

Film Reality change and check



Photo François Duhamel/Universal Pictures

Steve Jobs

Directed by Danny Boyle,
screenwriter Aaron Sorkin.
Universal Pictures, 2015.

<http://www.stevejobsmovie.co.uk/>

Danny Boyle's latest film is about Steve Jobs, and based mainly on a warts-and-all biography of the co-founder and driving force of the personal computer company Apple. Written by Walter Isaacson, the biography relied partly on interviews with Jobs held in 2009–11 after his diagnosis with pancreatic cancer in 2003; it was published in 2011, just after Jobs stepped down as head of Apple and shortly before his death.

Isaacson concludes his book with Jobs' meditations on death while they were sitting in the garden behind his house in California: "It's strange to think that you accumulate all this experience, and maybe a little wisdom, and it just goes away. So I really want to believe that something survives, that maybe your consciousness endures." Then Jobs went silent for a very long time. "But on the other hand, perhaps it's like an on-off switch. Click! And you're gone." He paused again, smiled slightly, and said: "Maybe that's why I never liked to put on-off switches on Apple devices."

This compelling detail is missing on screen, despite much design talk about slots, discs, programs, and bytes. In fact, the film does not deal with Jobs' illness or death. But there is certainly no dearth of drama and tension in the rapid-fire script by Aaron Sorkin (*The Social Network*) directed by Boyle at a frenetic pace, which builds up a portrait of Jobs as a kind of rock star, ending with a plangent song by his hero, Bob Dylan, *Shelter From the Storm*. Instead, we see Jobs—persuasively impersonated by a sleekly groomed, laser-eyed Michael Fassbender—at the height of his considerable powers. Structured in three parts, the film tells the backstage story of three product launches by Jobs in front of mass audiences: the Apple Macintosh computer in 1984; the NeXT computer in 1988 (on which Tim Berners-Lee designed the World Wide Web in 1989) after Jobs was forced

out of Apple; and the iMac computer in 1998, which made the company's fortune after Jobs returned to run Apple.

Much is made, rightly, of Jobs' notorious "reality distortion field": a phrase apparently borrowed from the television series *Star Trek* by a frustrated Apple software designer and applied to Jobs. That is, the inability of Jobs to consider technological and time constraints on the development and schedules of the company's products or human constraints on its staff, however personally gifted and dedicated they were to Apple. As a result, the film

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consists largely of jarring confrontations between Jobs and his feisty marketing manager Joanna Hoffman (Kate Winslet), his geeky co-founder Stephen Wozniak (Seth Rogen), his smooth CEO John Sculley (Jeff Daniels), and other team members, including a dispute with a former girlfriend and their growing daughter, whose paternity Jobs long refused to admit.

In one brief on-screen exchange, authenticated by Isaacson, Jobs refers to another driven personality in computing, Alan Turing. Is it true, someone asks, that the Apple logo, with its single bite out of an apple, was based on Turing's bite into a cyanide-laced apple? No, he

honestly admits—then adds that he wishes it were true. How weird, one cannot but reflect, that Jobs should have desired to associate his life's work with so disturbing an event, however famous.

Was Jobs a genius, like Turing, or even perhaps Arthur C Clarke (with whom the film opens in a far-sighted historic interview about computers)? Jobs plainly thought so, given his hyperbolic allusions to scientific and artistic geniuses in Apple's marketing campaigns, such as Albert Einstein and Pablo Picasso, and Apple's so-called "Genius Bar". Isaacson definitely agrees: "History will place him in the pantheon right next to Edison and Ford." And the film seems to take the same line, with perhaps more qualification. But whereas Edison, and to a lesser extent Ford, were undoubtedly inventors, surely Jobs—who did not write computer code—was not. Others, including Wozniak, invented the personal computer. But they did not see how to develop a version instantly appealing to the public. Jobs did, brilliantly, with more than 1% inspiration and years of perspiration. Apple changed the way in which all of us—physicians included—consume, manipulate, and share information. *Steve Jobs* catches his brilliance, and his dark side; but it is, fundamentally, a film about design, marketing, and publicity, not about science, art, and creative genius.

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