WOMEN AND COMPUTING
THE GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY
Rose Deakin

Women And Computing
by Rose Deakin,
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Computers will change the lives of people and nations as the wheel and the book have done. These changes are happening already but we are only starting to identify their effects, and have not yet begun to control them. These two books consider those changes in different ways: Rose Deakin sees computing as an opportunity for women, Peter Large thinks it a challenge for man.

WOMEN AND COMPUTING

'Why not encourage the women? The male manager is terrible — he's been mucking up industry for the last 20 years'. The words are attributed to a male professor of organisation psychology, but the thoughts are very close to Rose Deakin's own, though she's too polite to say so. She doesn't waste time on men or the sex war, however; her concern is that women see computing as a source of employment, and computers as industrial equipment.

Her approach is calm and matter-of-fact, recognisably the fruits of her career as a social worker, computer sales consultant and writer. The book reads like a good analyst's feasibility report — computing is an opportunity that women are apparently not taking. She sees the long-term remedies as education, employment and

'It is possible to break into computing with few qualifications and little experience, and without unprecedented abilities or intelligence.'

promotion, and the short-term objectives as self-help and enterprise — in short, women should act now to take advantage of the new market. There are suggestions for training, buying equipment and job-hunting, along with plain, non-patronising explanations of technical points, a glossary and a very good index.

There's humour and wit as well, however. Deakin is delighted to describe her feeling of glee after lecturing an audience of 200 senior civil servants on database management only a few months after learning the meaning of the term, and is rightly proud of the book that she expanded the lecture into.

Three chapters, which combine her personal and professional virtues, are especially interesting. They describe the different routes that she and seven other women took into computing, and

'[Researchers observe that] . . . the girls are making the correct suggestions for solving the problem in hand; their suggestions are brushed aside by the boys, who then take three attempts to get it right.'

emphatically demonstrate her theme: that women's aptitudes for organisation and communication, and their capacity for clear-thinking and hard work make them ideal computer users. The message to all women is clear: make computers your golden opportunity.

MICRO REVOLUTION REVISITED

A foreword by Neil Kinnock, the present leader of the Labour Party, the Open University's Set Book seal on the cover and a *Guardian* newspaper correspondent as author are this book's obvious credentials. They imply that the book will be socially concerned, optimistic, authoritative and well-researched.

And, on the whole, it is. Peter Large is a fine technical writer with good command of his sources and an obvious interest in computing and technology. The sociological theme of the book is the challenge that the growth of the computer age presents to established patterns of society.

'After all, computers are rigidly mathematically logical: people, praise be, are not.'

From the confused history of the first 40 years of computing, Large abstracts the five deadly dangers of thoughtless computerisation: crime, inefficiency, ignorance, unemployment and totalitarianism. He might have added redundancy — this book is, at least, a sixth revision of *The Micro Revolution*, written in 1980. Where Large began by enthusiastically heralding the new Industrial Revolution, he now stridently warns against repeating the mistakes of the old one. He describes the gadgets and the gizmos with verve and expertise, all the while developing his theme of industrial society's vulnerability to the computer's effects on production, employment, education and communication.

Large is engagingly enthusiastic about the possibilities of technology, but not starry-eyed about our society's ability to cope with de-skilling, job loss and automation. At the start of the book's

'We have let our machines evolve instead of redesigning them.'

survey of work, communications, robotics and future developments he describes an imaginary day in the life of Jane and Joe Babbage, circa AD 2014. Jane edits an international financial newspaper from a Cornish beach, while Joe runs his doctor's rounds over the public computer-videotext network. Their meagre earnings from interesting jobs are contrasted with the high wages paid to Nat, a 73-year-old handyman who still knows how to do manual labour. By the end of the book it's difficult to know whether Large hopes for or dreads his imagined future, and in what relative numbers he thinks we will follow Jane and Joe's cosy route to middle-class poverty and Nat's road to working-class abundance.

Micro Revolution Revisited
Peter Large

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