URL: https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/joining-the-software-revolution

Investor and entrepreneur John Lilly shares how he became interested in human computer interaction at Stanford, and the moment he was inspired by the thoughts of entrepreneur Mitch Kapor, who championed software design to make us fundamentally more human in our interactions with technology.

Transcript

The thing that I read at Stanford - the thing that changed my life and like all my career - you know when I came in to Stanford I was really interested in the kind of stuff that John Hennessey was doing, about computer architecture, about how to make computers go fast, fast, fast.. And then I had a couple of mentors, internships that I was at, at Sun which is not kind of where you think of HCI coming from, but also here at Stanford.. And there was a guy in my dorm named Sean Light who'll be, I will talk about through this piece, through the conversation today.. And Sean kept telling me I should do this thing called HCI.. Sean one of Terry Winograd's very first grad students in design at the time when we were just trying to figure out what the difference design was and human factors and usability.. And Sean said 'you got to do this, you'll love it.' And I was resistant, really resistant.. I was like 'no, no, I'm a computer architecture guy, I'm going to do multi-core instruction sets and silicon'.. And obviously I just really wasn't interested in HCI and then I read this piece by a guy Mitch Kapor.. And Mitch is the founder of Lotus, he started - he was one of the first people that really successfully commercialized a spreadsheet.. And he wrote this piece called A Software Design Manifesto..

And what he said is that software needs architects just like buildings need architects.. I think it's obvious now, but it wasn't obvious in 1991.. It's interesting because I was just reading it today, and what he said in 1991 is that the revolution hasn't succeeded, because what started is this very human counterculture thing to give PCs to people.. That was a revolutionary idea in the 80s.. Is what he said is 'well shit, this has become the mainstream.. Now computers are defining us instead of us defining computers.' And when I read this bold thing, he could have written this today and he could have written about mobile instead of computers and phones instead of computers.. And what he could have said is the revolution hasn't yet succeeded, because in spite of the amazing progress and the amazing work that we're doing with these things, we're still not fundamentally human in our interactions with technology.. And again that's a threat that's led all the way through my career and I think that we're finally waking up to.. I think that Steve coming back to Apple finally woke up the world about how important design, how important the human factor is.. More importantly how the important thinking about technology in context could be and how powerful it could be...