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MACHINE INTELLIGENCE 9

Machine Expertise and the Human Interface

Machine Intelligence
Editor-in-Chief. Donald Michie

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MACHINE INTELLIGENCE 9

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PREFACE

One intelligent approach to prefaces — is to have the empty preface. The well prepared reader will form a good idea of the technical programme just from looking at the table of contents; together with the names of the authors, this gives him a good idea of what happened at the symposium. I could try to assess the talks and direct the reader's attention to the more interesting communications. But I fear this would be too subjective and unfair to the remaining authors — all of them equally represented in this book.

However, recalling that Spring week in Repino, a resort 20 kilometres from Leningrad on the Bay of Finland and unpopulated at that time of year, I have come to the definite conclusion that the scientific meeting was in its own way unique. What circumstances gave this symposium its special character?

First, it was not a regular IJCAI-type conference for which there is advance preparation, taking into account previous conferences of the series and knowing that others will follow. The technical programme was more spontaneous than preplanned; there was neither selection of papers nor restrictions on the subjects. This element of improvisation gave the meeting a more free and varied character. The fresh audience and the absence of prehistory encouraged the authors not to restrict themselves to presenting their results, but to pay more attention to analysing the premises and motivation of their research. This gave some of the presentations greater depth and scope, much to the satisfaction of the audience.

Of course, it was important that the conference was an occasion for a "meeting of East and West". The mass media often play up such meetings, but I must admit that this meeting did not provide an occasion for such dramatizations. At the same time, the direct and friendly contacts between scientists with common interests, recognizing their common problems and diverse approaches to their solution — all that made the conference a kind of "festival of thought", greatly amplifying the creative motivation of the participants.

On the other hand, it did not turn out that the forum character made the

PREFACE

symposium superficial. Not at all. It can be said that the theme of the conference was "AI at work", and this is readily confirmed by the programme. At the same time, this obvious desire to do "real work" in artificial intelligence forced us to restate the question: Has there emerged a stable paradigm for research and development in AI? Is there a single paradigm or are there several of them — or is it possible to do successful work in AI without conscious use of any particular paradigm? Even though many authorities in the field were present, no-one tried to give a final answer to these questions. However, the participants at the final panel discussion unanimously agreed that AI had got its "second wind" in recent years and was again on the upswing.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the business-like programme combined with the atmosphere of enthusiastic exchange of ideas thoroughly justifies optimistic expectations.

ANDREI ERSHOV

December 1978