

Since, 1995 when the first version was published, we have seen the advances in fields such as artificial intelligence which have despite their rather slow emergence, enabled us to study such systems.

This is a book that sets its readers thinking along new lines and should interest the “traditional philosopher” as well as readers whose main interests lie in alternative systems, which can supplement the human mind’s activity. Whilst both the capacities and the limitations of the human mind has through the ages fascinated epistemologists and philosophers, the editors of this book believe that now is the time for us to earnestly consider alternative systems as well. They have given readers in this book an introduction to current thinking which is well worth their consideration.

Further information about the book can be obtained at: www.aaai.org

D.M. Hutton

Norbert Wiener Institute and University of Wales, UK

Maths for the Mystified

Michael J. de Smith

Matador

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203 pp.

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Keywords Cybernetics, Mathematics, Systems

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De-mystifying mathematics is an enormous challenge to any author. Michael de Smith does however tackle it to some purpose. From the outset it appears: to be a text aimed at students from the sciences and social sciences. It is not clear whether these students have taken any previous courses in mathematics or if they have, to what standard they have reached. We would expect readers of this book to have at least studied the basics so that they are better equipped to understand the author’s gallant attempts at making matters much clearer. Is it a “refresher course”? – Is it a study that aims to fill the gaps in the reader’s understanding of mathematics? Or does it hope to inspire those who believe they have already failed to grasp what mathematics is all about?

The result is a book that attempts to do all these things. It provides introductions to numerous topics and provides a background to many mathematical initiatives and developments. All of these sections have been written in an interesting and well-presented, way. It is true, of course, that a book of this size facing the enormity of the subject can only hope to stimulate the reader to further study. Choosing the right topics and giving the necessary applications that will fascinate, as well as inform has to be the prime concern.

The book does provide much that is of value to students who follow courses in computing and cybernetics as well as systems. Often such students are not mathematically inclined or qualified to pursue these courses but still persist in believing that they can make progress without being conversant with the basics of

mathematics. The same is, unfortunately, true of some researchers in these fields who still avoid anything mathematical. This book could well interest them because it includes the most important basics. After all, mathematics is an international language and proficiency in it is essential. What the author provides is of great interest and should spur the book's readers to want to study the subject to an even greater depth.

W.R. Howard

Computer Science International, Dinslaken, Germany

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Acting with Technology: Activity Theory and Interaction Design

Victor Kaptelinin and Bonnie A. Nardi

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344 pp.

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This is an unusual book which tells us what we have always appreciated, that everyday activity shapes the human mind. This means that our interactions each day with other humans and with artifacts may be structured into a viable theory based on activity. It goes further and suggests that there is a case for using activity theory to help us understand our relationship with technology.

To do this, Kaptelinin and Nardi need to introduce and describe what the theory is. This is completed at the beginning of the text where a full background to the development of the theory is presented. Only then is consideration given to its application to what we know as technology. With the most important tenets of the theory of activity discussed the authors then describe the links between interaction design and the theory. References are presented to back up their thesis. Many of the present-day issues in the development of activity theory are given and future progress discussed.

This book provides an excellent analysis of activity theory and will be of much interest and value to readers involved with cybernetic and systemic applications in many diverse fields of endeavour. Anyone researching the area of interaction design will also find that the notions and descriptions provided are particularly helpful in their project development.

W.R. Howard

Computer Science International, Dinslaken, Germany