BBC Micro: a bold step to get Britain coding

Video transcript: clip from *The Computer Programme*, Episode 2, first broadcast on BBC Two on 18 January 1982

CHRIS SERLE:

The word ‘programme’ is a well-chosen one for computers; I mean there is nothing new about the word.

What it usually means is ‘an ordered series of events’ and anything from an orchestral concert to a village festival. Now to use the word for a series of instructions isn’t a very big jump. But when we talk about programming computers, the word suddenly seems to take on a rather different meaning.

Well, if you think about a concert programme, the list is just made up of pieces of music to play. And what you won’t see is that after the interval the London Philharmonic Orchestra will hold a bout of all-in wrestling.

And even by changing the instructions, a motor car assembly line won’t suddenly start turning out pottery.

But a computer seems to able to do just about anything. I mean it can play music, it’ll give you your own personal telephone directory if you want it to. It can even draw pictures.

Now, Ian McNaught-Davis, how does one machine manage to do all those different jobs?

IAN MCNAUGHT-DAVIS:

Well very much as your washing machine was processing your clothes, what this is doing is processing information. The information is like your clothes, it moves information around.

And all it is doing to produce different things like this, it sends information to this screen, which gives it a different colour. Or it would send a signal to the loudspeaker here to give different tones on the music, or it could send information out to a cassette recorder like this.

And all it needs to do this is a sequence of instructions, and they’re relatively simple and broken down.

They can move information about, they can add one number to another, and of course the secret of a computer is that they can compare one number with another and then branch or move to other sequences, actions after they’ve done that.

CHRIS SERLE:

And in the case of all the examples we've seen, whether it's making pictures or making music, or any of the other jobs that a computer can do, it's still always the same kind of information that it's moving about inside itself.

IAN MCNAUGHT-DAVIS:

Yes, but the programme itself is broken down into these tiny little sequences, even for a colour picture like this one.