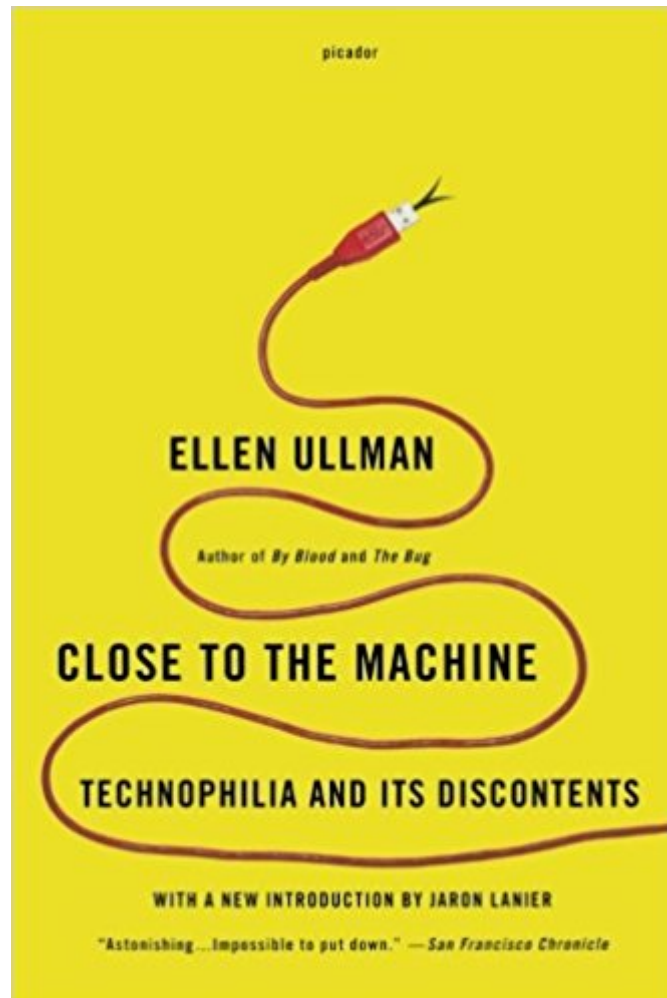




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Close To The Machine: Technophilia And Its Discontents



Synopsis

With a New Introduction by Jaron Lanier A Salon Best Book of the Year In 1997, the computer was still a relatively new tool---a sleek and unforgiving machine that was beyond the grasp of most users. With intimate and unflinching detail, software engineer Ellen Ullman examines the strange ecstasy of being at the forefront of the predominantly male technological revolution, and the difficulty of translating the inherent messiness of human life into artful and efficient code. Close to the Machine is an elegant and revelatory mediation on the dawn of the digital era.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If there is such a thing as a typical computer programmer, Ellen Ullman is not it. She's female, a former communist, bisexual, old enough to be a twentysomething's mom, and not a nerd. She runs her own computer-consulting business in San Francisco and in *Close to the Machine* explores a world in which "the real world and its uses no longer matter." This memoir examines the relationship between human and machine, between material and cyberworlds and reminds us that the body and soul exist before and after any machine. The wit Ullman brings to her National Public Radio commentaries shines through in the prose. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Astonishing” Impossible to put down. • San Francisco

Chronicle

“Close to the Machine may be the best---it’s certainly the most human---book to have emerged thus far from the culture of Silicon Valley. Ullman is that rarity, a computer programmer with a poet’s feeling for language.”

— Laura Miller, Salon

“Part memoir, part techie mantra, part observation on the ever-changing world of computer science [Ullman is] a strong woman standing up to, and facing down, ‘obsolescence’ in two different, particularly unforgiving worlds---modern technology and modern society.”

— The New York Times Book Review

“Fascinating|Chock-full of delicately profound insights into work, money, love, and the search for a life that matters.”

— Newsweek

“Ullman comes with her tech bona fides intact (she is, after all, a seasoned software engineer). But she also comes with novel material|. We see the seduction at the heart of programming: embedded in the hijinks and hieroglyphics are the esoteric mysteries of the human mind.”

— Wired

“This book is a little masterpiece|. I have never read anything like it.”

— Andrei Codrescu

“For someone sitting so close to the machine, Ellen Ullman possesses a remarkably wide-angle perspective on the technology culture she inhabits.”

— The Village Voice

I’ve thoroughly enjoyed reading "Close to the Machine" and am particularly fond of Ullman’s honesty and approach in sharing these anecdotes and thoughts with the readers. While some of the programming notes are dated, the mentalities, approaches, and accuracy with which she paints the situations and scenes is timeless. I highly recommend this to any computer professional looking for proof they are not alone and anyone who loves one as a window into their mind.

A must read, explains with such simplicity the complex intricacies of the people who drives or society forward today

Surprising in its honesty and the intimacy it brings forth, this is indeed a very interesting, funny and enlightening read. I recommend this book and am looking forward to read more of Ullman’s works.

Ellen Ullman’s Close to the Machine: Technophilia and its Discontents is autobiographical, yet is written in a erudite, breezy style that comes off the page as though she is actually sitting there, on the couch with the reader, who just happens to be her best friend. I’d almost say stream of consciousness. Her manner is personable and although much of the information given is technical,

it does not come across as technobabble. The author does not wear her brilliance on her sleeve, she glows from within without burning. She makes us feel the adrenalin rush of overcoming technical problems she has faced, and gives us an understanding of the tight knit world of programmers. We learn of her life path, her love for family along with her frustration with same. We learn of her reaching middle age and the fear obsolescence in her chosen field. Then the overcoming of both the fear and the obsolescence. I've read one of her works of fiction, *By Blood*, which exhibits the same 'pull you in and along' sort of prose. Completely different, naturally, but just as compelling. Highly Recommended

I read this book a year ago when it first came out and loved it. I've re-read it just to enjoy Ellen Ullman's terrific writing. She is a GREAT writer. Ellen Ullman uses her life in the fast lane to comment on parts of cyber-culture that we rarely talk about but ought to. It isn't political or technical. It's more social commentary.

I read this book while on a plane to San Francisco to do a 4-month internship, so it was really cool to gain Ullman's perspective on what the area and the culture was like... 15 years ago. I've recently discovered that knowing the historical context of something can really help you appreciate it more deeply, and this was a great way to do that. The narrative was interesting and funny and there were a few cool gems about software development too. I'm not going to re-read it any time soon, but I'm very glad I read it.

Highly recommended. Captures the zeitgeist of the dotcom boom with a focus on what's it's actually like to do technical work on a high pressure project and what is required to keep your skills current in a time of rapid technology evolution. Ullman's 1997 observations on knowledge work were prescient and are still relevant 20 years later. "I was once a devoted employee. But one day I arrived late to work from a dentist's appointment to find my colleagues heading toward me with their belongings in cardboard boxes. The software company had been swallowed up by a much larger one. Only a small maintenance crew would be left. My project and all the others had been killed. Only my boss and I were left. We were now in charge of "special projects." That is, we'd been given the courtesy of time to look for new work." "The corollary of constant change is ignorance. This is not often talked about: we computer experts barely know what we're doing. We're good at fussing and figuring out. We function well in a sea of unknowns. Our experience has only prepared us to deal with confusion. A programmer who denies this is probably lying, or else is densely unaware of

himself."We virtual workers are everyone's future. We wander from job to job, and now it's hard for anyone to stay put anymore. Our job commitments are contractual, contingent, impermanent, and this model of insecure life is spreading."We spend our time alone in front of monitors. We lead machine-centered lives; now everyone's life is full of automated tellers, portable phones, pagers, keyboards, mice."Also a candid exploration of what it's like to work as a technical consultant:"But nothing ends all at once. Every project leaves behind a distinctive echo: a rhythm of energy, a way of speaking, a way of speaking, a circle of relationship. For weeks I was certain I had calls to return, meetings to attend. It doesn't matter that you tell yourself you are a consultant who will go away. You've shared your working life during a time of stress, which is a precise form of intimacy. Consulting is like any relationship: it is impossible to stay in it for any length of time if you don't care."For now, I'm just going to enjoy where I am: at the beginning of a new contract, the rocket-takeoff learning curve, the exquisite terror of it, the straight-up ride against gravity into a trajectory not yet calculated. And for now, just this now, I feel I'm where I'm supposed to be: hurrying to a place I've never seen before."

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