The Space Between Us: Exploring the Dimensions of Human Relationships

Ruthellen Josselson
Sage, 1996, £15.50, 320pp.

Have you ever heard in your consulting room the despairing phrase, 'I don't know what love is', and been stuck for a response? If so, buy or borrow this lucidly written book, which explores and explains eight kinds of connectedness. The first four are present from the beginning of life, or shortly thereafter: holding (representing security and basic trust), attachment (as soon as the baby can discriminate mother from others), passionate experience (libidinal drives, starting with the need to suck, with another as the object of drive gratification), and eye-to-eye validation (overcoming the space between by finding ourselves in the other's eyes). The final four need cognitive maturation and are therefore later developments: in reaching up towards those who are bigger and wiser as a way of expanding ourselves, we experience idealisation and identification; the growing child also discovers the benefits of companionship, a form of mutuality, in which a bond is created; in adolescence we strive to fit in, to have a sense of belonging, the dimension of embeddedness with others; meanwhile the child has been learning how to bridge the space through tending and caring.

Of course, in adulthood, any given relationship may involve more than one of these dimensions, simultaneously or sequentially, each shading into another. Indeed, people tend to develop along particular relational pathways that favour one or two themes above others. For example, some life stories may be marked by attachment and caring, while others consecrate themselves to emulating someone they admire.

Thus, the author draws together and examines established theories, while at the same time incorporating the results of her own original research based on hundreds of hours of interviewing. She skilfully entwines the strands to show that relatedness is a multi-hued process. To Winnicott's 'holding' and Bion's 'containing', she adds a concept that particularly caught my attention — that of 'thereness'. Her research showed consistently that this was the most important factor in close relationships: 'I know that my husband (wife, friend, mother, grandfather. . .) is always there for me.' In adulthood, as in childhood, that sense of reliable support remains crucial to our well-being.

Until recently, psychological theory has focused on the development of the self: self-esteem, self-control, self-awareness, individual achievement and so on, with interconnection with others merely a backdrop to this central drama. Relationship as an aim in itself has had no place in such theories. Happily, Ruthellen Josselson corrects this egocentric view, showing how psychological health can flourish within a web of human connectedness.

I was particularly struck by her discussion of falling in love. This has been much

maligned in psychoanalytic literature, often being viewed as a sort of temporary psychosis. While acknowledging the unconscious origins, as postulated by Freud, this author emphasises the transformative aspects of this experience which awakens novel thoughts and goals, new aspects of self, often accompanied by outpourings of creativity, in which a person can feel reborn.

After a long line of male theorists it was refreshing to read a serious book on love by a female writer. Perhaps only a woman can admit to the intense pain of loneliness, appreciate that wanting someone else is not being 'dependent' or 'weak' but simply shows that, as humans, we operate best when that space between us is bridged — and here lies contentment. Indeed, I found this book wise and penetrating, offering remarkable insights into this complex and elusive subject.

Rachel Charles

Love is a Verb: How to Stop Analysing Your Relationship and Start Making It Great!

Bill O'Hanlon and Pat Hudson
WW Norton, 1995, £14.95, 186pp.

This book opens with a controversial statement: 'Analysis doesn't solve relationship problems and can even make them worse'. It then moves on to condemn self-help books, including some very successful ones, that provide explanations about why things go wrong in relationships. While it is true that understanding doesn't of itself necessarily effect change, nevertheless it can provide a sure foundation on which to begin to construct transformation.

In order to derive any benefit from this book, therefore, it is necessary to put aside one's own beliefs and accept that it adopts the narrow focus of 'solution-oriented therapy', of which Bill O'Hanlon was an originator. This offers direct advice about changing actions and points of view by focusing on the present and future, rather than the past. Some of the tips come directly from counselling practice and are useful: for example, 'You can acknowledge your partner's personal reality by repeating back what he or she has just said: "You were upset when I was late," or "You don't think I do anything around the house."' Other suggestions are that you don't blame the other person or give labels, such as 'Why are you so sensitive?' or 'You're crazy!' Rather, give praise and appreciation of the other's behaviour if it involves something you like. This is all very constructive.

The authors also recommend that grievances are expressed in terms of 'action complaints' or clear descriptions of what irritates you about your partner, with equally transparent requests for what you want instead. So far, so good.

This healthy advice is frequently interspersed with heavy jokes, some of which made me wince. However, the report of the 'remedial hug-training session', described in all earnestness, I found hilarious: 'Although he had given her hugs regularly as requested, Marge said that his hugs were perfunctory. He would just lightly squeeze her shoulder for a couple of seconds. Marge taught Ralph that a hug meant both hands on the back with firm pressure, embracing for at least forty-five seconds. As an engineer, Ralph appreciated these precise guidelines.' Seriously, though, are not people reduced to automata by such methods? Surely it is the quality of the embrace that Marge finds dissatisfying and this depends on feeling.

The point is that 'love' is not just a verb, an action; it is also a noun, with a dictionary definition of 'warm affection'. I find it astonishing that a whole book is written about love in which the feelings associated with it, ranging from tenderness to passion, do not feature. I have honestly tried to like this book, but the overall impression I am left with is of superficiality.

Rachel Charles

Women and Guilt

Ursula Markham
Piatkus, 1995, £6.99 pb, 137pp.

As a woman, and as someone who is no stranger to guilt (I agonised over being a day late with this review), I was intrigued to find out just what the author would have to tell us on the subject. Would there be an analysis, social, cultural or biological, of the reasons why women are prone to guilt? Would there be guilt-making exhortations to feel less guilty, or programmes of exercises that, like so many, have a built-in failure structure? Perhaps there would be an account of how the author, unlike other women, manages to live life without the merest taint of guilt.

When I overcame my guilt-ridden expectations and actually read the book, what I found was a mixture of different approaches held together by a basic soundness and common sense. The author has a background in, among other things, hypnotherapy and assertiveness training, and these ways of working are prominent. Different people will find some more helpful than others — not everyone can stomach a daily dose of 'I am a terrific person' — but the emphasis overall is on learning to let go, seeing the child's past from the adult's perspective, and reprogramming in the present. All of which is absolutely fine, so long as someone is ready to do these things. Past causes of present guilt are recognised, but not explored in depth, with the result that sometimes the process of reaching the new stage is made to seem easier than it really is.

For me the book's most disappointing

chapter was the one entitled 'Why Women Carry More Guilt'. Here the author deals with the different pressures and conflicts that women face, but does not engage at all with wider social or cultural issues. This is in keeping with the book's generally low-key, pragmatic stance, but gives the impression of a somewhat simplistic blandness. The same could be said about the treatment of some other topics, such as sexual abuse and sexual harassment. Areas where the book is stronger and possibly more helpful are around avoiding emotional blackmail and manipulation, and dealing with situations where one really is in the wrong. The final chapter, on bereavement, is a brief but compassionate look at the guilt we can all feel towards someone who has died.

I would recommend this book to women who are beginning to look for self-empowerment and who are not so deeply enmeshed in guilt that the book simply becomes another burden. It is easy to read, friendly and encouraging in tone; many of its suggestions are undoubtedly useful. I just need to be sure I don't feel too guilty about the criticisms I've made . . .

Susan Jordan

Thoughts Without a Thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist Perspective

Mark Epstein
Duckworth, £10.95 pb, 242pp

This is a stimulating book with some good anecdotal material. Its descriptions of meditation experience ring with authenticity. But for an introduction to Buddhism, I would suggest you go elsewhere. Mark Epstein, a psychiatrist with a training in both Freudian analysis and meditation, emphasises the psychological dimension of Buddhist spiritual experience. Comparing the approaches to the psyche of both Buddha and Freud he finds many similarities between the two: 'Buddha may well have been the original psychoanalyst.' He suggests that Freud's recommendation that therapists 'develop evenly suspended attention' while also suspending judgement is very similar to mindfulness meditation, 'bare attention', as explained in the Satipatthana discourse of Buddha.

Epstein feels that the time has come for a re-evaluation of what Buddhism has to offer psychotherapy, and that Freud's definition of meditation as like returning to the mother's breast or womb was based on a lack of understanding. There has indeed been a tradition of Western thinkers (with some notable exceptions) dismissing, or else incorporating without acknowledgement, Eastern psychological understandings. Epstein argues that a deeper understanding of Buddhism would show how it is complementary to the practice of psychotherapy, especially in its

use of meditation to examine the nature of the narcissistic (false) self. Psychotherapy has identified narcissism as a 'source of neurotic misery', but without treating its causes. Basically meditation can make more of the psyche conscious, since the Buddhist approach 'requires that all of the psyche be subject to meditative awareness'.

The book is divided into three sections, 'The Buddha's Psychology of Mind', 'Meditation' and 'Therapy'. Its strength is in its second and third sections, where Epstein's own application of meditation awareness to his practice of psychotherapy is illustrated by case material.

The first section examines the Four Noble Truths of *humiliation, thirst, release* and *nowhere-standing*, and holds interesting reflections and interpretations. But it is also confused by inaccuracies and a lack of clear definitions. Widely differing Buddhist sources are jumbled together on a page or combined under a phrase such as 'according to the Buddhists', which leads to a pick-and-mix Buddhism. I know there has been a synthesising of different psychotherapeutic approaches, but I wonder whether benefit accrues from doing the same to Buddhism, at least without some careful thought. The tendency is compounded when Epstein adds his own interpretations without clearly owning them. At times I longed for a little old-fashioned academic rigour, such as acknowledgement of sources.

Two example of this confusion stand out. The first is the analysis of the Six Realms of Existence as psychological states. This potentially fruitful bringing together of east and west has previously appeared in the works of Chogyam Trungpa, but in Epstein's book it is flawed by a lack of clarity over which are his own ideas and which those of traditional Buddhism. When he gives to the Animal Realm *desire*, the predominant characteristic attributed to the Human Realm, he is creating a seismic shifting of the cosmology of the Six Realms.

Secondly, there is a lack of clarity in the use of the word 'emptiness'. It is, I feel, misleading to describe how the 'restless and insecure self' flees to the 'narcissistic polarity' of either 'grandiosity or emptiness . . . preferring the certainty of one or the other to the reality of neither', thus suggesting emptiness as a clinging to non-existence; and then later in the same section to write, 'When we operate with an appreciation of emptiness, teach the Buddhists, we are protected from the extremes of left and right (of grandiosity and despair) . . .', thus using 'emptiness' to suggest a transcendence of extremes. To use opposite meanings for the same noun can only lead to confusion.

Finally I was left wondering whether a book on psychotherapy that includes a Buddhist perspective could really be complete without an explicit examination of *karma*, that most powerful agent of our human conditioning.

Rosamund Oliver

Social Interaction and Personal Relationships

Dorothy Miell & Rudi Dallos (eds)
Sage/Open University Press, 1996, £15.95, 381pp.

At a quick look this book seems very easy to understand,as the language used is clear and simple; but this is misleading, as it is difficult in concept.

I personally don't like the general attitude of the editors to their subject. I don't like the idea that human communication should be looked at and studied closely by professionals in order, presumably, to solve problems. I subscribe to the attitude of prophets of doom like George Orwell (*1984*) and Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*). People don't like others knowing all there is to know about things, certainly not social workers, or this other silly lot who think they can get into people's heads — a lot of people are dead set against psychologists, aren't they. If these editors had their way, communication as the rest of us know it would have to change so that we could defend ourselves against this nutshell attitude. What's the point, if the mystery of things disappears?

Are we to assume that if we tag on to the same way of thinking then after reading this book we should understand, or at least begin to understand, all there is to know about friendships and relationships in general? Instead of taking the usual look at problem cases and working around these? Apart from the chapters which form the main body, there are only five readings used to illustrate different aspects of study. Some are used more than others. Argyle is sound, as are Robert Hinde and Graham Allan. Richard Stevens gives the humanistic perspective. I particularly noted that intimate relationships references were predominantly of the 1950s and included Yalom, Fromm and Carl Rogers — nothing new in this, on the face of it.

People in general are and always have been concerned if their understanding puts them at a disadvantage. The usual reference points, which this book either overrides or 'apes', are found in, for instance, the reading of Shakespeare and women's problem pages and newspapers and magazines, which can all gradually give one an insight to the sort of ideas which the course writers in this book feel the necessity to spell out as an education. I personally find their blithe and matter-of-fact stance unnecessary, distasteful and inappropriate.

I saw a film on television recently, a comedy where a character came in and took a bite out of a piranha fish. Later on two potential lovers discussed internals, which were impossible and bionic: the male, unlike Winston in *1984*, had harnessed his rat, and it was inside his stomach in a controlled way going around and around on a wheel. If this was really the case, then I'd feel that this book was appropriate, that it was a wise book.

Joanne Webb

Why Do We Fall in Love . . . ? The Psychology of Choosing a Partner

Cathy Troupp
Virago, 1996, £7.99

In this book Cathy Troupp, a journalist, focuses on a question that fascinates us all: why do we choose the partners we do? What makes us fall in love? Her aim was to concentrate in depth on the unconscious reasons for the couples' original choice of partner. She interviewed sixteen 'ordinary happy couples', who were not seeking therapy but who wished to gain more insight into their relationships. I was encouraged by the fact that her sample, though small, included black and white, heterosexual and homosexual, and a cross-section of ages and classes.

Although love and our choices of partner seem shrouded in mystery, Cathy Troupp sees them as explicable. The hope, projection, disillusion and need for attachment which are intrinsic elements in many early relationships constitute four factors which influence the specific choices people make. Many couples sought people who would complement them by compensating for their 'missing parts'; others looked for similarity; some were united by shared defences, whilst yet another group were drawn to repeat past family patterns.

Cathy Troupp provides vivid illustrations of these four factors. She sees complementarity as a healthy element in our initial choice of partner. When we find in others the missing parts of ourselves we attempt to bring to life those repressed parts which we need to acknowledge and thus start to confront our problems. Charles, a stick-in-the-mud who had never moved from his home village was attracted to Susannah, who went to university, was passionately engaged with politics, had travelled widely and led an adventurous life. Susannah was attracted by the sense of safety and caring attitude he exuded. For Susannah the relationship was a homecoming, for Charles it was the start of something new and it stimulated him to begin a university course himself. Paradoxically, though Charles and Susannah saw each other as a way of breaking out of their respective moulds, their attraction for each other depended on their remaining within those same moulds. It was only when each could reclaim the missing parts of themselves which they had so valued in the other that real growth could begin.

Similarity, where 'like seeks like', is illustrated through Janet and Robin who were brought together by their lack of confidence and low self-esteem. By coming together each found another who understood how it felt to be unloved; at the same time they could compensate for this past lack of love. However, their closeness also depended on not allowing conflict into the relationship. Bernard and Harriet were another couple whose attraction was based on shared defences. They both feared emotional expression and had a limited range of emotional

responses. They depended on each other and had no friends. However the advent of children changed them: Bernard could express strong feelings in play, and through common experience with other mothers Harriet began to emerge from her former isolation.

Repetition of past family patterns plays an important role in choice of partner. There is the pull of what feels familiar and this can override a conscious wish to reverse negative aspects of the past. The point of bringing painful legacies from the past into current relationships is to have them resolved, and for this the couple need an awareness of the earlier patterns. Elaine and Greg worked on trying to find a better way of conflict resolution than the one they had inherited from their families. Elaine became aware of a tendency to needle in the same way as her mother had done and became more open, whilst Greg resisted his pattern of walking away and tried to stay and confront the difficulty. The book looks at issues of commitment, the early stages after the commitment has been made, cross-roads and conflict. It highlights that what constitutes a satisfactory way of being for one couple might be disastrous for another. What was interesting was not whether the couples had conflict, but how they tried to resolve it. When the inevitable stage of disillusion set in, some retained C.S. Lewis's 'power of seeing through love's own enchantment and not being disenchanted'. One couple flourished in spite of frequent and serious arguments, whilst another remained fulfilled despite the absence of sex.

Although the book was clear and readable and many elements resonated with me, overall it seemed somewhat fragmented and anecdotal. There were not enough samples to prove any theory and I only gained a tantalising glimpse of each couple's relationship. I was left feeling I had only glanced at many snapshots; I would have preferred the opportunity to browse through one or two family albums.

Val Simanowitz

Ritual, Power, Healing and Community

Malidoma Patrice Somé, Gateway Books, £6:95, 127pp.

A witch takes the form of a luminous goat spirit in order to curse and kill because a man has neglected his ritual to an earth shrine. We enter the world of Dagara ritual and community life in West Africa.

Malidoma, as well as having doctorates from western universities, is a shaman in the Dagara community. He was given a mission whilst in the womb, courtesy of his grandfather and another ancestor. His mission is to walk in foreign lands and talk to strangers, who may be enemies and could become friends. This book shows how he is helping strangers become friends. I think his books are as important

an account of a male upbringing and way of life as Maxim Gorky's *My Childhood.*

Malidoma offers us an ancient antidote to our enslavement to the corporation ritual of profit, power, consumerism, waste and machine worship: the figure of indigenous humanity. Indigenous humanity is at home in nature, wherein lies abundance; it is related to an ancestry in a community that has obligations to ritual. Its ritual contains and expresses the other world of powerful spirits, the ancestral influence, life in nature and communal experiences and energy.

He describes a profound and inspiring grief ritual in which the whole community takes part, and how that ritual was translated for Vietnam veterans. I was glad that jokers, musicians and singers were involved, for, as Malidoma says, communal grief on its own can kill because of the way we chase after our losses; but ritual, with its breadth and depth, can heal communal wounds.

At the end of the book Malidoma says that he wishes to find a home in the hearts of strangers. He is in my heart and his book is lodged there, too. It is a gift to be unwrapped carefully and a blessing that tempers the curse now on our western industrialised society.

Dave Jones

Doing Contextual Therapy

Peter Goldenthal
WW Norton, 1996, £21.00 hb, 244pp.

It is sad, really. Having just read the excellent book on narrative therapy by Jill Freedman and Gene Combs, to pick up this one and find that (a) it is not a million miles away from being the same approach, and (b) there is no mention of the other work in either book, is a reminder that psychotherapy is still divided into schools which are not on speaking terms. The heroes of Freedman/Combs are Michael White and David Epston, and the hero of Goldenthal is Boszormenyi-Nagy, but neither name is to be found in the other's index.

Goldenthal's book is based on family therapy and is stated to be just as useful for individual work. It has no teams, no one-way mirrors, no co-therapists even. The author lays a lot of stress on multilateral partiality — that is, lending 'therapeutic weight to the person whose past injuries or current efforts to give to others call for our support the most at that moment'.

Another concept which is used a good deal is destructive entitlement. 'People who rely predominantly on destructive entitlement in relating to others, however, have experienced so much pain and injustice, that they have become blind to the harm they cause others.' This is an idea I have not come across before, and it does seem relevant and interesting.

Another concept has to do with forced caretaking. 'One of the most dramatic and most frequent ways in which people are harmed is by being made into people's caretakers. This occurs earliest and with

the most devastating consequences when young children are made the unwilling caretakers of their parents . . . In the language of contextual therapy this state of unwillingly becoming a caretaker is referred to as destructive parentification.'

There is an emphasis on underlining the positive rather than sticking with the negative. 'The goal is to catalyze a shift away from a preoccupation with ogy . . . away from a pattern of blaming a child for his shortcomings and toward acknowledging him for his capabilities and his efforts to give to others.'

After some exposition, there are three chapters about working with one family, in detail. This is a very clearly written book, though somewhat pedestrian. I don't think it really adds much.

John Rowan

The Man Who Loved a Polar Bear

Robert U. Akeret
Constable, 1996, £14.95 hb, 235pp.

This is a book of case histories, rather in the manner of Yalom's *Love's Executioner*. Robert Akeret is a psychoanalyst, though you would hardly know it from the accounts given here, all of which are unusual, involving unorthodox moves and insights. The stories are moving, engaging, amazing, extraordinary. They are fuller than the usual case history, because Akeret has tracked down expatients years later to find out what happened in the end. It is an extremely well-written book, and readable in the highest degree. It is not until the last page has been turned that we discover the truth that 'my notes, recorded interviews, recollections and analysis were rendered into a narrative by my friend and colleague Daniel Martin Klein, a novelist. This book literally could not have been written without him.'

The author studied psychoanalysis with Rollo May and Erich Fromm and comes across as a wise and creative therapist. Any reader would find this book enthralling and a really good read.

John Rowan

Beyond Psychoppression: A Feminist Alternative Therapy

Betty McLellan
Spinifex, 1995, £12.99 pb, 192pp.

This is a powerful book from Australia, which puts together a number of earlier feminist critiques in a compendious way and makes a real impact of its own. It is divided into four parts. Part one is a history of psychotherapy and feminism. Betty

McLellan focuses throughout the book on Miriam Greenspan, but covers a number of other writers too. Chesler, Weisstein, Rush, Mander, Daly, Raymond, Kitzinger, Perkins, Armstrong, Klein, Millett, Mitchell — all are included.

Part two deals with some important theoretical issues: oppression ('oppression is at the root of most emotional and psychological problems affecting women'); access ('therapists must be honest about the accessibility of the therapy they offer'); honesty ('the practice of encouraging women to continue in therapy when it is not needed is dishonest and exploitative'); passion ('the expectation is that women will keep their passions subdued'); and justice ('emotional and psychological health is not possible when justice is not done'). One of the points the author makes here is that 'the ability to be angry is central to the mental and emotional health of all oppressed people'.

Part three deals with what she calls blame-the-victim therapies, which include: Freud and psychoanalysis ('the theory of the unconscious can always be used to benefit the agents of oppression and blame the victim'); humanistic therapies ('no amount of personal, individual awareness will change the oppressive structures of a society bent on keeping one group in power at the expense of other groups'); New Age and popular psychologies ('in New Age philosophy, reality and truth are replaced by positivity and pretence'); and lesbian sex therapy ('the new libertarian sex therapists are involved in constructing lesbian sex to resemble the heterosexual version as nearly as possible'). This sets up quite a devastating critique of most of the field. She criticises Carl Rogers for being too individualistic, and says: 'If feminist therapy is to avoid the humanist tendency toward blaming individual women for the problems they experience as a result of their oppression, the emphasis must be on the collective empowerment of women.' The danger is that therapy comes to be seen as a way of life, and as another commodity to be consumed.

Part four is about feminist therapy and its practice. McLellan emphasises the importance of support on the one hand and demystification on the other. She takes the slogan 'the personal is political' very seriously, and derives from it other principles such as separating the internal from the external, validating a woman's experience, the usefulness of the therapist exploring her own values and attitudes, and an emphasis on change rather than adjustment. The relationship between therapist and client is an egalitarian one.

But the feminist therapist is not afraid to be didactic at times. She speaks approvingly of 'an ability to educate the client toward a greater understanding of the social roots of her personal pain.'

McLellan believes that there are stages in the process of therapy: firstly, telling the story; then expression of sadness and helplessness; acknowledgement of oppression, expression of anger; and finally, working for change. In stage four, a woman may seek contact with other women and experience a feeling of solidarity, find opportunities for group discussion and consciousness-raising, and begin

to work with other women to bring about real changes in society.

She is clear that the object of therapy is to help a woman through a rough patch, 'so that she is then able to continue on her journey unaided'. She thinks that those who spend months or years in therapy are in danger of developing a life-long habit of achieving satisfaction from perpetually analysing what they are doing and ing, instead of simply getting on with their lives. Taking notes is unnecessary; keeping files is unacceptable.

This is a stark and well-defined position, and it is well stated and argued, with all the appropriate quotations and references to other work in the field. Anyone who wants to know what feminist therapy is all about had better read this book.

John Rowan

The Minds of Billy Milligan

Daniel Keyes, Penguin, 1995, £6.99 pb, 428pp.

This book was first published in 1981, and has presumably been reissued because of the current interest in child sexual abuse and in the question of multiple personality and dissociative disorders. It is a very thorough and convincing account of one man's experience. It tells of how sympathetic therapy was on the road to making him whole, when the psychiatric establishment decided that instead he should be punished. It is an enthralling and harrowing book to read, and I found it extremely absorbing.

John Rowan

Mastering Phobias: Cases, Causes and Cures

Richard Stern, Penguin, 1995, £6.99 pb, 157pp.

The author is a member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists who works at St George's Hospital. His book offers a good amount of background material on work which has been done on phobias, case histories of how phobias have been quickly cured, and suggestions for self-help. All of it comes from a cognitive-behavioural point of view. He dismisses psychoanalysis and does not mention any of the humanistic approaches.

John Rowan