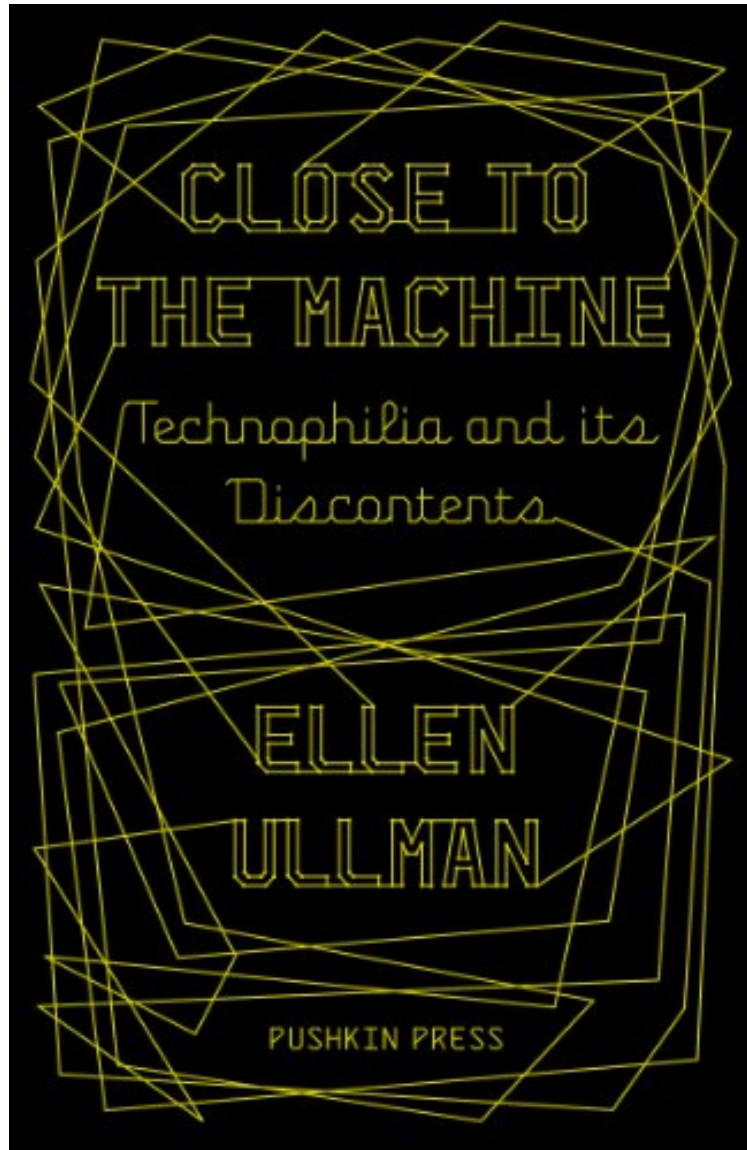


[Free] Close to the Machine: Technophilia and its Discontents

## Close to the Machine: Technophilia and its Discontents

*Von Ellen Ullman*

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**Von Ellen Ullman : Close to the Machine: Technophilia and its Discontents** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Close to the Machine: Technophilia and its Discontents:

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen1 von 1 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. An Important response to high-tech hyperbole.Von Michael S. AmeighEllen Ullman provides a load of thoughtful commentary on the nature of computer code and the professional class that writes it. Hers is a uniquely qualified voice in this realm, and she has a real talent for illustrating a highly arcane topic in ways that anyone can understand. From

her observations about the environment in which software engineers operate and her descriptions of the effects it has on their personal and emotional lives emerges a troubling picture of an industry without roots, without long-term vision, without commitment. It is a lonely world of big money, scarce leisure time, high-powered connections and low-powered social lives. The perspective is middle-aged, the tone serious, the credentials of the author superb. This book is thoughtfully written, nicely readable, highly useful to anyone who wants to acquire a broader context for understanding the impact of computing on daily life. 1 von 1 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. A story of the modern day alchemist, outstandingly narrated Von E. Cancelada I am torn between giving Ullman's book one star and five stars. No rate in-between seems to be suitable. Let's start with five stars. Once I opened the book I could not put it down. Having turned the last page, I went back, re-read several parts and made notes on margins. To me, the book is about three things at once. First, it is an autobiography of the run-of-the-mill programmer, whose professional and personal lives are tightly intertwined. Second, it is a first-hand account of gold rush era software development. The impeccably styled story has no sugar, no gloss, 'no feel good, everybody wins' stuff. Ignorance, brilliance, arrogance, raw greed and insatiable desire to control the world are presented in full honesty. "In my profession, software engineering," Ullman writes about AIDS database project, "there is something almost shameful in this helpful, social services system we're building. The whole project smacks of 'end users' - those contemptible, oblivious people who just want to use the stuff we write and do not care how we did it." I wrote on a margin: "Why would they care! . Drooling over your tech savvy is not in their job descriptions." Later I regretted my acerbic remark. Ullman did care for her users to the extend, which the pace of gold rush allowed her to have such sentiments. After all, 18 months with dusty social services was an eternity in the software world. The time came for her to jump into her red sports car and, at the speed of 80 mph, to move to the more dignified project with the latest and greatest technologies. (To a person, who reads this review: I am not being sarcastic. I truly admired the author's ability to write without self-justification of her good and bad deeds.) Third, this book is an amazing attempt to pass modern day alchemy for engineering. This is where Ullman lost all her stars in my eyes. Engineering is a planned activity based on science. As a rule, it produces very predictable results. None of three projects, which Ullman describes in the book, can be called a product of engineering. During the AIDS database project, she got around to meet her end users only 8 months into the project. Her sole concern at that point was "to save the system", regardless of its inadequacy to users' needs. The second project - patching a networking software in the failing start-up - was no better. The project was considered a triumph, when the programmers managed to demo the system that crashed "exactly once a day" (not twice, as before). The third project - a direct payroll deposit application - was outright scary. The software was written even without preliminary work flow diagram. Go figure what it could do with your honest pay. I am giving Ullman's book FOUR stars after all - for its powerful, passionate and honest writing. It touched my nerve. Oh, it did! Even the little lie about engineering did not spoil the impression. 1 von 1 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Technology in Human/Personal Terms Von Christopher Hefe If you're fascinated by the impacts of computer technology in personal and human terms, then you'll enjoy this book. On the surface, Ullman gives us a glimpse into the life of a consulting software engineer musing about the meaning and impact of technology. Ullman's world is filled with machine-like programmers drawn to the supremely logical world of software development, as well as managers who don't truly understand the technology or programmers that they are managing. Like a true techie, Ullman can easily convey rush of excitement when a debugged system finally \*works\* -- but unlike a true techie, she can just as easily describe the quirky, mechanical personalities of the people working "close to the machine(s)." Throughout, she intersperses some thoughts about her career, ranging from the stress of keeping up techno-savvy hot-shots, to the risks of working for startups, to the real impact "virtual companies" on society. Ullman's style was witty, insightful, and a joy to read -- I easily devoured this book in one day. In the end, this book is more about people than it is about technology, so I'd recommend it to anyone who is interested in the human side of the technology equation.

Kurzbeschreibung Close to the Machine: Technophilia and Its Discontents, Ellen Ullman's cult classic memoir of the world of computers in the 1980s and early 1990s, is an insight of a world we rarely see up close. "Astonishing... impossible to put down" San Francisco Chronicle "We see the seduction at the heart of programming: embedded in the hijinks and hieroglyphics are the esoteric mysteries of the human mind" Wired Close to the Machine has become a cult classic: Ellen Ullman's humane, insightful, and beautifully written memoir explores the ever-complicating intersections between people and technology; the strange ecstasies of programming; the messiness of life and the artful efficiency of code. It is a deeply personal, prescient account of working at the forefront of computing. With a new introduction by Jaron Lanier, author of You Are Not a Gadget "By turns hilarious and sobering, this slim gem of a book chronicles the Silicon Valley way of life... full of delicately profound insights into work, money, love, and the search for a life that matters" Newsweek Ellen Ullman's Close to the Machine, a memoir of her time as a software engineer during the early years of the internet revolution, became a cult classic and established her as a writer of considerable talent; with her second book, The Bug, she became an acclaimed and vital novelist; By Blood is her third. All three titles

are published in the UK by Pushkin Press. Her essays and opinion pieces have been widely published in venues such as Harper's, The New York Times, Salon, and Wired. She lives in San Francisco. 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. 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.