

Notes as Code

Luca Matteis, June 2020

Notes are great. Whether they are box-drawings, bullet-lists, wiki-like linked pages, they help us increase and manage our understanding of something.

The problem seems that with notes we are not taking advantage of the "executability" property that on the other hand exists for code; where we can pivot what we just wrote against some other things and slowly & correctly find a better understanding.

Of course code falls short in the opposite direction: too cryptic to understand; too unforgiving for quick thinking.

As a random Hacker News user so eloquently once commented:

Unless you've gone through the process of writing code it's impossible to understand just how pedantic and explicit you need to be when building software versus, say, giving your human colleagues instructions.

I am frustrated that writing code requires one to think of all the little details. With notes we can put things together quickly; copy & paste from other places without much care about how it actually integrates with the rest of the document.

I am also frustrated that with notes we are not leveraging the computing power beneath the keyboard: does this new concept conflict with anything I already said in the past? Can computing help me understand things better?

Here I am not trying to provide a solution but rather to question our current ways: can notes and code find a new middle-ground medium? *Something that is both useful for thinking and for telling the computer what to do?*