Computing and the Future

The Computer Age. A Twenty-Year View. MICHAEL L. DERTOUZOS and JOEL MOSES, Eds. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1979. xvi, 492 pp., illus. $25. MIT Bicentennial Studies, 6.

The Computer Age presents the views of 20 "noted people," selected for "either a record of predictive/analytical ability or the power to initiate change by virtue of their positions," on the possibilities for and implications of computers and information processing in the next 20 years. It is an extensive and exhausting work, with so much content that it is hard to epitomize it in a short review. Two general causes for disappointment do emerge, however.

First, the material, having been first presented in 1976 as part of MIT's contribution to the celebration of the U.S. bicentennial, has been a long time in preparation, and little seems to have been done to keep the manuscripts abreast of the times. The years since 1976 have seen the appearance of many very sophisticated electronic toys for both young and old: Texas Instruments' Speak-and-Spell, talking chess games, the real market penetration of the personal computer, and the emergence of VIDEOTEX systems. None of these harbingers is even mentioned. During this same period, a significant shift in the perception of the potential of information technology has occurred, away from the old and now virtually dead idea of the Videophone, which is favorably mentioned at one point in the book.

The second matter for concern is the propensity of most of the authors for putting their wine in old skins. In particular, the economic aspect of information is given a very conventional treatment, with essentially no reference to the potential of the new technology to permit the evolution of new and better ways for society to evaluate, order, classify, and synthesize its information. The whole cultural-industry aspect of information and the role computers and communications could play in the evaluation process, leading to whole new forms of that industry, are ignored in preference to considerations of how computers will impact the scientific or technical kinds of knowledge. Perhaps having been raised in a music publisher's home gives me an unusual insight into the economic aspects of information. My interpretation of terms like "information," "economics," or "culture" is much less confining than those expressed by the various authors in this work.

In places the book soars, and in other spots it barely plods. However, what is flight for one person is simply flighty for another. For me, Nicholas Negroponte's "Return of the Sunday painter" soared. On p. 29, Negroponte shows two examples of "key frame animation," one where the image of a runner evolves into that of a Coke bottle and finally into a map of Africa. Three symbolic icons are linked together by a series of intermediate sketches to smooth the transition from one visual icon to the next. The second example is from Peter Foldes's film "Hunger." It makes extensive use of images that are sequentially transformed, or, as a musician would say, modulated, to smooth the transition to the new image or idea. Movies, television, and computer graphics can all reproduce these image sequences. However, neither Negroponte nor any of the other authors puts forth the idea that the capacity to produce smoothly linked sequences of symbolic images might lead to the evolution of a new iconic language. John Licklider has, in the past, made this very suggestion, but in his excellent chapter, "Computers and government," in this book he assiduously avoids the point, even when discussing the "fostering" role of government and how computers might affect that role. In a book so much of which is devoted to discussions of language, I find this strange. There is, throughout the volume, a tacit assumption that mankind will not significantly change, adapt, or evolve as we gain skills and powers by using the extensions, or tools, we build for ourselves.

In his fine chapter Marvin Minsky observes that "the procedures we so admire in specialized human experts, however difficult they may be to discover or learn, are often quite clear and simple in the final analysis. But the knowledge and processes we acquire and use to get around our infantile physical and mental worlds is—at least so it seems—a fantastically intricate mixture of many different structures." It may be that we need to return, in measure, to those more infantile approaches to unravel the complexities of what information technology really is.

By and large the book seems a bit pessimistic, for there is no assurance that all is unfolding as it should. The pessimistic note is sounded particularly in areas where concerted and wise government action or leadership is seen as important or urgent, as in encouraging the evolution of adequate networks.

The volume contains its own criticism, in the penultimate chapter. Unfortunately, both the criticism, by Joseph Weizenbaum, and the responses, by Daniel Bell and Michael Dertouzos, tend to refute particular points of view rather than use the divergence to construct a synthesis. Differing points of view can be used for mere argument, or they can be used in the making of useful riddles to explore the extent of the new potentials.

Too frequently, in an effort to be creative and forward-looking, books about the future are just naïve. *The Computer Age* certainly does not have this fault, for it is a very competent, albeit somewhat conservative, treatment of what is a most important subject.

GORDON B. THOMPSON
Bell Northern Research, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Atmospheric Deposition

Effects of Acid Precipitation on Terrestrial Ecosystems. Proceedings of a conference, Toronto, May 1978. T. C. HUTCHINSON and M. HAVAS, Eds. Plenum, New York, 1980. xii, 654 pp., illus. $49.50. NATO Conference Series I, vol. 4.

Acid rain has been receiving considerable attention in the news media as well as in the scientific literature in recent years. We now know that stack emissions from fossil-fuel combustion sources can travel hundreds of miles, undergoing chemical change, finally to be deposited as "acid rain." Scientific interest in the subject has grown rapidly in North America over the last five years, with interest among European scientists tempered only slightly by a somewhat longer involvement with the problem.

Editors T. C. Hutchinson and M. Havas have produced a signal contribution to the literature on the effects of acid precipitation. This symposium volume will rank with the *Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Acid Precipitation and the Forest Ecosystem* (U.S. Forest Service, 1976) and the issue

of *Ambio* dedicated to the subject (1976), which have headed the list of essential reading in this field.

Many of the contributors to the volume are European, and there is some awkwardness in the translation of some of the papers. In the main, however, the papers are well presented and the meaning and intent are clear.

The papers range from excellent to average. In a well-done paper Grennfelt *et al.* evaluate the sulfur and nitrogen budgets for coniferous forests in southwestern Sweden. They make the important point that many substances that enter the ecosystem may have an acidifying effect, perhaps with some delay after deposition. Some of the substances, of course, reach the ecosystem by means other than simple snow or rain. Eaton *et al.* give a sulfur budget for the northeastern United States that is surprisingly close to that given by Grennfelt *et al.* for southwestern Sweden. Ulrich dwells on the minutest details concerning sources of and sinks for hydrogen ions, which makes reading laborious. A paper by Anderrson *et al.* on forest ecosystem responses ranks among the best in the book owing to its ecological context and conceptual basis.

One matter that requires a great deal more research is chemical change that occurs in rainfall or other precipitation as it is intercepted by forest or other vegetation canopy, litter, and mineral layers of soil and moves through the watershed into streams and lakes. The two papers dealing with this subject, by Likens *et al.* and Gorham and McFee, represent significant steps in looking at watershed dynamics. The former paper presents new data that build upon data from previous years at Hubbard Brook, New Hampshire. The latter paper is excellent in its contribution to the conceptualization of the factors that must be taken into account in quantifying or modeling the dynamics of precipitation input and runoff.

Recent data might tend to cast some doubt on some of the conclusions reached by the editors in 1978 or provide a more penetrating understanding of some of the phenomena. In general, however, their conclusions and recommendations can still stand. Many of the matters on which they recommend further research are now being investigated intensively.

Scientists with an interest in atmospheric deposition, particularly its ecological effects, will find the book to be of great value.

NORMAN R. GLASS
Environmental Protection Agency, Corvallis, Oregon 97330

Adaptation to Cold

Comparative Mechanisms of Cold Adaptation. Proceedings of a meeting, East Lansing, Mich., Aug. 1977. LARRY S. UNDERWOOD, LARRY L. TIESZEN, ARTHUR B. CALLAHAN, and G. EDGAR FOLK, Eds. Academic Press, New York, 1979. x, 380 pp., illus. $24.

Opportunities for research on cold adaptation are numerous and diverse. Because of the multitude of processes involved, however, many of the researchers in the field are specialized and communication across disciplines has been lacking.

The purpose of this book is to stimulate such communication. The 12 chapters and seven "discussions" are the products of a two-day symposium and workshop. The subject matter is about evenly divided between plants and animals, and the coverage is unusually broad. In addition to direct effects of temperature on specific processes, whole plant and animal mineral nutrition, the energy balance of a vegetation canopy, and even some population dynamics and reproductive biology are discussed.

The book is too short to provide detailed reviews. Instead, by juxtaposing diverse topics, from hibernation in homeotherms to ice formation in plant cells, it serves mainly to stimulate new questions. The last chapter of the book is devoted to future trends in cold adaptation research, and the next-to-last chapter describes research support facilities north of the Arctic Circle. Those interested in an encyclopedic treatment of a specific topic can look up the many review papers cited in the text. The emphasis here is on what is not known, why it is important to know, and how it can be found out.

Overall, the book is a success. In part, the success is due to the implicit ecological perspective of the editors and many of the authors. The word "ecology" is rarely used, but the environmental context is clear enough that diverse, specialized topics are almost unavoidably seen as part of an overall pattern of adaptation. Also the individual papers are concise and well-written enough that most readers can pull them together themselves, and they do not present more detail than nonspecialists can absorb. For these reasons the book will be stimulating to students and to a general scientific audience as well as provide inspiration to workers in the field.

Although there is no summary chapter, several common themes are apparent. Perhaps the most frequent are those of acclimation vs. acclimatization, hypothermia vs. hibernation, and the difficulty of interpreting in vivo or laboratory results in terms of the whole organism in the field. Uncertainty about the role of membranes, particularly membrane phospholipids, in cold adaption is mentioned in at least five papers, with widely differing approaches.

Botanists tend not to distinguish between acclimation (adaptation to a specific environmental factor) and acclimatization (adaptation to a whole environmental complex). Zoologists are much more aware of the distinction but are unable to explain why, in the case of body fat accumulation, for example, the acclimation response to lower temperature is opposite to the acclimatization response to the onset of winter. Similarly, the peak in the photosynthetic response curve may vary with environmental temperature, but the photosynthetic rate at that temperature occasionally decreases to below the unacclimated rate. Clearly, both botanists and zoologists are trying to interpret such data in terms of single limiting factors when it is likely that direct and indirect effects of temperature are interacting. A mechanism for dealing with such interactions is suggested in a chapter by Miller *et al.* on simulation modeling, and the chapters on mineral nutrition by White and by Chapin suggest alternative pathways.

The emphasis on questions, rather than answers, conveys an excitement about cold adaptation research that is rare in such broad reviews. Certainly, enough questions are raised to keep researchers busy and communicating for years to come.

GAIUS R. SHAVER
Ecosystems Center, Marine Biological Laboratory, Woods Hole, Massachusetts 02543

Protein Chemistry

Protein Methylation. WOON KI PAIK and SANGDUK KIM. Wiley-Interscience, New York, 1980. xviii, 282 pp., illus. $27.50. Biochemistry, vol. 1.

Enzymatic methylation is one of the mechanisms by which nature can alter the structure and thereby the biological activity of proteins. During the last 15 years, interest in the subject has grown tremendously. In this book, Paik and Kim, who have carried out much of the pioneering work on protein methylation, review our knowledge of these reactions and document their diverse nature and