
Book Reviews

Clinical Intuition in Psychotherapy: The Neurobiology of Embodied Response

Terry Marks-Tarlow

New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012. Contents, illustrations, diagrams, references, index. 278 pp. \$35.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780393707038

One in the Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology, this book aims to “integrate the best of modern science with the healing art of psychotherapy.”

In the foreword to *Clinical Intuition in Psychotherapy*, Allan Schore hails “this groundbreaking book” as a contribution to the “paradigm shift that is occurring in psychotherapy” (p. xi), describing the wider context as an “interdisciplinary trend towards the integration of psychological and biological realms.” The paradigm shift, Schore suggests, has generated a deeper understanding of “the psychodynamics and neurodynamics of the change process embedded within psychotherapy” (p. xii).

Author Terry Marks-Tarlow highlights the problem with clinical intuition—its potential to seem either “magic” or “mysticism.” She notes that for this reason clinical intuition in psychotherapy has lacked “scientific legitimacy,” suffered

neglect, and been “avoided as a legitimate topic of scientific interest” (p. 51). But Marks-Tarlow remains convinced there exists “a firm scientific grounding to all acts of intuition,” and her conviction underpins this admirably scientific investigation of the phenomenon.

Readers familiar with Marks-Tarlow’s impressive and original *Psyche’s Veil: Psychotherapy, Fractals, and Complexity* know she is grounded in nonlinear science and understands its implications for the workings of the mind and brain and of psychotherapy. And nonlinear science proves fundamental to Marks-Tarlow’s insights into clinical intuition. Here, too, it is a unifying strand of her work. But she also draws on a wide range of scientific theory and an in-depth knowledge of research in psychology, psychoanalysis, attachment theory, neuroscience, biology, ethnology, and related areas of study.

The introduction establishes the three premises about clinical intuition Marks-Tarlow interweaves through the book: clinical intuition “fills the gap between theory and practice”; it involves the “perception of relational patterns, both in self and other”; and it is “a necessary ingredient for deep change during psychotherapy” (p. 3).

The opening chapter, “Flashes, Hunches, and Gut Feelings,” lays out the scientific and theoretical foundations of the author’s understanding of intuition more generally and its relevance in psychotherapy. Marks-Tarlow discusses the differences between left hemisphere and right hemisphere; between top down, cortical, explicit, conscious, deliberating modes of processing experience and bottom up, subcortical, implicit, unconscious, embodied modes of processing experience. Intuition, she argues, is part of the implicit realm. She describes how, in psychotherapy, there exists “a never-ending kaleidoscope of ever-shifting self-states in patient and therapist,” and she conceptualizes clinical intuition as that which enables moment-to-moment processing of these “continually changing contours of perception, motivation, and emotion” (p. 19).

Chapter 2 gives a comprehensive scientific, psychoneurobiological account of “implicit processes” and the “origins of clinical intuition within the implicit realm” (p. 33). Marks-Tarlow identifies a number of key properties of intuition: It is nonverbal (or preverbal); It is “emergent” in the complexity theory sense, i.e. nonlinear, emerging out of dynamics and patterns of interaction that unfold over time and are not predetermined or explicable by fixed laws and chains of cause and effect; And it is holistic, in contrast to left hemisphere top-down reductionist thinking.

Subsequent chapters include “Empathic Roots,” “Play,” “Survival of the Wittiest,” “Lighting the Way,” “Navigating the Seas,” and “In Pursuit of Wisdom.” These chapters elaborate the interconnectiveness of intuition with human empathy, play in psychotherapy, humor, imagination,

embodied and conceptual self-awareness, and, finally, wisdom. But a summary of the contents and themes of the book will not do justice to it. Indeed, this is a book the whole of which is more than the sum of its parts. Its style is by turns discursive, conversational, theoretical, humorous, explanatory, anecdotal, personal, scientific, admonitory, metaphorical, playful—but in a way that is neither distracting nor whimsical. Like her earlier work, *Clinical Intuition in Psychotherapy* is lucidly and extremely well written—Marks-Tarlow has a rare gift for conveying complex ideas and weaving complex connections between concepts—and for bringing these to life with great clarity and agility.

The author provides detailed and lengthy clinical case material from her work with adults to illustrate her themes. She makes visual imagery an integral part of her message through her extensive use of her own illustrations and cartoons together with a range of other art, pictures, and diagrams. Here again readers of *Psyche’s Veil* will be familiar with Marks-Tarlow’s gift for selecting or creating apposite visual expressions of what she wishes to communicate. The end result is a book that is at the same time thought provoking and emotionally engaging.

Not surprisingly, *Clinical Intuition in Psychotherapy* will be most relevant to psychotherapists, but it will also interest all those involved in the study of psychological, emotional, and relational processes, and of the links between mind and brain. Although there is much about play, I am not sure how much the book might appeal to more general readers who have neither an academic nor a policy interest in play. Moreover, Marks-Tarlow—for

understandable reasons—after theoretical discussion of the origins of play in the mammalian instinctual repertoire and its function of socialization, mostly focuses on the more “advanced” functions and sophisticated forms of verbal, artistic, child, and adult play.

This is perhaps linked to a broader point about the book—its context. Although idiosyncratic, *Clinical Intuition in Psychotherapy* can be seen as part of a North American tradition in the evolution of discourse and debate about psychotherapy and its workings (though of course, as I hope I have made clear, it is far more than just this). Marks-Tarlow is a psychotherapist working with adults, and her discussion and descriptions of psychotherapy are about this work with comparatively high-functioning (psychologically speaking) adults, despite their early experiences of trauma and the severity of their difficulties. The book undoubtedly makes a valuable and extremely interesting contribution to the theoretical debate and understanding of psychotherapy; however, in relation to clinical practice, what Marks-Tarlow advocates is more a starting point than a paradigm shift. Indeed, her emphasis—quoting Wilfred Bion—at the outset on setting aside “all memory and desire” and on the importance of not knowing as a thematic keynote of her book (pp.10–11) are already a cornerstone of psychoanalytic child psychotherapy in the United Kingdom.

I suspect Marks-Tarlow quite deliberately does not systematically address the important but complex subject of countertransference in psychotherapy (despite referring to it and clearly making use of it and the concept in her work). More spe-

cifically, she does not treat whether or how countertransference links or overlaps with her conceptualization of clinical intuition. Not only could this be an interesting and useful discussion, some might consider it a significant omission in a book about clinical intuition in psychotherapy. Others might argue that it is simply too big a question and beyond the scope of the book. I certainly want to stress that these comments are in no sense criticisms of the book but rather observations about its parameters and scope. I entirely endorse Schore’s conclusion in his foreword, that readers of this book “are in for an intellectual and emotional treat” (p. xvii).

—Graham Shulman, *Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Lanarkshire, Scotland*

How Eskimos Keep Their Babies Warm and Other Adventures in Parenting (From Argentina to Tanzania and Everywhere in Between)

Mei-Ling Hopgood

New York: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2012. Contents, notes, bibliography. 292 pp. \$15.95 paper. ISBN: 9781565129580

Ah, parenting . . . the third rail of dinner conversations (behind politics and religion)! Mei-Ling Hopgood, a traveling journalist by trade and a thirty-something mommy of an almost three-year-old, writes a fun, interesting, and compelling book for parents, academics, and professionals. *How Eskimos Keep Their Babies*