

# Re: Theodore Adorno, a prophet of data systems design

**Source:** <http://coding.derkeiler.com/Archive/General/comp.programming/2004-01/1107.html>

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**From:** Edward G. Nilges (*spinoza1111\_at\_yahoo.com*)

**Date:** 01/10/04

Date: 10 Jan 2004 13:27:56 -0800

Richard Heathfield <dontmail@address.co.uk.invalid> wrote in message news:<btopn1\$kc8\$1@titan.btinternet.com>...

> *Edward G. Nilges wrote:*

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>> *Richard Heathfield <invalid@address.co.uk.invalid> wrote in message news:<3ffd6e68@news2.power.net.uk>...*

>>> *Edward G. Nilges wrote:*

>>>

>>>> *You see, the implicit rule is that it's about "algorithms" (which most programmers aren't qualified to discuss at a theory level,*

>>>

>>> *That's simply not true. Programming is /about/ algorithms (and data structures). A programmer who is not qualified to discuss algorithms might as well pack up and go home.*

>>

>> *Most programmers cannot discuss how to prove algorithms correct or deductively predict the behavior of programs. This is a large part of the theory of algorithms.*

>

> *Mr Nilges's rather loose acquaintance with the concept of proof will not distract those subscribers for whom his articles are a familiar burden, but nevertheless he has, perhaps unwittingly, stumbled upon a minor truth, insofar as many (I will not go so far as to say "most" without seeing some statistical evidence to back it up) programmers are perhaps not familiar with the idea of "proving" an algorithm to be correct. (Some are, of course.) But as Donald Knuth famously observed, proofs can be overrated. They are tricky to get right, and embarrassing to get wrong. To see a correct algorithm proof is a rarity. Peter van der Linden tells a most entertaining story about a proponent of proofs who tried to show the "correc*