

**The Radical Impact of Experiencing on Psychotherapy Theory:  
An Examination of Two Kinds of Crossings**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper articulates the radical impact of Eugene Gendlin's philosophy on psychotherapy theories. Since the early beginnings of psychotherapy, what appeared in consciousness was thought to be representations of past events that got repressed in the unconscious. However, Gendlin's philosophy proposed a radically different model, where consciousness or *experiencing* was observed to be essentially creative. The paper articulates the creative nature of experiencing by examining Gendlin's concept of *experiencing*. Furthermore, it discusses two kinds of *crossings* seen in Gendlin's philosophy. These are *crossing* as Re-experiencing (*Nacherleben*), and the *crossing* of two contexts such as a metaphor and a situation. Some of Carl Rogers' psychotherapy responses are discussed from the point of view of crossing.

Keywords: Crossing, Experiencing, Re-experiencing, Metaphors, Empathy

This paper articulates Eugene Gendlin's concept of *experiencing*, and examines what he calls *crossing*. Gendlin uses the term crossing in at least two distinct ways. The focus of this paper is to explore the significance of these two types of crossings for a theory of psychotherapy. It is my view that an examination of these two types of crossings will contribute to psychotherapy, by showing what is actually happening in the therapist-client interaction, and in the client's experiencing. The view of psychotherapy that emerges may be very different from the way one usually thinks about it. Hence, I believe that Gendlin's theory of Experiencing has a radical impact on psychotherapy. Throughout the paper, parts of Gendlin's philosophy that are relevant to psychotherapy will be highlighted and Carl Rogers' articulation of therapy responses will be discussed from this perspective.

### Experiencing

This article chooses to begin its investigation with Experiencing. Instead of beginning a theory of psychotherapy with particular contents or units (such as *the unconscious*, *the self*, for example) which are assumed to exist, this paper starts with *experience as we have them*.

Imagine a particular situation, for example, waiting for a client to come into your office on a particular afternoon. This is a distinct and unique experience. With a different client, or on a different time of the day, or on a different day, in a different location, the experience of waiting for someone to come would be a totally different experience. And how could you express this particular afternoon, waiting for this particular client in your office? You would notice, first of all, that although there is a distinct feel about this situation, it is difficult to say exactly in words what this feel would be. You would have to wait for the right words to come. Gendlin uses the term *direct referent* to articulate experiencing (Gendlin

1962/1997). I interpret this term to mean that the feel of this situation comes to you directly before construing the situation with words or concepts.

As you sit and wait for words to come, a word may come: *anxiety*. For some reason or another you feel anxious about seeing this client this afternoon. As you try out this word *anxiety*, you may notice that this word is not exact, that *apprehensive* might work better. But as you sit with *apprehensive*, a memory may come of this client speaking harsh words, and you might notice how *hurt* you had felt in a previous session. But you notice that this is not only your memory, it is also your striving to work out the hurtful feeling and relate to the client in a way that would not be so hurtful. You might wonder if this *hurt* may actually be the client's experience, and you find yourself wondering how to *care* for that hurtful experience in the client.

In this example, it can be observed that one does not have a *static experience of anxiety*. As you stay with what once felt like *anxiety*, other words come from that process of trying out words. It is not *anxiety*, not *apprehensive*, not only *hurt*, but also *care*. Experience is a process from which many words and concepts arise and are exceeded. Thus, it is referred to as experiencing with an *-ing*.

Gendlin seems to have derived his concept of experiencing from the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). "Dilthey had three terms: 'experiencing', 'expression' and 'understanding'...But Dilthey says that experiencing is inherently always also an understanding already, and also an expression" (Gendlin 1997a, p.41). Gendlin gives an example of a spider playing dead when threatened (Gendlin 1997a). The spider playing dead is the spider's experiencing, and also the spider's expression through which we can understand that the spider feels threatened. But Gendlin seems to have developed upon Dilthey's hermeneutic cycle of 'experiencing-expression-understanding'

in his own way. In other words, although Dilthey attempted to understand the works of *others*, often historical persons and works through ‘experiencing-expression-understanding’, Gendlin brought these to the very nature of *how we have experience*, and to the immediate interaction with the other, as in a psychotherapy session.

When you feel a bit of anxiety waiting for your client this afternoon in your office, in that instant, you are experiencing *anxiety*, and *anxiety* is your expression and you understand that you are *anxious*. Gendlin writes that Dilthey “also had a positive assertion; they *are* a further experiencing. Dilthey pointed to characteristic kind of continuity (*Zusammenhang*) of the three” (Gendlin 1997a, p.41).

The expression *anxiety* brings a further experiencing and a further understanding. Now you understand that you are not anxious, you feel *apprehensive*, and still further that you feel *hurt* and *care* and so on.

Incidentally, the Focusing practitioner may recognize that experiencing articulated as *experiencing-expression-understanding* is parallel to the crux of the six movements of Gendlin’s Focusing Short Form (Gendlin 1981/2007). These are the second movement, felt sense (experiencing); third and fourth movements, handle and resonating the handle (expression); and the fifth movement, asking (understanding). Clearly, Focusing Short Form features *experiencing*, the movement of *experiencing-expression-understanding*.

### **Experiencing and Re-experiencing (*Nacherleben*): Reflexivity**

But how can *apprehensive* come from what was once experienced as *anxiety*? It is as if there is always at work, a kind of monitor of our experiences. In other words, you say: I must be feeling anxious, but as those words depart your lips, there

is a *mind’s eye*, as it were, monitoring that you just said: *I must be feeling anxious*. In your *mind’s eye monitor* the word *anxiety* may not appear to be appropriate enough. And you look for better words. *Apprehensive* comes, as it is monitored again. In other words, in Gendlin’s elucidation of consciousness, experiencing and re-experiencing (*Nacherleben*) come together. This brings about a basic *reflexivity* to our experience. And this is how a “characteristic kind of continuity (*Zusammenhang*) of the three” can occur.

Many psychotherapists from Freud to Rogers (at least until the mid-1970’s) assume only one way by which new meanings emerge in experience: what was once unconscious becomes conscious. Thus, *apprehensive* or *hurt* must have been *restored* from the unconscious, they would assume. However, this view is difficult to uphold, as in Gendlin’s critique of the *repression paradigm* (Gendlin, 1964). First of all, why should *hurt* be repressed? And secondly, how come the mechanisms of defense failed at this instant, to deliver unconscious content to consciousness?

The repression paradigm however, is strongly rooted in most psychotherapy theories, including Client-Centered Therapy. As I have shown in a previous article (Ikemi, 2005), around the time that Rogers’ book *Client-Centered Therapy* (1951) was published, Carl Rogers adhered to the repression paradigm where there were two layers of experience. What appeared on one layer, the layer of *awareness*, *represented* or *symbolized* what existed in the other subconscious layer. Rogers would frequently use expressions such as “denied to awareness”, “distorted” or “not accurately symbolized in awareness” (Rogers 1951) to say of how some experiences were not “assimilated” into conscious awareness. In the mid-seventies, Rogers seems to have altered his view significantly (Rogers, 1975). This altered view, which drew heavily of Gendlin’s concept of Experiencing, saw that “at all times there is going on in the

human organism a flow of experiencings to which the individual can turn again and again as a referent in order to discover the meaning of his experience” (Rogers 1970, p.141). Hence, this altered view saw meaning as discovered by referring to experiencing rather than by uncovering unconscious contents, nevertheless, his *theory of personality and behavior* (Rogers, 1951; 1959) that runs upon the repression paradigm, is well studied among psychotherapists. Thus, many psychotherapists from psychoanalysts to client-centered therapists think and write about their therapies based upon the platform of the repression paradigm.

This article begins with experiencing. From the outset, this already has a radical impact, in that it is different from most other psychotherapy theories. A theory of psychotherapy emerging from Gendlin’s philosophy does not run on the repression paradigm. What follows runs on the *experiencing paradigm*, so to speak, enabling a radically different view of therapy.

### **The First Kind of Crossing: Re-experiencing and the Understanding of Other Persons**

Re-experiencing or *Nacherleben* is a term that Dilthey often used (Dilthey, trans. 2002/1910). I will refer to it henceforth as *Re-experiencing* with a capital R to distinguish this term from the ordinary usage of the word to mean *experience again*. Gendlin does not seem to use this term both in his philosophical and in his psychological works, with the exception of his master’s thesis (Gendlin, 1950). However, while he does not use this term explicitly, a close reading of Gendlin’s philosophy would make it apparent that he is using this concept and is providing his own term, *crossing*, to refer to his interpretation of Re-experiencing. A little later, I will quote Gendlin directly to demonstrate this point.

Before that, I would like to show how I explain Re-experiencing. I frequently use the following exercise in my workshops. I read something like the following narrative and ask how the audience experienced this narrative.

On a hot summer day, when the sun was directly over my head, I was walking on the beach in my business suits. I found the beach hard to walk. Sand kept coming into my shoes. When the wind blew, sand would blow onto my clothes. I heard children playing by the waves—but I kept walking straight. I started to get thirsty and looked around. At a distance by the street, there was a vending machine for drinks. *But it’s so far away*, I thought. So I stood there wondering what to do. (Translated in part from Ikemi, 2016, p.91.)

People who listen to this narrative, report that they had experienced this narrative as imagery. And I would say: *that imagery is your Re-experiencing*. It is through that imagery, Re-experiencing, that we can understand the other. Moreover, the audience’s Re-experiencing is richer than the author’s experience, in that the Re-experiencing contains much more detail than what was explicitly stated in the narrative. When asked what was there in their imagery that was not explicitly mentioned in my narration, the audience often report that they heard the sound of waves, the call of sea gulls, the smell of the ocean, the sensation of sweat on the skin, the sight of shells and seaweed on the beach, cars passing on a distant street, some trees ahead... Saying what was in their Re-experiencing, or *crossing* the audience’s Re-experiencing with my experiencing, carries my experiencing forward, and makes my experiencing richer. Now, after the crossing, I do hear sea gulls in my own experience, and I do smell the ocean, and I do see the seashells .... I can now say that these *were implied*.

When we say that the right phrases *were implied*, we tell about a special relation, not a correspondence... We saw this relation also when I said that rephrasing a point carries forward so that we discover more of what it “was” (Gendlin 1997a, pp.22-23).

I will return later to this special kind of *was*. For now, I would like to point out that when the audience’s Re-experiencing crosses with mine, my experience becomes richer and more of what *was implied* becomes explicit.

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, 1997a, p.41)

In this interesting passage, Gendlin first mentions Dilthey’s articulation of Re-experiencing (*Nacherleben*), that of “understanding the author better than they understood themselves”, and then he interprets Dilthey in his own way. Finally, he writes “Or, as I would say it: these cross...” In other words, crossing is Gendlin’s interpretation of Dilthey’s Re-experiencing (*Nacherleben*). The first way with which Gendlin uses the term *crossing* is *Re-experiencing*.

Re-experiencing is often confused with empathy. Makkreel (1975) criticizes certain philosophers for *mistranslating* Re-experiencing into empathy. He summarizes Dilthey’s position on the difference between Re-experiencing and empathy in the following way.

Indeed, Dilthey clearly recognized that empathic projection of the self into the other can become an obstacle to understanding. Our understanding

of the dramatic characters on the stage, for example, will be hindered by reading our own concerns and motivations into them (Makkreel, 1975, p.252).

One psychotherapy professor who was attending one of my workshops said that in my summer beach exercise, he was trying hard to be empathic towards the main character. *Trying to be in his shoes*, as one might say of empathy. But since he could not understand why the main character was wearing a business suit and walking on the beach under the hot summer sun, he was having difficulty in experiencing empathy. Indeed, his “empathic projection of the self” (Makkreel) was not working out. While he was struggling with this, the narration ended and he was surprised that others in the workshop could cross so many details into the narration, while he could not. He then told me that he was trying to be empathic, and his efforts got in the way of Re-experiencing, while the others, who seemed to make little effort at empathy, visualized and crossed easily into the narration. I believe this is an instance of how the “empathic projection of self into the other can become an obstacle to understanding” (Makkreel).

I believe that Re-experiencing is more basic than empathy. The audience *sees* the imagery of the beach before they can decide whether or not to have empathy for the main character. Re-experiencing emerges pre-reflexively, before one can think or judge about it. It is not my intention to say that empathy ought to be replaced with Re-experiencing. My intention is simply to point out that the two are different.

Therapists are often taught not to impose their own interpretations on the client’s experience. Therefore, many therapists are afraid of saying what came in their Re-experiencing. Therapist listen carefully and often say back the gist of the client’s self-understanding. This type of therapist response is called *reflection*. From the standpoint of the *Experiencing*

*paradigm*, the reflection response strengthens clients' own reflexivity, their own Re-experiencing. It helps clients to check if their own words and formulations adequately say their experience. Thus, from this point of view, the reflection response is not only an expression of therapist empathy or acceptance. Carl Rogers testifies to this, when he says that the reflection response should be called "testing understandings" or "checking perceptions" (Rogers, 1989). As such, it seems as if Rogers were *crossing* his understanding or *crossing* his perception from his Re-experiencing.

In fact, the description of the *process of empathy* that Rogers (1975/1980) reformulated, reads like a description of Re-experiencing. He writes that an empathic way of being has several facets.

It means entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment to moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever, that he/she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in his/her life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments, sensing meanings of which he/she is scarcely aware, but not trying to uncover feelings of which the person is totally unaware, since this would be too threatening (Rogers, 1980, p.142).

In this description, Rogers seems to be describing his Re-experiencing of the client's experiencing. He seems to make little effort for empathic self-projection, "as if one were the person", to use Rogers' earlier formulation. Instead, Rogers is Re-experiencing the life of his client, "becoming thoroughly comfortable in it" and "temporarily living in his/her life". From this Re-experiencing, Rogers would attempt to *cross* his understanding, his perceptions, his "sensings" of the client's experiencing. He continues:

It includes communicating your

sensings of his/her world as you look with fresh and unafraid eyes at elements of which the individual is fearful. It means frequently checking with him/ her as to the accuracy of your sensings, and being guided by the responses you receive. You are a confident companion to the person in his/her inner world. By pointing to the possible meanings in the flow of his/her experiencing you help the person to focus on this useful type of referent, to experience the meanings more fully, and to move forward in the experiencing (Rogers, 1980, p.142).

In the quote above, it seems to me that Rogers is crossing his "sensings" of the client's experience with the client. As I have shown in a previous article (Ikemi, 2013), Rogers seems to be explicating the felt meaning he senses from his interaction with his clients. Although Rogers never used this term, it seems to me that what Rogers was actually doing in his empathic way of being and in his reflection responses amounted to *crossing* his Re-experiencing with his client's experiencing.

Incidentally, Rogers writes that he is reformulating his conceptualization of empathy by "draw(ing) on the concept of experiencing as formulated by Gendlin". This is seen clearly in the last sentence of this citation, where what Rogers calls an "empathic way of being" is helping the client to *focus* on the felt meaning, so that experiencing is carried forward ("move forward"). Rogers seems to be working on the Experiencing paradigm, although he retains some of the repression paradigm, as evident in the previous citation. Some traces of the repression paradigm are seen where Rogers conceives of what "a person is totally unaware of" as contents that are "too threatening" to appear in awareness. Thus, he seems to assume that there are certain experiences that exist only in subconscious form, for they are too threatening and therefore repressed. Nonetheless, his intention is not to uncover and restore what is unconscious, but to

help the person “move forward in the experiencing”. In this way, it seems to me that although Rogers did retain some elements of the repression paradigm, he was moving to operate on the Experiencing paradigm.

### **Crossing and Intersubjective Reality**

At one workshop, I was explaining how the crossing from the audience is mostly accurate. Most of what the audience said *were implied* in my experience. But sometimes, the audience’s Re-experiencing would not cross with my experience. For example, one participant said that she saw me dressed in a grey suit, walking on the beach. The grey suit did not cross with my experience, because in my imagery, I was wearing a black suit. Overall, however, the audiences’ Re-experiencing were mostly accurate. No one seemed to be too far off, for example, no one said that there were gold coins laid out on the sand. As I explained this, one lady asked me: *so gold coins don’t cross with your experience, how about beauty in bikinis?* As I was about to say, *No, no bikinis here*, something happened in my experience. I *saw* the backside of a woman in blue bikinis in my imagery! *No, ...well yes*, was my answer. My narration began to take a new turn from that instant. Similarly, at another workshop in Japan, a participant said that in her Re-experiencing there was a sweating woman with a towel around her neck, frying noodles at a beach house shop (There are such beach house shops in Japanese beaches during the summer). Immediately in my imagery emerged a beach house shop and even a glass of cold beer! These instances show how one’s experiencing is always affected by the other’s Re-experiencing. Thus, a story becomes *our story*; the story does not remain to be *my story*. Hence, as we know from everyday life, when we discuss a personal problem with one friend, we may arrive at a certain reasonable solution. But when the same problem is discussed with another friend, a different solution

emerges. Similarly, in psychotherapy, the nature of the client’s problem may be understood in one way with a certain therapist, and in a different way with another therapist. It does not really matter which understanding is true, because when people cross with another, intersubjective realities emerges. Understandings emerge within these intersubjective realities.

Psychotherapists may fall into the illusion that there must be only one truth. But a situation is always situated in a certain way when one reflects upon the situation with a certain person, and situated in another way with a different person. In this way, the client’s experience is *always already crossed* with the therapist’s from the moment they enter the consulting room.

Furthermore, Gendlin warns us about the *single technique* and *single theory systems* in psychotherapy, where one technique or one theory is claimed to be the only truth (Gendlin, 1973). Instead, the client and therapist live each moment in a unique intersubjective reality, so the experience of what is true is always already different, even with the same therapist.

### **The Carried Forward Was**

“Present experiencing is always capable of something new that reshapes the past (Gendlin, undated).” As Gendlin frequently writes, when our experiencing is carried forward, we *now* see how it really *was*. The same kind of *was* appears frequently in Gendlin’s writings, both in philosophy (Gendlin, 1997b, for example) and in psychology (Gendlin, 1964, 1996, for example). This kind of *was* is seen frequently in psychotherapy. For example, the client would say: *Oh, now I know what it was. I was afraid of her all this time*. Although very common, this is a strange kind of *was* when you

think about it. The client says that he was afraid of her *all this time*, but yet he was not aware of being afraid of her five minutes ago. It is the carrying forward of experiencing that brings about what came before. It is a forward movement that *reads backwards* as Gendlin would say.

Psychotherapists frequently experience this kind of *was* in their therapy sessions, but miss the temporality of such explication process. If the therapist envisions time as an organization of events in chronological order, then the only way to make sense of such a client statement would be that the *being afraid of her* was formed in the past and remained repressed in the unconscious, until it came into consciousness during the therapy hour. As mentioned before, however, Gendlin (1964) refutes the repression paradigm on the grounds that it is not possible to explain how a certain content got repressed and how it got released. Instead, Gendlin sees experiencing as creating meaning. It is the carrying forward of experiencing that situates the past in a new way, giving rise to new meanings with which one sees the past.

The understanding of temporality as evident in the ‘carried forward was’ is not new in phenomenology and existential thought. We are reminded of Kiekegaard’s famous maxim: “Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.” Understanding is always a forward unfolding that reads backwards. We owe to Gendlin, the very specific way in which he developed the temporality of carrying forward. Now, it is not only an abstract truth but an observable phenomenon in psychotherapy. The *carried forward ‘was’*, as we might call it, has a radical impact on psychotherapy theory. In most psychotherapy theories, ‘contents of the psyche’ are assumed to exist *a priori*. These are contents such as *the unconscious* (Freud), *Oedipus complex* (Freud), *defense mechanisms* (Freud), *the*

*Self* (Rogers), *archetypes* (Jung), and so forth. Gendlin’s phenomenology has shown that these concepts emerge *only after* the carrying forward, hence they exist *a posteriori*.

It alarms me sometimes when I hear people, both clients and therapists, thinking about therapy and focusing, with an assumption that a certain set of particular contents, such as early trauma, inner self, true self, inner child, split-off parts, past lives and so forth, are bound to appear. As Gendlin (1996) wrote, we can only understand retroactively, and so we are *not knowing* in advance how the experiencing will carry forward; *not knowing* in advance how a person will make sense of, and create meaning from their experiencings. It alarms me when people, both clients and therapists, lose the *not knowing* and start with assumptions. Then therapy will become assumption-centered, and it will no longer be client-centered nor experiential. It reminds me of Gendlin’s critique of Medard Boss (Gendlin, 1977) where he criticizes the “great problem in Boss’ *method*” (italics added), even though Boss used phenomenological *concepts* in his dream interpretation. It alarms me when people, both clients and therapists, impose certain contents or concepts on experience, without staying in the openness of *not knowing*. In this openness, the therapists’ Re-experiencing moves forward as the client’s experiencing carries forward, and they look backwards together to discover freshly how they got here.

### **The Second Kind of Crossing: Metaphorical Crossing of Two Contexts**

There is another way with which Eugene Gendlin uses the term *crossing*. In explaining about this *crossing*, Gendlin gives the following example “how is your anger like a chair?” (Gendlin, 1986, p.150). The usage of the term *crossing* here, does not denote Re-experiencing (*Nacherleben*),



but shows the linguistic crossing of a metaphor and a situation, crossing *chair* and *anger*, in this example. “A metaphor brings the word’s old situation into a new situation. The two contexts ‘cross’ and form something new” (Gendlin, 1986, p.150).

In contrast to conventional theories of metaphor where the similarity of the situation and the metaphor is assumed to be primary, in Gendlin’s metaphor theory, the similarity is found after the carrying forward (Gendlin, 1995; Okamura, 2016). Thus, there is no apparent similarity between anger and chair at first, but these become apparent as experiencing is carried forward. I will give an example from a Focusing session to illustrate this later.

Okamura (2016) points out that Gendlin’s *crossing* of two contexts can be seen in a traditional form of Japanese word-play riddle called *Nazokaké*. Indeed, the word *Nazokaké* is made of two parts, *nazo* meaning *riddle* and *kaké* meaning *to multiply* or *to cross*. Although it is extremely difficult to make a *Nazokaké* in English, the following is my clumsy attempt, which turns out to be more like a pun. Yet, I hope to convey the playful feel and structure of *Nazokaké*. *Nazokaké* comes in three lines: the first line is the *kaké* which I translate as: *to cross*; the second line is the *toki* which I will translate as: *to solve*; the third line asks for the *kokoro*, which means ‘heart’, but I will translate it as: *the crux*.

When focusing and phenomenology is  
*crossed*  
And *solved* as *My Levi’s*  
What is *the crux*?  
---Answer: Gene’s (Jeans)

Gendlin’s example of *crossing* has the same structure as *Nazokaké*.

When your anger is *crossed*  
And *solved* as ‘a chair’  
What is the *crux*?

Focusing too, has this same structure. For instance, when a person is Focusing on their work environment that feels like a grey cloud in the chest, this can be put into the form of a *Nazokaké* riddle.

When the grey cloud in your chest is  
*crossed*  
And *solved* as ‘your work environment’  
What is the *crux*?

The following is a vignette of the second kind of crossing in a Focusing session. Although *Nazokaké* is not used explicitly, the same kind of riddle structure can be observed.

A beginning Focuser volunteered to be the Focuser in a demonstration session. She said that she had a habit of constantly touching her hair, and was wondering if Focusing could help her get rid of that habit. She said that she had curly hair which she didn’t like, and she had gotten a straight perm, but the roots of her hair were curly, and that bothered her. I told her that I wasn’t sure if Focusing could help with this, but we could certainly give it a try. I asked her: what is your hand wanting to do by touching your hair? She said, her hand was constantly looking for curled up hair and it was wanting to straighten them out. I then asked her: I wonder if this makes sense to you, but if you said to yourself, *I want to straighten out my curled-up life, and live a straight life, then, what comes to you?* To my surprise, tears welled up in her eyes. What came to her was how her parents’ relationship was strained and curled up, and she was always in the middle straightening things out. She talked for the next 30 minutes or so, about how she was constantly *straightening out* her parents’ relationship. When the session ended, she looked refreshed and was amazed at the power of working with metaphors. I was amazed that throughout this session, she had not touched her hair at all after the crossing.

In this session, we had crossed *curled up-straighten out* with her life. It had the

structure of *Nazokaké*, although I did not put it that way.

When *wanting to straighten out the curled-up parts* is crossed

And solved as *your life*

What is the crux?

---Answer: I straighten out my parents' curled up relationship.

### **The Two Kinds of Crossings are not Separate**

The following vignette comes from a workshop that I had conducted in China. It shows how the two kinds of crossings articulated in this paper occur seamlessly. Transcripts of this session and a discussion on how meaning was created in this session, have been published in Japanese (Ikemi, Li & Wong, 2016). In this section, I will summarize the session and what came for the Focuser in the follow-up interviews.

The Focuser had a felt sense in her chest which was like dark clouds forming in the shape of an upside-down hat. The session ended but she was still puzzled by what the upside-down hat meant. I crossed my Re-experiencing into the upside-down hat as we reviewed the session in front of the audience. Soon after we began the review, she realized that since the upside-down hat was a hat, it could not close, it could only take-in and continuously did so, taking in everything the Focuser wanted. She also recalled how she had overeaten recently, and how her abdomen felt so bloated after that. As I heard this, a word came from my Re-experiencing, *perhaps...uhm...this upside-down hat is greedy?* The Focuser laughed out and said, *that's it exactly! How come you understand me so accurately?* She then said that she had just started a business and wanted to do so much, too much, that the relationship with her assistant had become strained. Yes, she said, she had been *greedy* and that was causing the

inharmonious relationship. She was interviewed 5 days later and then one month later about the impact of this session. In these follow up interviews, she said how she, at first, did not want to admit that she was greedy, but now she realized how *greedy* she had *always been*. And *greedy* was a subtle but big part of her life, in her education, in her business and generally in her life. The greediness of wanting more had always pushed her, painting her *inner scenery red* but now she said, her *heart is the color of the gentle blue sea*. And now, she said, *even my stomach feels good!*

In this session, as I Re-experienced her upside-down hat, the word *greedy* came to me. When I mentioned this to her, my Re-experiencing *crossed (Nacherleben)* with her experiencing. Then, the word *greedy crossed* (metaphor) with many contexts of her life. The two kinds of crossings occurred seamlessly.

### **Implications for a Theory of Psychotherapy**

I believe that an elaboration of the two kinds of crossings in Gendlin's philosophy will contribute to a radical re-consideration of psychotherapy theories. Since the early beginnings of psychotherapy, what appeared in conscious experience was assumed to represent memories stored in the unconscious. "Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences" (Breuer & Freud, 1893/1955, p.7.) was the famous observation at the outset of psychoanalysis. Henceforth, *memory* was the featured cognitive activity in psychoanalysis, where psychoanalysts attempted to bring back memories, using hypnosis and free association. Human experience needed to be *explained* by finding their *causes* from past events. This model necessitated psychoanalysis to arrive at determinism, where consciousness was *determined* by unconscious processes that originated in the past.

As shown earlier, Carl Rogers also used this paradigm in his theory of

personality and behavior (Rogers, 1951, 1959), at least during the 1950s. With Gendlin however, consciousness is seen as essentially creative. It *processes* what we already know to create meaning, or to *make sense of* experience. Rather than memory, *crossing* is the featured cognitive activity. Many concepts elaborated by psychoanalyst can be crossed to create novel meanings, but experience is never determined by these concepts, nor by the past. If one finds, upon reflection, that a certain experience was determined by past events, that too is a novel meaning that was just created.

This article explores the impact of Gendlin's philosophy for a *theory* of psychotherapy, as evident in its title. Implications of this theory for psychotherapy *practice* is profound but subtle. This is so, because the theory articulated in this article brings a point of view for understanding what happens in the therapeutic relationship, rather than a particular skill of therapy. The author welcomes case studies and further discussions of how psychotherapy practice can be understood with this point of view.

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