THE HANDBOOK OF

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

VOLUMEIV

AVRON BARR
PAUL R. COHEN
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The Handbook of Artificial Intelligence

Volume IV

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and
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To the memory of our good friend Dianne Kanerva (Technical Editor, *The Handbook of Artificial Intelligence Volumes I–III*)

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PREFACE

The Handbook of Artificial Intelligence began as a seminar directed by Edward Feigenbaum at Stanford University in the Spring of 1975. The idea was that if each student wrote eight or ten short articles, this would be sufficient to cover much of the field. Like many early AI projects, the Handbook had big goals but was somewhat naive about what it would take to achieve them. Ultimately it took more than one hundred graduate students and researchers, roughly 1500 pages, and seven years to represent most of AI at a level of detail that was accessible but not superficial. And we almost missed the boat: The early 1980s were certainly the last opportunity to survey the whole field with a successful balance of breadth, accessibility, and depth. By then, AI was already growing rapidly, like our ubiquitous search trees, getting wider and deeper as scientists extended the field and specialized areas within it. On the commercial front, AI was making front page news.

If we have any illusions that the *Handbook* project was finished in 1982, they were quickly dispelled. First, the books were remarkably successful, which convinced us that they filled a niche. Second, Addison-Wesley took over the *Handbook* and encouraged us to continue the project. Finally, the books had a surprisingly long life given the rapid progress of AI research. It became clear that by the mid-1980s, people were reading the *Handbook* to get a snapshot of the state of AI circa 1980. This convinced us that future volumes of the *Handbook* should not attempt to revise earlier volumes, but should instead summarize the field as we now understand it, circa 1990.

For this reason, we stress that although several chapters in this volume cover topics discussed in previous volumes, they are not revisions of the previous chapters. Computer vision, for example, was covered at length in Volume III by Takeo Kanade and his colleagues. But vision is a huge area of research and the chapter in this volume, by Robert Haralick, Alan Mackworth and Steven Tanimoto, offers a different perspective. Similarly, new distinctions and perspectives underlie the chapter by Michael Lowry and Raul Duran; in Volume II, the topic was called Automatic Programming, here it is Knowledge-based Software Engineering.

Two other chapters synthesize recent work in new frameworks. In his chapter on Natural Language Understanding, James Allen integrates work on unification grammars, semantic processing, contextual xiv Preface

knowledge, and discourse analysis. Some of the most dramatic changes since the original volumes have happened in the area of Expert Systems. The original volumes organized the discussions of expert systems not in terms of architectures, or knowledge representations, or any other underlying principles, but in terms of three applications areas: science, medicine, and education. The new chapter, by Bruce Buchanan and Reid Smith, offers a framework of fundamental principles and issues, within which specific expert systems serve as illustrations.

This volume also includes four chapters on topics that were nascent or nonexistent when we published the previous volumes. Yumi Iwasaki has written a broad, analytical survey of work in Qualitative Physics, an area that is becoming increasingly important as AI systems begin to interact with physical devices in real environments. Alfred Round's chapter on Simulation has similar concerns but a different orientation. It describes efforts to integrate numerical simulation and AI techniques. This work is representative of many research ventures that are forging new technologies at the intersections of AI and other fields.

Edmund Durfee, Victor Lesser, and Daniel Corkill discuss the problem of Cooperative, Distributed AI systems. Researchers in this challenging new area are trying to develop coordinated collections of spatially and functionally distributed agents that work simultaneously on problems that are too large for individual systems to solve efficiently. H. Penny Nii's chapter on Blackboard Systems should perhaps be on everyone's list of basic readings, so pervasive are blackboard architectures in AI today (e.g., most of the systems described in Durfee, Lesser, and Corkill's chapter are based on blackboards).

In the early days of the *Handbook* project, individual articles were contributed by graduate students and assembled into chapters by the editors. Often the editors rewrote the articles, making us de facto authors. By the time the third volume was being compiled, however, we had stopped soliciting individual articles. Nearly all the chapters in Volume III were produced by one or two experts. This gave us longer, more integrated chapters, although the basic form continued to be one or more overview articles followed by discussions of individual systems.

In Volume IV, we went one step further and commissioned signed chapters by some of the best people in the field. We asked them to describe the state of the art, the significant developments and the open questions in their areas. We bid authors to strive for breadth (albeit within one area of AI) and depth, although we secretly believed they would have to sacrifice breadth for depth. Remarkably, this didn't happen. Instead, many sacrificed the "Handbook format" of the first three volumes. To see why this is significant, recall the structure of previous *Handbook* chapters: an introductory section was often followed by an "issue" section, and then by several sections—the bulk of every chapter—describing

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systems. In this volume, in contrast, the bulk of every chapter is devoted to issues, principles, and theory. Although systems still figure prominently, much more text is given to their analysis. It reflects a significant maturation of AI that this volume of the Handbook is less concerned with the systems we build than with what we have learned and have still to learn by building them.

Avron Barr Paul Cohen Ed Feigenbaum

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Chapter XVI

Blackboard Systems

H. Penny Nii—Stanford University

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A. OVERVIEW

HISTORICALLY THE BLACKBOARD MODEL arose from abstracting features of the HEARSAY-II (Erman et al., 1980) speech-understanding system developed between 1971 and 1976. HEARSAY-II was able to respond to spoken commands and queries about computer science abstracts stored in a database. From an informal summary description of the HEARSAY-II program, the HASP system was designed and implemented between 1973 and 1975. The domain of HASP was ocean surveillance, and its task was the interpretation of continuous passive sonar data. (Domain refers to a particular area of discourse, for example, chemistry. Task refers to a goal-oriented activity within the domain, for example, to analyze the molecular composition of a compound.) HASP, as the second example of a blackboard system, not only added credibility to the claim that a blackboard approach to problem solving was general, but it also demonstrated that it could be abstracted into a robust model of problem solving. Subsequently many application programs have been implemented whose solutions were formulated using the blackboard model. Because the characteristics of the application problems differed and the interpretation of the blackboard model varied, the design of these programs differed considerably. However, the blackboard model of problem solving has not undergone any substantial changes in the last fifteen vears.