

ax Microsoftus ~ The Peace of Microsoft

What sort of new informational empire are we seeing born?

Long ago in Boston, speaking in computational time, Steve Jobs announced that the schism between Microsoft and Apple must end. The days of conceptualizing the relationship as a David and Goliath morality play needed to cease. This seems to me a reasonable thing. Bill Gates, to formalize that new way of thinking, declared that Microsoft would invest \$150 million into Apple stock. It wasn't the weirdest treaty in history, but it may just turn out to be one of the most important. It may in the future determine how a whole lot of people on the planet will think.

The last few weeks have seen the mother of all paradigm shifts enter the consciousness of the global Mac community. The question that I believe is in the heart of every Mac user regardless of their individual purpose: "How is what happened going to alter the future development of my OS and the way I use it?"

This is the usual ego-centric defensive perspective folks have evidenced throughout time. It is the healthy norm, and not so far from the wonderings of many users. But while the computer industry is relatively new, the history of ideas, intellectual history, has been developing for millennia. I believe there are parallels between the events of the moment and what once occurred when other "ideas" rose to prominent, if not popular, positions.

Once Upon a Time

Once upon a time a Roman Emperor, Constantine the Great, chose to be baptized on his death bed. By the year 391 Christianity was declared the state religion, with all other faiths and heathen cults officially prohibited. Many historians feel that from this time onward the focus of the Empire, including its religious mania, was only inward. Believing itself perfect and unchallengeable in glory, it found it easier to co-opt the new faith, oppose

all dissent and acquire incalculable wealth. It would abandon its roots and the knowledge of its origins. Rome would end although the Empire would go on for nearly a thousand years more. With a mindset predetermined to see itself as already "perfected," little development occurred. Ceremonial ritual overshadowed all aspects of the second Empire's life. It became oppressive, intrusive, brittle and fossilized. I fear that could be a result of the events of this "historical" summer too. I am concerned to see so massive a conviction that knowledge of what is best resides in those who've to now been in power and making the imperial decisions many have resented. I for one looked to Apple as a hope for a more free realm to work in, not as a client kingdom. Why am I getting a bad feeling Apple could become a puppet state held hostage to the might of another's overwhelming numbers? Would I want such a regime to survive at any cost?

And so the Story Goes...

In more recent history (the December 2nd, 1996 issue of Newsweek) there is an article on Microsoft and an interview with Bill Gates. Within the article it is surmised that the company will grow to double its size over 5 years, and that was written when the Dow Jones was no way 8k. Bill Gates describes the Microsoft idea of customers as "intimate and ongoing" and "The easy way to do that is the concept of membership. We ask you to register, and if you're willing we'll upload [from your hard disk] a few profile bits about how you're using the applications and what your hardware is." As Newsweek wrote: "And every month you'll pay the Bill."

There are more interesting comments from Mr. Gates in that Newsweek: "And so the relationship, even on productivity software, is a lot more intimate and ongoing. And with the interactive content you go from contacting us every two years down to contacting us two or three times a day, where you're saying, "What are the top stories that I care about"...

The issue at hand for Mac lovers and users the world over is whether the influence of such a power as Microsoft will reform the Apple we know and admire into an OS that could devolve to picking top stories for us to care about and having us convinced we need to call three times a day before we so much as change fonts. The historical Apple user has been something of an anomaly, aware of their times and but not all that obedient to them. Their philosophy has been one of the greatest personal freedom, with a general disdain for gravity. They rise when others fall. How will this be influenced by such new board members as Larry Ellison advocating a path away from the individual to the collective? As feuding princes go, we are well advised to put our faith in none of them. Machiavelli is still right when it comes to sizing up those seeking power for themselves. What would IBM officers do to Apple's way of thinking of "the as of yet unthought"? How long has it

been since they had a new way of seeing? They talk the business talk, but do they walk the "Apple" walk? I worry that the Apple corporation to be saved may not be an Apple I want. There may be more than a few new bites to come out of it.

And Goes Further Yet

Whatever incarnation it will take in time to come, I believe the Apple user is betting on very far reaching abilities and developments to carry on the historical tradition of the line. Such advances must occur if we are to celebrate the long stand against conformity, as opposed to standardization. If we few, we lucky few, we band of brothers [and sisters!] (thank you Willi S.) are to salvage something worthwhile from loyalty to an uncommonly wonderful idea that no amount of common sense could make us abandon, then we must guard against blinding ourselves to the ideals that inspired us originally. The past shows the dangerous effects that gargantuan organizations and deified rulers have had upon humankind, and their computers. It will be for the users themselves to keep reminding all of the triumphal procession celebrating their own brilliance: "Remember, thou art but mortal!"

Steven Rodoletz is a mutant with lots of schooling who loves a good question. Da Vinci is the Man, and invented everything; Pauling was the real deal and a class act. Hommage.

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