



Embodiments of Mind (MIT Press)

Warren S. McCulloch

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Preface by Jerome Y. Lettvin Warren S. McCulloch was an original thinker, in many respects far ahead of his time. "Of all our contemporaries in brain research McCulloch is the most personal, idiosyncratic... he is at the center, the pivot of a whirligig of explosive thinking," wrote a colleague in 1966. Embodiments of Mind, first published more than two decades ago, teems with intriguing concepts about the mind/brain that are highly relevant to current developments in neuroscience and neural networks. In his preface to this timely reissue of McCulloch's work, Jerome Lettvin notes in particular that among the papers are two classics coauthored with Walter Pitts. One applies Boolean algebra to neurons considered as gates; another shows the kind of nervous circuitry that could be used in perceiving universals. These first models are part of the basis of artificial intelligence. McCulloch, who was a doctor, a philosopher, a teacher, a mathematician and a poet, terms his work "experimental epistemology." In this collection of 21 essays and lectures he pursues a physiological theory of knowledge that touches on philosophy, neurology, and psychology: "There is one answer, only one, toward which I've groped for thirty years; to find out how brains work..." Chapters range from "What is a Number, that a Man May Know It, and a Man, that He May Know a Number," and "Why the Mind is in the Head," to "What the Frog's Eye Tells the Frog's Brain" (with Jerome Lettvin, Humberto Maturana, and Walter Pitts), "Machines that Think and Want," and "A Logical Calculus of the Ideas Immanent in Nervous Activity (with Walter Pitts). Embodiments of Mind concludes with a selection of McCulloch's poems and sonnets.

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