me about how people came alive and became more themselves within just a few minutes of this kind of interaction. I wanted to learn this way of responding. I had found a home base for my work and also for my life. (I have studied, taught and written about Gene's work and its interface with relational psychoanalysis since that time—dialoguing, collaborating and debating with him through the years.) This kind enthusiastic response is, I believe, how Gene embraced Carl's work when he was a student.

In preparing this talk I told Gene I would say that he carried Rogers' work forward by including the body and the nuance of felt sense in his method. Gene said emphatically, "No, no Carl had all that!" Gendlin told me that when he was a student, Carl asked the class how they wanted to learn. Gene volunteered to respond to what the client said on a tape recorder and then asked Rogers to respond to the same segment. He said that Rogers' responses were "better," closer to the felt meaning of the client. Carl didn't say back words, content or simple emotions, but expressed his *feelings* of what the client was expressing. Gene carried Rogers' work forward by elaborating a philosophical underpinning for Carl's practice that, of course, extends the practice.

Rogers said: "When the therapist understands how it truly feels to be in another person's world, without wanting or trying to analyze or judge it, then the therapist and the client can truly blossom and grow in that climate." Gene is a philosopher and as such wanted to understand the nature of this amazing process. What do we mean by the person's "world" and what is it to "feel it?" What is the nature of this "climate" or "way of being together" that generates growth and blossoming? He developed new kinds of concepts that help us feel our way into, and think our way into, the nature of this experience (and experiencing in general). Gendlin speaks of this dimension from which change comes as "the implicit"- the realm of what is just below the surface of thoughts and emotions. He introduced the concept of the "felt sense" or body knowing that we live from and often take for granted. When we, as therapists, listen openly and deeply to what is just coming into awareness, encouraging and welcoming it, we can help to create the kind of growth climate Rogers was speaking about. His way of articulating this dimension of experience helps therapists to point to it, and people who don't naturally notice it, to find it. (Gene developed two practices from this philosophy: "focusing" and "thinking at the edge." Focusing is a practice not to be confused with focusing as an orientation in Focusing-Oriented Therapy ("FOT").

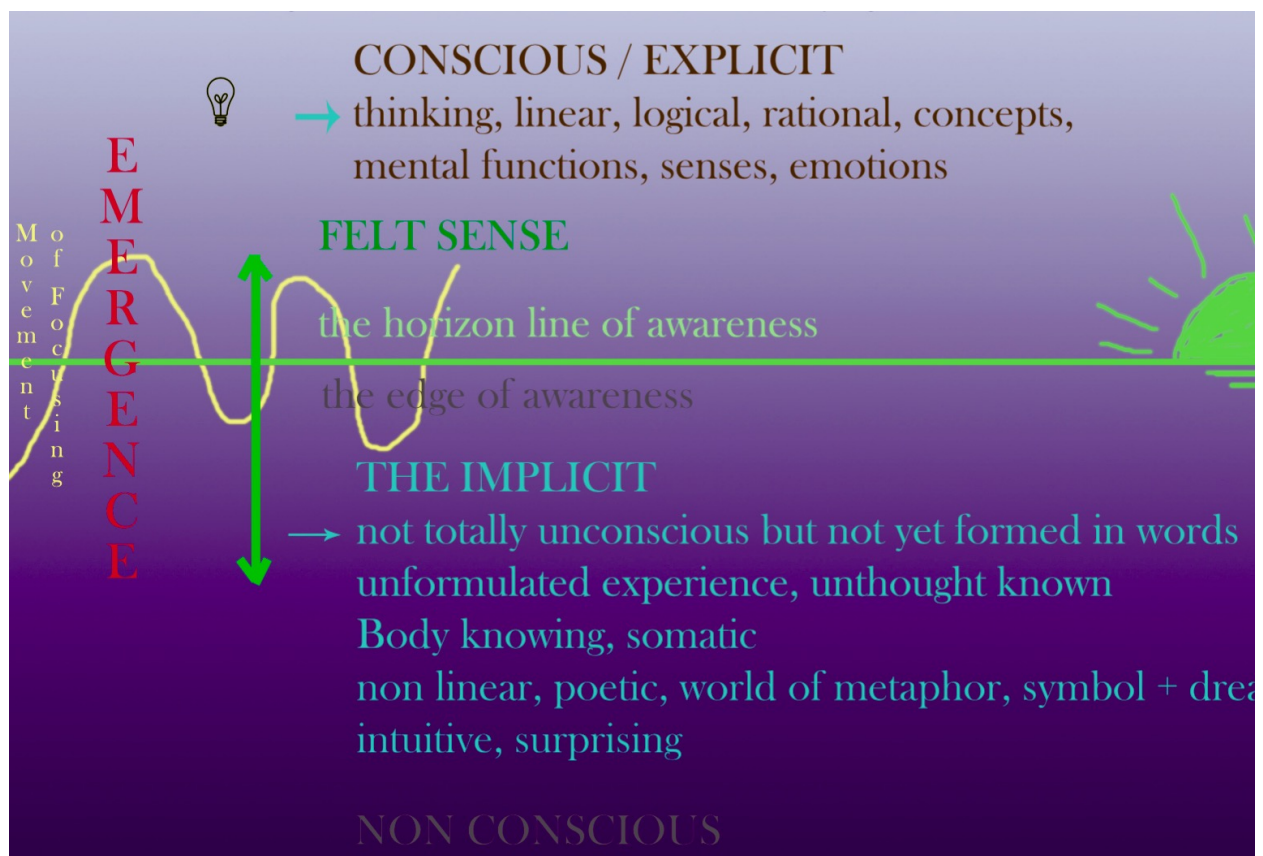
Let's see what happens in this talk if we pause and notice this dimension of our experience right now. How are we taking in this talk? What are we sensing beyond the words? How are we implicitly dialoguing with it? What kind of climate are we semi aware of?

2 - INTERACTION FIRST

Gene believed that the therapist's warmth, genuineness and positive regard are healing conditions. He had experienced this healing when he was in therapy with Carl. He tells the story that when he was first in therapy with Carl he could not believe that Rogers felt positively toward him and genuinely understood him (the "monstrous thing" he felt he was) but his not believing it didn't matter. Even before he walked into Roger's office for his session, he was different. He agreed with Carl that it is the relationship that heals, but stressed that it is not what we say about the relationship, or believe about it, but the actual, lived experience of it. In our theory class (which you can find on YouTube) Gene asks the group, "How is it that the client comes to you and pours out all their troubles, perhaps in the same way they do with others, and that helps?"

Gene's answer to this primary question is that therapy and all of life is an interactive process. He says "we are interaction" and therapy works because with a new person you are a different interactive process. We are not separate, entity-beings but inter-beings. I often quote him as saying, "Our main job as therapists, is to *BE the* kind of interaction that will make the person better. We are being the healing climate. There are two people, but one interaction."

This understanding is freeing and empowering for me as a therapist because I no longer feel it is my job to "get" the client to change, to focus, to do or be some different way. Instead, I can find that new way in myself and bring it into the interaction. I can wholeheartedly take on the challenge of being the "New Other," the "Partner" the "One" with whom "The One in There" (Gene's name for the inner experience) can engage in new ways with, and articulate the unsayable stuck experiences and carry forward stuck interactions.



3 - THE IMPLICIT realm of experience is beyond words (or under the words). "The unthought known," "body knowing".

Implicit experience is a vast intricate world of thought/feeling/ body sensing that is always interactive. It is not unconscious, but just on the edge of our awareness. Gene speaks of it as a "something" that pokes up from felt experience. It talks in the language of felt sense, metaphor and imagery. This "something" is also a "someone" – "the one in there" Gene calls it. It's a voice that needs to be welcomed and heard, articulated and drawn out so it can find its own words, open up and move forward. We can trust that when that inner one can be found and finds its voice—it's deeper point—there is new energy, insight and hopefulness, even if what it finds is difficult or painful. The process of unfolding the felt sense and following its unfolding is a moment-to-moment guiding force in therapy.

4 - EXPERIENTIAL

By experiential, Gene means that therapy is what is FELT in the moment, in the body, in the living interaction. It is a "speaking from" rather than a "speaking about" process. Gene sometimes says to the client who is describing something, "Is that here now? Can you find that?" Slowing down, pausing, bringing your own resonant metaphysical and feelings can help the process of therapy be more experiential.

VIDEO - Gene Gendlin demonstration
"Something Was Ripped Out of Me"

Brief comments about the video:

Gene is talking more in this teaching demonstration than he usually would in a real therapy session. He is pointing to the crux of what the client is up against, "it's" point. Gene is keeping the feeling company. He is inviting the client to stay close to the edge of what comes in her. Gene and the client are together making an interaction that welcomes what is trying to speak. (Gene distracts her by encouraging her to let her tears come and she finally tells him she doesn't need that and he laughs and says that he likes clear instructions.) There is a turning point, a felt shift,

when Gene says, "We don't yet know what it needs." She looks up, becomes more alive, struck by the "we." "That's a new one for me," she says. They unfold the exact felt meaning of this particular "we" feeling. The felt sense words are "not, not cared about." Finding the right name—the right words to resonate with the feeling moves the process forward.