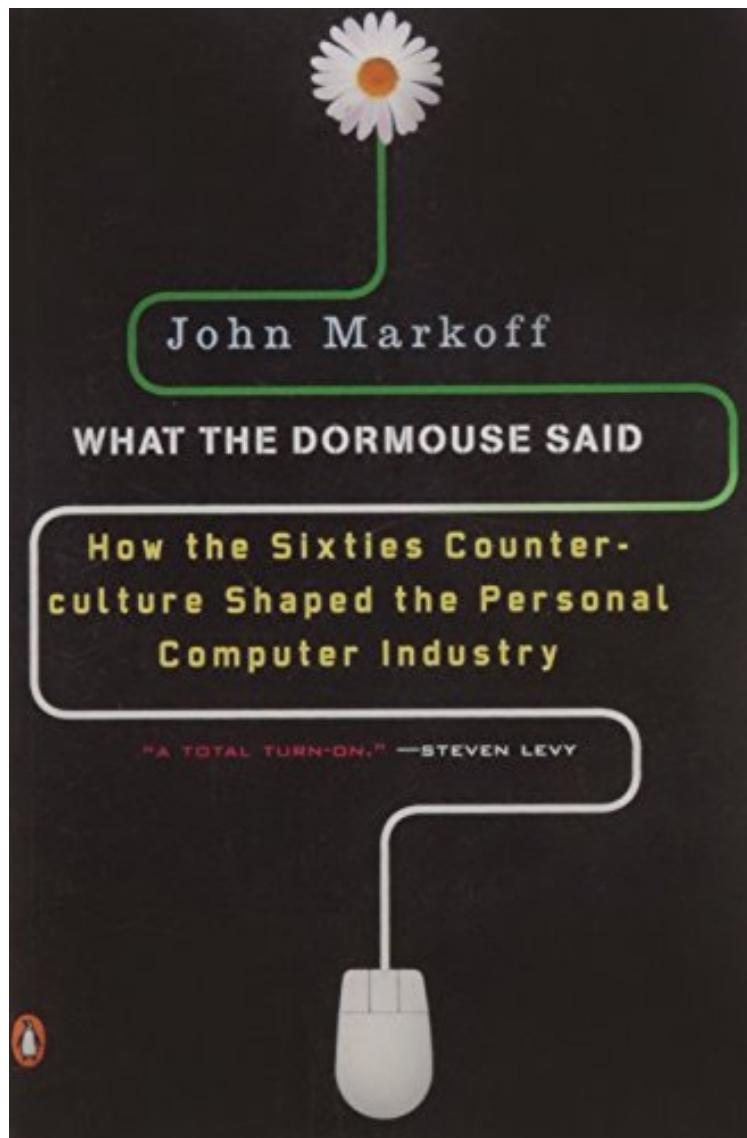


What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry

John Markoff

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John Markoff : What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating History of Personal Computing By Kindle Customer This

book was a fascinating history of personal computing in America, most specifically in Northern California, most especially in the Stanford region. I swear, I had no idea that Stanford played such a strategic role in the development of the personal computer. The book attempts to tie together nerdy engineers with counterculture LSD druggies with free love types with antiwar activists with students with hackers and the mix is considerably hard to pull off, even for a writer as accomplished as Markoff. In fact, I would say that he fails at it. Still, he tries, yes, he does. He tries a chronological approach to things and soon we have computer science engineers dropping acid in what will become Silicon Valley, leading to who knows what kinds of creativity. But Markoff really concentrates this book on two or three people: Doug Engelbart and his Augmented Human Intelligence Research Center at SRI (Stanford Research Institute) and John McCarthy's SAIL (Stanford Artificial Intelligence Laboratory). Another important figure is Stewart Brand, author of the Whole Earth Catalog. Finally, there was programmer extraordinaire, Alan Kay. Engelbart had a vision and he pulled in people to create his vision. He envisioned a computer this was the 1960s that would augment how people thought and what they did. McCarthy also envisioned a computerized world, albeit a slightly different one. Brand envisioned a computer for every person, while Kay envisioned small computers laptops of today that were so easy to use, that small children could be taught to use them. And these men all pulled it off! Engelbart plays such a large role in the book, that it's nearly all about him, and I think that does the book a bit of a disservice. Nonetheless, it's he who creates the mouse to use with a display and keyboard in the late 60s. He was funded largely by ARPA and was critical in the development of the ARPAnet, the precursor to the Internet. At some point, the book shifts to Xerox PARC (Palo Alto Research Center), the infamous Xerox research facility that had the most brilliant geniuses of the twentieth century under one roof and who literally did invent the personal computer as we know it to be. This was before Steve Wozniak and his famous claim that he invented the personal computer. Under Bob Taylor at PARC, Kay and the others who had shifted over there invented a graphical user interface, an operating system, a text editor (word processor), programming language, software, Ethernet for networking, a mouse, display, keyboard, audio, and a laser printer, which would be the only thing Xerox would go on to make money with. Xerox was so stupid, they never realized what they had in hand and they could have owned the world, but they didn't. Stupid, stupid, stupid. Markoff weaves various stories of people like Fred Moore throughout the book, attempting to capture the counterculture spirit, but it seemed a little lost on me. Most of the techies weren't overly political. Most avoided Vietnam by working in a research facility that did weapons research (SRI). Most dropped acid at some point, but very few seemed to make that a lifestyle choice. I thought it was an interesting book, as the topic is personally interesting to me, but it wasn't the most cohesively written book and I would have expected a little more from a writer of Markoff's stature. Still, four solid stars and recommended. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. What the Palo Alto Dormouse said. By Onyx Parrot. John Markoff's book traces the origins of interactive computing from the perspective of the community surrounding Stanford in the 60s and 70s. The account details the rise of the Stanford AI lab, and the NLS project at the Stanford Research Institute. The latter produced the Mother of All Demos in 1968, where lab leader Douglas Engelbart demonstrated technologies such as hyperlinked text, the mouse, copy paste editing and video conferencing, decades before they became commonplace. Along the way Markoff describes the environment of war protest, free universities and psychedelic drugs surrounding the developers of the technology. Computers were still very much a new thing then, and the paths people took becoming involved with them were varied and unique. This book is very much focused on the Stanford tech community in the 60s and 70s, and not the history of the personal computer as a whole. Important figures in the development of the PC (e.g. Steve Jobs, Bill Gates), as well as pioneering work done elsewhere are only mentioned in passing here. Silicon valley in the 60s and 70s was a very different place than the hyper-expensive Internet Valley it's become now. As a unique and detailed account of that moment in time and place, the book tells the story well. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Amazing Story - Early drug and corporate culture meet in the beginnings of Silicon Valley with surprising results. By Stephen. The Obdurate. Amazing story detailing the early semiconductor and early processor explosion and creation of the Silicon Valley alongside the early SF drug culture. Specifically, electronics companies allowing and in some cases encouraging employees use of LSD. It seems likely that most of it's true and even if only some of it is true it's unbelievable. It ties this in with various other things, like Ridge Vineyards and Ken Kesey / Penny Lane, among other things.

Most histories of the personal computer industry focus on technology or business. John Markoff's landmark book is about the culture and consciousness behind the first PC - the culture being counter and the consciousness expanded, sometimes chemically. It's a brilliant evocation of Stanford, California, in the 1960s and 70s, where a group of visionaries set out to turn computers into a means for freeing minds and information. In these pages one encounters Ken Kesey and the phone hacker Cap'n Crunch, LSD, The Whole Earth Catalog and the Homebrew Computer Lab. What the Dormouse Said is a poignant, funny, and inspiring book by one of the smartest technology writers around.

From Publishers Weekly. Starred . Since much of the research behind the development of the personal computer was conducted in 1960s California, it might seem obvious that the scientists were influenced by the cultural upheavals

going on outside the lab. Very few people outside the computing scene, however, have connected the dots before Markoff's lively account. He shows how almost every feature of today's home computers, from the graphical interface to the mouse control, can be traced to two Stanford research facilities that were completely immersed in the counterculture. Crackling profiles of figures like Fred Moore (a pioneering pacifist and antiwar activist who tried to build political bridges through his work in digital connectivity) and Doug Engelbart (a research director who was driven by the drug-fueled vision that digital computers could augment human memory and performance) telescope the era and the ways its earnest idealism fueled a passion for a computing society. The combustive combination of radical politics and technological ambition is laid out so convincingly, in fact, that it's mildly disappointing when, in the closing pages, Markoff attaches momentous significance to a confrontation between the freewheeling Californian computer culture and a young Bill Gates only to bring the story to an abrupt halt. Hopefully, he's already started work on the sequel. Agent, John Brockman.(Apr.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From the Inside Flap
Thanks to the cunning of history and the wondrous strangeness of Northern California, the utopian counterculture, psychedelic drugs, military hardware and antimilitary software were tangled together inextricably in the prehistory of the personal computer. Full of interesting details about weird but not arbitrary connections, John Markoff's book tells one of the oddest--because truest--of California tales and thereby helps illuminate the still unsettled legacy of the Sixties. --Todd Gitlin, author of *Media Unlimited* and *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*
From the Back Cover
"Wonderful . . . [It] makes a mind-blowing case that our current silicon marvels were inspired by the psychedelic-tinged, revolution-minded spirit of the sixties. Its a total turn-on." Steven Levy, author of *Hackers*