Steve Jobs and Lars von Trier: Incarnations of interconnections of creativity and innovation

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The present interest in the link between creativity and innovation is of recent date and has come about as part of the discourse of the knowledge-economy. According to the prevailing definition creativity is about having a new idea and innovation is about carrying out a new idea (Robinson 2011; Saywer 2012). Historically, however, the two concepts have existed separately, and the interconnections between the processes of creativity and innovation have not yet been thoroughly examined.

The focus of this inquiry is on the interconnections of creative and innovative processes. The idea is to investigate concrete and exemplary ‘incarnations’ of such interconnections by analyzing and comparing the working practices of American entrepreneur Steve Jobs and Danish film director Lars von Trier. Both have demonstrated extraordinary degrees of both creativity and innovation in their work. Jobs' declared goal was to make great products and he made Apple the most valuable company in the world; Trier never makes the same type of film twice and his declared goal is to move forward the art form of film.

The research questions of the paper are: What are the similarities and differences of the creative and innovative working practices of Jobs and Trier? How may these findings contribute to the understanding of the nature of and interconnections between creative and innovative processes?

The basis of the analysis is the authorized biographies on Jobs and Trier (Thorsen 2010; Isaacson 2011). Their working practices is analyzed and discussed with theories of innovation and creativity (Poincaré 1908; Schumpeter 1934; Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Dyer 2011). The theoretical framework is the theory of creativity and innovation understood as a question of Bildung which is a German concept of the cultivation of character (Hammershøj 2012; 2014). According to this theory the processes of creativity and innovation are both driven by the same affective forces of transcendence and judgment.

The finding of the paper is that there exist several similarities between the innovative practices of Jobs and Trier: Both have been notorious for pressing their employees to outdo themselves, for having an outstanding intuition and fierce judgment, and for transferring their visions and sense of direction to others (e.g. Jobs' infamous ‘reality distortion field’). Based on these and other findings innovation and creativity are interpreted as different ways of relating to the process and the matter that promote transcendence and judgment.