Class 15: The Design of LISP

Held: Friday, February 23, 2007

Summary: Today we consider McCarthy’s groundbreaking 1960 paper, “Recursive Functions of Symbolic Expressions and Their Computation by Machine, Part I”, particularly the S-expressions and the eval function.

Related Pages:
- EBoard.
- Reading: John McCarthy - Recursive Functions of Symbolic Expressions and Their Computation by Machine, Part I.

Notes:
- Don’t forget Kumail’s Comedy, tomorrow at 7 p.m.
- I believe I distributed Monday’s reading last week.
- Wednesday’s readings distributed today.

Overview:
- Summary of the Paper.
- S-Expressions, S-Functions, and M-Expressions.
- Eval.
- Other Topics.

Summary
- What is McCarthy’s thesis (does he have a thesis)?
- What seem to be the main contributions of this paper?

S-things and M-things
- What are S-expressions?
- What are M-expressions?
- What are S-functions?
- What does McCarthy say about their relationships?
The `eval` Function

- What is it supposed to do?
- How does it work?
- (We’ll start to replicate it in Scheme.)

Other Topics

- How does the syntax seem to have changed?
- The `eval` procedure, as designed, is dynamically scoped rather than statically scoped.
  - What does that mean?
  - How can we well?
- How does the garbage collection system work?