

TOOLS FOR GRAPHICAL INTERFACE DESIGN

**James Hollan
Edwin Hutchins
Mark Rosenstein
Louis Weitzman**

**Future Technologies
Navy Personnel Research and Development Center
San Diego, CA 92152**

Introduction

A major element on our research agenda is to understand the power and perspicuity of graphical interfaces. In most of our work we have been concerned with exploring the usefulness of graphics for supporting the development of understandings of complex dynamic physical systems. An important message to builders of instructional systems from cognitive science and artificial intelligence is the crucial importance of mental models, not only for understanding how experts represent knowledge but also for understanding the errors a novice might be expected to make.

We have argued (Hollan, 1984) that much of the naturalness and power of graphical interfaces results from the vast amount of experience people have in dealing with objects physically arrayed in space. Graphical interfaces can draw on this experience by providing representational elements that map more directly (than say text) to a person's mental model of a domain. In this way, the interface can make visible conceptually important aspects of a domain. In addition, it makes possible the depiction of systems with greater fidelity to the way we think and reason about them by providing multiple perspectives, maintaining explicit state information, and depicting a topology that supports and encourages the use of visualization skills.

The goal of this paper is not to reiterate our earlier arguments, but instead to survey a set of tools we have implemented to facilitate graphical interface construction. We think that these tools are examples of mechanisms that allow the combination of human and artificial intelligence and thus their discussion is germane to the topic of this conference. Before describing the tools, we would like to mention some of the ideas which motivated them. One motivation is our conviction that interactive graphical interfaces enable powerful new ways for people to interact with machines. Our experience building inspectable simulation-based training systems has convinced us of this and of the crucial importance of recognizing the variety of

types of knowledge that must be combined to build a successful system. One cannot expect to build effective instructional systems or interfaces without having a rich understanding of the domain of application. Knowledge of human cognition, the way people do and should think about the domain, must also be used to augment the domain knowledge in order to make it accessible to a student. Likewise, hardware and software technologies must be understood so that they can be effectively employed to provide productive interactions.

In order to assist in satisfying the requirements for these diverse types of knowledge, we have been building a set of tools that provide domain experts with facilities that implicitly support good interface design and allow them to do an increasing portion of the interface development task. By applying the same stringent requirements to the tools that we apply to the interface that the designer will build, we make the incorporation of the expert's knowledge into the design of the interface much more natural. If the tools allow the expert to work closer to the way she thinks about the domain, this traditionally hard task is simplified.

The types of interfaces we are interested in have sometimes been called Direct Manipulation (DM) interfaces (Shneiderman, 1982). That is an appealing term in that it captures some of the feel of the interface, but only a portion of the power of a DM interface consists of the feeling that one is directly manipulating objects on a screen. Much more important in our view is that the semantics of the task domain are built into the behavior of the interface. The entities depicted and the operations made available are those that closely match the way one wants to think about the domain. Surely the three principles Shneiderman lists are important to interface construction,

Continuous representation of the objects

Physical actions or button presses instead of complex syntax

Rapid incremental reversible operations whose impact on the object of interest is immediately visible

but the real power lies in what aspects of the domain get represented, how they are depicted, and how appropriate the operations provided are to the semantics of the domain. Thus, for example, the real power of spread-sheet programs is that actions directly associated with the semantics of the domain, like making projections, are immediately available. One changes a number and the implications of that change are automatically propagated. This allows the user to think at a level appropriate to the task, not at the level of the mechanics of arithmetic.

Our concern in designing tools to support interface construction is more with building systems for experts than with building expert systems. We would like to provide tools that allow people who are expert in a domain to build interfaces that incorporate their expertise and make it available to others. We want to construct not just tools but tools for making tools. The tools we discuss in this paper were motivated by a concern for the ways graphical interfaces can support the

development of effective mental models for reasoning and problem solving. The tools include: an object-oriented graphical editor developed to assist us in building interactive inspectable simulation-based instructional systems, a behavior editor which allows one to create simulations by putting together iconic representations of parts, and an icon editor which supports the design of new graphical icons and allows the specification of new dynamic graphical behaviors.

Graphics Editor

The Graphics Editor originated out of our work on the development of Steamer (Hollan, Hutchins, Weitzman, 1984). A major aspect of Steamer is the ability to view and interact, at a number of hierarchical levels, with a simulation of a propulsion plant via a color graphics display. For example, one can interact with the simulation at an abstract level such as is depicted in the Basic Steam Cycle diagram (Figure 1) or at a more detailed component system level, such as the Make-up and Excess Feed system (Figure 2). These dynamic graphical views consist of iconic depictions of components, gauges, and other objects designed to assist one in understanding and interacting with the plant.

It is important to understand that this graphical interface functions in two ways. First, it reflects the state of components in the simulation. Thus, for example, it reveals whether a particular component is operating or not by means of changes in color or other graphical features of the iconic representation. A pump's state is depicted by its color, appearing green if it is operating and red if it is off. Columns above valves show how far open the associated valve is. A second function of the graphical interface is to allow one to change the state of a component within the simulation model. Such changes are made by manipulating a mouse pointing device. For example, one could increase the level of a tank in Figure 2 by pointing at a high position in the tank and clicking a button on the mouse. The tank would immediately reflect the new level and more importantly the propagated effects of that change would also immediately become visible. If one were to raise the level of the tank on the left in Figure 2, it would cause the Reg Valve to open. Raising it above a certain level would cause the 1b Forward Pump to turn on. Thus, the graphical interface allows both the monitoring of the state of the plant and also its manipulation.

Diagrams are built using a Graphics Editor. An important part of a curriculum designers task, in construction of a Steamer-like interface, is to put together diagrams that assist students in understanding a simulated system. The black and white screen depicted in Figure 3 provides the designer with editing and critiquing controls, while the color screen reflects the current state of the diagram, such as seen in Figures 1 and 2, and provides control over the layout of the icons. Consider the designer building the diagram drawn in Figure 2. To lay down a tank in that diagram, the designer would select a tank icon from among the existing icon types. The cursor would immediately be moved to the color screen and the designer would choose a location for the tank by clicking a mouse button. The shape of the tank

would then be determined by moving the mouse and clicking again.

Once the diagram is completed using the tools provided by the graphics editor, the designer must relate the graphical depiction to the underlying simulation model of the 1200psi steam plant. The process of connecting icons to the simulation model is called tapping. The communication between the icons and the simulation model is through variables. An icon can probe and/or set variables. On each tick of the simulation an icon that probes a variable will reflect the value of that variable. For example, a dial would change the position of its needle to show the current value of its associated variable. An icon that sets a variable when interacted with will set the variable in the simulation model to reflect its current state. To tap the left tank in Figure 2, the designer clicks on tap on the B&W screen. A menu pops up (see Figure 4), into which the designer types the names of the appropriate variables.

Building Steamer diagrams required the existence of suitable icons to represent the physical components. It also required a math model which would simulate the actions of a steam plant. For Steamer, we have hand constructed the large set of icons. A sample of these is shown in Figure 5. We also had access to a high fidelity simulation model of a propulsion system. The goal of much of our current research is to produce tools that will relax these constraints and facilitate the construction of similar instructional system for other domains. We now turn to a discussion of two of these tools: a Behavior Editor and an Icon Editor.

Behavior Editor

One real obstacle to a domain expert being able to use the Graphics Editor to construct an interface for a domain is the requirement of an existing mathematical model of the domain. Even if a model is available it is unlikely that a domain expert, without significant additional effort, will have sufficient understanding of the simulation model to be able to tap icons into it. The Behavior Editor is an initial exploration of a tool which would eliminate the need for an underlying simulation model. The icons in the Graphics Editor know how to "appear" in order to represent the status of variables to which they are tapped, but the behavior of the system is defined by a simulation model. The Behavior Editor is composed of icons that know both the behavior and the appearance of the objects they represent. The behavior of the system emerges from the interactions of the icons with each other. The ability to incorporate the behaviors required in a simulation is facilitated by the object-oriented implementation of icons. For example, consider a dial. In the object-oriented system we use, Flavors, many of the properties of the dial actually come from component objects (Mixins, in Flavors terminology).

These components are in fact common to many of the icons. Figure 6 shows some of the components of a dial: Continuous, Rectangular and Tap mixins. Into any icon that displays continuous values, we add the object called Continuous. This object provides the icon a place to hold the icon's value and the minimum and maximum values the icon can display. The Continuous Mixin also provides

commands, or messages the dial icon will understand, such as *constrain-value* which truncates a number to be between a minimum and maximum value. Icons such as dials or valves understand other messages like *draw* which cause the receiving icon to draw itself on the color screen.

To make intelligent icons capable of generating a simulation, it is necessary to add components with domain and simulation knowledge. We have built a number of icons that know the rudiments of fluid dynamics and understand about connections to other icons. These include tanks and pipes that know about pressure and flow, so they can be used in fluid systems. Figure 7 depicts a very simple system constructed in exactly the same manner as with the Graphics Editor but involving behaviorally "smart" icons that can be connected together. These icons have mechanisms for recognizing when connections should be made and thus the topology of the diagram is automatically generated.

An excellent example of the flexibility engendered by icons with connectivity knowledge is the Super Sensor. This icon is a dial which asks icons it connects to what variables can be monitored and which variable to measure by default. In Figure 7 notice that a Super Sensor is connected to the middle tank, to monitor its level. Sensors know how to monitor appropriate aspects of the objects to which they are connected. We can manipulate these aspects by clicking on the *Miscellaneous* menu item on the Behavior Editor screen. In Figure 8 we see that the sensor has defaulted to measure *value*, which is highlighted. If the designer wishes, he can change the sensor to measure fluid exchanged by clicking on that menu item. When we interact with the tanks, setting their levels, we are actually setting the initial conditions of the simulation. On the Behavior Editor screen (Figure 8), we can then click on *run*, and the simulation will run till equilibrium. It is important to notice a fundamental difference between the Behavior Editor and the Graphics Editor. In the Graphics Editor, the designer would need a mathematical model of these tanks and pipes and then it would be necessary to find the appropriate variables to tap the icons into. Here the icons themselves perform the required computations for the simulation.

All these icons, both those with and without domain knowledge, were hand coded. It became clear to us that while these icons are useful in this particular domain, we required a tool to help expand the range of domains by facilitating the building of new icons. We have begun the construction of an editor to assist in creating new icons without requiring the user to resort to traditional programming.

Icon Editor

The development of an Icon Editor is one of our current projects. The interface to this editor is depicted in Figure 9. From a set of basic icons and behaviors a designer with knowledge of the fundamentals of a domain can construct icons, both for Behavior Editor applications and also for use with the Graphics Editor when a simulation is available. The Icon Editor provides an environment in which complex icons can be constructed from more basic ones. In addition, we also

provide mechanisms for a user to specify new behaviors for icons. The pane labeled *Existing Icons* in Figure 9 shows the set of icons an icon builder can choose from. As component pieces of the icon are added, their presence is reflected in the *Constituents* list. Procedures for the new icon are constructed in the *Method* area.

One of our current interests is in understanding the task of creating an intelligent appointment planner. As part of that work, it was necessary to construct calendars. A calendar's basic unit is a date object. Its use in an intelligent calendar would be to interact with other calendars to resolve scheduling conflicts. Thus, a person might instruct the calendar that she would like to meet with another individual. The calendars of the two individuals would then negotiate an agreeable date. The date objects would also have a graphical form to provide a means of visually displaying the calendar. Here we consider how that image would be built up and how a simple behavior for the icon would be constructed.

The image of the date is a box with the day and the numerical date. An icon builder, first specifies the components of the date icon. From the list of existing icons, a rectangle is selected as the outline for the date icon. Clicking on name, a menu pops up with the default name Rectangle. "Background" is then typed into the name slot, allowing this icon to be referred to with a meaningful name. In a similar way, we can lay out a day and numerical date in the date icon. These are also given names and default values and colors. These are the constituents listed in the *Constituents Pane* of Figure 9.

We are currently exploring methods that allow the icon builder to specify behavior. To continue with our example consider an icon builder specifying the behavior to change the day. The builder selects *Method* in the menu and types in the name of this message: *set-day*. A menu pops up allowing the specification of day as the argument to the message. The three steps in changing the day are to have the day erase itself, set its string to be the new day, and then draw itself. Clicking on *Transform* allows the specification of the first step in the procedure. The builder clicks on day, and then types in the message *erase*, which is what the day should do first. Clicking on *Do It* installs this step. Similarly the other two steps are defined. These are the steps shown in the *Transforms Pane* of Figure 9. To test the procedure, we might click on send. A menu would pop up asking us to specify what day. We might type in *Thursday*, and click on *Send*. On the color screen, the day would change to Thursday, providing immediate feedback that this procedure is correct. In this way behaviors for the icon can be specified. Our first experiments allow specification through defaults and pop up menus. In later versions, we expect more and more of this specification will be performed graphically.

Future Work

Currently we are building views into real-time systems, such as the view shown in Figure 10 which monitors activity on a VAX 780 running Unix. A statistical assistant and a scheduling assistant are also under construction. Other support tools are in the planning stages. One of these is a Graphics Design Assistant to help a domain expert better utilize knowledge from the graphic arts to provide views that are visually more consistent and informative. An instructional support tool is also being planned which will allow the domain expert to specify activities and tests based around a diagram or a series of diagrams.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have briefly discussed three tools: the Graphics Editor, the Behavior Editor, and the Icon Editor. These tools greatly facilitate the construction of interactive graphical interfaces. The ability of students and researchers to see into systems increases their ability to understand and control those environments.

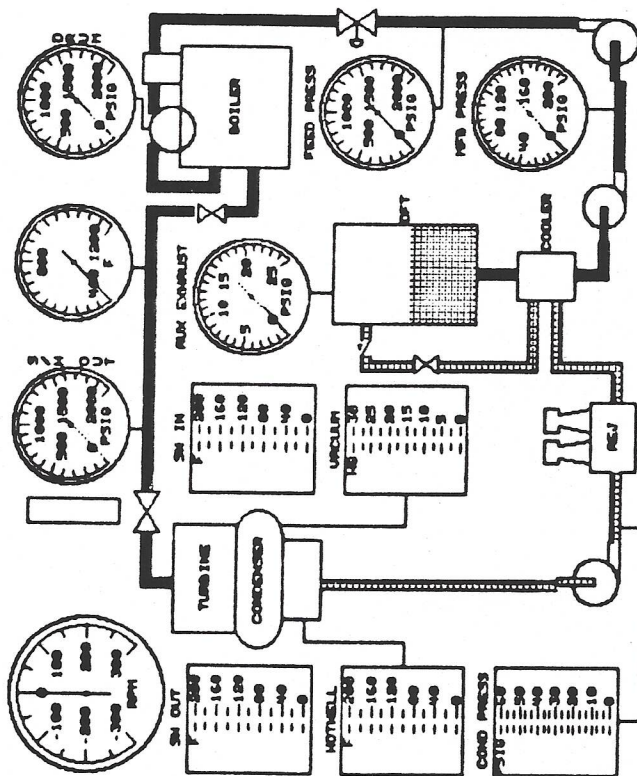
A particularly appealing aspect of the theme of this conference, *Combining Human and Artificial Intelligence: A New Frontier for Human Factors*, is that it may lead us to look beyond the current fascination with expert systems to much more exciting forms of interaction, interactions based on the understanding that the computer is more than a new tool: it is a new medium for the construction of tools.

References

- Hollan, J. D. (1984). Intelligent Object-Based Graphical Interfaces. *Human-Computer Interaction*, G. Salvendy (Ed.), Elsevier, Amsterdam, 293-297.
- Hollan, J. D., Hutchins, E. L., & Weitzman, L. (1984). STEAMER: An Interactive Inspectable Simulation-Based Training System. *AI Magazine*, 5 (2), 15-27.
- Shneiderman, B. (1982). The Future of Interactive Systems and Emergence of Direct Manipulation, *Behavior and Information Technology*, 1, 237-256.

Graphics Editor

BASIC STEAM CYCLE



Exit

Clear

Hardcopy

Transfer

Hardcopy

MS-CYCLE 3

Lisp Graphics Editor (VIEW)

CREATE: >steamer>diagram>ntsc-sc>ms-cycle.lisp

mpd

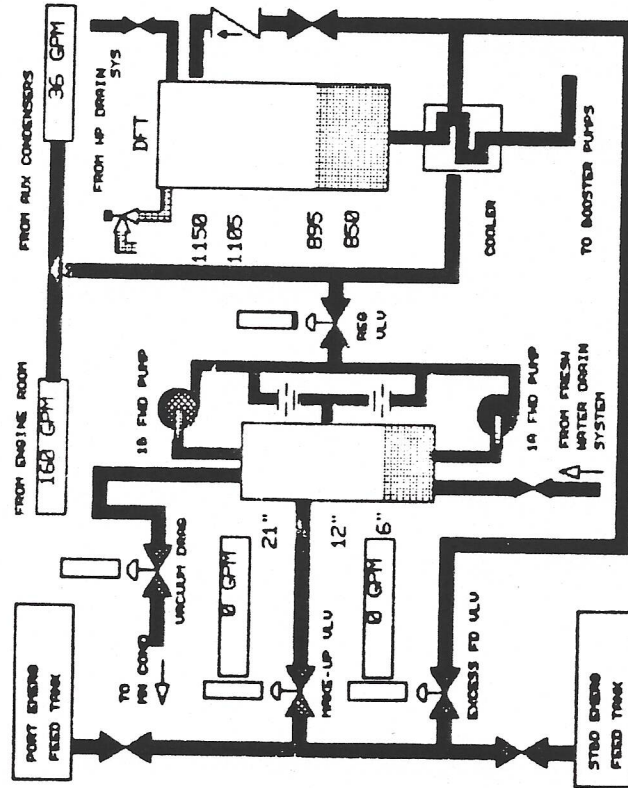
10/21/84 19:39:53 Heltzman

ICON:

Run

FIGURE 1

MAKE-UP & EXCESS FEED



Transfer

CRETE>steamer>diagrams>black-and-white>nake-up>excess-feed, 13p

FIGURE 2

Graphics Editor

Diagrams		Find	Save Write KB	Name Type Flavor	List Recorder Taps	Draw Hardcopy Interact	Initialize Configure Set
Diagrams							
Highlight Clear All Mark	Tapped Untapped	Type Find Mark	Draw Show	Size Points	Diagonal T Square		
Grid							
Delete Undelete	Draw List Describe Inspect	Move Copy Edit Shape	Name Rotate Reflect	Color Label Tap Misc			
Edit							
Circle Rectangle Lozenge Triangle Trapezoid Diamond Hexagon Octagon	Graph Multi Plot Graph	Centrifugal Pump Rotary Pump	Bar Switch Knife Switch Rotary Switch Toggle Switch				
Line Polygon	Dial Column Tank Digital Bar Force Bar Bar	Y Strainer Duplex Strainer Impulse Trap Orifice	Stop Valve Anglesstop Valve Check Valve Relief Valve Safety Valve Regulator Valve 3 Way Valve 4 Way Valve				
Text Banner	Signal Flame Pipe	Circuit Breaker Fusible Link Fuse Discut	Other				
Icons							
<p>MAKE-UP-EXCESS-FEED *</p> <p>Graphics Editor (VIEW) Tap complete.</p>							

npd

10/22/84 10:43:39 hollan

ICON:

1x1

OFFICE serving HULOKAY

FIGURE 3

Graphics Editor

Diagrams Find Save Write KB Name Type Flavor List Recorder Taps Draw Handcopy Interact Initialize Configure Set

Diagrams

Blank Icon Continuous Tap:

Max Value: 25.

Min Value: 0.0

Tap Mapping: UNMAPPED

Tap Probe: MH:FFLFHG

Tap Set: MH:FFLFH

Exit

Delete Undelete Default Edit Draw List Describe Inspect Move Copy Edit Shape Name Rotate Reflect Color Label Misc

Circle Rectangle Lozenge Triangle Trapezoid Diamond Hexagon Octagon Line Polygon Text Banner Graph Multi Plot Graph Dial Column Tank Digital Bar Force Bar Bar Centrifugal Pump Rotary Pump Air Ejector Y Strainer Duplex Strainer Impulse Trap Orifice Setg Bedg Circuit Breaker Fusible Link Fuse Biscuit Bar Switch Knife Switch Rotary Switch Toggle Switch Stop Valve Anglesstop Valve Check Valve Relief Valve Safety Valve Regulator Valve 3 Way Valve 4 Way Valve Other

Lisp

Graphics Editor (VIEW)

Tap marked icons.

MAKE-UP-EXCESS-FEED :

CREATE: > steamer > diagrams > black-and-white > make-up-excess-feed. lisp

npd

Any button to be pressed to choose

ICON:

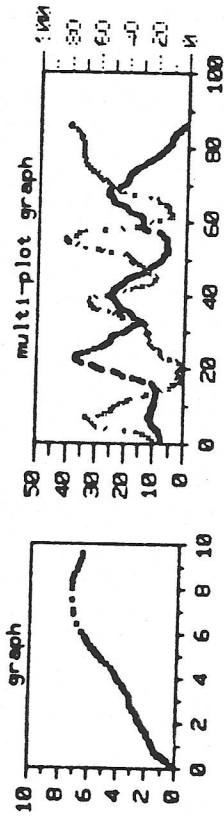
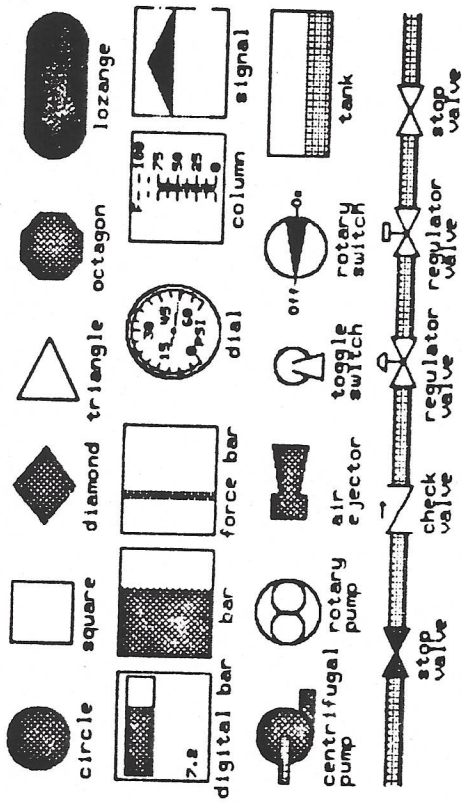
Choose

OFFILE serving HOLOKAI

FIGURE 4

Graphics Editor

ICON SAMPLER



Transfer Handcopy Clear Edit

Lisp Graphics Editor (NORMAL)

SAMPLER *

Handcopy

CREATE: > a: teanar > diagrams > black-and-white > sampler. lisp

pdf

10/22/84 09:32:25 mbr

ICON:

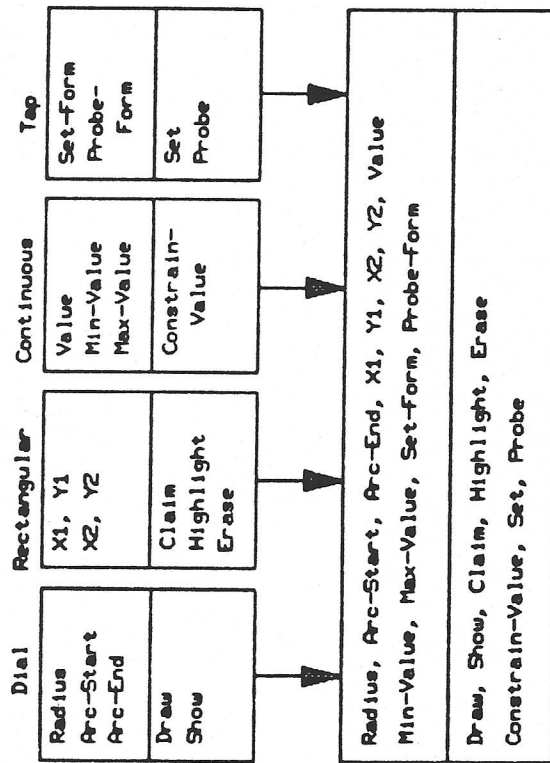
Run

FIGURE 5

Graphics Editor

Internal Icon Structure - Dial

Mixins



New Flavor

Lisp
 Graphics Editor (NORMAL)

Transfer Hardcopy

Clear Edit

ICON-STRUCTURE 1
 CREATE: >steener>diagrams>ntsc-sc>icon-structure.lisp

npd

10/22/84 09:38:52 nbr

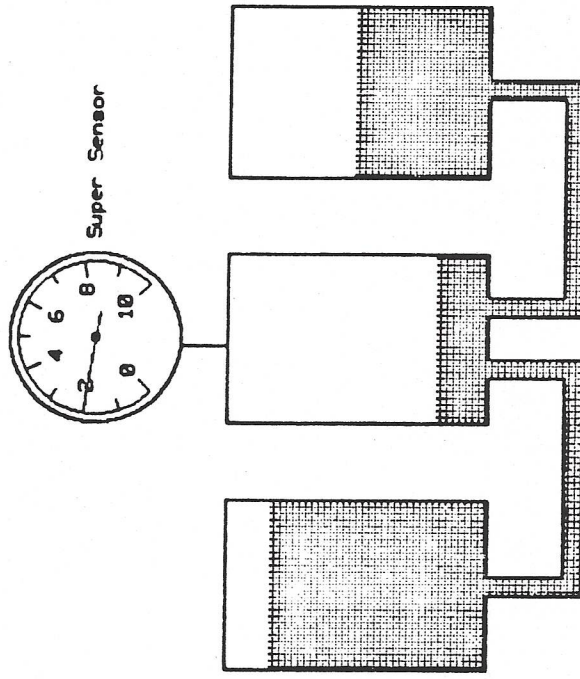
ICON:

Run

FIGURE 6

Behavior Editor

Tanks and Pipes Simulation



Transfer Handcopy Clear Edit

Lisp
Graphics Editor (NORMAL) TANK-SIMULATION: CREYE: >steamer>diagrams>Tank-Simulation.Lisp

mpc

10/22/84 08:26:38 nhr

ICON: Run

FIGURE 7

Behavior Editor

Super Sensor *(<SUPER-SENSOR 37657712> connected to TANK
*(<TANK 37521654>)

Diagrams Tick Find Save Write KB List Recorder Taps Name Type Flavor Draw Hardcopy Interact Initialize Configure Set

Diagrams

Highlight Clear All Tapped Untapped Type Find Mark Grid

Draw Show Size Points Diagonal T Square

Delete Underline Draw Move Name Color
SUPER SENSOR Icon Miscellaneous:
Instrument Type: DIAL COLUMN BAR FORCE-BAR DIGITAL-BAR SIGNAL
GRAPH BANNER
Variable To Monitor: VALUE FLUID-EXCHANGED
Exit

Circle Rectangle Lozenge Triangle Trapezoid Diamond Hexagon Octagon

Graph Multi Plot Graph Centrifugal Pump Rotary Pump

Bar Switch Knife Switch Rotary Switch Toggle Switch

Sensor Line Super Sensor

Air Ejector Y Strainer Duplex Strainer Impulse Trap Orifice

Stop Valve Angletop Valve Check Valve Reller Valve Safety Valve Regulator Valve 3 Way Valve 4 Way Valve

Digital Bar Force Bar Bar Signal Flame

Sstg Ssdg Circuit Breaker Fusible Link Fuse Biscuit

Text Banner

Other

Icons

Lisp Graphics Editor (NORMAL) TANKS-AND-PIPES-SIMULATION *
Set miscellaneous parameters of marked icons.

CREATE: >steamer>diagrams>tanks-and-pipes-simulation.LISP

10/22/84 07:43:28

ICON: Choose

FIGURE 8

Icon Editor

Top of Existing Icons List				Top of Constituents List	
<div> <div> <div>Create</div> <div>Find</div> <div>Save</div> <div>Write</div> <div>Composite Icon</div> </div> <div> <div>List</div> <div>Name</div> <div>Describe</div> <div>Inspect</div> <div>Flavor</div> </div> <div> <div>Initialize</div> <div>Draw</div> <div>Interact</div> <div>Hardcopy</div> <div>Set</div> </div> </div>	<div> <div>CIRCLE</div> <div>RECTANGLE</div> <div>LOZENGE</div> <div>OCTAGON</div> <div>TRIANGLE</div> <div>BOX</div> <div>SOLIDBOX</div> <div>DIAMOND</div> <div>HEXAGON</div> <div>TRAPEZOID</div> <div>LINE</div> <div>POLYGON</div> <div>BANNER</div> <div>TEXT</div> <div>FILLPOINT</div> </div>	<div> <div>Mark</div> <div>Delete</div> <div>Undelete</div> <div>Move</div> <div>Copy</div> <div>Shape</div> <div>Name</div> <div>Rotate</div> <div>Reflect</div> </div>	<div> <div>Background</div> <div>Day</div> <div>Numerical Date</div> </div>		
<div> <div>Draw</div> <div>Show</div> </div>		<div> <div>Size</div> <div>Points</div> </div>	<div> <div>Bottom of Constituents List</div> <div>Top of Instance Variables List</div> </div>		
<div> <div>Grid</div> </div>					
<div> <div>Color</div> <div>Label</div> </div>		<div> <div>Tap</div> <div>Misc</div> </div>			
<div> <div>Menus</div> </div>		<div> <div>Rotate</div> <div>Reflect</div> </div>			
<div> <div>Bottom of Existing Icons List</div> </div>					
<div> <div>Variables</div> </div>			<div> <div>Bottom of Instance Variables List</div> <div>Top of SET-DAY's transforms</div> <div>ERASE WITHOUT-ARGS</div> <div>SET-TEXT-STRING WITH-ARGS</div> <div>DRAW WITHOUT-ARGS</div> </div>		
<div> <div>Methods</div> </div>			<div> <div>Day</div> <div>Day</div> <div>Day</div> </div>		
<div> <div>Date *</div> </div>			<div> <div>Bottom of SET-DAY's transforms</div> <div>STEAMER: DIAGRAMS; DATE.LISP.NENEST</div> </div>		

npd

10/22/84 10:08:34 nbr

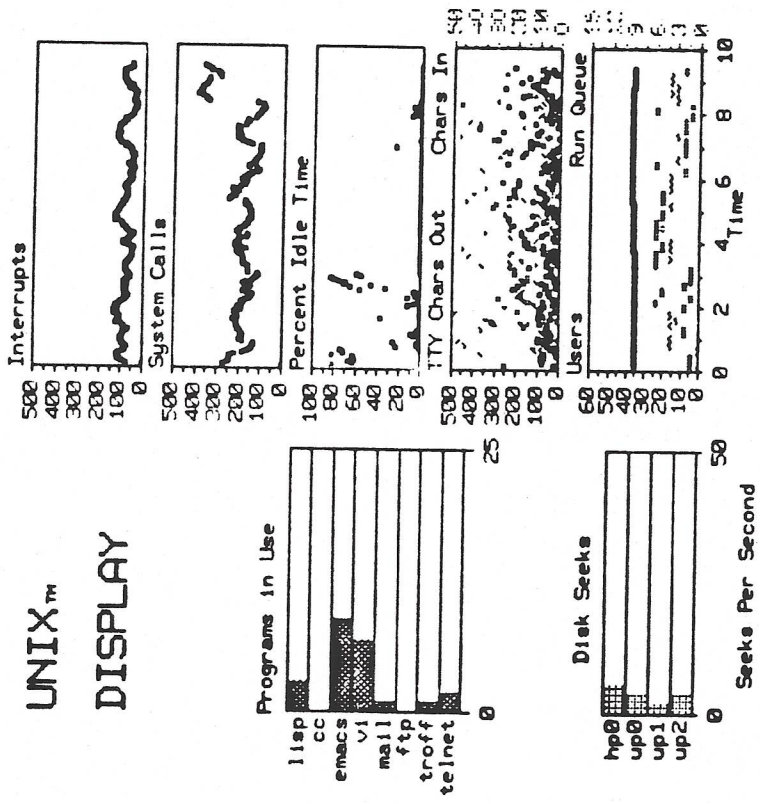
ICON:

191

FIGURE 9

Graphics Editor

UNIX™ DISPLAY



[10:00 From CREIE: Request for Screen Hardcopy of 09:37 completed.]

Transfer Hardcopy Clear Edit

Lisp Graphics Editor (VIEW) UNIX 3 CREIE: > steamer > diagrams > black-and-white > unix.lisp

mpc

10/22/84 10:00:44 hollian Run OFILE serving HOLOKAI

FIGURE 10