

Rhetorical Criticism of Bill Gates' speech at CES, January 2007

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A direction for the future

The announcement made on January 7, 2007 by William Henry Gates, III, (Bill Gates) at the International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada, was not a surprise or unexpected in any way. Between five and seven million people had tested one or more of the beta versions. (Gates, 2007, Pg. 2). The release of Windows Vista and the concurrent release of Microsoft Office 2007 will affect every computer user on the planet, eventually. According to Avneesh Saxena, vice-president for Asia-Pacific computing systems research at IDC, in 2004, “Microsoft currently has around 90 percent share of the client operating system market.” Already, if you use a computer for any purpose other than personal, unconnected (offline), use you are using Windows. “I don’t know of any banking entity that does not operate in a Microsoft Windows environment. I personally serviced nine separate entities, including Wells Fargo Bank and Washington Mutual,” said Steve McLain, former vault manager for an armored transport service. If you have a bank account, it is serviced using Windows. Which pretty much boils down to the fact that if you access the Internet or communicate with another computer for any business purpose whatsoever, you have most likely used a windows machine. It does take some time for all users to switch to a new operating system. There are still people who use Windows 95 even today. But eventually Microsoft stops supporting the old operating systems and users are forced to upgrade or lose support for critical functions such as virus protection (MS Site, 2006, Par. 1).

The new Vista operating system (OS) is now available. This OS is based on a new graphical interface (Bowman, 2006, ¶2). All interface is based on a “search” model instead of requiring the user to drill down to programs or files. “Live Icons” actually open a picture of a

manila file folder to show a thumbnail picture of folder contents. Naming and sorting have begun to be obsolete (Bowman, 2006, ¶ 3-10). Navigation is simpler.

Concurrently, features that used to be strictly two-dimensional are becoming three-dimensional. An example is the well know website www.mapquest.com, which offers 2-D maps of places all over the world. Another, more updated version is Google Earth, where the user can zoom in on an actual photograph of the place to get a real-life view of what their destination looks like. In Windows Live, a subscription service that is an integral part of Windows Vista, there is a feature called Virtual Earth 3D. This was demonstrated at CES by Justin Hutchinson during Bill Gates' speech:

“This is pretty cool to demo using a mouse and keyboard like I'm doing here, but it's more fun to use an Xbox 360 controller. I can plug any Xbox 360 controller into any Windows Vista PC to play all my games, and I can also use it to fly around Las Vegas here. This is fun. So, you see here a virtual 3D map of Las Vegas. Not only can I fly around, I can actually drive right down the street. This is pretty fun. It's also practical. So if I'm new to town, I can get a sense of where everything is, get a sense of my landmarks. We can also lay down real time traffic information. That lets me decide what is the quickest way to get there.” (Gates, 2007, pg. 4)

These advances make it simple, and more convenient, to use video game controllers to control the PC.

As more people use video game controllers to interface with the PC, more programmers will write programs to accommodate that trend. Before too long, if one wants to stay current, it will be necessary to own and know how to use a video game controller to navigate certain

functions on the PC. This will give the video game generation an advantage over those that came before them. Already the divide between those who have and use computers and those that do not is commonly known. Even the U.S. military is creating their commercials to reach the video game generation (US Air Force commercial, 2005). And it is becoming our reality. Richard “Mack” Machowicz, a ten-year veteran of the U.S. Navy Seals and host of the Discovery Channel’s *Future Weapons* program described the engagement of traditional human piloted aircraft with the F-22 Raptor remote-control combat aircraft, “A single F-22 Raptor can successfully engage up to seven enemy aircraft at a time, and anything less than three enemy aircraft is unchallenging” (Machowicz, 2007, Episode 3). The actual pilot called it boring. This is a symptom of the video game encroaching on reality.

In this paper I will argue that the release of Windows Vista signals the beginning of a social divide between those of the video game generation and those who are technologically challenged, and Bill Gates is aware of this and supports it.

First I will provide a description of his speech, then I will describe the context in which it was given. I will give a short overview of the neo-Aristotelian method of rhetorical analysis, and finally I will analyze Gates’ speech given to CES to show that through his use of Delivery and Invention, including the sub-categories of Ethos, Pathos, and Logos, Gates introduces the new direction of our technological future and subtly emphasizes that this direction belongs to the generation of the future.

Bill Gates’ Keynote address at CES

On Sunday, January 7, 2007, William Henry Gates, III (Bill Gates), Chairman of Microsoft Corporation, presented the pre-show keynote address of the International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada (Gates, 2007). Bill Gates is the single wealthiest

individual on planet earth (Kroll/Fass, 2006, List 1). Arguably this gives him a certain amount of implied credibility.

The speech was given at the Microsoft Pavilion at the Venetian Casino and Hotel in the Palazzo Ballroom. Over 4,000 attendees of CES were present to hear Gates share how Microsoft is delivering on the promise of the "Connected Experience." Windows Vista, which Gates characterized as the most important release of Windows ever, will make it easier, safer and more fun to use the PC (CESweb.org, 2007, Keynotes ¶ 2). Gates began the speech with a high-level snap-shot of the current state of connectivity and use of the personal computer (PC). He commented that over 2 billion digital photos were taken last year saying that 65 percent of homes are using digital cameras (Gates, 2007, pg. 1). He talked of Internet adoption and the worldwide penetration of connectivity. He stated that over 40 percent of U.S. homes now have multiple personal computers. And that "young people, the new generation, they actually spend more time on their Windows PC than they spend watching TV" (Gates, 2007, pg. 1). He talked about the metrics they are using to track the extended global marketplace using specific examples of new gadgets that are available.

Gates pinpointed the weakness in the drive for connectivity as the connection saying that "the content people now need to think about how they create around this environment, how they connect into it" (Gates, 2007, pg. 2). He challenged the hardware and software industry to deliver on the promise of connectivity.

Gates then described the launch of the new Microsoft operating system: Vista. He highlighted some of the features and benefits of the new system. But he did not go into great detail. He turned the stage over to Justin Hutchinson, a young Microsoft employee, who gave a multi-media demonstration of Vista and some of the features. Hutchinson demonstrated

Windows Live Search and the Virtual Earth 3D technology that is built into it, and he announced collaboration with FoxSports.com in the creation of SportsLounge. Finally, he demonstrated video creation software that allows the user to easily create photo DVDs with built-in themes, create and present digital photos with GroupShot, and create a full-motion desktop “wallpaper” for the PC with a Vista Ultimate Extra called DreamScene.

Gates then resumed with an overview of some of the collaborations Microsoft has engaged in with strategic partners such as AMD, Intel, HP, Sony, Toshiba, and Medion. This section included two video segments highlighting the products they have come up with. He ended this section by introducing Robbie Bach, President of Entertainment and Devices Division for Microsoft Corporation, who spoke about connected entertainment.

Bach highlighted the Zune, Microsoft’s new portable entertainment/MP3 player, described some of the Windows capable cell phones on the market, video games for the PC, and, of course, the Xbox 360 (Gates, 2007, pg. 7). Bach also used the technique of turning the stage over to younger Microsoft employees, Lisa Sikora and Albert Penello, to demonstrate the capabilities of Xbox Live. Bach then continued with a description of the new features of Windows Media Center PCs stating “this holiday (2006) 80 percent of PCs sold in the United States were Windows XP Media Center PCs (Gates, 2007, pg. 10). Bach and his team went on to demonstrate Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) and the movies available on Live.

Gates transitioned Bach’s presentation into another direction by introducing Mark Fields from the Ford Motor Company (Gates, 2007, pg. 12). Fields announced collaboration with Microsoft called Sync using Microsoft Auto software to create a seamless connected experience in and out of the automobile. Sync uses voice commands and bluetooth wireless as well as text-to-speech to create a complete hands-free system for cell phone calls and text messages. It also

accepts nearly all portable music players and USB storage devices allowing personalization in play lists and choices with voice commands. Sync will be available on a dozen Ford vehicles in 2007.

Gates ended by giving a preview of some of the features that will be coming in the near and not so near future.

Geek-fest

This speech was given at the International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada on January 7, 2007. The audience was made up of professionals in the field of information technology (IT), consumer electronics, related industries and representatives of the media. It was essentially a presentation of the world's most recognizable "Uber-Geek" to an audience of other "tech-geeks."

CES is a showcase of the latest and greatest products, services, and technologies offered by a wide variety of vendors. Each of these vendors participates in CES with the intent of generating sales of their products or interest in new technologies to strengthen their positions as they compete for research and development (R & D) dollars. Participants have the opportunity to attend educational presentations from some of the leaders in the field of consumer electronics to help businesses expand their businesses and understand new technologies (CESweb.org, 2007, fact sheet ¶ 6). Verified registrants representing the United States, Canada, Mexico and more than 130 other countries include manufacturers, retailers, content providers and creators, broadband developers, wireless carriers, cable and satellite TV providers, installers, engineers, corporate buyers, government leaders, financial analysts and the media from around the world (CESweb.org, 2007, fact sheet ¶ 2). It is a smorgasbord of techies.

The show is timed right after Christmas when retail pressure is down and just before the February price drops. The technologies introduced and showcased at CES help companies gauge interest in their current offerings and impacts price changes. "We expect the 2007 International CES will present us with great new opportunities to broaden the market for our new remote control solutions," said Jon Sienkiewicz, director of marketing for Universal Remote Control, in Harrison, NY (Business Wire, 2006, December 13, ¶ 5). It is a time for many new technology announcements.

Concurrently, Steve Jobs of Apple Computers, Inc. hosted the MacWorld expo in San Francisco, California (Lee, 2007, ¶ 2). Jobs introduced the new iPhone; it was a long-awaited and much anticipated announcement. The two conferences compete as fiercely as the two companies.

Other contextual factors include the recent anti-trust suits against Microsoft. These suits have been filed in United States Federal court as well as in some international courts. The suits primarily target the methods that Microsoft has used to make Internet Explorer the dominant Internet browser. Judgments in European Union courts have disallowed Microsoft Media Player and Internet Explorer from being bundled and packaged with Windows (Galli, 2006, ¶ 11). This has changed the way Microsoft does business in Europe. U.S. courts have been less harsh. While fines have been levied, and certain practices curtailed, such as pricing structures that disadvantage some vendors, (Galli, 2006, ¶ 6). Microsoft has maintained an 80 percent market share in the United States.

Politically in the past couple of years there has been a significant public outcry against government monitoring of personal communications (Isikoff/Hosenball, 2005, ¶ 9). The ability to maintain personal security has become a priority in American consciousness.

Neo-Aristotelian Method

For the analysis of Bill Gates' speech, I will use the Neo-Aristotelian method. The Neo-Aristotelian method of rhetorical criticism has five canons as defined by Cicero (Stoner/Perkins, 2005, pgs. 140-141). These five canons are Arrangement, Elocution (Style), Invention, Delivery, and Memory. While Gates used all of these methods, for this paper the primary focus will be on Delivery and Invention.

Delivery in Aristotle's time referred to the actual physical delivery of the message through the use of the voice and the body (Stoner/Perkins, 2005, pg. 147). Today delivery includes the use of audio/visual equipment (A/V) such as video clips, music, and Power Point presentations; deferring to sub-rhetors to present a portion of the speech; distributing handouts of a speaker's outline; and other innovative methods for involving the audience. It includes the use of verbal and non-verbal devices to reach the particular audience in such a way as to move them to a desired feeling and through such to move them to action.

Invention refers to the method of creating or positioning your message to be most relevant to the particular audience. Invention has three sub-categories. These are referred to as artistic proofs and include Ethos, Pathos, and Logos. Ethos is an appeal to credibility or ethics; Pathos is an appeal to emotion; Logos is an appeal to logic or reason (Stoner/Perkins, 2005, pgs. 148-153). All three of these artistic proofs are important tools in the creation of Gates' speech; all three were used to great advantage in creating the appropriate message for this audience.

Analysis

Gates uses Delivery to visually reinforce the changes that are imminent. He uses the three artistic proofs of Ethos, Pathos, and Logos to Invent his message and give it meaning to the audience.

The delivery of this speech at CES used all of the latest technologies available. The speech was introduced following a video presentation promoting Microsoft. From the beginning of that video to the end of the presentation, every piece of equipment worked flawlessly – an uncommon feat in today’s world of presentation delays due to equipment and presentation incompatibility, further subtle proof of the superiority of Microsoft and Windows. Gates delivered his speech with what seemed to be a small remote control device in his hand. But upon further scrutiny it appears to actually be a mini-teleprompter device to keep his speech on track. This gave his speech a polished flow, which added to his credibility.

Within the speech are three video presentations. These presentations were professionally produced to present a particular aspect of Vista or vision of the future in the multi-media style we have become accustomed to when viewing advertisements of product launches (Gates, 2007, pgs. 6, 8). They were also designed to break up the presentation and keep the audience engaged. The first two segments were in short sequence, a delay and attention getter allowing the stagehands to make quick adjustments to the physical presentation needed for the multi-media interactive demonstration introduced by Robbie Bach.

Both Bach and Gates turned over the stage to multi-media demonstrations of Vista using the “Live” technologies and Xbox 360 controllers to younger employees of Microsoft. This change in delivery again kept the audience interest, but it also emphasized that these technologies are meant for the younger generation. When Justin Hutchinson was demonstrating

the Virtual Earth 3D technology he made the point that it was “pretty cool to demo using a mouse and keyboard [*old technology*] like I’m doing here, but it’s more fun to use an Xbox 360 controller” (Gates, 2007, pg. 4) [*comment added*]. Again, this was a subtle demonstration that this is a technology for the young.

Gates used all three of the artistic proofs, ethos, pathos, and logos, to show that the future of technology belongs to the next generation.

First he demonstrates ethos, or an appeal to credibility. Gates has automatic credibility when it comes to technology. After all, no one has ever done what he has done. But he passes his credibility on to the younger generation. First by introducing Hutchinson in order to demonstrate the newest, coolest, technologies, then by presenting Bach as the next expert. Bach is a much younger, hipper, presenter than Gates. But as President of the Entertainment and Devices Division, Bach has quite a bit of automatic credibility of his own. He uses the same device as Gates and hands the presentation over to two young, connected employees of Microsoft, Lisa Sikora and Albert Penello. These two young employees do not automatically have credibility; it is borrowed credibility from their boss, Bach. Bach even goes so far as to say that he is going to demonstrate the live experience in Windows, but then turns it over to a younger person. “What I want to do now is demonstrate the live experience on Windows, and for that I have Lisa Sikora on stage, and she’s going to take us through a demo of Live on Windows” (Gates, 2007, pg. 9). Lisa and Albert act out an interaction with Lisa in her “office” and Albert at home on a couch. This demonstration is again conducted using the Xbox 360 controller, not the keyboard and mouse.

So, both Gates and Bach loan their automatic credibility to younger employees who then have implied credibility.

Most of the speech and presentation by Gates and his sub-rhetors relies on pathos. The appeal to emotion is a very powerful thing. Gates' words especially have strong appeals to our emotional involvement with our computers. He paints pictures with his words, such as when describing high definition computer screens telling us "that when you buy it you just drool looking at that picture" (Gates, 2007, pg. 1). He makes sure that he addresses his audience's emotional attachment to their software by telling them that the old stuff can run on Vista, but you have so much more capability. He starts describing the features of Vista, then stops to say "rather than talk about the features I just want to talk about what we've been through together" (Gates, 2007, pg. 2). This is a true emotional appeal to pull the audience in and get them involved in the topic.

An unexpected emotional appeal begins about halfway through the speech. Gates begins to refer to the Windows "ecosystem" and operating "environment." He uses an emotional appeal to "green" or environmentally friendly, a movement much more commonly associated with the video game generation. He goes so far as to say you can "grow the capacity" (Gates, 2007, pg. 6). Bach also carries on that theme by calling their new game *Gears of War* an "evergreen property" (Gates, 2007, pg. 8).

Of course there is an appeal to logic – Gates is an engineer, after all. There are numerous statistics thrown in to strengthen the case that Vista and Microsoft are the best and will continue to be the best. Pages of quotes could be included. The speech leaves little room for argument that Microsoft is on top and will stay that way for a very long time.

Along with the three artistic proofs, Gates ends his speech with few scenarios of pure invention. He describes the world of the near future in terms of technologies built into the Microsoft House of the Future on the Microsoft campus in Redmond, WA. These scenarios

center on technologies commonly used by the video game generation, but not so common among older Americans. It becomes very clear that Gates' vision is dominated by technologies, and those not participating will be left far behind.

The three scenarios begin with a demonstration of Windows mobile on the cell phone (Gates, 2007, pg. 14). This phone has the ability to know where you are, to tell you when the next bus will arrive, and to even give you a coupon for a nearby restaurant based on your personal preferences coded into the phone. The phone then connects to the home to provide video feed of the front door where a delivery person is waiting with a package. Through the phone, Gates is able to talk to the delivery person and send an electronic signature to him authorizing the package to be left on the doorstep.

The second demonstration is in the home. The package that was delivered has a Radio Frequency Identification Device (RFID) on it. The home is able to read this and knows that a food processor has been delivered. Once within the kitchen, the home computer sees that Gates has never used this type of device before and asks if he would like assistance. This is accomplished with new screen technologies that allow the computer screen to be projected onto any surface with complete interactivity. The home RFID reader knows what food commodities are in the house and suggests several recipes for the food processor based on the available ingredients in the home (Gates, 2007, pg. 14). Gates calls this a little bit of software for the kitchen.

His final demonstration is of a bedroom with interactive screens for the walls (Gates, 2007, pg. 15). In this room he can play Xbox 360 on the walls or set the entire room to have wallpaper appropriate for his mother to stay in the room. Included in this wallpaper is a picture frame with a live video feed to his mother's house so she can keep an eye on her cat.

This section fulfills the requirements of true invention. The demonstrations are lively and keep the audience's attention, and they fulfill a purpose of moving the vision forward to the future – a future that will be dominated by the video game generation. They serve to show the audience that if they are not technologically savvy now, they will be even farther behind in the future and will not be able to keep up.

Conclusion

This rhetorical artifact was extremely effective. It served to announce the launch of the new product, Windows Vista Operating System, and also gave subtle instruction from the most powerful man on the planet that the future belongs to the technologically savvy, primarily the younger video game generation. Gates showed this through his method of delivery and by appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos, as well as through a creative use of invention.

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