HCI Remixed review: Chapter 6

Lieberman's "A Creative Programming Environment"

Review

In this chapter, Henry Lieberman discusses a work that impacted him greatly: David C. Smith's "Pygmalion: A Creative Programming Environment." Within, he describes how we owe much of modern computing to Smith's work with Pygmalion and Xerox STAR, and why such an out-of-the-way thesis impacted him in such a deep way.

Through reading Lieberman's chapter, and becoming introduced to Pygmalion, I've become increasingly aware of the importance of a graphical interface to the usability of computing. For example, as I type this document (in LaTeX), I am able to preview it by clicking a button. By connecting a green play symbol (▷) with the action of "compile and preview," workflow is suitably augmented to encourage more agile and efficient production. A small thing, but grand in impact. Applying this paradigm to programming seems a tremendously powerful idea, and it is truly a shame that more hasn't been done in this field.

Salient Sentence Blocks

- "I had become somewhat frustrated with Logo and wanted to push programming for beginners in a new direction. While graphics, using the famous Logo turtle, was a linchpin of our strategy for getting kids engaged with learning programming, Logo itself was still a textual programming language, and I wondered about the possibility of using graphics itself directly for programming." (37)

- "It took me a while to get into reading the thesis, but once I did, I tore through it in a single sitting, and emerged dazzled and stunned." (38)

- "It is not an exaggeration to say that we owe this man all of today's modern graphical interfaces." (38)

- "Pygmalion innovated in so many ways, it's not funny." (39)

- "The reason I tell you the story about how I discovered Smith's work is to say that sometimes the most innovative work might be ignored by the mainstream. You might find it in long-forgotten theses instead of the Best Paper at CHI." (41)