

Restless Innovation

Mapping the ontogenetic opportunities of creative change

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Abstract

This paper will examine how innovation (the successful impacting of creativity) should respond to intellectual traditions outside of its normal purview, in order to keep the creative engine of its activities vibrant. Drawing mainly from philosophy, but revolving around a single sentence from Arjun Appadurai's 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy' – in which he asks refugees "not to let their imaginations rest too long" – this paper will argue for a theory and practice of innovation to be 'restless'. A 'restless' innovation will have a number of particular characteristics, and this paper will note especially those that relate to its space. Not simply because the refugee noted by Appadurai is determined as such by its relation to space, but also because innovation will be determined by the spaces it creates and by which it is created. A 'restless innovation' will therefore be one that is topologically complex and ontogenic.

For philosopher Michel Serres any strategy must, before dealing with energetics and dynamics, engage in a topology (1982: 103). Serres expert, David Webb, succinctly defines "the topological account" as dealing with "a complex space determined by the material combinations in question" (2006: 130). While topology has been migrating into many different practices from its mathematical home (notably the work by Lury et al. 2012), its role in innovation has not been so widely examined (Valverde et al. (2007) is a notable exception). This paper will lead an examination of the philosophical conditions for conducting a strategic topology for innovation. It will do so pivoting around two moments. The first comes from a reading of one sentence from Appadurai, as it encompasses issues of strategy's relation to policy directives in an era of global capitalism, and the related concerns of a fluid, innovative approach to agency. The second deals with unpacking the concept of cartography in the work of philosopher/psychoanalyst pairing Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari whose work not only produces an innovative philosophy, but also provides a pragmatic philosophy of space that highlights its complex, creative and material characteristics. From these I intend to clear the ground for a development of an innovation that is restless in its strategic development and pragmatic implementation.

This paper both argues for and exemplifies the creative potential involved in the collision between different modes of thought and practice. It would be self-defeating if such a paper looked only to the research milieu of the 'target' discipline for the concepts with which to drive its own innovation. I hope, then, that in maintaining the importance of an ontogenetic innovation, the expression of this importance is also restless.

Keywords: Appadurai, cartography, Deleuze and Guattari, innovation, ontogenesis, space

Key references

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