

particular, will be of interest to most of those who read this book, though some, I fear, will not be of much interest to more than a few. Quite a lot have now appeared in the journals, though the authors are to be congratulated on the speed with which they have produced this book.

I think that there is enough in this book between the review articles, of value to all, and the rest, according to individual preference, for it to earn a place in the department library. Individuals who balk at the cost should seriously consider obtaining it direct from the USA: at around half of the price cited here it is a much more attractive proposition.

NMF MURRAY

Elements of Petit Mal Epilepsy. Edited by M S Myslobodsky, A F Mirsky. (Pp 419; \$81.95.) New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1989.

There can be no doubt that petit mal (simple absence) epilepsy represents one of the most fascinating of the epileptic syndromes. It is the most clearly identified of the genetically determined epilepsy syndromes and the one that is most easily identified by electroencephalographic (EEG) recordings. In spite of this, the genetics and neurophysiology of this condition remain controversial and so it was with a sense of some expectation that I picked up this book which attempts to provide an up-to-date summary of research and theory of petit mal epilepsy.

The book is a multi-author production, the major contributions coming from a number of basic scientists and clinicians working in the National Institute of Mental Health/National Institute of Health, Bethesda, Maryland. Additional contributions are provided by Pierre Gloor, Elving Anderson and Allen Hauser. Some of the chapters are excellent, including those of the genetics of petit mal epilepsy, the mechanisms of generalised spike wave discharge and the anticonvulsant pharmacology of cultured CNS neurons. However, the remaining chapters are likely to be a disappointment for practising neurologists seeking further enlightenment in this area. Significant portions of the book are given over to long discussions of the effects of absence seizures on awareness and evoked potentials. As the arguments in these chapters develop it seems that the central relationship between generalised spike wave discharge and its clinical effects become evermore remote and the final conclusions

are difficult to understand. The ultimate manifestation of this approach is a chapter which attempts to draw parallels between petit mal epilepsy and a number of metabolic encephalopathies including dialysis dementia and hepatic encephalopathy. Such an approach seems a final step into the realms of fantasy ignoring as it does the enormous clinical differences that manifestly exist between these conditions.

In the final analysis I cannot feel that the book has satisfactorily achieved its aims. Those chapters of a satisfactory and high standard are available in similar forms in other publications and the rest of the bulk of this volume will not be of major interest or have significant educational value to the majority of clinical neurologists. For this reason it is difficult to recommend this publication.

DW CHADWICK

Psychopharmacology and Reaction Time. Edited by I Hindmarch, B Aufdembrinke, H Ott. (Pp 194; £24.50). Chichester: John Wiley, 1988.

This book is based on a workshop on the use of reaction time in psychopharmacology that took place in West Germany in September 1985. It contains 14 chapters and includes contributions from a number of eminent workers in the field of information processing. In general, the majority of chapters focus on the approach that the author has found or considers most fruitful in the investigation of drug effects on reaction time, together with illustrative experimental evidence. Most chapters deal with the effects of drugs on the quality and speed of information processing, although a number consider the influence of other independent variables such as age, IQ, anxiety, and time of day on reaction time.

A number of salient conceptual issues and experimental approaches such as the distinction between structural processes and energetic mechanisms in human performance research, state-versus performance-oriented analysis, the individual as an active processor of information and the issue of speed-accuracy trade-off are discussed. Multi-dimensional assessment through recording of evoked potentials during reaction time tasks, the importance of qualitative examination of the pattern of responses in serial reaction time studies in addition to quantitative analysis, the distinction between lift-off time and movement time, the advantages

of using a task that allows manipulation of task variables instead of a test battery, the superiority of ecologically valid, real-life tasks over laboratory tasks are some of the methodological refinements of reaction time measures that are highlighted in the book.

Unlike many books that are based on the proceedings of a workshop or conference where the finished product often looks like a series of bound photocopies, this book is professionally edited and produced. The only drawbacks are the complex style of writing in a number of chapters and the failure to describe specialised techniques in simple terms for the benefit of non-expert readers. A noticeable example of the latter is Sternberg's additive factor method, which is referred to or experimentally-employed in the majority of chapters and yet is nowhere described in any detail. Besides psychopharmacologists, the book is suitable for a wider readership. It will be of value to anyone engaged in or embarking in information processing/reaction time research. At £24.50 this relatively slim volume is likely to be sought on the shelves of institutional libraries rather than personally acquired.

MARJAN JAHANSHEH

Correction

In the paper by Cole, Philip, Sedgewick, "Stability and tremor in the finger associated with cerebellar hemisphere and cerebellar tract lesions in man", (*J Neurosurg Psychiatry* 1988;51:558-68) figure 1c was an unrelated MRI scan. The correct CT scan is shown below.

