



Awakening Clinical Intuition

*An Experiential Workbook
for Psychotherapists*

Terry Marks-Tarlow

Foreword by Allan N. Schore

“We must be able to see through the eyes of another, while standing in our own shoes.”

Awakening Clinical Intuition: An Experiential Workbook for Psychotherapists

Written by Terry Marks-Tarlow, PhD

Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn, PhD



The Meadow: A Guided Meditation

I sat, comfortably, and breathed—several ocean breaths, consciously narrowing my throat on the exhalation. My senses focused inward. I followed the gentle voice on the mp3 cd and entered a high mountain meadow. A slight breeze tickled the fine hairs on my cheek and neck. The sun’s warmth relaxed any nervous wondering. I smelled dry dusty dirt. I reached down to stroke the velvety leaves of the mule’s ear growing in abundance and listened to a squirrel chirp his warning of my presence. I saw the shovel and was drawn to a place to dig. A chest or container of some sort, I was told, awaited my discovery. Within it were items foretelling a story, just for me. I opened the chest eager to see what lay inside: a light brown, leather-bound journal, soft supple leather, the kind that feels luxurious to the touch, ivory pages, unlined, an expanse of space for me to explore, a sharpened yellow No. 2 pencil, a squishy pink eraser, and an orange-ish feather with brown trim. I looked again to see if I had missed something. I knew that once I buried the box and left the meadow there was time to reflect and write in response to guided questions; and yet, I felt as if something was missing.

Clinical Intuition

According to Terry Marks-Tarlow, PhD, when we interpret guided imagery journeys such as my experience with ‘The Meadow’ (Marks-Tarlow, 2014, p. 159) or any outcropping from our unconscious, “it is important to use clinical intuition and not a set formula to process meaning” (p. 161). Marks-Tarlow (2014) offers her insights into clinical intuition and its place in our lives and in our clinical practice in her newest book entitled, *Awakening Clinical Intuition: An Experiential Workbook for Psychotherapists*. It is the offspring from its parent book, *Clinical Intuition in Psychology: The Neurobiology of Embodied Response* (Marks-Tarlow, 2012), where Marks-Tarlow grounded clinical intuition in interpersonal neurobiology and offered case vignettes, personal stories, and original artwork as guideposts for readers’ understanding. Her intention for this ‘workbook’ is to offer a user-friendly, hands-on, experiential journey into the realm of intuition for personal growth and clinical application— “the writing is less heady,” she says.

Following in its parent’s footsteps, *Awakening Clinical Intuition* offers extensive data detailing the developmental foundations of intuition; however, the language is plain, simple, a fascinating read that captured my attention without straining my analytic left-brain’s need to figure it out—the concepts flowed readily, easily. And, as in its predecessor, the importance of empathy, play, humor, imagination, and metaphor are encouraged and supported as practitioners learn how to use clinical intuition to develop and express their wisdom. Marks-Tarlow designed the guided exercises (an mp3 cd comes with the book) to stimulate embodied experience and enhance readers’ access, awareness,

and self-trust in intuition. She notes that intuition must be nourished indirectly, via experiences and reflections; it cannot be explicitly taught.

The heart of this workbook is about being with the experiences to open yourself to your intuition (and potentially your intuitive guides). Reading the scripts provided in the book, reading the reflection sequences, reading but not experiencing will leave the reader hanging. Blank spaces are provided in the workbook so readers can write about their experiences; questions are provided to guide readers as they reflect on their own experience as well as to guide discussions with patients. The reflective component is in place ‘to bring the experience home’. “It’s one thing to have an experience,” she writes, “another to process it and embody it.” As a reviewer, I read through the book with an eye for what it offered. As a person, I did many of the exercises and found myself curious enough to spend more time following the paths that appeared before me. This workbook is ideal for those new to the concept of intuition as well as those already familiar with and using intuition in their lives and practice. Marks-Tarlow will stretch your awareness, and she offers new experiences to share with your patients. She is clear in her stance, however, that as therapists we must hold our hypotheses lightly—we must check out our intuitions and never assume they are true because at times it is difficult to distinguish between grounded intuition and ungrounded countertransference. Her intention is for readers to use their curiosity as a place to move forward in their clinical work.

In terms of formatting, there are ten chapters ranging from cultivating inner space and making time, to finding your center, gaining perspective, and developing your



Glee! by Marks-Tarlow

clinical “sense abilities”.

Each chapter tethers the past (both key concepts from the parent book as well as information from preceding chapters in this book) to the present conversation as well as to upcoming concepts. It is a blend of fact, opinion, and experience. Marks-Tarlow adheres to her own advice—the book’s design is playful, humorous, and imaginative including creative original artwork, word placement on the page, use of font style and size, and white space. At times you are reading a textbook with a first person presence then you’re immersed in poetic ramblings as she teaches readers how to “listen for the music under the words” and “attend to the texture of the silence” in their clinical interactions (p. 170). As readers tune into what they feel, see, and know, as they experience being intuitively in sync with their patients such that all aspects of themselves are aligned so they become present to themselves in an actual moment in time, Marks-Tarlow hopes to “counter robotic, dehumanizing, and demoralizing trends by placing clinical intuition in its central guiding place” (p. 198).

Incorporating prenatal and perinatal psychology concepts (employing knowledge about infant growth and development) with the metaphorical use of life and experience, Marks-Tarlow locates “inspiration along with intuition as aspects of implicit processing with the human right brain” (177). If your left brain is too busy trying to analyze patients and fix them, “the right-brain capacity to step into the dyadic dance by keeping time with the underlying music of relational rhythms is inevitably blocked” (page 42). She uses the breath to tap into our source of vitality; every breath, she writes, represents a chance to reset the balance between effort and release. “From a perspective in which the breath captures the whole of our being, inhalation represents the capacity to find, see, and nourish ourselves as well as to take in new things. Exhalation represents the capacity to release, let go, and clear out what is toxic, unnecessary, or emotionally unhealthy” (p. 55).

Using these exercises during clinical sessions and taking time to observe yourself in relationship with your patients, readers will have the chance to notice the contrast between their right-brain sensory-based looking and their left-brain cognitive-based labeling where they actually

stop taking information in from their eyes. “When we operate intuitively,” Marks-Tarlow writes, “we flow in an unpremeditated, nonlinear fashion with whatever catches our attention” (p.88). Conscious decisions are left by the wayside and “an emergent process arises by which joint attention shifts and flows according to the intersubjective field of how two people intermix from moment to moment in mind, body, and brain. The closer we remain to our implicit primary sensory experience, as unfiltered by thought, analysis, or strategy the more responsively we align ourselves with intuitive facilities” (p.88).

According to Marks-Tarlow, the primary function of clinical intuition is to inform us of our true perceptions, feelings, and responses on a moment-to-moment basis, at the dynamic edges between self and other, between the inner and outer worlds. As therapists move beyond simply accessing present-centered

embodied perception and truly integrate, contain, and process it in a way that is thoroughly unique to who they are as their most authentic selves, they will experience a transition in their clinical work—in their sense of knowing and being with



Heart of the Rising Sun by Marks-Tarlow

themselves and their patients.

A wise mentor in her own right (with over 30 years of experience), Marks-Tarlow leaves readers with an important message, one that resonated strongly with me: “Although inspired by the techniques and insights of others, we must simultaneously commit ourselves to discovering our own truths” (p. 170).

Now that the pressure of reading this book to write a formal review is over, I will revisit the exercises and spend more time being in the exercises and in the reflection. I get the gifts that were present in my box in that high alpine meadow, but I’m not so sure about that lingering feeling that something was missing.

References

Marks-Tarlow, T. (2014). *Awakening clinical intuition: An experiential workbook for psychotherapists*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Marks-Tarlow, T. (2012). *Clinical intuition in psychotherapy: The neurobiology of embodied response*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.



Original artwork by Marks-Tarlow



Awakening Clinical Intuition: An Experiential Workbook for Psychotherapists

A Reflection

by Terry Marks-Tarlow, PhD

For me, writing is like a river that runs through my veins, coursing more deeply than any other current in my life. Along with being a clinical psychologist and artist, I am also a wife and mother. I used to feel guilty about the intensity of my preoccupation with writing, as if this meant I didn't love my husband and children enough. I've come to realize the falsity of that fear. If I don't take care of myself fully first, how can I possibly serve others? This realization has freed me up. I now experience my personal history as marked by twin births. The birth of my body occurred more than 50 years ago, signaling my physical arrival on Earth. The birth of my spirit occurs in an ongoing fashion, through my writings, outside of time. This second birth feels like a successive awakening, an integration of intellect, passion, and spirit. This is the realm where I cobble together meaning on the grandest scale.

My first book—*Creativity Inside Out: Learning through Multiple Intelligences* (1996, Addison-Wesley; foreword by Howard Gardner)—emerged to resolve an early career crisis. This happened right after I graduated with a Ph.D. from UCLA. I had based my dissertation on a prospective study of depression, choosing a project that seemed quick and dirty. In reality, the topic didn't interest me in the least; meanwhile my passions had lain dormant for years, while I thrashed my way through graduate school, prioritizing sanity over fulfillment. As I slowly came up for air, it dawned on me that creativity is what moves me most.

So I became a consultant for the Lawndale School District, working with teachers to fashion a creativity curriculum. The final book emerged out of our collective vision that creativity is the key to holistic learning. I had jumped fields to take on this project, and upon finishing the book I had yet another sobering insight. I wasn't really interested in the field of education; and clinically I

didn't work with teachers or even kids. Worst of all, I had taken ten years to study and write *about* creativity largely because I hadn't been ready to dive fully into my own creative process.

As I result, I began immersing myself in the arts. I danced. I practiced yoga. I drew. Novel ideas were coming in droves out of a newfound fascination with nonlinear science, particularly fractal geometry. Intuitively, I sensed fractals are profoundly related to nature's creativity and psychological complexity specifically. After much studying, I took the plunge into my own unconscious, in search of my own insights. My second book, *Psyche's Veil: Psychotherapy, Fractals and Complexity* (2008, Norton; foreword by Daniel Siegel) emerged. Blood, sweat, and tears were packed into the pages of that case-based book, which I also illustrated myself. It took 12 years and three drafts to write. The real challenge was working my way through the profound aloneness I felt working out my ideas, plus the terror of being considered crazy in what I "saw." I imagined colleagues would perceive me as making things up. I anticipated the shame of being laughed at and intellectually dismissed for off the wall, rather than cutting edge, ideas.

The process of writing *Psyche's Veil* was a bit like climbing a mountain. But I persevered, and was proud of doing so. In the end, I discovered that reading that book is almost as difficult as writing it had been. Despite the clinical content, the material is quite abstract, based on pure math and science. This easily scares away most clinicians. I also learned that the feeling states that surround the writing of any book can very easily exude from its pages, which in turn can stimulate the very same feelings in the readers themselves. I had been scared to write the book, and now people were scared to read it.



Inner Freedom by Marks-Tarlow

While gratifying to complete this behemoth task, I was also clear I didn't want to repeat it. I chose my next topic as a means to break through the intense struggles and isolation I had felt. I hoped that *Clinical Intuition in Psychotherapy: The Neurobiology of Embodied Response* (2012, Norton; foreword by Allan Schore) would provide a sharply contrasting experience. I wanted to stay connected with readers from the start. So I imagined the book's narrative as an open invitation into a relational dance. This time I sought a broad, rather than narrow audience. I wanted to address all psychotherapists across the great theoretical and professional divides. Most importantly, I strove to

hold the reader in my heart from the start. Rather than lead with heady abstractions, instead I offered clinical and personal stories filled with dialogue as a means to share my vulnerabilities and internal processes. I wanted to be fully accessible and transparent. I wanted to be fully grounded in embodied awareness. I was scrupulously honest about how I faced the uncertainties, ambiguities, and chaos of clinical practice—how so often I flew by the seat of my pants as I reached for internal guidance. The book adopted an evolutionary perspective. I used animal stories to illustrate the common emotional foundation and neural limbic circuitry found in all mammals. I aimed to strip away human hubris that we are the only

creatures with empathy, grief, a sense of justice, or the instinct to play.

It took me only one year to research, write and illustrate my third book. For the first time, I was behind the task of speaking, training, and giving workshops on the topic. Almost immediately, I felt ready to give birth to its most recent companion, *Awakening Clinical Intuition: An experiential Workbook for Psychotherapists* (2014, Norton; foreword by Allan Schore, reviewed in the pages of this journal). I had thoroughly learned my lesson that it is a lot more fun to dance with readers than to struggle alone. In this fourth book, I tried to take the process a step further. Not only did I again hold the reader continually in focus, but I simultaneously strived to pay as much attention to myself. I wanted to walk my talk, by integrating all facets of my body, mind, brain, and spirit holistically as I wrote. In striving to provide exercises and opportunities to tap deeply into one's own grounded foundation, I wanted to do the same with myself. I yearned to proceed without struggle. I envisioned letting my unconscious lead the way only and precisely when it was ready to do so. To honor this vision, I wanted to wait until my fingers itched to fly. If I didn't feel fully inspired in this way, I vowed not even to sit down at the keyboard.

Happily, *Awakening Clinical Intuition* emerged in a matter of months, even more quickly and effortlessly than *Clinical Intuition in Psychotherapy*. To conceive of and manifest the workbook proved to be an act of pure joy. Thankfully, my psyche was fully aligned with the subject matter. I could trust my own perceptions, reflections, and impulses while remaining connected to the reader. There was something luxurious about relying so heavily upon my own intuition as I wrote about intuition as a valuable resource. I reached a new level of



Tree of Life by Marks-Tarlow

integration. Gone were my previous fears of being a fraud. Vanished were self-doubts about offering something of value. I no longer needed reassurance from others. What remained was the pure high of self-expression—a high I'm convinced touches upon the magic of psychotherapy when we succeed in helping others to find their own voices, hearts, and histories.

I write these reflections without yet reading any reviews or receiving feedback on *Awakening Clinical Intuition*, for it is just now launching

into the world. I am eager to discover whether my own spirit of joy has successfully leaked into the pages. My hope is to inspire all sorts of psychotherapy practitioners, both seasoned and newbies alike, to muster up the courage to cultivate their own idiosyncratic perception and clinical style. At this point in our field, great pressure exists for accountability and empirically proven methods. While this is important, I sincerely believe scientific approaches must be counterbalanced by artistic and intensely personal sensibilities.

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Psychotherapy is serious business: blood, sweat, tears, doubts, and fears are a regular part of our jobs. Yet, despite the gravity, pressures, stresses, and challenges, when it comes down to the minute-to-minute implementation of theory, no cookbook can guide us. Only through intuition can we tap into the richness of the moment and the fullness of the whole context. Only through intuition can we touch deep enough in ourselves and others to encounter true novelty that is necessary for embodied change. When we tap into our own intuition in service of guiding others, we offer inspiration, modeling, and safety. This helps our clients/patients to likewise find their own internal lights as guidance through the thicket.

Terry Marks-Tarlow, PhD, is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Santa Monica, California. She teaches effective neuroscience at Reiss Davis Child Study Center. She does yoga, dances, draws, and generally strives toward a balanced life through embodying her values. She is available for psychotherapy, talks, and trainings through her website: www.markstarlow.com