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Empathy as Vicarious Introspection in Psychoanalysis

Abstract

The psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut defines 'empathy' as 'vicarious introspection'. An inquiry is undertaken into what 'vicarious introspection' really means. The implications of this statement for the constitution of a psychoanalytic fact are explored. Without empathy, the inner life of man is unthinkable, according to Kohut. This points in the direction of a transcendental argument that empathy is the foundation of community, implicated by Kohut's position. This transcendental argument is explored and its limitations noted. An example of a specific, particular vicarious experience and its introspective processing is engaged. Implications for empathy, the self and, as the founder of self psychology, Kohut's idea of the selfobject are engaged.

Vicarious introspection and the constitution of a psychoanalytic fact

What Kohut says is primarily written from the perspective of clinical theory of transference, although the discussion sometimes goes over into metapsychology as well. One of Kohut's major contributions to psychoanalysis is the discovery of two hitherto undifferentiated forms of transference. The opening of the field of narcissistic transferences reveals two polar styles of inter-relating involving the activation of the grandiose self and the idealized, 'omnipotent' object in a mirror and idealizing transference. This discovery of forms of transference relating to the self has earned Kohut the distinction of being the founder of 'self psychology'. Though it is an over-simplification, these correspond to a maternal, nurturing role and a fatherly, goal-oriented role. Kohut

consistently maintains that introspection and empathy are necessary constituents of psychoanalytic facts (Kohut 1971: 37); and, having done so, stops arguing about the constitution of empathy and introspection and instead uses them to constitute something else ('facts'). We shall follow his example, first engaging the approach of vicarious introspection, then looking at a paradigm case, a clinical vignette, of its use.

In the follow text, the psychoanalyst, Heinz Kohut, uses 'empathy' synonymously with 'vicarious introspection'. The importance of the question of the relation of empathy to introspection is considerable. Nothing less than the constitution of what is a 'fact' in psychoanalytic psychology turns on the inter-relation of these two terms.¹ A representative text in which all four term – 'empathy', 'introspection', 'vicarious introspection' and 'fact' – are connected occurs in Kohut's essay on 'Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis':

Let us consider a simple example. We see a person who is unusually tall. It is not to be disputed that this person's unusual size is an important fact for our psychological assessment – without introspection and empathy, however, his size remains simply a physical attribute. Only when we think ourselves into his place, only when we, by vicarious introspection begin to feel his unusual size as if it were our own and thus revive inner experience in which we had been unusual or conspicuous, only then begins there for us an appreciation of the meaning that the unusual size may have for this person and only then have we observed a psychological fact. (1959: 461)

It is relatively easy to say what 'vicarious introspection' is not. It is no kind of Russellian knowledge by acquaintance with another's sensation or intellectual intuition of the alter ego. No privileged access to another's fantasy life is entailed, and the situation remains an inter-human one in which the animate expression of the emotional life of the other and receptivity to it mesh with one another.

What the locution 'vicarious introspection' wants to call to our attention is how the emergence of an interpretation from empathic receptivity is mediated and facilitated by what we called 'mineness' in Heidegger – an awareness of one's own experience of receptivity to the micro expressions of the other's animate sensory-affective life. We have encountered the issue of the formulation of an interpretation based on one's empathy before. Now we can make further progress with it.

In vicarious introspection one is *not* introspecting the feelings, sensations or experiences of the other at all. Such an operation would be

to misplace a displaced perception, using Dretske's expression. Rather one is introspecting a vicarious feeling, sensation or experience aroused in oneself by the other's animate expression of feeling and so on. One is directing attentional awareness to a feeling, sensation or experience aroused in oneself, determining that it is mine and, yet, acknowledging that it represents an experience caused by the experience of the other. In introspection one comes to realize that this feeling is not an endogenous feeling, arising from purely endogenous processes in oneself, but is a vicarious feeling that is part of being receptive towards another's animate self-expression. Using the first person 'I' for clarity, it is myself, not the other, who is the target of introspection. The other is the target of my empathy; I am the target of my introspection.

A misunderstanding occurs if the emphasis is accidentally misplaced – *misplaced*, not *displaced* – from the vicarious to the introspective aspect in defining 'empathy' as 'vicarious introspection'. This makes it seem that empathy consists in introspecting another's inner life. This goes too far. Empathy is *not* telepathy. Empathy consists in introspecting one's own vicarious receptivity towards the other, and it is through the vicarious dimension of experience that one makes the distinction between the individual self and the other.

The chief characteristic of vicarious introspection is that it requires a double representation. First, it requires a representation of the other's feeling, sensation, affect and so on. This is what empathy shares with emotional contagion. Second, vicarious introspection requires a representation of the other as the source of the first representation. Of course, this latter is what is lacking in emotional contagion. Thus, what differentiates vicarious introspection from various other forms of affective communicability is the distinction between a representation of the other as the cause of what is being experienced and the vicarious experience. In short, 'vicarious introspection' is a way of elaborating the experience captured and made mine by means of empathic receptivity. This provides input to further processing of the inter-human experience by related acts of empathy, including empathic understanding.

In the above-cited text from Kohut, the transformation of a 'physical attribute' into a 'psychological fact' (of psychoanalytic psychology) occurs in three steps. First, with regard to the other person, 'we think ourselves into his place'. Next, the vicarious experience is determined to be mine. The introspective awareness of the vicarious experience occurs based on an emerging, transitory, partial identification with the other individual. The experiences that are thus aroused belong to me – they are mine – and are available to attentional identification and

re-identification as the content of the introspection. Finally, an 'appreciation of . . . meaning' of the person's size completes the institution of a 'psychological fact'.

What it means to 'think ourselves into the other's place' is an issue. Am I imaging myself in the other's situation as I am – or as she or he is? And if I already know how she or he is, then why is it necessary to imagine at all? I already know her or him. Suppose that I am of short stature and hate it. Given Kohut's example, I would just love it being tall. I would be delighted no longer to talk to people while either staring at their middle chest or being constrained to look up at them if I want to make eye contact. However, that is not the question. The question is how this person – this other person – feels about being tall. If one knew that, then one wouldn't have to imagine oneself in their position. So how does the process get started?

Starting with the experience of meeting a tall individual that one has never encountered before and who walks into one's office, one may fall back on something like an argument from analogy to bring what is experience-distant closer to what is familiar. But this is an argument that already supposes that the stranger and oneself belong to the same community of fellow travellers capable of arriving at an understanding. Feeling the other's 'unusual size as if it were one's own' entails an analogous kind of recollection of experiences in which one may have been unusual or conspicuous. However, the introspection that takes place is not of the other but of one's own experiences.

In this passage, the vicarious experience is driven by imaginatively thinking oneself into the other's place. This revives experiences that are described and as mine in which one has been 'unusual or conspicuous'. In a coincidence of opposites, the quality of being conspicuous due to short stature would work almost as well as being too tall in capturing the quality of the experience of unusually sticking out in an uncomfortable way. The result is an 'appreciation of meaning' of what is implied by being personally conspicuous and unusual. In simplest terms, the point is that a physical fact – seven feet tall – is given meanings in terms of human interrelations – girls who are five feet tall won't date him; can't find a decent suit off the rack; height is not all that is required to be good at basketball, still a klutz; can't fit in coach class on an aeroplane and can't afford business class.

The grass is greener on the other side of the hill, and that is also the case here. When you cross over the hill, the grass is not greener after all. Vicarious experience extends to a range of experiences that enable a bootstrap operation that ascends to an experience of the other. The

tall individual knows all the disadvantages. He constantly bumps his head going down the stairway into the basement. He has to travel on aeroplanes on business, and does not remotely fit into the seat in coach class. Long trips get really painful. It is hard to find clothes that fit without expensive alterations. In short, it is misleading to put oneself in the place of the other without considering the particular character traits, personal preferences and historical patterns of experience that go along with 'being oneself'. It is clear that Kohut appreciates this in that he starts collecting reminders about how being usually tall and conspicuous would be, having carefully built 'unusual' into the description.

Still, one cannot help but get the impression that Kohut's interest in observation is as much a gesture in the direction of the authority of a certain paradigm of what is science (E. Nagel 1959) as opposed to a genuine conviction that what is constituted by empathy and introspection are 'observables'. The intention here is not to deny the analyst the use of his eyes and ears, or even to suggest that he merely uses his senses in a different way than the experimenter (although the latter is so); but rather the idea is to disclose the function of interpretation in the constitution of psychoanalytic facts. We return to the hybrid character of empathy and the way that aspects of two polar dimensions, receptivity and interpretation, are intertwined in it.

Without empathy, the inner life of man is unthinkable

The following consideration shows that for Kohut a psychoanalytic fact is not principally an observable, but involves an aspect of the understanding of meaning. Only after vicarious introspection can experiences in which we have been unusual be revived, 'only then begins there for us an appreciation of the meaning that the unusual size may have for this person'. Kohut recognizes that an 'appreciation of meaning' is involved in the constitution of a psychoanalytic fact. Empathy is not only tactical; it is strategic. It is not only empirical; it is constitutive of the psychological life of the human being. Thus Kohut explains:

Empathy is not just a useful way by which we have access to the inner life of man – the idea itself of an inner life of man, and thus of a psychology of complex mental states, is unthinkable without our ability to know via vicarious introspection – my explanation of empathy... what the inner life of man is, what we ourselves and what others think and feel. (1977: 306)

Coming toward the end of Kohut's *The Restoration of the Self* (1977), this statement might mistakenly be taken as simply rhetorical or inspirational (although it may be these also). This statement, however, should be taken at face value. When it is taken in this way, it is astonishing. It is an assertion that the very idea of the mental life of the human being (man) – what we ourselves and others think and feel – is 'unthinkable' without the ability to access (and know) others by means of empathy. Empathy is constitutive of the mental life of human beings, what we ourselves and what others think and feel.

An obvious first question is whether Kohut says both too much and too little. Does he say too much? What basis is there for asserting that empathy is the foundation for the complex psychology of mental states – thoughts (and beliefs?) as well as emotions, affects and sensation? Without making it too easy to skate through on a technicality, it is useful to recall that many beliefs do not arouse our empathy because they relate to what are *prima facie* physical facts, not psychological ones. Empathy is not constitutive of the physical world, but of the psychological one, understood in the sense of what makes us human. Kohut's interest would be in empathizing with beliefs and related mental states, presumably including human actions, in so far as they are vehicles for meaningful human relations. Even the simplest imaginable belief takes on a wealth of human significance that make the beliefs matter. The belief that it is raining *matters* in that the belief gets entangled with a whole world of background contexts that present or shut down possibilities. That it is raining *means* that the whole world seems to reflect one's sadness; that one can't go out and play baseball with the guys from work – no fun allowed; that one gets to stay home and read – which is an enjoyable possibility; that the person and one's spouse get to stay home by the fire – the possibility of fun is allowed; that on the day of Mozart's funeral in the movie *Amadeus* it was raining too – the heavens were crying. The list is without limit. What it does not mean is a mere report about the weather. The affects and emotions are what make beliefs and actions matter to human beliefs and actions, so empathy brings them along too.

Kohut is explicit that the discussion extends to both oneself and the other – 'what we ourselves and what others think and feel.' Empathic understanding is elaborated as the further 'up stream' processing of the vicarious experiences disclosed in directing attentional awareness ('introspecting') to one's openness in (empathic) receptivity to the other person. We can readily see why it is very useful to have another person – a committed and gracious listener – to mediate the accessing of one's

most intimate meditations. Thus, while it is in principle possible to empathize with oneself, all of the risks and hazards of confabulation and limitations of introspection loom large (Hurlburt and Heavey 2001). The techniques of journaling, analysis of the counter-transference and interpretations inspired by suspicion that things are not what they at first seem to be, are essential. Very few individuals have been able to get far with a self-analysis – Freud and Jung come to mind – and even then the results have inspired volumes on how incomplete the job was. Still, as an ideal point on the horizon towards which to work, empathizing with oneself remains a meaningful task.

Does Kohut perhaps say too little? If the inner life of man is a ‘we’ that is not a mere, rhetorical editorial ‘we’ but an actual first person plural form, then it is an easy next step to conclude that empathy is constitutive of the community of human beings, starting with the self and other. In this particular passage, Kohut is primarily arguing for the constitution of a scientific community – including psychoanalysts who define the realm of their data gathering activities through empathy. For example, according to Kohut, the Kleinians are part of the community even if somewhat imprecise, while Alexander goes beyond the pale in rejecting empathic methods in favour of education and suggestion (Kohut 1977: 307). Of course, this is a caricature of both what Kohut says as well as his would-be Kleinian and Alexandrian colleagues; but the point is that empathy is used as the foundation for community, here understood as the ‘in group’ of self psychologists who ‘get it’ about the scientific use of empathy.

While this latter statement goes beyond what Kohut explicitly asserts – that empathy is the constitutive basis of the human community writ large – it is consistent with his approach. It avoids the misinterpretations of empathy as compassion, on the one hand, and a sixth-sense perception (‘telepathy’), on the other (Kohut 1977: 304). The essential tools of psychoanalytic transference, and the interpretation of resistance themselves, become sense-bearing within the field of observations constituted by the analyst’s empathic and disciplined (‘scientific’) immersion in the experience of the other.

If there were any doubt about Kohut’s commitment to the establishment of a community of fellow travellers on the path of empathy – the unity of observer and observed – then it is Kohut’s account of the first psychoanalytic cure through the application of empathy:

The mutation that opened the door to the new field of introspective-empathic depth-psychology (psychoanalysis) took place in 1881, in

a country house near Vienna, in the encounter between Josef Breuer and Anna O. (Breuer and Freud 1893). The step that opened the path to a whole new aspect of reality – a step that established simultaneously both the novel mode of observation and the novel content of a revolutionary science – was made by the patient who insisted that she wanted to go on ‘chimney-sweeping’ (1893: 30). Yet it was Breuer’s joining her in this venture, her permission for her to go on with it, his ability to take her move seriously (i.e., to observe its results and to commit the observations to paper) that established that unity of observer and observed which forms the basis for an advance of the first magnitude in man’s exploration of the world. (1977: 301–302)

This documents the paradigm of the establishment of the first psychoanalytic community of self and other in Breuer’s deployment of empathy to treat Anna O. The famous ‘talking cure’ was Breuer’s gift of empathy, which should not be underestimated given the stereotyped authoritarian approach to medicine characteristic of that time and place.² Obviously this is not the first use of empathy as every parent, teacher and human being knows. Rather is the first disciplined, scientific use of empathy.

Consider now an analogy to the constitution of a psychoanalytic fact through empathy. In order to know some phenomenon one must be capable of being affected by it. Musical sounds are a constituent of one’s experience and understanding because of a capacity for hearing. Even if on some occasion one’s hearing breaks down or is destroyed, the concept of ‘musical sound’ still makes sense. It is still thinkable, conceivable, so long as one admits the intelligibility of the capacity for hearing. One may debate the origin, quality or meaning of some configuration of sounds. One may marshal other empirical tests, authorities or perspectives to scrutinize some sounds. But we agree about the possibility of agreement, even if we never arrive at agreement in this particular case. However, in a universe without hearing as a general capacity, in a universe without organisms sensitive to – receptive to, capable of apprehending, able to be affected by – sounds, neither music nor even noise is thinkable. It would be a logical contradiction to assert ‘No sound is audible’ (because there is no such thing as hearing) and ‘Some sound is audible’. We are no longer capable of conceiving of sound, much less understanding or knowing them.

A parallel consideration applies to empathy. Kohut’s position: without empathy, the very idea of the mental life of the human being is unthinkable. Note how this is immediately qualified in the direction of

a community of individuals by invoking 'what we ourselves and what others think and feel'. This is because empathy, as a general competence in human inter-relations, makes this life intelligible and sense-bearing by constituting it as a field of study in the first place. Thus, Kohut writes: 'Empathy does indeed in essence define the field of our observations' (1977: 306). Here the phenomena (feelings, emotions, thought and, presumably, meaningful behaviour) are dependent on that function which makes possible our access to them. Empathy is that function on the basis of which the experiences studied by depth psychology are opened up and constituted as accessible and knowable. Because empathy is that without which the constitution of our psychological life does not make sense, it is the condition of possibility of that life.

Now let's explicitly shift this consideration in the direction of the community of human relations. Empathy is the function through which human relations makes sense, insofar as without empathy we would not even be able to conceive of human beings as capable of expressing and being receptive to the expressions of feelings. A communal field of experience in which feelings are expressed and receptively apprehended, but which is completely lacking in empathy would be unthinkable. Empathy is the organizing principle on the basis of which these experiences are made accessible.

Granted that we do have these experiences of expressing and being affected by others' feelings, of becoming aware that the feelings of another have an impact on our own, we ask: How is this possible? We find that it is necessary to posit some capacity or competence – let us call it 'empathy' – upon pain of contradiction if we refuse it. A world with expressed and receptively experienced emotions, including vicarious experiences, but without empathy, would be an absurdity in the strict sense. It would be a world of musicians without hearing – the frantic movement of bows across violin strings and fingers on ivory piano keys would be in vain for neither the musicians nor the listeners would in principle be capable of hearing the music. Similarly, without the capacity to empathize with the feelings of another, we would be just bodies located physically in space alongside one another – no inter-human connection would exist at all. Human beings would not matter to one another. We would be emotional zombies, physically alive but affectively dead.

This line of reasoning, which is sometimes referred to as a 'transcendental argument' after Kant, provides a principle that answers a question of the form: granted that we have certain experiences, what must the constitution of our mental functions be like in order to account for the

very possibility of such experiences? In fact, Kant never uses the term 'transcendental argument', an invention of Kant interpretation that is worthy of note. What Kant does refer to are 'transcendental proofs' and 'procedures' (1781/87: 624 (A788/B816); also 592 (A737/B765)); and, of course, there is the famous 'transcendental deduction', deduction being a form of argument.³ In any case, human experience in encountering other individuals indicates that we are affected by their feelings and that our feelings (in turn) affect them. What is being proposed is that there must be a functioning capacity for being receptive to the feelings of others in order for the recognition, identification and further understanding of feelings in another to be 'thinkable', conceivable in any sense. Empathy, then, is just such a condition of possibility for describing others (and by implication ourselves) as capable of being affected by feelings.

Here the intimidating term 'transcendental' requires further clarification. It can be paraphrased as 'not capable of being contradicted by experience, but nevertheless relating to experiencing and providing the framework or structure within which that experience becomes meaningful.' Empathy is what makes possible the experience of affecting and being affected by the feelings of another person. This experience, in turn, is the basis on which we are subsequently justified in positing the existence of the capacity for empathy. But in this experience empathy is itself presupposed, for without empathy the experience itself could not occur. Thus, the argument has the force of logic. It is concerned with what is 'thinkable', 'conceivable', without contradiction. Yet it is more than mere logic, for it concerns the realm of experience. Empathy is that on the ground of which being affected by the feelings of others is constituted as a realm of accessible experiences in the first place.

What Kohut has in fact given in the cited passage is an example of such a 'transcendental argument', although in an implicit and abbreviated form. Kohut traces a path from the experience of the individual ('self') and other in community to empathy. In this process empathy is the condition of possibility of community. Invoking empathy as an inter-human competence makes understandable the experiences that individuals do in fact have. It makes intelligible how we are able to be receptive to the feelings of others. But, at the risk of paradox, how do we explain this principle of understanding?

Indeed that is the proper question since a show stopper objection occurs at this point. The sceptic might argue back that it is quite conceivable that we would all be emotional zombies – where is the logical contradiction in that? There is a wide spectrum of disfunctions of empathy – extending from autism to sociopathy – which, in greater

or lesser degree, exemplify the loss of empathy without incurring anything formally illogical (Hobson 2002; Farrow and Woodroof 2007). It is true that the lives of such individuals are challenging and characterized by intermittent or frequent breakdowns in behaviour, understanding and communication. Yet the capacity for logical thinking seems unimpaired and, in some cases, is even enhanced, resulting in elaborations of consistent, systematic thinking.

Still, the contradiction occurs practically and experientially. First, practically, if everyone behaved unempathically, zombie-like, always passing by the traveller at the side of the road in distress, the short term results would perhaps be undesirable yet not too bad. However, the loss of empathy for the other would diminish empathy for oneself entirely independently of utilitarian consequences. The individual would still experience distress – hunger, injury, loss – yet zombie-like would be unempathically indifferent to his or her own fate as implicitly as to that of the other. Apathy and lethargy would win out. People would stop asking for whom the bells tolls, not because of loss of engagement with others, but because of zombie-like loss of interest in themselves.

Intuitively, in terms of this argument, empathy and altruism remain separate distinctions, but the argument is parallel. Just as it is a contradiction to commit to reducing one's own suffering without also reducing the suffering in the world (including that of others), so too it is a contradiction to commit to being open to the empathy one receives without increasing the empathy in the world (including that of others). One is in the world and intending one's own empathy intends the empathy in the world directly and necessarily. The contradiction occurs because oneself is also an example of another in the world – intending empathy for oneself without also intending it for an other does not stand.

Experientially the answer is also direct. The statement 'Empathy is constitutive of the mental states that make us humans in a human community' does indeed lead to a contradiction by means of a counter-example from experience if the subject term (empathy) is deleted (withdrawn). If one withdraws the statement that there is empathy, then the contradiction emerges. If there is no empathy, 'No mental states of the other individual are able to be experienced.' This statement directly contradicts the assertion (and indeed the experience) that 'Some mental states of the other individual are able to be experienced.' This leads back to the further contradiction in terms of being human (humanity) which is the realm of experience under-girding the connection between empathy and mental states. Empathy gives us our humanness,

of which mental states are a paradigm example. Withdraw the one, the other cannot stand. Of course, the sceptic is still able to question the premise, claiming, in effect, that the first transcendental argument requires another one in order to establish the conditional upon pain of not really attaining a principle that is both logically rigorous and applicable to experience.⁴

One answer to this sceptic is to backtrack on the universality and necessity of empathy. Empathy is indeed a form of receptivity to the animate expressions of the affective, volitional and intellectual life of the human being; but it is entirely accidental and contingent that we as humans are constituted that way. Empathy is a primitive capacity not further analysable in itself. Of course, one can analyse the neurological substrate, mirror neurons, although these are no less contingent than the empathic resonance which they ground. One can analyse the intentional structure of empathy, with its necessary correlation with the intending of the other in community, though, once again, the intentionality is no less contingent than the empathic understanding which it grounds. One can analyse the informational infrastructure of empathy, the communicability of affect and related propositional content. One can analyse the functional operation of empathy, with the mechanism of partial identification. None of these analyses, while enriching of our knowledge of empathy, are a backstop to the regress of the transcendental argument. All are ultimately contingent and a feature of the way we humans are thrown into the world. The contradictions that result from subtracting empathy from the equation are a function of human inter-relatedness and limited to the sphere of human inter-relations, not generalizable to all possible (logical) worlds. Thus, we arrive at the challenge of confirming or refusing a specific empathically formulated interpretation in the context of the hermeneutic circle formed by the individual self and the other, for example, the analyst and analysand.⁵ Let's consider an example.

Example of the act of empathic receptivity in psychoanalysis

Now let's look at an example in which empathic receptivity is more than a fleeting moment between Hanno and Thomas in *Buddenbrooks* where the son's eyes meet the father's. In the following vignette from psychoanalysis, empathy is laid out in sequence as receptivity and interpretation. An interpretation is explicitly provided in the context of the hermeneutic circle formed by the analyst–analysand interrelationship. Discussion is required to surface the empathic understanding on which the interpretation is based.

In the following example, Dr Wolf gives an example where an analysand was mourning the death of her mother, a difficult individual with whom the patient had a tumultuous relationship. This is a complex instance and will itself require discussion to deliver the point about the relation between empathic receptivity and understanding. It is worth quoting at length:

During the second year of her analysis, a young mother reported that her own mother, who had been comatose for several weeks, had died. As a child, this analysand's relationship to her mother had been one of intense ambivalence, because the mother, in addition to being almost constantly critical of her daughter's behavior, also said on repeated occasions that she really did not like her daughter and predicted she would come to a bad end. Fortunately, the daughter got along famously with her father – until the latter left the family, divorced and remarried. Mother and daughter, both left behind, patched up a fragile truce that was often punctured by hostile outbursts from either. The mother had had a similarly hostile relationship with her own mother, and she frequently accused the analysand of being a tramp like the girl's grandmother. When the analysand arrived for her first session after her mother's death, she talked about her mother's prolonged illness and death with some sadness. Of course, she added matter-of-factly, she felt a sense of relief that her mother's suffering had ended. She then reported a dream in which a man was staring at her bare legs.

My own inner experience [writes Dr Wolf] while listening to her, however, was not in the resonance with her apparent sadness nor with the heavy mood that one might experience to emanate from a mourning person. Instead she had evoked in me an almost flirtatious impulse. I concluded . . . tuning into her inner state, that, indeed, she was not experiencing much mourning, sadness, or depression, but was in a playful frame of mind, although she gave no outward sign of the latter; my inner experience was the only clue. I then noticed that she was not wearing stockings that day, which was unusual for this usually well-dressed woman. . . . I felt from my reaction that she was feeling flirtatious rather than depressed. Her protestations of sadness, I concluded, were a pro forma conventional response. Her flirtatiousness was evident. . . . I interpreted her behavior as her attempt to show me that she was reacting properly to her mother's death by telling me she was sad; but, I continued, the death had stirred up such intensely

painful feelings of loss that she had to deny them by feeling playful and by evoking admiring attention to her self, much as she had obtained her father's attention during childhood when her mother had spurned her. (1988: 20–21)

As Dr Wolf listened to the analysand's account unfold, he found himself aware of feelings of playfulness and flirtatiousness. By the way, there is no difference in saying 'my own inner experience' and 'my own experience'; however, the former highlights that for Dr Wolf the experience had the quality of 'mineness'. In spite of the surface structure of her story being about the loss of her mother, sadness and mourning, it aroused in the listener a sense of playfulness and flirtation. Though the available information is limited, Dr Wolf did not infer the playfulness, rather he perceived micro expressions of happiness in her voice, manner and appearance, as well as the tease of the missing stockings, which counts as behaviour but also may evoke desire and flirtation. All these fragmentary traces were integrated by Dr Wolf's empathic receptivity and generated the vicarious sense(s) of playfulness and flirtation, available to his attentional monitoring via his own introspection. Absent additional data, the degree to which these fine-grained micro expressions were unconsciously transmitted is an open point; but they were likely pre-consciousness and available to attentional awareness (introspection), once Dr Wolf became aware of the usefulness of examining the analysand's ambivalence, empathically attending to her expressed (und unexpressed) feelings.

Simple experiences of empathic receptivity are useful in clarifying the basic interpretation – 'I feel that he is feeling sad, because I feel it too.' Still, the real world is more complex. That is what occurs here. It is not that Dr Wolf is openly sceptical that things are not what they seem to be. Rather the empathic listening that he deploys is pure and uncontaminated by his own past to allow for the possibility that things are not what they seem to be. This is completely consistent with the understanding of the man on the street that self-serving distortions and disguises are characteristic of everyday behaviour. He does not ask, 'How would I feel if my mother passes away after a conflict-riddled life?' He just feels playful while listening; then describes this as a vicarious experience; and, finally, uses the experience to relate to the other, basing an interpretation and communication on it.

The conversation between Dr Wolf and the analysand is grounded in the primary rule of analysis, free association and an attempt to report sincerely about what one is thinking, experiencing, feeling. This rule is

designed precisely to allow the distortion and disguises to be surfaced in the conversation, but they are still distortions and disguises. What is the difference between the analyst and the analysand's listening? The short answer is that the difference is the listener's experience, discipline and method. Dr Wolf brings to his listening (and introspection) a self-analysis as a means of controlling variability along with the results of his own psychoanalysis with a training analyst. These point to specific methods and training in guarding against the loss of control of the counter-transference, the interference of unresolved issues in the analyst. For example, had the analyst become flirtatious with the analysand (an event that did not occur) or engaged in a mourning process as a participant, then a chance for the analysand to benefit from the analyst's empathy for her would have been missed.

By introspecting his own feelings and sensations, Dr Wolf ruled out the possibility that the feeling of playfulness was caused by his own endogenous ('inner') processes. He was able to control for (and, in this case, rule out) influences from his own past. The same applied to endogenous reasons occasioned or caused by his own chemistry (for example, if he was just feeling apathetic that day). When he says 'my inner experience was the only clue', we should *not* take this to mean that he used inference, intuition or a lucky guess, to conclude that his patient was relieved at her mother's passing. Rather he paid heed, attended to, what was available to his awareness and formed a considered judgment that the feeling of playfulness that had gradually dawned over him was caused, in turn, by the analysand's feeling playful. In other words, this experience was reinterpreted as – recoded as – 'outer', a function of the other's feeling, which, strictly speaking, was the efficient cause of his own feeling. The feeling of playfulness was first identified as mine ('inner') and then re-described as having its source as not mine ('outer') in the analysand's own dynamics around the death of her mother, and indeed the less overt and explicitly expressed part of her expression. The analysand was relieved finally to be finished with this difficult mother and was feeling playful. It is likely that this sense of playfulness was communicated in micro expressions, trace affects, barely perceptible but real enough, and picked up by Dr Wolf's empathic receptivity (on micro expressions see Ekman 1985; 2003). Of course, 'finished' does not mean the relationship was complete in the sense that working through had occurred. However, it is not unusual for additional possibilities and opportunities to become visible once the practical grip of the past has fallen away, in this case a demanding mother, even if the psychic reality has not yet caught up with the practical one.

How did Dr Wolf (or how would anyone) distinguish between the situation in which he experiences a sense of playfulness that is caused by the other's sense of playfulness and one in which the sense of playfulness that he experiences is endogenous, arising from within, or caused by other aspects of his experience, excluding the other, or even including the other? The short answer is self-knowledge and self-inquiry. One must matriculate in the school of suspicion of Nietzsche, Marx and Freud, and delve behind the immediately given contents that are available to one's attentional monitoring (see also Gazzaniga and Smylie (1984) and Nisbett and Wilson (1977)). If one is afraid of the other person, of the impulsiveness of his or her desires, of the impulsiveness of one's own desire as aroused by his or her desires, then the possibility of a misunderstanding, misalliance and counter transference looms large.

Meanwhile, Dr Wolf's account should be taken literally. He was aware of an experience – a sense of flirtation/playfulness – that was available to his (Dr Wolf's) attentional monitoring of his sensations, affects, feeling. This empathic receptivity and data gathering became the source of a further act of empathic understanding. It was unpacked in his interpretation based on his understanding of the situation and the relationship between analyst and analysand. Specific methods are available for validating (confirming or disconfirming) the accuracy of an explicit intervention (interpretation). This too is part of the hermeneutic circle that forms empathic receptivity, empathic understanding, empathic interpretation and empathic articulation in language as a disciplined method of inter-human inquiry. The effectiveness of Dr Wolf's act of empathic understanding evoked additional responses, including symptoms, from the analysand that provided evidence of its accuracy as well as limitations.

What was particularly effective was the way the analyst made himself available to the patient, not as either flirtatious or as participating in the conventional process of mourning. Rather he was someone interested and concerned – offering a gracious and generous listening – about her without having to be flirtatious (and then withdrawing) like her father or confrontational (and then depressive) like her mother. Without using the term 'blind spot' for the patient's flirtatious behaviour, it is precisely such an area to which the interpretation is addressed. Dr Wolf provided a glimpse of a new possibility – an individual who would relate in a way different than the existing pattern by acknowledging her for who she is without having to be flirtatious. A further step is required for the analysand to take on this possibility as a new one for her personally

and thereby go beyond the constraints of an unworkable pattern from the past.

It is worth offering a point of amplification of Dr Wolf's clinical vignette. This is to be distinguished from his interpretation as such. Dr Wolf does not say – probably because he would reveal too personal a fact for a published case history – what was the cause of his 'inner experience... the only clue'. The point is that what is missing from Dr Wolf's account is any explanation of his fine-grained delicacy of empathy as he listened to the analysand. Long training, a deep commitment to being of service in relieving suffering and vast analytic experience were crucial. Did he pick up on a micro expression of flirtatiousness in her voice or on her face amidst the otherwise sad account of her mother's passing? Presumably he was open to the other as a total integrated configuration or gestalt of voice, dress, behaviour in which some micro feature was not integrated, providing a clue to his available introspective attention that something was not in place. At this point it is sufficient to raise the question and understand the area from which the answer would be forthcoming to make the point. There is a whole area of research, indicated by Darwin (1872) and followed up by Ekman (1985; 2003), in which empathic receptivity to micro expressions of expressed and unexpressed emotions function to inform and provide input to further empathic understanding.

**Example of the act of empathic understanding in psychoanalysis
(continued)**

Let's follow the hermeneutic circle of empathy from empathic receptivity to empathic understanding and look at the case of Dr Wolf's analysand again. This is a nice example that is free from metapsychological jargon. What is perhaps missing in Dr Wolf's vignette by way of the literary finesse of a Thomas Mann, is made up in the high melodrama of a real world soap opera. In what follows, Dr Wolf's vignette is used as a springboard for a paradigmatic analysis of empathic understanding that goes beyond anything Dr Wolf said and perhaps beyond what factually occurred. Explicit assumptions are called out for the sake of discussion where that is lacking in the vignette. What have we got to work with? A constantly critical mother, who states she does not really like her daughter, predicts she will end badly and calls her a 'tramp'. A father with whom the relationship is positive – until he leaves the mother and daughter and starts another family. That must have hurt. One cannot help but think that this individual must have been incredibly strong to have gotten this far.

The point is this analysand lives in an understanding of what is possible for her and her life; and this is likewise the case with us all, even if the details are less (or more) melodramatic. What about this experience defines the limits of what is possible coming from the past? Is love with such a mother possible? Well, yes, but it might look like a confrontation, a fight with name calling, leaving everyone exhausted and sad. Is love possible with a father such as this? Well, yes, but he leaves, causing a loss of closeness and affection.

There is what happened – the father left – the historical occurrence – and then there is the narrative that is woven around it – ‘he left’ . . . that means . . . ‘he doesn’t love me’. He left; and the analysand made a decision about the direction and intensity of his affection. There are many unexpressed feelings, thwarted goals, disappointed aspirations here. All of them constrain the understanding of what is possible. Many of them have the status of an inter-relational hallucination. They are invented meanings about what happened that have a grain of truth, but not more than that. Obviously the therapeutic process – not available to the reader here – will be responsible for working through and expressing (some of) those feelings, goals, aspirations so that the grip of the past can be given closure.

Empathic understanding provides a clearing for possibility – in this case, the possibility of breaking through – engaging and resolving – the obstacles confronted by the individual in the past, blocking the way to possibility as such. Empathy provides the clearing for the possibility of possibility. This means precisely that the one who is empathizing does so in empathic understanding that implements the possibility of taking a stand for the other so, for example, the other’s blind spot is recognized, identified, distinguished and, thus, made visible to the other as a possibility. In a blind spot, distractedness in the superficiality of the everyday rises to the level of a commitment that prevents the other from seeing what is possible. The one who is empathizing is not able explicitly to show her or him explicitly, since to tell another about one’s blind spot does not make it visible. The blind spot is not cognitively penetrable. It is what an individual does not know that she or he does not know. The blind spot makes one blind to possibility. The blind spot is kept in place by hidden and unacknowledged commitments – for example, a commitment to being flirtatious in order to be noticed, a commitment to first having a fight and then being sad in order to get close to others.⁶

The empathic understanding provides the possibility of the pattern switch, in this case, from ‘love is not possible with this father’ to ‘granted the behavior was an issue, on that occasion, he had a different way of

showing his love'. Working through all the details in therapy is precisely the work of creating the possibility of such a pattern switch, preferably invented by the analysand. A pattern switch occurs and what seemed inevitable – my father doesn't love me – gets distinguished from what actually happened – he left an unhappy marriage and she (the analysand) invented ('made up') an interpretation about the depth and direction of his affection. This empathic interpretation aims at restoring the analysand's functional integrity and wholeness. No single interpretation is going to do that; but a series of properly timed interventions can provide recognition – light dawns gradually over the whole – that is constitutive of the analysand's sense of coherence, self and effectiveness as an agent engaged in spontaneously choosing, committing to projects, accomplishing things.

In this particular case, new possibilities for self-expression show up – she takes off her stockings and goes bare-legged. While this act is still constrained by the possibilities of the past – being flirtatious – it points in the direction of new self-expression. The limits of the possible – not in the logical but in the imaginative sense – are being redefined. Dr Wolf's interpretation is that such a response is a not entirely successful attempt at calling attention to herself in a fulfilling and mature way. It would be premature to say whether such new possibilities would occur to her in art or business or in raising healthy, happy children that enjoy the advantages of an available, loving, affectionate parent in a way she could not imagine as a girl.

Empathy, the self and selfobject

No conversation about Kohut is complete without acknowledging his contribution to the dynamics of the self and the key term 'self object'. Another word for 'self' is 'character', though some conditions and qualifications need to be added. As with Aristotle, so with psychoanalysis, accomplishments in the direction of excellence produce character. The self as a function is a centre of spontaneity, possibly emergent in large-brained organisms. The self function is the spontaneous intentionality of generating possibilities, synthesizing the manifold of experience, constituting content as sense-bearing, integrating the on-going stream of lived temporal unfolding and laying down a network of experiences that provide a multilayered sediment of experience. This sedimentation – a context of associations of experience – provides the structure required to support and implement vicarious experience – enabling one individual (self) to experience emotions with, in and through the other individual. Character is what emerges and develops after experiences

have been processed and left behind in an on-going living into the future by the eruption of spontaneity.

In short, the self is to the function of integration of experiences as the coral reef is to the micro organisms that live and die there. The self is the beautiful, multi-coloured graveyard of skeletal remains of processes that have produced results, sedimented and accreted in a boot strap operation of character formed in coping with the challenges of human interrelations. What then is the relationship between empathy and the self? The connection with the self is direct. Empathy builds structure in the self. At first, empathy provides symptom relief to the self. A gracious and generous listening, based on vicarious experience, restores the emotional equilibrium of an upset, stressed out person, like laying back in a warm bath. Of course, such relief does not last over the long run. Empathy comes into its own when, in an on-going empathic relationship, empathy breaks down and fails in a phase-appropriate, non-traumatic way. These non-traumatic failures of empathy occur within a context of successful empathy that builds structure in the self. This structure enables the individual to deal with the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, as setbacks, breakdowns, defeats as well as accomplishments inevitably arise in the course of life. How does it build structure?

Let us return to the clinical vignette from Dr Wolf. In the interaction the analyst is 'the other' in a special way. He is a witting – and sometimes unwitting – participant in the high drama of conflict with parental authority, abandonment and survival – only he has to work in uncovering the details of the script, incompletely available to him, along with his analysand. The way Dr Wolf cycles through the various roles – all the while striving to interpret and interrupt the pattern of re-traumatization, disappointment and abandonment – means that he is a special kind of intermediate and transitional other for the patient. He is invested by the analysand with interest, energy and significance beyond his personal participation. He is an other as a self. This kind of intermediate and transitional phenomenon is called a 'selfobject' by self psychology after Kohut (1971; 1977; 1984) or a 'transitional object' by Winnicott (1971), who working independently came up with the same notion. Without introducing any terminological innovations, Kohut chose 'selfobject' because 'selfother' would be too paradoxical; however, the object in question is a self. Many of the features of the other in the dynamic of individuation and humanization explored in the paradigm cases of death, loss of the other, the Good Samaritan and the friend can be translated into the language of

the selfobject. It is no accident that the therapist–patient duo is also on this list.

The connection between hermeneutics and psychoanalysis comes directly to the surface in the paradigm case of loss. The dynamics of the lost other are further worked out in the process of mourning. In mourning, a lost other is preserved in one aspect of the individual ‘I’ through identification with the other.⁷ The lost other becomes a selfobject that is substituted for an aspect of the individual that lives and performs ‘I’. The other is lost as an object in reality, and one (‘I’) can no longer have it as a possession; so one becomes the object in fantasy, in *being* the object. Freud writes:

Identification with an object that is renounced or lost, as a substitute for that object – introjection of it into the ego [*Ich*] – is no longer a novelty to us. A process of this kind may sometimes be observed in small children . . . A child who was unhappy over the loss of a kitten declared straight out that now he himself was the kitten, and accordingly crawled about on all fours, would not eat at table, etc.

(Freud 1921: 109)

Let’s be clear about this. Here the child is not asking ‘How should I act “as if” I were a kitten?’ The operation is not cognitive; it is ontological. The child does not care in the sense of being worried; he cares in the sense of an identification in which the missing kitten is straightaway implemented by the child’s *being* the kitten. Here the process of identification has been isolated before it has gone underground, so to speak, and been closed from shared access. The identification process is directly visible to mere inspection. The matter has gone beyond the stage of a game of pretending when the child no longer wants to eat at the table and insists on crawling on all fours instead of walking upright. Freud’s ‘etc.’ also speaks volumes here since it implies that the child is regressing in other ways such as ‘forgetting’ how to use the toilet, an area in which the kitten also had no competence. While it is a mere speculation who the patient was, the loss of toilet skills on the part of the child of a family friend may perhaps have occasioned a visit to have a chat with ‘Uncle Freud’, thus disclosing this little vignette. Here the child has himself become the transitional selfobject. As the work of mourning progresses, the child’s self will become further differentiated, strengthened, humanized by the inclusion of aspect of others lost and won. He or she will be able to possess the beloved kitten in imagination, so it may be able to be relinquished in reality. As the child grows up,

this ontological capacity for identification will be further elaborated as the talent for role playing, leadership and metaphor.⁸ Play acting will become an explicit 'as if' performance that retrospectively evokes earlier vicarious experiences.

Likewise through empathy, a substitutive identification – a partial identification – is mobilized at an appropriately mature level using a vicarious experience. The child *lives* vicariously in being the kitten; in contrast, the adult has a vicarious experience. Note the way speech captures an important aspect of experience in that 'vicarious' has 'vicar' (a 'substitute' or 'deputy') embedded within it. This dimension of substitutability is unambiguously preserved in the locution 'vice versa', often used at the end of a statement that can be reversed. It indicates that the reciprocal substitution of terms may be made by switching views. Ontically, the one individual is substituted in a role in which he represents the other. Thus, the patient in therapy does not recall rebelling against the authority of his parents; but constantly finds himself questioning the authority of the analyst. The child who has lost a kitten, crawls on the ground on all fours and so on. Ontologically, the one individual becomes the other by assimilating the other to his way of being in relation to himself and the involvement with the world of locomotion, meals, chores and so on.

Vicarious experience can be characterized as a transitional phenomenon – activating the same features of leadership, love, hypnosis and mourning where the other is substituted for an aspect of oneself. However, it is important to note that vicarious experience serves a different purpose than all of these. When objectified, vicarious experience functions as a selfobject. Its purpose is to establish contact with the other in a way that preserves the integrity of each individual. Vicarious experience is not as strong as the global merger witnessed in the case of the child who lost his kitten (where the ego was submerged in and sacrificed to the other in living vicariously). It is intermediate between the former and the isolation of the adult in mourning (where the other individual (object) is eventually recognized as irretrievably lost). In contrast with the latter, vicarious experience has more chance of success in establishing contact with an inter-human reality, in which facts and fantasies can be shared and tested.

For example, if one is living into ('re-enacting') a pattern of rejection experienced by an admired, idealized person of great power and influence in one's life in a hidden and unacknowledged commitment to mastering this no longer occurring breakdown, then one may continue selecting father-like authority figures, who inevitably disappoint

and 'let you down' after an initial 'honey moon' period. The self is directly engaged as a repository for such a pattern of experience, guiding the decision to engage with the other, admired individual as if it were a choice whereas it is a repetition of a pattern laid down in an undeclared commitment by the self.

The unacknowledged commitment to ideals and values in the realm of the other is driving the process. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the pattern gets re-enacted in the idealizing transference in psychoanalysis where the analyst becomes a character in the drama – a selfobject – that evokes the historical situation. The examination, exploration and interpretation of the transference create the possibility of interrupting the pattern. This occurs by a process whereby the analyst, who is after all an imperfect human, functioning as a selfobject, is idealized and then seemingly inevitably fails. But the difference is there too. These ways of failure are non-traumatic or at least can be so managed by a skilful and caring analyst. Instead of being globally unavailable by divorcing his wife and leaving the family, as occurred in the analysand's relation with her father (in the above-cited vignette), the analyst (say) goes on a two week vacation during a period when the analysand is experiencing vulnerability (which is almost always). The absence invokes the original trauma, but is milder, better able to be surfaced, called out, interpreted, integrated and transformed in a positive, productive way that creates possibilities of self-expression, creativity and humour for the analysand herself.

By interpreting the repetition of the historical pattern in an empathic relation with the analyst, the analysand works through the initial trauma. In the process, she acquires additional structure as part of her self that re-enacts the development of the self and enables her to delay gratification, to wait, to endure the separation. We know that the structure of the self is enhanced because (if) the individual is able to endure the frustration and delay that could not previously be handled without breakdown. During the separation, the analysand (say) engages in creative activities – using the extra time to pursue excellence in her profession, hobby or recreation – rather than lethargic, empty apathetic moping or watching TV, characterizing the loss of contact with the life enhancing, empathic selfobject (the analyst). The self is strengthened in its being, not in what it knows; and, thus, strengthened, the self becomes capable of dealing at an enhanced level of effectiveness with the challenges of life, integrating setbacks, transforming breakdowns into positive possibilities, even dealing with traumas (insofar as it is possible to do so) in a productive way.

Conclusion: empathy and translation

Philosophers are concerned about translation. We have alternative accounts of empathy only a few of which are the target of a complete inquiry in this work. We have a hermeneutic account of empathy that, mirroring the intentional account at the level of human being in the human world, articulates the paradigm affectedness of empathic receptivity as understanding of the possibility of taking a stand for the other as a gracious and generous empathic listening. We have an intentional account of empathy that in effect traces a hermeneutic circle from empathic data capture of the other's vicarious experience through 'up stream' cognitive processing in empathic understanding to the articulation of empathic receptivity in an empathic communication that creates a community of shared affect. We have a psychoanalytic account of empathy as vicarious introspection that grounds what a psychoanalytic fact is. In addition, although not considered in this book, we have a neurological analysis of empathy in which mirror neurons discharge and the proper areas of the brain are demonstrably activated – lit up in bright colours on the *fMRI* read out. We have a causal account of empathy, based on a neurological layer that hypothesizes a shared manifold of experience subtending phenomenal sensations of vicarious feelings and shared affects. We have a functional account whereby fine-grained distinctions of experience – operating analogously to aesthetic taste – implement the human uptake of the expression of emotions and feelings in empathy. We have the moral relevance of those emotions such as shame, pride and guilt that we can only experience in interaction with others – made available to one individual's experience that otherwise would fall beneath the threshold of awareness of the other. In a world where error and failure are common, multiple paths to a result are a significant way of checking and providing support as to the robustness of the phenomenon in question (Wimsatt 1994: 199). How are we to translate between these different levels, perspectives and methods? There is no magic bullet or secret algorithm for doing so automatically. However, this work has called out the links and connections and transitions between different perspectives where such are available.

This is likely to be taken as implying a position about the translatability of these different perspectives between one another. However, there is no new position here. Empathy confronts the same challenges as all other methods of human receptivity, understanding, interrelation and communication. All the concerns about the translatability between different paradigms are applicable here. As Donald Davidson

famously noted, if you cannot tell whether the conceptual scheme is different, then you can't tell if it is the same either. So, is there then a conceptual scheme at all: or just language, fuzzy and vague at the edges, by which we humans try to bootstrap ourselves into a stable conceptual frame of the canonical state of human understanding of one another as a community of fellow-travellers? A bootstrap operation, by which we reach a dynamic equilibrium in our relations with significant others – wives, husbands, parents, children, friends, colleagues, competitors, story-tellers and total strangers? In short, we are mapping the scope and limits of our understanding and experience of empathy from within the boundaries. Yes, there are different intellectual traditions – hermeneutics, ordinary language analysis, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, neurology, aesthetics, theory of the moral sentiments (sympathy) – that intersect, converge and diverge, and overlap without necessarily being reducible to a smaller conceptual footprint. The power comes from being able to deploy different methods to produce the same result; or, in the cases where the results diverge, to grasp the interdependency of method and result.

In some cases, translation seems to work smoothly. Thus, the design distinctions for authentic human being – deployed in the spirit of Heidegger – unpack empathy as a paradigm case of affectedness (respect), understanding (the possibility of possibility; projecting a stand for the other), interpretation (implementation of possibility; commitment), speech (listening). This nicely maps to the intentional structure of empathy in the spirit of Husserl as acts of empathic receptivity, understanding, interpretation and speech. At a higher level, this meshes with empathy as vicarious introspection in psychoanalysis. In other instances translation breaks down as the inquiry transgresses the boundaries between mirror neurons (hypothesized to sub-serve empathy as a folk (social) psychological concept), the conceptual mechanism of a shared manifold linking the experiences of two individuals vicariously and the occurring human inter-relation in a human context of being with one another. Neurologists and social psychologists, parents and ontologists, moralists and therapists, are having different conversations about empathy, which enrich one another in turn and are neither mutually exclusive or eliminable.

Empathy is indeed a form of receptivity to the expressions of the affective, volitional and intellectual life of the human being; but it is seemingly accidental and contingent that we are constituted that way. Of course, one can apply basic distinctions of being human to an analysis of empathy and distinguish empathy's affectedness, understanding,

PROOF

Empathy as Vicarious Introspection in Psychoanalysis 157

interpretation, and articulation in speech (listening). One can analyse the intentional structure of empathy, with its necessary correlation with the intending of the other in community, though, once again, the intentionality is no less contingent than the empathic understanding which it grounds. One can analyse the informational infrastructure of empathy, the communicability of affect and related propositional content. One can analyse the functional operation of empathy, with the mechanism of partial identification. One can analyse the neurological substrate, mirror neurons, although these are no less contingent biologically than the empathic resonance which they ground. None of these analyses, each one of which enriches of our knowledge of empathy, is a complete explanation of empathy in the context of human relations. In the final analysis, few readers are intimately familiar with all the nuances of the writings of Heidegger, Husserl, Searle, Kohut and Freud. Yet everyone has firsthand experience of empathy, even if it is not called out explicitly, if the individual was ever a child, parent, teacher, friend, Good Samaritan, story-teller or related to another person. The coverage is complete, even if this list is not. The task engaged in this work is to make explicit that of which we already live in an understanding. Make it explicit and use it to inform and enrich our relations with others – and our empathy.