terms "the limited certainties of the pathology paradigm with orthodoxies of a different origin". He quotes Erich Fromm, "The quest for certainty blocks the search for meaning". In the areas of both gender and deliberate self-harm this quote should be engraved on our hearts. The author has clearly kept it close to his, and has succeeded in introducing the reader to the published works in this area, and has picked his way through the gender minefield relatively unscathed.

D. ROY, *Consultant Psychiatrist, South Western Hospital, London*

Teaching Systemic Thinking. By DAVID CAMPBELL, ROS DRAPER and CLARE HUFFINGTON. London: Karnac Books. 1991. 88 pp. £7.50.

The authors of this book make no pretensions that it is a comprehensive text on teaching systemic thinking. They do, however, pack into its 88 pages a number of very useful ideas. There is attention to the wider effects of any teaching, not only on the 'ecology of ideas' of both teachers and students, but also on the agencies from which they come. The major section is devoted to exercises that vary in content and complexity, and will enable participants to experience the systemic process in action. Participants explore systemic principles and their application in therapy by group discussion, using regular feedback and questions that challenge assumptions and generate new connections. Throughout the process they are encouraged to take responsibility for learning to suit their individual and agency needs. There are suggestions for reading and writing tasks, and homework.

This book is refreshing in its emphasis on the co-evolutionary nature of the process that makes teaching and learning fun. It also shows the enormous potential of teaching systemic thinking through exercises.

BEGUM MAITRA, *Senior Registrar in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Department of Child Psychiatry, St Mary's Hospital, London*

Suicidal Behaviour in Europe: Recent Research Findings. Edited by P. CREPET, S. PLATT, G. FERRARI and M. BELLINI. London: J. Libby. 1992. 327 pp.

This book presents a selection of papers based on presentations made at the 3rd European symposium on Suicidal Behaviours and Risk Factors, held in Bologna in September 1990. In total there are 32 articles organised into five sections: European perspectives; risk factors and predictors; cognitive aspects of parasuicide; psychiatric illness and suicidal behaviour; and substance abuse. It is longer than the book based on the 2nd symposium held in 1988, and its greater number of papers cover a broader range of topics. Most of these report on empirical studies, although a few present detailed reviews of the literature. Gratifyingly few of the articles contain similar material to that presented in the earlier volume.

Some of the papers present intriguing new evidence on established themes such as the impact of media reporting on subway suicide in Vienna, or the role of unemployment in suicide in Italy. Others tackle new themes such as the effect of the fear of AIDS, or the role of substance abuse in suicide among the young. Most notable is the emphasis given to prediction and prevention, on which there are 13 papers. The result is a wide-ranging coverage of current research into suicide and parasuicide in Europe, the findings of which are placed in the context of international literature. The editors are to be congratulated on their selection of papers, and the authors for the generally high quality of the material presented.

Although there are differences in presentation (some papers do not contain abstracts and occasionally the list of references is a little brief), these do not materially detract from the book. It forms essential reading for anyone with professional interest in suicide.

I. K. CROMBIE, *Senior Lecturer, Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Ninewells Hospital and Medical School, Dundee*

Existential/Dialectical Marital Therapy: Breaking the Secret Code of Marriage. By ISRAEL W. CHARNY. New York: Brunner/Mazel. 1992. 294 pp. US $24.95.

The philosophical title of Dr Charny's book, with its suggestion of a search for a world-view in a landscape of uncertainty, is descriptive of his approach to marriage. On reading, I was reminded of an aside of E. M. Forster's, in *Howards End*, which observes that in a way of life without religious faith and without roots in a native place we have to depend on love to give our experience significance. "May love be equal to the task!" he apostrophises sincerely but without undue optimism, and in this attitude I believe a marital therapist best approaches the relationship in trouble which presents itself, a relationship which is at once the common structural unit of all society, and a unique and mysterious experience of two individuals.

Dr Charny's view of the task of love seems to me to owe much to the romantic movement, a precursor of existentialism, in which it was held that to travel hopefully is better than to arrive at a state of relative disillusion and reconciliation. His couple's quest is romanticised, rather than the couple itself, and the marital therapist appears as a Virgilian guide pointing out innumerable 'marital traps' along their way: 'success traps', 'incompetence traps', and 'complementarity traps', in which you may think you have just worked

out who hoovers the car and who mends the washing-machine, but role rigidity is about to stop you dead in your tracks. In this strenuous atmosphere the therapist may long for a theoretical base to set out from, but will be offered a conscientious and informed, but rootless, eclecticism which embraces psychodynamic, systems, and even learning theory.

In a room with an unhappy couple, I need more of a 'kitchen and bedroom' mind than a 'mountainous landscape' – more assumptions than it seems an existential/dialectical approach can allow me – in order to start work at all. The exhortations of this particular guide, "Couple therapy should seek the highest level of functioning and fulfilment possible for each couple given the total picture of their possibilities and their limitations", seem bewildering rather than challenging.

SASHA BROOKES, *Marital Psychotherapist, Associate, Tavistock Institute of Marital Studies, Tavistock Centre, London*

Parents whose Parents were Divorced. By R. THOMAS BERNER. New York: The Haworth Press. 148 pp. US $14.94.

"Divorce is sad and destructive", "The only event worse than divorce is divorce after remarriage". Journalist Professor Berner has collected anecdotal reports of 300 adults whose parents were divorced and presents here their experiences as children of divorce, as adult survivors, and subsequently as parents. He argues that as widespread divorce is only a phenomenon of the latter half of this century, we are only now able to judge the long-term effects of divorce on children's subsequent parenting.

The book is presented as a research study, but in the introductory chapter the author writes candidly of his ignorance of research methods, seeking sources of funding, and devising a suitable research instrument. Not surprisingly, as an example of research methods it is deeply flawed; the research sample was recruited by newspaper advertisements asking for volunteers who wished to report their experiences of divorce by completing an open-ended questionnaire (taking four hours). Although he approached more than 300 newspapers, only 459 people replied and 231 filled in the questionnaire. The resulting histories are thus highly self-selected.

One recurring conclusion is that the consequences of divorce still live with those affected and that most are still trying to work through the sequelae, particularly in bringing up their own children. This is almost certainly an unrepresentative characteristic of the self-selected sample.

We are presented then with a collection of volunteers' anecdotes about divorce, interspersed with a reasonable selection of academic references. The result is a compelling and eminently readable insight into the respondents' (mainly white female) experiences. What do the anecdotes of these people tell us that is more widely generalisable? I have no doubt that their touching, thoughtful stories give a valuable insight into life during and after divorce. Despite my initial reservations this was a worthwhile and informative read.

SIMON GOWERS, *Senior Lecturer in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, University of Manchester*

Screwing the System and Making it Work. Juvenile Justice in the No-Fault Society. By M. D. JACOBS. Illinois: University of Chicago Press. 1990. 296 pp. £25.95.

The author spent ten years working as a research analyst at a juvenile court in a prosperous suburban community in the USA. He describes the methods used by the probation officers at the court: ethnographic, statistical and literary. His conclusions about their work are summed-up by the book's title: individuals attempt to get the best for their clients, despite the workings of a bureaucratic and chaotic system.

The book is organised into three parts, the first consisting of case studies and interviews with probation officers and other court workers. The probation officers emerge as committed and hard working, sustained by small rewards in a system full of frustrations and disappointments. This is underlined by the statistical analyses in the second section of the book, which show that outcome for most juvenile offenders is determined by historical or situational factors. Despite the best efforts of the courts, their impact on this process is often negligible. In the final section, these findings are placed in a wider context and characterised as problems of a 'no-fault society' where juvenile delinquents are reluctant to accept responsibility for their offending, and courts and institutions are, in turn, reluctant to accept responsibility for the delinquent. The book ends with a plea for an end to the 'no-fault society', greater co-operation between institutions, and a "strengthening of the rule of law".

The descriptive parts of the book will provide few revelations for anyone familiar with juvenile justice. The writing style will also alienate many readers. The no-nonsense approach of the title does not permeate the rest of the book and we are told, for example, that one of the chapters "explores the substantive irrationality resulting from the uncoordinated exercise of discrete fragmentary rationalities". The book's strengths lie in its detailed description and analysis of individual cases. By contrast, the final plea for agencies to work together and for a strengthening of the rule of law is simplistic and disappointing.

TONY MADEN, *Senior Lecturer, Department of Forensic Psychiatry, Institute of Psychiatry*