

Caveat lector

Few constructs in psychology enjoy such a well-documented and validated track record as intelligence and cognitive abilities. Their applications are widespread and important, although their implications are sometimes seen as 'controversial', even socially divisive. Colin Cooper, well known for his television appearances in the BBC programme *Test the Nation*, details the science and dispels the myths. He has no axe to grind; and his book is incisive, accessible, challenging and exhaustive – he even includes mention of the cognitive abilities required to grow onions! All of this is achieved in a compact and reasonably short book, written in an engaging, informed and amusing style. Importantly, Cooper devotes ample space to discussing the various meanings of intelligence and cognitive abilities, which is just as well because at first blush they can appear elusive, especially to the undergraduate student, who typically comes to the subject armed with a little knowledge but many misconceptions.

Another strength of Cooper's book is how it positions this vibrant research topic in the broader context, especially of the two schools of psychology: experimental/cognitive (which includes developmental and social processes) and differential psychology; with the former focusing on mean differences, where typically *differences* between people (which always exist!) are seen as a nuisance and assigned to the statistical error term; and the latter, in contrast, taking such individual differences as primary data, using various statistical techniques of association and correlation to describe and assess their impact – and here, Cooper even manages to make factor analysis understandable to the novice.

As Cooper correctly notes, 'For example, social psychologists study variables that influence prejudice *in the population*, and do not trouble to consider whether or why some individuals are more prejudiced against minority groups than others' (p.1) – and the same can be said for many other areas of psychology. He is right – and the student reading this will get a deeper understanding of how different 'schools' of psychology do, and should, relate to one another: this serves to deepen understanding of psychology and sharpen critical faculties.

In eight well-contained chapters Cooper takes the reader through everything that they could reasonably be expected to know: 'Introduction' (insightful discussion of different meanings and the experimental/cognitive differential schools); 'What Are Abilities?' (description of items, tests, standardisation, and interpretation); 'The Structure of Mental Abilities' (delineation of

factor analysis, Spearman's *g*, and hierarchical models); 'Alternative Views of the Structure of Abilities' (presentation of social construction models, self-ratings, unusual abilities, Sternberg's Triarchic theory, Gardner's multiple intelligences, and emotional intelligence); 'Social and Biological Origins of Abilities' (summary of various genetic methodologies, multivariate genetic analysis, gene–environment interactions, and the limitations with these approaches); 'Ability Processes' (discussion of speed of processing tasks, working memory and *g*, and physiological correlates); 'Applications' (examples from education, personnel selection, job fit and performance, health and wellbeing); and a final chapter that is bound to inform and delight, 'Reflections and Conclusions', in which Cooper provides appropriately critical discussion of group (e.g. black–white) differences; implications of the Flynn effect (i.e. rise in IQ over the generations, which may explain group differences); interventions to boost IQ (e.g. Head/Sure Start type programmes), neural plasticity and various myths (e.g. 'magic bullets' to raise IQ – including the Mozart effect); and the social implications of the 'bell curve' theory of Herrnstein and Murray (i.e. advanced technological countries dividing along the lines of levels of cognitive ability) – there is also a section on how cognitive tests might be used to identify and select disadvantaged children for university, especially from the British white working class who are underrepresented in British universities.

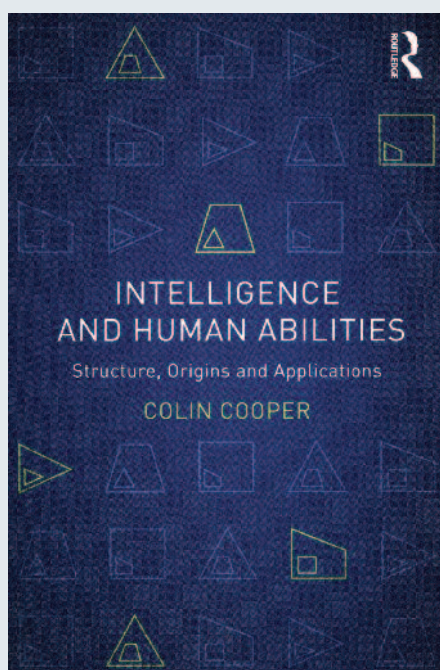
The thing with Cooper is that, not only is he very well versed in the entire field of intelligence and cognitive abilities, he is entirely level-headed and he conveys all of this in an easy-to-read fashion that belies his vast knowledge. Even technical issues (e.g. the various forms of genetic

methodologies) are presented in a way that will not only educate students but should give reading pleasure.

This book needs to be on 'required' reading lists of psychology students and those in related disciplines. It would also be read with profit, albeit perhaps with dissatisfaction, by those who prefer to dismiss this important field of psychology as pseudo-science. The 'take home message' is that, 'Few theories in psychology have stood the test of time as well as the psychology of human abilities' (p.217). Reader beware: Cooper's book is likely to charm you into knowing far more about the science of intelligence and cognitive ability than you ever thought possible or appropriate!

Routledge; 2015; Pb £29.99

Reviewed by Philip Corr who is Professor of Psychology at City University London



Intelligence and Human Abilities: Structure, Origins and Applications
Colin Cooper



A mother's love

Room
Lenny Abrahamson (Director)

The novel *Room* received critical acclaim when published in 2010, and it was shortlisted for both the Orange Prize for Fiction and the Man Booker Award.

Although a powerful and original book, its subject matter meant it was not an obvious candidate for a screen adaptation. But it is now an Oscar-nominated film, with the book's author, Emma Donoghue, responsible for the screenplay.

The first half of the film is set in the eponymous room, occupied by young Jack (Jacob Tremblay) and Ma (Brie Larson). It becomes apparent fairly early on that this room has not only a bed, wardrobe and table, but also a bath, toilet and basic cooking facilities. A skylight provides the only view. Without having to say so, it's understood that Jack and Ma do not leave this room. But seen through Jack's eyes, there's no reason to leave Room. It's all the world he's ever known, and contains everything and everyone he loves. There's comfort and security in the order imposed by Ma, with morning exercises, regular mealtimes and a ration

on watching the fuzzy TV. They make snakes out of egg shells, bake cake for his fifth birthday, splash around in the bath. Ma sings to him, and Jack feeds from her breast.

Occasionally, Ma does not get out of bed at all, and Jack must amuse himself. And they have a regular visitor, Old Nick. Jack must stay in the wardrobe when Old Nick visits, and be very quiet.

Donoghue was apparently inspired to write the story after reading about the cases of Natasha Kampusch, and Elisabeth Fritzl and her family. Anyone drawing on such deeply disturbing real-life cases has a responsibility to avoid sensationalism and voyeurism. This the film achieves with ease. We see Room through Jack's eyes, and Jack is inevitably an unreliable narrator. But his innocence about his situation is neither sentimental nor contrived. What unfolds is a hymn to parental love, and the protective power of children's innate adaptability to, and acceptance of, their environment.



Psychologists will inevitably find themselves wondering how a child of his age would develop in such circumstances. What would be his deficits? Would he have developed particular strengths? Is passively viewing social interaction on a TV likely to aid social development? Most importantly, if freed from Room, would normal life be possible for either Jack or Ma? These questions move to the fore in the second half of the film.

Brie Larson gives an impressive performance as a victim who is determined to not be victimised. Jacob Tremblay is astonishing as Jack, for which both Larson and the director Lenny Abrahamson must share

some credit. The novel was perhaps stronger in conveying the enclosed world of Room, but the film benefits from transition to the screen in the later stages.

Anyone put off seeing *Room* because the bones of the story sound harrowing should be reassured. Some scenes are definitely challenging, and possibly upsetting for some. But *Room* allows us to see what parental love might look like stripped of the normal distractions – how transforming that love is, not just for the child, but also the parent.

I Reviewed by Kate Johnstone
who is Associate Editor
(Reviews)



Deserves a prime slot

The Brain with David Eagleman
BBC Four

I have only watched the first two episodes of *The Brain with David Eagleman*, but if the remaining episodes are anyway near the same quality, then this should go down as a landmark series. Full disclosure – I have known and admired David's work for some time as he is a talented scientist and writer, but what makes *The Brain* so outstanding is the way that he has so effortlessly translated his accessible style and passion to the screen.

Students of psychology will recognise many of the familiar landmarks in the history of cognitive neuropsychology: neurons, brain imaging, patient HM, false memories. But even though these are classic undergraduate examples, Eagleman brings them to life in a compelling way that is as satisfying for the seasoned student as well as for the naive. He does this best, as he does in his writing, by the use of thought

experiments and visual metaphors, guiding his audience through difficult conceptual terrain, such as self-identity, consciousness and moral responsibility.

What makes this series so good (apart from the high production values) is that Eagleman immerses himself in the documentary, relating his own experiences and expertise where relevant. And he's not averse to poking a bit of fun at himself. In one segment, as he describes how brain plasticity can accommodate loss of function with ageing, Eagleman is under the bonnet of a car engine, applying wrenches, sockets, pliers that he tosses nonchalantly over his shoulder as he describes how the brain can re-purpose tools to solve problems. I was wondering if he were to hit a passer-by, whether that would make a convenient segue into a discussion of head injury and local lesions.

Over and above the fun, Eagleman invites us to consider deep philosophical issues in a way that evokes wonder and awe. Eagleman combines the passion of Sagan, the depth of Wittgenstein with a little bit of Mythbusters thrown in. When you watch *The Brain*, an hour flies by before you realise it. There again, David is the perfect host to explain why that may seem so.

Maybe it is a shade too North American in style, even though it was co-produced with the BBC: but this was probably the intended major audience. It is really a shame that *The Brain* was scheduled to the less populated BBC Four – the series is worthy of a prime slot for the general public.

I Reviewed by Bruce Hood who is Chair of Developmental Psychology in Society, University of Bristol and founder of Speakezee.org



Light fantastic

Letting in the Light
The Grove, London E15

January: the first payday of 2016 seems a long way away, and the media is full of the misery of 'Blue Monday'. It's a challenging time for everyone, but especially so for those who are not in robust mental health. So it's no coincidence that the public exhibition 'Letting in the Light' in Stratford seeks to uplift and illuminate through art, created by people with personal histories of mental illness.

The exhibition, organised by the Stratford-based arts and mental health organisation Daily Life Ltd, is located on a typically depressing inner-city stretch of pavement, between a betting shop and the public library. But its appearance is anything but depressing. The art is displayed in 10 tall light boxes, warmly glowing against the grey Stratford sky. The public location mean this exhibition accessible to everyone, at any time of the day or night.

What is especially great about this exhibition is the text provided by each of the 35 artists displayed. Much of modern art eschews such explanatory labelling. In this exhibition, the text not only gives one a greater appreciation of the art, but helps normalise the artists' mental health issues. Liz Atkin's Lavish, for example, shows part of a face, dramatic and brightly painted. The text underneath talks about her 20-year history of compulsive skin picking. Reading this made me reappraise the picture, and gave me a different understanding of it. Dolly Sen's Coffee Stain Stars was inspired by



the endless cups of tea and coffee she drank on a psychiatric ward. Chris Gray's colourful Starfrisk + Monster, arresting and slightly intimidating, is simply about his state of mind as a paranoid schizophrenic.

But it's unfair to single out any of the works in the exhibition: not only is the standard is very high, but the range of techniques used, and experiences behind them, are so varied. What they do all seem to share, though, is a hopefulness about the artist's own mental health, and the benefits of having a creative outlet through which this can be explored and shared. I came away from Letting in Light feeling both brighter, and enlightened.

I The exhibition runs until 24 March 2016 (see www.dailylifeld.co.uk/daily-life-ltd-present-letting-in-the-light)
Reviewed by Kate Johnstone who is Associate Editor (Reviews)
See also *Big Picture*, centre pages



'I can't imagine living to old age like this'

Rethinking Anorexia Nervosa
BBC Radio 4

I was lucky. I recovered from my anorexia with CBT, being sectioned, force-fed and put on a reward programme. But one treatment does not fit all, so as I now write about this often misunderstood and fatal illness it's important to hear of new approaches to treating it. In an insightful 28 minutes, psychologist Dr Sally Marlow offers so many people hope for the future for their loved ones.

Sara and Linda open the show with their personal accounts of the deeply complex psychological condition of severe and enduring anorexia: 'Everything is perceived through the lens of feeling completely distressed about your body', 'It's like a funnel... it becomes narrower and narrower and more difficult to get out of it, the more you get entrenched in the eating disorder.' Dr Marlow explains the despair such people feel when treatments fail.

Dr Marlow goes on to explore new and experimental techniques to help people with 'severe and enduring' anorexia (around a quarter of all sufferers). Some have had the condition from teenage years until their mid-forties and fifties, with many years of therapy: Linda had experienced refeeding, groups, CBT therapy and interpersonal therapy without success.

Professor Ulrike Schmidt (King's College London), who describes anorexia as 'the

most lethal of all psychiatric disorders', talks about how deep brain stimulation to interrupt the pattern of learned behaviours towards food may hold a key. Dr Rebecca Park (Oxford University) describes a growing understanding of the parts of the brain that affect this condition, in particular the limbic system (involved in reward processing), the somatosensory cortex (which plays a part in body image) and the insula (which detects internal states such as pain and hunger).

Dr Marlow experiences transcranial magnetic stimulation, a technique to excite or inhibit nerve cells, which appears to reduce anxiety. Still at the 'proof of concept' stage, there have been promising results with trail participants and it's now set for a randomised trial with sessions five times a week for four weeks. Professor Schmidt feels it may reduce preoccupation with weight and increase engagement with other forms of therapy.

Over at the University of Toronto in Canada, a team are trialling a far more invasive technique – deep brain stimulation. Professor of Psychiatry Blake Woodside and neurosurgeon Nir Lipsman target the subcallosal cingulate, which they call a 'call centre for emotional processing in the brain'. One sufferer, whose condition was so severe that her family was planning for her funeral, suddenly announced she would like

a piece of pizza the moment the electrodes were turned on.

The researchers say they have been 'gobsmacked' by the results after six months, although they do also caution that deep brain stimulation does not offer a 'magic bullet'. A key point is that such treatments may increase a person's receptivity to other, more psychological, forms of treatment.

Dr Parks says she is keeping a very close eye on these results, and continuing their work to develop optimal targets for such treatments. Medical ethicist Dr Jacinta Tan (University of Swansea) reminds listeners that when using novel treatments with such a 'deeply human dilemma', the first principle is to do no harm: 'health professionals and researchers as well have this sense of desperation, we're just looking for anything.'

Thankfully, Dr Marlow reminds us, 'necessity is the mother of invention', and I was personally very encouraged to hear that the treatment of severe and enduring anorexia is being rethought.

I Listen to the programme at www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06wczm3
Reviewed by Tina McGuff who is an author and eating disorder campaigner (see www.secondstosnap.com)



Body counts

Dark Circus
Barbican Centre, London

There are two art forms I would crawl over broken glass to avoid: rom-com films, and physical theatre. I'm not therefore an obvious choice to review *Dark Circus* by Stereoptik. The marketing promised 'two visual artists who draw and play music live to build a big top universe'. My attitudes to mime were formed as a teenager in the 1980s courtesy of a show called *Not the Nine O'Clock News*, when Rowan Atkinson appeared as mime artist Alternative Car Park, to tell us his body was his tool. Tonight I was determined to banish that precursor to Mr Bean, and open my mind to the possibilities of mime. After all, there are other circumstances where my brain manages to suspend disbelief, to create meaning from visual and audio stimuli – why not here?

I wondered what a mime audience would look like. It turns out they're much like any other theatre audience, a bit younger perhaps. But there were few clues that I was going to experience anything out of my comfort zone – not a Breton t-shirt, twirly moustache or white glove in sight.

Within seconds of the opening, I knew I was going to be immersed in something special. The performance consists of 55 minutes of an artist and a musician drawing and providing a soundtrack for a narrative for a circus where bad things happen. This Circus was indeed Dark, and on the screen in front of us a trapeze artist fell off her perch, a lion tamer was eaten, knife throwing went very badly wrong. But more than the story, the delicacy and damn cleverness of the art and music produced along the way was utterly mesmerising. Meaning emerged from what first appeared to be random brush strokes as the Stereoptik duo manipulated our senses and our emotions using low-tech equipment like overhead projectors, ink and acetate. How quickly a blank light box became a field, became a setting for a big top, became an urban housing estate, and with what beauty. The overhead projector faded in and out as ink bled, charcoal was smudged, and guitar strings became a lion cage. A pile of powder? Sand? Iron filings? It was hard to tell in the dark, but whatever it was, it



was transformed into exquisite tower blocks. How did they do that? And how did I feel such poignancy?

The Dark Circus acts rolled on, punctuated by a ringmaster with more than a whiff of a seedy Elvis impersonator about him. He asked the audience to welcome each performer as they were projected up in front of us, and we applauded at their entrances, and at their deaths. I was transfixed. But then, for me at least, although not I think for most of the audience, the bubble burst. Spoiler alert: there was a happy ending. Suddenly there was a big red clown's nose, changing the monochrome tones of the Dark Circus into coloured hues. Light and happiness arrived with a vengeance. The performance climaxed in everyone who had

died coming back, boogying along with the lion and having a simply smashing time. I felt like I did in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* when Andie McDowell's character turns to Hugh Grant at the end and says 'Is it still raining? I hadn't noticed.'

The first 80 per cent was good enough for me to more than forgive, however; so much so, that when I got home, I immediately went online to book tickets for my son, an art student. So thanks to Stereoptik: I still would have preferred a high body count, but that probably says more about my own inner workings than theirs.

I Reviewed by Dr Sally Marlow who is at the National Addiction Centre, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience King's College London



In-depth analysis

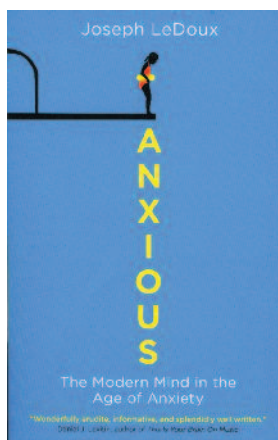
Anxious: The Modern Mind in the Age of Anxiety
Joseph LeDoux

Having been fooled by the bright cover and expecting a light 'popular psychology' read, I was surprised to discover that *Anxious* is in fact a detailed, rigorous scientific examination of approaches to studying fear and anxiety. That being said, I quickly found that LeDoux's skilful writing style effortlessly integrated this high level of scientific detail into a clear, well-written narrative.

LeDoux starts by charting the evolution of his own views on attempts to understand the emotional brain, guiding the reader to his current stance that we need to address what different researchers and approaches actually mean by the word 'fear'. He distinguishes between unconscious survival mechanisms and the conscious experience

of fear and anxiety, which both play important but distinct roles.

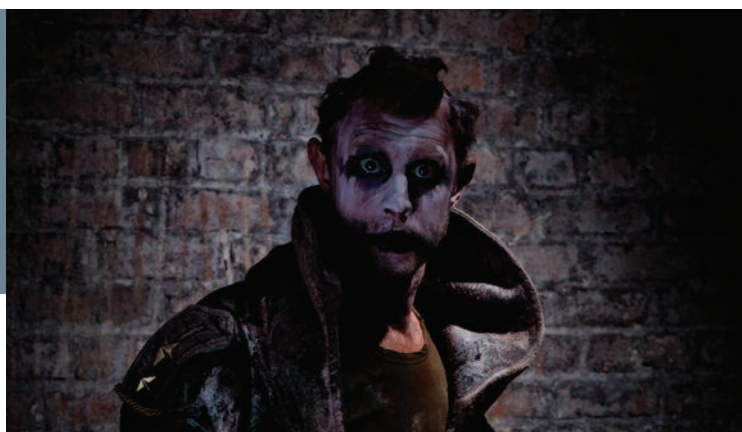
Unlike many other researchers in the field, LeDoux argues that what we have inherited from animals is not the conscious feeling of fear, but rather the mechanisms for detecting and responding to threats. In animals capable of consciousness (such as humans), feelings of fear and anxiety are, he argues, constructed based on how we interpret signals from these threat-processing mechanisms.



The book finishes by considering how a fresh understanding of fear and anxiety and their underlying brain mechanisms can inform therapies.

Those hoping for a light read should look elsewhere, but LeDoux's book is essential reading for researchers and practitioners seeking an in-depth scientific analysis of approaches to understanding fear and anxiety.

I Oneworld; 2015; Pb £14.99
Reviewed by Holly Scott who is an MSc student (Research Methods of Psychological Science) at the University of Glasgow



When words are not enough

Oog
Al Seed

The London International Mime Festival was founded in 1977, and spans the spectrum of wordless performance, such as physical theatre, circus and puppetry. In 2016 it ran for a month across different London venues, featuring 18 different performers from nine countries.

'Oog' was performed by Al Seed, a Glasgow-based artist. The piece starts with the performer sitting on a chair, entombed in a massive leathery coat. The stage is empty apart from a rope ladder hanging down at the back. There's a throbbing, insistent soundtrack beating out. Slowly, the man emerges from the coat, first just his hands, and then his head, in strange, spasmodic movements. Seed's physical talent is immediately apparent in his ability to convey disconnect between a man and his movements. It's like watching an old film, where the fewer frames per second meant that all movements were jerky. Once the man emerges, he starts socialising with (imaginary) others, turning his head, laughing and drinking. Then he'll suddenly sink down, unable to carry on the illusion, until he rises up again.

As the piece progresses, the man escapes the restriction of his coat. We realise that he is a soldier, either plagued by memories or perhaps returning to the fighting from furlough. He takes up his weapons and gradually becomes at one with them. They are extensions of his arms, and he is a fighting machine, unthinking and automatic. When the fighting lulls, the man is drawn to the ladder. He is hesitant to climb it, even although it seems to offer him escape from this darkly lit place. We start to understand that the fighting has traumatised him, and has affected his ability to function.

There are many ways to interpret this piece. Perhaps his coat represented antidepressants? Or his numbness, post-trauma? Is the way out via the ladder his suicide, or admitting that he needs help? One definition of 'Oog' is as an acronym from the gaming world: Out of Game. Does this mean he is 'out of' soldering, which has become something akin to a shoot-'em-up computer game? Or has he metaphorically checked out? The privilege of a piece without words is that the audience is free to interpret it however it likes. Ultimately, it's like trying to describe music. It is essentially visceral: like the experience of PTSD. This is a thought-provoking and fascinating piece that shows how much can be expressed in movement in the right hands.

I *Oog won the Total Theatre Award for Physical/Visual Theatre at the 2015 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. This performance was at Jackson's Lane, London. A clip is available at <http://alseed.net/oog-on-tour>*
Reviewed by Kate Johnstone who is Associate Editor (Reviews)



A time-saver

The Student's Guide to Studying Psychology (4th edn)
Thomas M. Heffernan

This has become my go-to guide when quick and clear answers are required. Heffernan offers useful advice to those considering a psychology degree, to people like me, who are halfway through their study, and to those wondering 'where to next?' upon completion of their degree.

The guide begins with an overview of psychology and its approaches, before focusing on the practical skills required by students during their degree, such as study, writing, research methods, reports, ethics, exam preparation, and postgraduate opportunities. In the writing skills, samples of potential answers for essay questions and empirical reports are provided, with checklists and further reading recommendations interspersed throughout. He

ends with advice as to the options available after undergraduate study, looking at some of the major specialisms in this discipline.

In an effort to refresh some skills, I referred to two sections during recent assignments: APA referencing, and empirical research report writing. These sections were clear and concise, and as a result, a time-saver. Whilst I wish I had invested in this guide when I commenced study, it will now remain close to hand until I am considering 'where to next?'.

I *Psychology Press; 2015; Pb £19.99*

Reviewed by Michèle Mulqueen who is a second-year undergraduate psychology student, University of Derby Online Learning

Death – it's a cultural thing



Death and Bereavement Across Cultures (2nd edn)
Colin Murray Parkes, Pittu Laungani & Bill Young (Eds.)

Death is not an easy subject. Discussions around it can be morbid, deep, disturbing, enlightening. Despite death being an inevitability for us all, we are, in general, still reluctant to openly discuss what death and dying means for us. As a result, we are often ignorant of how those different from ourselves react to death. This book sets out to bridge this gap in our knowledge and help the reader to better understand how those from other cultures deal with death and bereavement.

The different styles of the chapters can make the book seem disjointed at times. Additionally, the Introduction felt like a bit of a slog to get through to reach the main sections addressing death in other cultures. Nonetheless, do not allow these criticisms to deter you from reading this very well-informed handbook. The authors do a great job of covering the practices and beliefs of the

major religions as well as diving a little deeper into some of the smaller subsections of these religions. All of this with the purpose of informing anyone who may find themselves face-to-face with someone from one of these cultures who has experienced a bereavement about how to more effectively help that person to cope with their loss.

An entire section addressing how professionals can make use of this information to improve their services further highlights that not only must we do more to tailor our approach to the needs of others, but also that this can be done. Much like any encounter with death, this book is a tough but meaningful, thought-provoking read.

I *Routledge; 2015; Pb £24.99*

Reviewed by Richard Potter who is an MSc Social Psychology postgraduate and mental health volunteer



A guide to the unteachable things

The Therapist in the Real World: What You Never Learn in Graduate School (but Really Need to Know)
Jeffrey A. Kottler

Kottler is a prolific author on the process of therapy and the internal world of the therapist with a chatty, readable style. He approaches this topic both as a long-qualified therapist, with plenty of experience to fill in whatever was missing from his graduate education, and as a faculty member trying to ensure that his psychotherapy students have as few gaps in their knowledge as possible.

Kottler identifies a number of reasons why, despite extensive training, newly qualified therapists have much to learn. Sometimes this is due to serious omissions on the part of the training courses themselves: for example, he discusses how the experience of deep, complex communication in therapeutic relationships can change the new therapist's expectations of their personal

relationships. Few trainee therapists are warned of how their training may affect their entire lives.

However, most of the issues identified here are not inadequacies of courses but intrinsically unteachable things; I appreciated the author's attempts to put into words the moments of intense connection in therapy that are impossible to communicate to anyone who has not experienced them. He makes an interesting point that qualified therapists rarely see each other work, so most of what he has learned has come directly from clients. He also observes that in training, we can underestimate the value of our knowledge because it is shared by everyone around us. It is only in clinical practice that we come to discover that providing what seems to us to be very basic

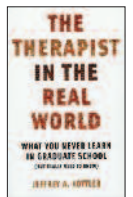
information can be our most useful service to clients.

Another intrinsic problem in training therapists is what Kottler calls 'the fickle nature of knowledge in our field' – or his rather depressing claim that half of everything learnt will be useless within 10 years. The challenge for courses is to find a way to teach the very latest theories, while simultaneously urging students to continue learning throughout their career, as the concepts they are currently mastering will soon be obsolete. His approach to this dilemma is to emphasise basic therapeutic skills and common features across theoretical approaches; this is an old idea, but his discussion is still an interesting one.

As well as tips for improving therapy skills, the book has some practical suggestions

about office politics, presentation and teaching skills, and writing for publication. US/UK differences do not get in the way of the author's ideas, and in fact the section on the influence of insurance company policies translates extremely well to an increasingly cost-driven NHS. The personal anecdotes, often self-deprecating, enliven the book and endear the author to the reader. I found the book both useful and thought-provoking, and will be seeking out a few of Kottler's many others.

I Norton; 2015; Pb £18.99
Reviewed by Dr Emma Taylor
who is a clinical psychologist with North Essex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust



Extreme cinema

The Revenant
Alejandro González Iñárritu (Director)

This piece is not a review of *The Revenant*. This bit is: Di Caprio dies a dozen deaths and is reborn each time to a new nightmare. The camerawork and sound are so intimate you can almost feel each rasping breath on your face. The landscape looks suitably awesome, all churning rivers, driving snow and imposing trees leaning into the centre of each frame. In fact, trees seem pretty significant. It's a decent film. 8/10.

But I wouldn't say it's 'enjoyable'. It's the kind of film where you may well hear people coming out of the cinema saying 'Well, that's three-and-a-quarter hours of my life I won't be getting back'. (Incidentally, I think that's how time works in general, and I'm not sure why that particular critique is mostly reserved for films.) I think there's a bit of a trend towards films like this. Before Christmas, I took my young boys to see the latest Pixar offering, *The Good Dinosaur*. We all came out feeling like we'd really been through the mill: never mind 'mild threat and peril', this was non-stop suffering and you'd struggle to even say it had a happy ending.

To be fair, that was a bit of a surprise, whereas I knew perfectly well that *The Revenant* would be hour upon hour of Di Caprio dragging his broken carcass through inhospitable landscapes. And still I went. Why?

I wonder whether there is a kind of cinematic Ikea effect [tinyurl.com/owjyd7s] at play: the more work you put into something, the more you value it. This might even extend to understanding what on earth it is that the characters are saying: Bryan Singer deployed the 'deliberately unintelligible dialogue' tactic in *The Usual Suspects*, Christopher Nolan took the baton and flew in *Interstellar*, handing it



to one of his charges Tom Hardy – who seems to be making it his modus operandi (see his 'Bane' in *The Dark Knight Rises*) – to mumble on in *The Revenant*. At least the plot is clear enough... I'm convinced another trend is for filmmakers (and writers for TV, come to that) to employ the 'Guru effect' [tinyurl.com/htm33hq], leaving people so

baffled by the disjointed goings-on that they feel the only explanation is they're in the presence of great intellect.

Maybe I'm overthinking it, and it's just the age-old artistic tradition of playing with extreme emotions in a safe environment. Di Caprio embodies determination: 'As long as you can still grab a breath, you fight.' Perhaps we live in such a cosseted age, so removed from the wilds filling the screen here, that it's fun to imagine being forced to show such resilience. It is indeed a good game to spot the point in *The Revenant* at which you would just slump in a corner and quit... I think I lasted about seven minutes.

I'm fully aware that having a pop at *The Revenant* for being relentlessly bleak is like criticising Ant and Dec for lacking sufficient gravitas. But I remain intrigued by the notion that actors have to suffer for their art – Di Caprio got bashed about and cold, therefore he's a shoe-in for an Oscar – and that we have to suffer by extension. Could psychologists shed light on this growing trend for 'extreme cinema' [tinyurl.com/gm9kjr4]? I asked a couple of them... see the online version of this review for their thoughts.

I Reviewed by Dr Jon Sutton *who is Managing Editor of The Psychologist*