

YOU MATTER

Do Apple Products Create A Thinking Environment*?

Nancy Kline

"Thank you, Nancy. That was great. Now, about payment. You can choose. We can give you \$5000. Or you can have a Mac SE with a laser writer printer. Which would you prefer?"

I had just finished presenting a seminar for a team at Apple. It was my first corporate client. \$5000 was a fortune to me.

"I'll take the \$5000," I said.

"No you won't," she said.

"I thought I had a choice, I said."

"You do," she said, "but you have made the wrong one."

I thought of come-backs, but my conflict-averse mouth said, "Okay."

"Good," she said, "you'll never look back."

"Sure," I thought, already worried about what Beth, my secretary, would say when she heard there would be no money coming, only a computer and printer, neither of which we needed, did we?

When the Mac SE arrived, however, Beth lifted it out of its case, set it on the desk, and was hooked. I left her alone with it. I wasn't drawn. It was going to be a big adjustment. And I couldn't really see the point.

A few weeks later, though, one evening alone in my office, I sat down at the desk, reached to the back of the computer, flipped the simple switch, heard the sonorous tone, watched the little face emerge, listened to the

* A Thinking Environment® is a set of ten behaviors that generate independent thinking in people.

cute clickety clicks, saw the “Welcome to Macintosh,” picked up the mouse, and fell in love.

Twenty-six years, nine Macs, three iPods, and two iPhones later, I am still trying to figure out why.

And a few months ago it came to me: maybe we love Apple products because they are a Thinking Environment. When you think about it, they “embody” all of the “ten components.” And in doing that, I wondered, do they, in a sense, help us think for ourselves?

I thought about it more. I could see that Apples start by making us feel good about ourselves. The minute we see one, touch one, move around in one, it is as if we hear it whispering, “I am glad you are here. I have had you in mind.” And that is, as we know, the starting point for independent thinking: an environment that says, “You matter.”

I decided to be systematic.

Place

Most obviously, then, these products are a place that says to us from the minute we arrive, “We anticipated this moment. We have identified your needs and some of your deepest aesthetic desires.

“Our creators have prototyped and produced us by pretending to be you, projecting ruthlessly into what your experience of us will be. We have set things up to be right for you, some of them beyond your imaginings. You matter that much.”

In being welcomed in that way, we sense we are valued. And so our brains work better. We can begin to be creative. We can begin to think for, and as, ourselves.

Attention

Also, through their elegance, their curves, their fluidity and dependability, their unobtrusive but complete and supple presence, Apples “listen” to us. They do not interrupt us. They get out of the way. They want our minds to work. They help us to give birth to ideas and to express ourselves in ways we never thought possible. They act as a seamless source of generative attention.

Equality

And in the midst of this, the products are, on purpose, our equal – not our master, nor our slave. They create a relationship of equality. And part of this experience is a kind of respect for the boundaries between us and them: they do not collapse into uninvited clunkiness or infection or

invasion of our work. They operate simply, intuitively, obviously. And so we feel as smart as they are.

Ease

And of course these creations of visual and electronic grace offer us ease. They offer emotional white space. The minute we engage with them, we breathe out. Every bit of them we touch or press or swipe or flip or lift or see or unpack produces ease. Ease is built in.

Appreciation

These products also seem to beam appreciation. They tell us that whatever our challenge, we can do it, we can learn it, we can create it, we can make whatever is truly exceptional and bountiful and best. They say, "We honor your intelligence and sensibility." They say, "You deserve this."

Encouragement

These products say, "We offer you courage to go to the unexplored edge of your ideas by not competing with you. We do not want to control or limit you or make you look or feel stupid for a single second. And we will not be confusing or mysterious or hard to reach. We want you instinctively to figure us out and use us nimbly. Our simplicity is here to support your complexity."

Feelings

Apples free us to feel. They remove us from repression and stoicism and mechanical obedience and boredom. They say, "Our gentle lines; lightness of touch; willowy movement; depth of light and color; curved, caress-able casings; zooming dimensions of memory; and perfect packaging invite you to feel, not just to think. Your heart is important in all you do. Using us, you have space to feel."

Information

They say: "You no longer need to live in ignorance or denial. With our speed and sureness of foot we will take you to all the information you need in order to think well. And we will back it up and save it so that you can zoom through time to find it, miraculously. We will do this faster than you have ever experienced, so that here you can think faster than you have ever experienced."

Diversity

Apple products have always (long before the 1997 ad) said, "Think different." They have always said, "Be who you are; revel in your diversity; be, and think for, yourself. We are here to remind you that who you are is uniquely interesting and valuable."

Incisive Questions

And as they do all of this, Apples are asking, "If you knew that you are intelligent, good, deserving, creative, and full of choice, how would you live?" It is as if Apples, just by being so interested in and respectful of us, allow us to dream, to unearth and discard assumptions about ourselves and the world that have held us back for years.

I feel all of this every time I open my Air and feel the keys accepting my fingers just so. Every time I create a card from my photos (and know that within days the hard copy will arrive full of quality and so beautifully packaged I gasp a little), or watch all my Apples synch, or pull up my photo events into a new world of light, every time I feel the satisfying click of the little white earphones snapping perfectly into the wonder that is my iPhone, or the quiet magnetic plug tip hugging the tiny cradle on the sleek edge of my Pro, perfectly, I feel the way I do in a Thinking Environment. I feel smart.

And when I close my Air for the night, and walk out of my study, turning just to admire it on my desk, a little work of art, I can hear it saying back to me, "*You are a work of art, too, don't forget.*"

Ah.

Love again.

Then Why Not Everywhere?

I have wanted for a long time to write about this effect Apples seem to have on people – partly because I experience it all of the time and wanted to capture it. But partly also because the more I think about it, the more I am certain that every product should be a Thinking Environment in these ways.

And so should every service. And every place (of work, of living, of creating, of buying, of relating, even of worship). Human beings are so breathtakingly beautiful we deserve to experience these ten behaviors every minute of the day and night, in everything we touch and use and relate to and run into. Everything.

Of course, Apple figured this out all by itself. One day, like magic, the Apple Store appeared. Right out of all of our imaginations and beyond them, there it was, nearly a symphony of dignifying experiences. We love these stores. We love them because, just like the products, they love us.

Visit one. Look around. Stay as long as you like. Try everything. Genius bars; One-to-ones; free workshops; free consultation; free wifi; nearly a

thousand welcomes; on-tap listeners; a hundred learners; and all that light wood and glass. Even the stairways are a bit of music.

We walk in, and we sense that beauty and brains matter equally and are the same thing anyway. We sense, once again, that we matter.

Is that why we spend our lunch hours there, and our happy hours, and our weekends, why we line up way before opening time?

Love again.

I remember the first year of the Apple Store in London's Regent Street. I thought I had entered a cathedral. And the deity was obvious. It was not the merchandise; it was the customer. I knew it the minute I stepped over the threshold and lowered my head after gazing around at all that space and light. There greeting me were the Apple people in their adorable tee shirts that said, "We love to talk about stuff like this." They made me feel that I was the best thing that ever happened to them.

On my first visit, I discovered the phenomenon called the Genius Bar. A bar of experts with plasma screens behind them with quotes from Einstein and others praising thinking. A bar of geniuses, how perfect. And one of them wanted to do whatever it would take to make me an even happier friend of my (then) PowerBook G4 laptop.

They wanted to teach me, too, not just fix my machine. And they listened until I had said everything. Then they answered and waited for me to understand. Then they taught me some more. And smiled. (They really do like to talk about stuff like this.) And it was all free.

They were all about twelve years old it seemed to me, all prodigies for sure. But I began to seem amazing to them when I slipped into the conversation that I had been an Apple user since 1986, and that I still have my first Mac, an SE, and its laser writer printer. They gasped, those geniuses - and I felt like Lady GaGa for two seconds. I gave another (there had been hundreds over the years) silent, grateful nod to my original Apple client and her "You'll never look back." She was right. But neither of us could possibly have envisioned this.

Apple seems to get it: humans deserve, and want, a Thinking Environment everywhere.

Hearteningly, so do others. And they turn to Apple to think about the possibilities. I was with a Minister of State in the Cabinet of the President of an African country. His job was to create a new department of the economy. The opportunity was immense. He wanted to know how I

thought he could attract the best, smartest, most compassionate, most able people to join his team, to produce real change for the country. His question was, "If Steve Jobs were in my position, what do you think he would do with this opportunity?"

As far as I was concerned, the Minister's very question proved that the President had appointed the right person. I could have just said, "Steve Jobs would have appointed you and ask you to figure out what to do here." But I knew the question was intended to stretch us both, so I thought about it.

"I think Steve Jobs would figure out what people need," I said, "and what they want deep down, when they come to work. I think he would think about people in their jobs the way he thought about people at their computers.

"I think he would know that what they want, even when they cannot articulate it consciously or coherently, is to know that they matter. They want to experience their own intelligence, their own new thinking. They want to experience precision and poise and permission to be messy while they think afresh.

"They want work to energize them, to use them well. They want to think for themselves and be listened to. They want at the end of the day to know that they made a positive difference. They want to know that they were not required to lie. They want to express their values through their work. They want to remember their impact. They want to want to go to work the next day.

"I think Steve Jobs would consider how to create for you an environment that was essentially an Apple product.

"I think he would figure out how to create the same kind of experience in your Cabinet, in your conversations and at meetings, that Apples create at the desk and on the lap and in the palm. In all of these we know that we matter and will be honored.

"He might also know that neuroscience would support this: that when we know we matter, our limbic brains produce those brilliance-making hormones like endorphins and serotonin. They bathe the cortex, and we can think well. We actually get smarter."

I smiled. "What do *you* think Steve Jobs would do?" I asked the Minister.

"Interesting," he said, "but Steve Jobs would have a fortune to pay these people."

“Yes,” I said, “he would, but he wouldn’t have to. People will often take a pay cut if they get back the difference in dignity, energy, and meaning.”

People want to live each day that way. Thinking Environments help that happen. So do Apples. They give us back ourselves and take us to parts of ourselves we did know were there. They make us all geniuses.

Of course we fall in love.