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Speculative leadership: Using a radical Hegel to reinterpret practice in local government

Critical review of published works

Michael Bennett

April 2023
Hegel and leadership 49
Ethics, immanence and speculative leadership 51
Leadership in the works 54
  Emotional connection 55
  Making sense of organisational realities 55
  Provoking reflections on practices and assumptions 56
  Managing political relations with council leaders 57
  Decentred leadership and dilemmas 58
  Management consultancy, thinking for others and speculative reason? 60
  A speculative exposition of localism and local government reform 61
Developing the idea of speculative leadership 63
  Limits – and enablers - of speculative leadership 68
7. Conclusion 69
8. Bibliography 72
Abstract and Lay Summary

This thesis begins by reviewing the author’s published work, which sought to describe and account for the nature of leadership in local government, based on long-term engagement with socio-professional networks of UK Chief Executives. Beginning with the contradictions that lie at the heart of the Chief Executive’s role, it distils and explores some of the key themes of the decentred leadership that work identified, including relationality, reflexivity and institutional reform. The thesis goes on to articulate an alternative theoretical framework for leadership, one which is more clearly grounded in philosophy and so forms a more resilient basis for practice. In doing so, it draws on a radical Hegelian tradition to provide an exposition of leadership in which speculative reason and the struggle for recognition become resources with which leaders might form imperfect, temporary yet effective strategies in confronting the dilemmas they face.
Acknowledgements

I thank Kevin Orr who co-authored a number of the works on which this thesis is based and without whose contribution they would not have been possible.

It was in conversation with Colin Mair that the idea of focusing the ontological lens of continental philosophy onto the experience of public sector leadership was given its initial impetus. I turned up as an intern in the Scottish Local Authorities Management Centre (SLAMC), an ignorant graduate of political philosophy in 1996, but Colin, who was the Director of SLAMC at the time, embraced the opportunity to talk about what Hegel, Nietzsche and Foucault might mean for the future of professions, organisations and their leadership. Of course, the theoretical ‘meta-bollocks’ never made the papers and the slide shows for which SLAMC was renowned. However, Colin’s approach to public service reform and improvement was deeply resistant to one-dimensional, ‘one best way’ thinking. He was a powerful champion of ‘joined up’ and strategic approaches to multi-faceted and complex challenges, situated in the context of people and places; in the actuality of the present, not in some other world that exists only in our wishful thinking. I expect there is much in this thesis that Colin would disagree with, I only wish we could still have the argument.

The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) was also a terrifically rich learning environment which brought me into contact with leading chief executives, first in Scotland and then across the UK. I learned a huge amount from the spontaneous interactions with hundreds of SOLACE members, of which there are too many to mention here. A special thank you to Alan Campbell, George Thorley, Clive Grace, Tim Byles, Barry Quirk and Derek Myers who were office holders with whom I worked particularly closely.

My role made me a useful point of contact for leading local government, politics and public administration academics. I am sure I didn’t make the most of all those encounters, but I am indebted to John Stewart, George Jones, Steve Martin, Vivien Lowndes and many others with whom I had enlightening discussions.

The root of this thesis lies long, long ago in a class taught by Kimberly Hutchings at the University of Edinburgh in 1995, in which I first encountered Hegel, his Phenomenology of Spirit and its relevance for political theory and practice. It is with gratitude that I acknowledge Kim’s deep influence on my intellectual life ever since. However, it is also with mixed feelings that I recognise it has taken me more than half my life to give a first response to some of the questions she posed. The struggle continues ...
From the bottom of my heart, I thank Richard Freeman for being the perfect, adaptive supervisor, who welcomed me into the university community and who knew how to form the right relationship, even in the dreaded Covid era. Richard is the ideal combination of principle and pragmatism. His principles discourage you from disappointing him and you understand when you have. He is also able to give tough, pragmatic advice when it is needed. PhDs, he made sure I realised, are for finishing. They are not timeless quests for some revolutionary paradigm shift. The idea of originality, he’ll tell you while locking your eyes with his, is almost always a lack of adequate secondary reading.

I am also grateful to my examiners for an inspiring opportunity to discuss the thesis and for their perceptive and constructive comments that have much improved the final product. The final manuscript was reviewed and read by my two great friends Jonathan Underwood and Eleanor Malone. They suggested many corrections and refinements. I am immensely fortunate to have had their aid. Despite all this support, any errors of fact, or failures of interpretation, are of course mine alone.

My greatest thanks are to my wonderful Mum and Dad who never gave up, despite my best efforts to break them down, and who have been a constant and steadfast source of advice and support through thick and thin. Diolch yn fawr.

Finally, I dedicate this to Sandy and Martin, with all my love.
1. Introduction

Public leadership is wrought with dilemmas and impossible choices between incommensurate ends. Leaders deploy a range of imperfect and temporary strategies for governing where goals are not compatible, where uncertainty reigns, agency is limited, capacity is strained and conflict inevitable.

Through a reading of Hegel, this thesis will argue speculative leadership provides an original conception of thinking about leadership where, despite the significant constraints, possibilities and opportunities can be perceived, recognised and enacted in the grounded actuality of organisational life.

It is not an account of what leaders ought to do, but it is an exploration of how leaders think, negotiate and interact in the face of binary oppositions and limited knowledge, to create the space for new opportunities for action. It is therefore an account of how leaders can (and sometimes do) think about possible syntheses in the face of apparently incompatible ends. Leadership emerges as a social practice of struggle, where failure is inevitable yet meaningful action towards improvement is possible.

I aim to make a two-part contribution, intertwining a theoretical argument about the idea of public leadership with a practitioner’s tales from the field. The thesis combines these contributions to offer philosophical and practical insight through data, stories and analysis.

By reviewing the attempt in the author’s previous works to explain the nature of local government leadership, the thesis seeks to create a developed and resilient phenomenological framework which is a more theoretically explanatory. In doing so the aim is to offer a more valuable basis for leaders to challenge and to improve their practice.

The contribution of this thesis

The works reviewed in this thesis are based on thousands of interactions with public service leaders. This includes formal interviews with chief executives and executive directors as well as years of professional and informal engagement with this group. The works explore issues of:

1. Insider/outsider research, co-production and reflexivity
2. Local government policy and institutional reform
3. The idea of practice as a researcher, consultant and leader
4. Storytelling, leadership, relationality and “decentred” analysis
While concepts of relationality and reflexivity are trending in the interpretative approach to leadership theory, public administration and social policy, their ontological and epistemological assumptions remain under-theorised. This thesis will try to argue that uncertainty on these philosophical principles leads to inconsistency, wavering argumentation and unclear exposition. Furthermore, the lack of a theoretical basis fails to provide leaders with ways of thinking about decisions in the face of inevitable dilemmas.

It is the contention of this thesis that:

1. Leaders never attain perfect (complete and collective) knowledge of what any given situation involves. This creates an epistemological and ontological contradiction at the heart of leadership.
2. Leadership practice is - or can be - a speculative process in which leaders use a combination of reason, intuition and experience to seek to understand, to recognise the situation they are in, and to address conflict and contradiction.

In exploring these themes, this thesis brings a radical reading of Hegel’s phenomenology to bear on the relationship between reason and reality and the implications for leadership. Building on a range of philosophical and sociological sources, and influenced significantly by the work of Gillian Rose, I offer a reading of Hegel’s philosophy from the speculative tradition as a never accomplished process of grappling with necessary and ongoing misrecognitions (Rose 2009, 2017, 2014; Schick, 2022; Davis, 2018).

One aim of this thesis is to review, critique and to place the original works in a wider context. Another aim of the review is to re-read and re-interpret the original data in ways that challenge, complement and deepen the original analysis.

The contribution to policy is to suggest a new framework for interpreting public leadership and the prospects for local government reform through a critical review of the empirical research and published work.

A final contribution is to demonstrate how notions of philosophy are all at play in the practice (both scholarly and professional) of policy and public administration. The impact is to problematise common accounts of leadership practice, (alongside those of research, of localism and of consultancy) and to offer an argument for speculative thinking in and about these engagements which present a potential field for further exploration.
2. Overview of the works

(i) Context of the empirical work

The empirical work is based on more than 25 years of engagement and embeddedness in the socio-professional networks of public service leaders, especially local government, in Scotland and the rest of the UK. It also encompasses a study of chief executives in the USA and Canada with the support of the professional associations in those countries, International City Managers Association (ICMA) and the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA). This embeddedness was a result of the author holding senior policy and executive positions in SOLACE, the UK’s professional society for senior officers in local government. The role involved close relations and daily interactions with chief executives and senior officers of councils covering the discussion of government policy, leadership development and the governance of the Society. These intimate interactions allowed close observation of leadership practice in a wide variety of contexts, as well as opportunities to explore and understand how individual leaders articulated their thinking, in private and in public, how they talked about their own failures and limitations, how they commented on the challenges and practice of others and what they thought was important in recruiting and selecting future generations. Together with the formal interviews which underpinned the studies undertaken for the published portfolio of works on which this thesis builds (hereafter ‘the works’), this informal observation of leaders in different circumstances over a significant period forms the empirical basis (‘the data’) of the critical approach taken in this thesis.

(ii) The role of the chief executive

The role of the chief executive is the most senior officer position in UK local government. The chief executive is tasked with ensuring the professional organisation is equipped to deliver political ambitions, within budget and within the law. The role was created to replace the post of town clerk following the Paterson Report in Scotland (1973) (adapting recommendations of the earlier Baines Report in England (1972) for the Scottish context), which recommended that local authorities needed greater corporate management capacity to adapt to the challenges of the modern world. The job was also shaped by contemporary thinking about organisational behaviour, which promoted the importance of strategic management, intra-organisational coordination and leadership over the legally neat administration of distinct professional operations. Over time, the managerial and leadership components of the position developed further to become responsible for “leading change programmes in complex organisations; setting tone, influencing culture and developing staff; working with elected members and external partners, and ensuring priorities are delivered” (NPA p.201). The role therefore is typically understood as combining and balancing leadership, strategy and policy, community engagement and communication and political management (Bennett
Councillors in the UK are large and “complex organisations, not least in relation to the range of front-line services for which they have responsibility, taking difficult decisions in the face of competing demands from different stakeholders, meeting statutory obligations in the midst of financial constraint and addressing wicked social or economic issues” (NPA p.201). Larger councils such as the City of Edinburgh Council spend over £1 billion per annum and the chief executive is ultimately responsible for balancing the need to deliver the council’s political ambitions within resources available, defined as a legal budget. Over the last decade these resources have been declining. At the same time the Council budget must meet statutory obligations which were established decades ago in quite different socio-demographic and fiscal circumstances. The position is not simply a technical role and the chief executive is fundamental in the British system in supporting and advising the democratic mandate of councils (Self 1972; Mouritzen & Svara 2002; Svara 2006; Rhodes 1981, 2007; Nalbandian 2005). Chief executives move between professional and technical officers, private and public sector partners and elected politicians. A key element of their role is interpreting political ambitions into policy goals and professional tasks that can be allocated resources and delivered through organisation. Additionally, chief executives have responsibility for setting the culture, demonstrating how professional officers and politicians should act, ensuring ethics and good governance by ‘speaking truth to power’ (SOLACE 2005; Bennett et al 2014; Grace, Martin & Bennett 2014).

Importantly, however, despite all this, the position of chief executive has no formal basis. The designation of chief executive is simply a title given by an employer to an employee and is used to complement the weak statutory role of Head of Paid Service as defined under section 4(1)(a) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The Head of Paid Service is a rather passive role which is required to make proposals on the following matters to council:

(a) the manner in which the discharge by the authority of their different functions is co-ordinated;

(b) the number and grades of staff required by the authority for the discharge of their functions;

(c) the organisation of the authority’s staff; and

(d) the appointment and proper management of the authority’s staff.

Although most contemporary local authorities empower their chief executive (or managing director or whatever nomenclature they choose) with a wider range of duties and responsibilities than this limited list, any additional responsibilities remain a matter of
employment law and the chief executive’s employment remains a matter solely for the council itself. In other words, the chief executive is the Head of Paid Service, but while the role of the chief executive is superficially strong, and outward facing, constitutionally it is weak. The chief executive’s leadership holds only so long as it pleases the ruling political group (or a voting majority) at any given time and has no further basis.

This context is significant for understanding the role of contemporary chief executives. While they have reach and leverage across the full range of policy issues in any local place, often outwith the responsibilities of the local authority itself, such as health, transport and policing or the implementation of central government policies, they have extremely limited constitutional independence. This fragility, and a chief executive’s capacity to manage that contradiction, is highly constitutive of how they see their role.

Checks and balances on unelected professionals are of course the bedrock of democratic authority. Leadership must have its limits because all leaders are themselves imperfect and limited. In the thesis, this tension between formal power and the implied responsibilities of the role runs throughout the data that will be reviewed and re-interpreted. It is this that makes local authority chief executives a compelling subject for exploring the practice of leadership.

(iii) The works

There were many phases in the empirical work. In addition to my deep and longstanding engagement from 1997 to 2022, the authors jointly interviewed 98 local council chief executives between 2008 and 2017. The research was concerned with how chief executives use stories in their leadership practice, as a form of learning or in peer-to-peer communication. Relatedly, between 2017 and 18, 18 additional interviews were conducted for a project on how chief executives understand and act in the face of policy dilemmas.

The works submitted for this thesis complement a wider portfolio of publishing for academic, policy and practitioner audiences, some of which are referred to throughout the thesis. To distinguish the works which form a part of the thesis from others in the wider portfolio, they have been assigned a short code reference as follows:

Orr and Bennett 2009 [QROM], 2010 [PMM], 2012a [PAR1], 2012b [ML], 2017 [PAR2], 2018 [NPA], Bennett and Orr 2013 [NCLG] and Bennett 2016 [K&P], 2020 [LGR].

Several works (QROM, PAR1, PAR2, PMM, ML, NCLG & NPA) are co-authored with Kevin Orr of the University of Hull and then the University of St Andrews. The collaboration was a shared endeavour in which research and writing were done, as we said in the works, jointly.

The focus on reflexivity and co-production in the works led us to record in some detail our mutual contributions (e.g. QROM p.86; PAR1 p.488; ML pp.428-432 & PAR2 p518). The texts
show both authors’ contribution to the works were substantial, influential and necessary to their production.

The works reviewed in this thesis are based on thousands of interactions with public service leaders. This includes formal interviews with chief executives and senior managers as well as years of informal, but professional, engagement with this group.

The principal focus of the published works is fourfold:

1. Insider/outsider research, co-production and reflexivity: The works explore the research production process between an academic and a practitioner, surfacing the role that the researchers play in the definition and production of knowledge itself. Methodologically these pieces highlight the dynamics of co-producing research and the complexity of the choices and dilemmas involved. The works attempt to show how the research and knowledge production is reflexive, turning a critical lens on the researchers as participants in both a collaborative study and interacting traditions of scholarship and practice.

2. Storytelling, leadership, relationality and “de-centred” analysis: The way in which the leadership repertoire of those whom I worked with and observed had taken what we called a relational turn. In other words, how leaders and followers co-create meaning through interconnected relationships in highly interactive contexts. One of the ways in which these shared meanings are created in organisations was through narratives or stories that make sense of complexity and change.

3. Local government policy and institutional reform: the waves of reform, the rise and fall of localism, the connected decline of local government and the way in which local authorities and central government have failed to forge partnerships or institutions that reflect and negotiate their interdependence over the last two decades, including the impact on local government’s role in public health.

4. The idea of practice as a researcher, consultant and leader including consultancy practice as a form of aporetic reasoning.

Running through the works - both the methodological pieces and those concerning leadership practice - are two major themes of relationality and reflexivity. These are rich concepts that illustrate important ways in which research about leadership and leadership practice itself is a historical construct rather than descended from heaven.

(iv) Analytical approach in the works

Collectively, the many stories collected in the works are analysed by what we called “standard, systematic, inductive, and abductive processes in which we moved between data and theory, focusing on instances of leadership and storytelling or narrative work” (PAR2 p.518).
We use an “open coding system in which we iteratively identified a raft of provisionally significant themes (for example, “motivation,” “managing complexity,” “working across boundaries”), which we then collapsed or combined into broader categories (Strauss and Corbin 1990). We moved from data-generated first-order codes to second-order themes, in keeping with the tradition and norms of interpretive research (Bevir and Rhodes 2015; Boyatzis 1998) and involving creative acts of interpretation. We sense-checked our interpretations with chief executives during interviews and through email dialogues” (PAR2 p.518). Our coding schema is presented in figure 1 below (PAR2 p.519).
The diagram shows the connection between the first and second order codes we attributed to the data and how we organised the findings in these four key categories.
• Inviting an emotional connection with public service
• Making sense of organisational realities
• Provoking reflections on practices and assumptions
• Managing political relations with council leaders

This thesis provides a stronger reading of those data, using a more focused theoretical lens, and this creates different interpretations with alternative possibilities that with greater explanatory power.

In revisiting the works for the thesis, I use three principal data sources: 1) The works themselves, re-read and re-interpreted through the theoretical lens of speculative reason; 2) the original data on which the works are based, similarly re-interrogated and 3) unpublished material such as emails, papers and my personal diary.

In addition, I revisit some of the literature on which the original works lean as well as drawing significantly on new literature to support and explain the new interpretation offered in this thesis. To complement my analysis in the final chapters on speculative leadership, I also draw on my more recent professional practice and research data which took place after the publication of the works and the research collaboration had concluded.

While it would have been possible to re-read the original coding more speculatively, for the purposes of comparison, the thesis retains the original second order codes to enable a comparative reading of the data later in the thesis.

By problematising the central concepts of the works - reflexivity and relationality – and by providing a speculative exposition of leadership that this thesis wants to suggest there is a more satisfying epistemological and ontological explanation for the empirical observations documented in the works.

The main impact of this has been to offer an alternative and stronger re-reading of the original data than presented in the works.

(v) Production of the works

A number of the works on which the thesis is based are artefacts of co-production, having been accomplished through a process of interaction, of to-ing and fro-ing between two workers, the authors (Bennett and Orr). This production was a result of shared but negotiated endeavour, a labour process and an attempt at capital creation. It was a programme that had multiple aims and objectives, mostly shared. Most obvious among these was a shared intellectual quest to study and then inform leadership practice. It was also a professional opportunity to produce new intellectual insight and the subsequent possibilities that might
create. Lastly, it began as a social project to work together in ways that maximised our shared interests and built on the enjoyment of a strong friendship.

**Research purposes**

As within any research team, there were different purposes too. Interwoven through the shared interest in public service leadership, the researchers had diverse motivations linked to institutional frameworks for performance and the need to create a sustainable career path in competitive and precarious environments.

Drawing on what was recorded in the works concerning motivations, on the one hand there was an academic who wanted to maximise his access to data from an elite, difficult to access group of senior managers of interest (QROM p.92-94, ML p. 433, PAR1 p.492 & PAR2 p.518) to create published assets. On the other hand, there was a practitioner (the current author) who had wanted to diversify his work interests, remain connected to academia (PAR1 p.492, ML pp.433-4), and also promote critical understanding of his professional group - while remaining on guard against any professional risks the research may present (QROM p.98).

The research itself concerned speaking to local authority chief executives about how they use stories in their leadership and how storytelling features as a form of learning in peer-to-peer communication.

**Research in the world**

The development of the research programme was organic. It started from the germ of an idea and eventually sprouted branches of activity and thought that either grew or dropped off depending on the support and nourishment available. There was no compulsion from either employer, nor from the subjects of this thesis: on the contrary, there was a job of persuasion to be done to gain consent from the subject group of chief executives and senior managers for whom I worked. By implication, there were no resources. All the work was done in addition to the job description. A permissive authorisation from my own employer gave me considerable flexibility to use my time, contacts, and networks on the understanding that my primary role was not compromised. The authorisation was also based on the understanding that there would be no negative consequences for the organisation I worked for (SOLACE) or its politically sensitive members (see QROM p.96, ML pp.433-4 & PAR1 p.494 for published account).

My co-researcher, the business school academic, likewise had significant autonomy but there was a perceived imperative that our collaboration would produce results, both immediately in terms of publications, but also over the longer term with autonomous access to the network bringing commercial opportunities for the school, such as the development and improvement of executive education. While “lip service is often paid within universities to the importance of practitioner relevance”, we wrote, “institutional rewards are attached to other
kinds of endeavours such as publication in key journals, income generation and so on” (QROM p. 92).

An attempt was made to secure resources from a well-known fund, but our proposal was refused on the basis that, according to the reviewer, local authority chief executives would have no interest in storytelling. This dead end was more than a demoralising disappointment and raised existential questions for the research. Did the refusal foreshadow the future reception of our labours? Was there a widespread perception in the traditional public administration community that theoretical insights into organising and organisation could not be based on empirical fieldwork of the kind we were pursuing? This decision seemed to encourage us to think about idea of co-production in a binary way? Did it raise the question of whether a mixed team of co-producers like us would be bound to be seen as amateurish and not “proper research” (see vignette 1, PAR1 p. 492)?

We asked ourselves these and many other questions as to whether and how we could continue. In the end we decided we would carry on but that we would have to adapt our programme and our methods to fit our available time and resources.

At some point, after the first phase of the empirical research, we began to question our methods and how they would compare to an ideal research process. The research access we had was because of my role as a member, but also as an official gatekeeper, of the group, “regulating and controlling access to the network and to individuals” (QROM p. 92). We recognised that: “The characteristics of the researchers matter. It is by virtue of who they are that they are both interested and able to gain access to a group. Success relies on being credible and being able to gain access, generate trust and sustain engagement” (ibid). Nevertheless, we said, while this position enabled “excellent access to chief executives” it also “raised some particular issues about the politics of the fieldwork, and what this means about our position as actors and producers of the research outcomes” (ibid).

I wrote a hurried note to Orr in January 2008:

“The subjects were all chosen on the basis that I knew them and thought they would either be interesting or at least would be amenable to being approached. I did not know them all well but I had some relationship with them all and knew some very well.

This obviously posed certain issues for us in the interviews and will do again in the analysis. We gained access due to a relationship I had developed and damaging that relationship is not in my interests. On the other hand I repeatedly commented on the fact that I feared I would compromise the research and urged you to challenge that. My position could be seen as both an enabler and a constraint, but it could be argued that the idea of access without constraint is a methodological myth. All researchers come from somewhere and it could be argued that the CEXs [chief executives] were
more candid, or more authentic in their responses, because they were in trusted company.\textsuperscript{1}

Reflection on this core methodological issue of \textit{neutrality} and of the relation, or again the interaction, between the researcher and the field (the subject/object, knower/known) led us to consider several different options. The works highlight and document some of the post hoc reasoning as captured in our interactions. We record that: “We have fretted somewhat about the methodological appropriateness of picking our interviewees on this basis, anticipating difficult questions from other researchers, conference delegates, journal referees and the interviewees themselves” (QROM p.93).

This passage identifies the subjects of our worry. We knew intellectually that we needed to reflect further but we were clearly preoccupied by how others in authority – and with influence over our academic advancement – would perceive any weakness. We went on to say that “we could extract both reassurance and further reasons to worry from the literature (ibid).” For example, van Maanen (1982, p. 111) rejects the idea that “informant selection should be, even in the ideal, random or representative. Members of the studied organization are hardly equivalent in the knowledge they possess” (QROM p93).

We balanced this by noting Yanow’s (2006) counterpoint that reliance on a relational network may exclude voices and experiences of those not already part of the conversation (QROM p.93).

These dilemmas suggest different interpretations and critical angles. The approaches taken by the works is to focus on two principal analytical paths. Firstly, to consider the issue of reflexivity in the co-production of research and secondly to explore the politics of co-production.

\textsuperscript{1} Paper from Bennett to Orr on 20 January 2008 titled “QRM thoughts 200108.”
3. Reflexivity and politics

3 (i) Reflexivity

Following developments in modern philosophy and social theory, critical approaches to qualitative research have problematised the idea that social science can be objectively grounded on objective truth claims, given the researcher’s necessary involvement in the processes of data generation and analysis (Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000; Linsted 1993). Reflexivity is widely discussed as one response to this critique (see Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000; Cunliffe, 2003; Hardy and Clegg, 1997; Hibbert et al., 2010). In ethnographic organisational research, reflexivity has become a central theme in a methodology characterised traditionally by the importance of the researcher’s participant-observer status (Van Maanen, 1982, 1988; Agar 1996).

In pursuing the idea of reflexivity in organisational research the works are heavily influenced by the writing of Ann Cunliffe, a senior colleague of my co-author.

Social construction of what, again?

It is illuminating to consider the philosophical basis underlying the account of reflexivity in the work of Cunliffe, a significant figure in contemporary organisational theory.

Cunliffe’s work touches on headline themes from 20\textsuperscript{th} century European philosophy to support the proposition that: “Together, the existential focus on individual responsibility and the hermeneutic emphasis of self always in relation to other can offer a way of reframing leadership” (Cunliffe, 2009 p.90). In reflecting on whether this shows that ‘phenomenology’ provides a critical perspective Cunliffe concludes that: “It is this different way of thinking about social and organizational life as emergent, socially constructed, and inherently ideological and political, that encourages us to challenge taken-for-granted organizational realities, places upon us a responsibility for relationships with others, and forms the genesis for alternative realities” (ibid, 93).

For Cunliffe the contribution of reflexivity as an idea “focuses on philosophical issues about the nature of reality and knowledge, but reflexivity also raises fundamental questions about our ability as researchers to capture the complex, interactional and emergent nature of our social experience (Cunliffe, 2003 p. 984).” Cunliffe’s notion of “radical reflexivity” (ibid) “turns the reflexive act upon ourselves to deconstruct our own constructions of realities, identities and knowledge, and highlight the intersubjective and indexical nature of meaning” (ibid, 989).

Following Cunliffe’s lead, the works’ treatment of reflexivity claims that:
“Reflexivity undermines the researcher’s claims to a-historical objectivity (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). There is no way to stand outside of politics or to stand outside of research – ‘we have experiences only within a prior discourse’ (Bevir and Rhodes, 2003 p. 23). Forms of knowledge are linked intimately and constitutively to interests in society and to forms of power (Hardy and Clegg, 1997). Reflexivity can surface issues about the politics of knowledge production and fieldwork which have particular resonances for joint academic-practitioner endeavours” (QROM p.86).

The works hold close to Cunliffe’s claims that “Radical reflexivity’s contribution is to recognize the social and political aspects of methodological choices and to problematise claims to be representing empirical structures through their work. […] These are brought to the fore through [reflexivity’s] impulse to be wild, to unsettle. The act of making these paradoxes visible is itself a practical achievement” (QROM p.87).

Again, the works articulate the role of reflexivity as a force for surfacing and unsettling but gloss over some important implications. What are these meta-level paradoxes and what are their implications? What is the import of this kind of wildness? Is it a necessary feature of the world? Is it an observation about the world that lies beyond our cognition? Is it a necessary or sufficient condition for creating a critical perspective? For sure reflexivity raises questions about emergence, but what are the implications for practice? These questions appear to be begged but unanswered in the works.

This thesis seeks to address them in chapters 5 and 6. It argues that the works, following Cunliffe, offer an overly strong interpretation of reflexivity in claiming that it – rather than centuries of post-enlightenment modern philosophy – has undermined the researcher’s claims to ahistorical objectivity. Reflexivity is a product, not the cause.

The works’ assumption of social construction in lieu of any ontological account of what it means to be or to be constructed weakens the argument overall. Can we say anything about what it is about the world that leads to the social construction of modern life? Or do we just have to observe it as a phenomenon without seeking any further understanding? Why does being a child of our time deny our ability to grasp our historical reality? In the end, the under-
theorising of the concept of social construction in the works leaves it unable to do the required conceptual lifting.

Furthermore, because the works do not clearly address the philosophical issues they raise, their account of reflexivity is at times unclear. In focusing on the reflexivity literature, rather than the post-enlightenment philosophy literature, perhaps the works fail to engage sufficiently with the ideas from which reflexivity is derived.

A strong version of reflexivity, which is often suggested in the works, would seem to entail an undermining of the researcher’s access to knowledge - even about themselves. This radical account of reflexivity is akin to the Cartesian/Kantian tradition in which the self is alienated from knowledge about the world (explored in chapter 5). At other times the works appear to hold a version of reflexivity which hints at the possibility of knowledge but of a kind which is limited and contextual. The lack of a clear theoretical account leads to a wavering between these and other positions.

It is the latter interpretation that the thesis wants to privilege and reinforce by seeking to ground it philosophically in Hegel’s ontological and epistemological framework.

A second area of engagement with and critique of the works is that while they connect to and raise important ontological and epistemological questions, they are presented as rhetorical or presentational rather than points of explanation and understanding. This in turn raises questions about the works’ own stance. As argued above, while the works suggest there is nowhere to stand outside of politics or history, do they conclude that it does not in fact matter where we stand? Is the implication that all standpoints can be critiqued or justified equally? The works problematise but, because they do not clearly address the philosophical questions they raise, cannot contribute to resolving the resulting dilemma. Is this because there is nothing we can do to resolve them? Does the author, the researcher, the leader always operate *ex nihilo*?

Under retrospective scrutiny some of the theoretical questions surfaced in the works appear to be floated in ways which remain weightless and unable to hold down the required theoretical ballast the argument needs. By conflating different philosophical traditions and running together references that draw on different philosophical standpoints, the works’ overall position becomes unclear.

The weakness is not just that we concede our critical stance, but as this thesis will go on to argue in the next chapter, the weightless reading of epistemology and ontology devalues the access we have to knowledge through experience and intuition and undermines the value of struggle that lies at the heart of my account of speculative leadership.

This thesis will argue that is precisely because we are grounded in the present and that we must resist idealist conceits and normative fantasies that the researcher, the leader, as a self-
consciousness being, must struggle to understand the world around them and strive to overcome the inevitable failures they experience.

3 (ii) Politics of co-produced research

Another methodological theme explored in the works is the politics of co-produced research. The politics of co-production frames research not just as a social act but at times as a performative confection that problematises the research process itself. By focusing on the political and organisational necessities that underpin the accomplishment of research and published research assets, the works seek to illustrate how knowledge is produced and performed in human and organisational terms. By framing collective action and intersubjectivity performatively, the works attempt to show reflexivity in action, but also call into question the nature of research itself.

Our thinking arose out of a conference paper in which we outlined our early notion of the politics at the heart of our research (Orr & Bennett 2008).

Throughout the programme of research, I facilitated as the ‘insider’ and my co-author assumed the role of ‘outsider’. The attitude of the chief executives (sometimes referred to as practitioners in the works) to my co-author was often one of curiosity. One chief executive asked in amazed tones after they had given us an initial stream of consciousness, “Is this the sort of thing you are after?” Another expressed amazement that academics could write “tomes” out of the material we were collecting. Yet another, a law PhD, being more academically and intellectually sceptical, labelled the idea of researching storytelling as “popsociology” (ML, p.433).

Tribal insiders and outsiders

In the works (QROM pp. 92-99; ML pp.433-436) we describe in detail the choreography we used in the researchers’ dance we imagined would persuade our interviewees to talk about the mercurial subject of storytelling in leadership.

Deploying Agar’s notion of the stranger handler (Agar 1996) we framed a narrative of insider/outsider where the outsider academic was being given privileged access to an inner sanctum of data by the knowing insider’s performance of secret rituals:

“At such times the outsider had gained access, been introduced, experienced legitimation and protection and now was being quietly escorted from the premises by the stranger handler” (QROM p.99).

And while it was never treated as data in the works in the same way, we were conscious that our status was reversed entirely when the socio-professional context changed. Venturing into
academia-land as a non-accredited practitioner to attend a conference in Albuquerque was a highly formative yet challenging experience.

I noted in my diary:

“Distrust of practitioners - experienced [the event] far more as an ‘outsider’ than I had anticipated and I was struck how my job description and institutional affiliation mattered. Practitioners [were] routinely patronised and characterised as “not having to do the critical report,” “people who left school early and went on to earn elephant salaries.”

I was also struck by the apparent disjuncture of ethnographers laying bare the power structures in groups they studied and yet their blindness to power display, apparent to me as an observer, in their own networks.

My diary records:

“Professionals at conferences (ethnographers at work) – trading stories, networking, being there, being seen to be there. Looking for the next thing, the next move” (ibid).

This sense of professional demarcation impacted on our data, on our identities, on the purpose of our project and was a heavy influence leading us to think of co-production as “an inherently political process involving negotiations between the members of two tribes” (PMM p.199).

In ML, we used and partially transcribed discussions that we had held at the British Library in which we had reflected on these tribal transgressions.

“In the British Library Tapes we reflect on examples from across the last three years ...

Mike: You remember we were interviewing all those chief executives ... I remember you being quite offended by how these people talked about academics as having their head in the clouds. And then I remember going to the [ethnography] conference in the States and getting vaguely offended by the way in which I was patronized for being a practice monkey, by professors (see ML p.435 for fuller dialogue).

But while we described the phenomena – the disharmony, the antagonisms as part of the landscape – in retrospect the works offered little by way of explanatory framework or

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4 John van Maanen and Michael Agar are spared any implied criticism. They were the two most celebrated researchers present, and while were power-playing paradoxes. While they certainly participated in powerperformative display with their peers, with us, junior participants, they were incredibly generous and supportive. “Fuck research!,” van Maanen heckled during others’ talks. as a form of been there, done that solidarity. Agar meanwhile enjoyed prickling tenure teasing tenured academics by recounting how he had given up on universities as sites of learning and why he had become an independent ethnographer (an even more literal professional stranger than before, perhaps).

5 Personal diary
theoretical account as to why struggle and conflict were inherent parts of the world of co-
production.

We wrote about “the tricky issues that arise in coproducing research involving cooperative
interactions between members of two communities that have distinct interests, expectations,
and priorities” (PAR1 p.487).

But we felt that on balance:

“Reflection on the politics of co-production enables us to become more attuned to the
benefits and constraints, reflexive dynamics and hidden motives of such work. The rise in
significance of academic–practitioner collaborations makes this task an important one and
we hope the ideas included here will be of interest to public managers, policy-makers,
academics, researchers and those involved in the commissioning of research” (PMM p.199).

We also described some of the issues within the research team:

“We have been engaged in a process of becoming learners and co-researchers, an interactive
process which entails tussles with a multiplicity of identities and, indivisible from these
processes of identity work, political struggles with institutional and professional pressures.”
(ML p.428)

By way of explanation, the works suggest:

“A different way of thinking about academic-practitioner research interactions and
emphasize that, rather than forming a communion which takes place in a space beyond
politics, they remain as situated, relational and ongoing interactions enlivened by collisions
and dilemmas” (ML p.429).

There is much to agree with in the treatment of the politics of co-production in the works.
There is less emphasis on social construction than in the treatment of reflexivity and more on
the negotiation of politics. The works describe a research team struggling and negotiating
their way through some conflicting interests and difficulties and offer a perceptive look at,
and attentive listen to, internal as well as external and institutional perceptions and politics.

While we did have different organisational perspectives, different profiles and different
access to knowledge within our participant network, perhaps the insider/outsider framing
was too binary. Although Orr and I had different work imperatives, we also shared many
significant interests and values. The insider/outsider framing was stimulating and thought-
provoking but perhaps a speculative reading of the co-production material would have been
more critical and would have problematised the binary assumption of the ‘two tribes’
discourse. Perhaps this would have allowed us to explore how our shared intellectual
interests and our drive to ‘do co-production’ allowed us to operate – at least for a time - in
the ‘broken middle’ in which we were experiencing and questioning the ways these two tribes
kept reinforcing fixed and separate identities – to manage and mediate the aporias arising out of the seeming inside/outside status and clash of tribal identities. This is a line of research that it is unfortunately impossible now to pursue with Agar, but the speculative re-reading of insider/outsider binaries may be a rich and rewarding seam to mine in future research.
4. Relationality and leadership

4 (i) The idea of relationality

The idea of relationality played a key theoretical role in the works as a means of interpreting leadership practice among the chief executives we studied.

The works review the literature and highlights “the importance of the collective dimensions of leadership, reflecting contemporary shifts in governance (Ospina and Foldy 2015, quoted in PAR2 p.517)” and communications. We reflected on how “leadership is seen as located in practices and created in communications” and how this related to our work in storytelling.

Uhl-Bien, a key influence in the literature reviewed in the works, defines relational leadership as “a social influence process through which emergent coordination... and change (e.g., new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviors, and ideologies) are constructed and produced” (Uhl-Bien, 2006: 665, quoted in PAR2 p.517).

Relationality in leadership studies

Relational leadership is the view of leadership and organisation as human and social constructions that emerge from “the rich connections and interdependencies of organizations and their people” (Uhl-Bien, 2006 p.655). Uhl-Bien contrasts this to what she calls a more “traditional orientation, which considers relationships from the standpoint of individuals as independent, discrete entities (i.e., individual agency)” (ibid). A “relational” approach to understanding leadership practice prioritises context and not individual people, “and views persons, leadership and other relational realities as made in processes” (ibid).

The relational approach, we wrote, therefore “presents a ‘postheroic’ view of leadership (Crevani, Lindgren, and Packendorff 2010; Fletcher 2004; Spillane 2006, quoted in PAR2 p.517)” that rejects the over-theorised agency of strong individuals. In this way, we said, “leadership is accomplished collectively, within communities of practitioners, through local everyday interactions, and mediated by stories and narratives (Denis, Langley, and Sergi 2012, quoted in PAR2, p.517).” This was the starting point of the analysis of our fieldwork.

The works (PAR2) contained and analysed stories that chief executives had told us, either as part of a research interview or in an informal conversation with me during other interactions outside a research interview.

Relational stories

The stories we curated as part of the works were organised around the four principal ways in which we identified chief executives engaging in storytelling within and outside their
organisations. As well as analysing chief executive stories, our fieldwork also examined their own explanations of their practices. The works therefore tried to show not just how chief executives use stories and try to influence narratives but also the rationale offered for how they understood their own practice.

In one vignette (Dinghy) we recounted a story that I heard a chief executive use numerous times, in different contexts, as a way of capturing the power and responsibility of public service and leadership (and perhaps also as a way of asserting their own leadership credentials). The story concerns a chief executive who is out in a dinghy in the flooded streets of their city, an event which is endangering life and requiring the evacuation of a number of properties.

The chief executive recalls being “out on a dinghy with three other council workers, with life jackets and council badges. A woman was hanging out of her window in distress, with her crying baby. We pulled up below, and Andy, who was at the front of the boat, stood up and stretched up his arms and said, ‘It’s OK, hand us your baby down.’ And she did. The mother trusted us because we were from the council. That’s the level of trust people give the council - that someone will hand over their baby to us. Don’t underestimate the power and legitimacy of local government” (PAR2 p. 520).

The works identified relationality in this story’s account of “teamwork, relationships of trust, and the council’s standing in the eyes of the public - even its logo is a signifier of trustworthiness. Finally, it features a chief executive showing himself to be proud of working with others, on the front line, at a time of crisis” (ibid).

Another story (Naked) told directly to the author illustrates what the works called the “perpetual relationality” (PAR2 p.521) of the role of the leader. The chief executive of a Scottish local authority receives a call from a very senior government figure and MP while the chief executive is stark naked and dripping wet surrounded by other cyclists “from all walks of life” (ibid) after an early Sunday morning bike ride with his club. The subject’s reflection is: “You’ve got to be ready for that kind of thing at any moment. This is the kind of organization we are” (ibid).

The works analyse the relationality of the story as suggesting how “the chief executive is never out of contact and is in constant relation with key members of his professional network” (ibid). Through the telling of the tale the chief is encouraging others, more junior colleagues, to understand the kind and quality of exposure the top job involves.

“A chief executive is always ‘switched on’ and reachable, even when stripped, literally, of the day-to-day trappings of leadership. The story also communicates the idea of an organization that is accountable, scrutinized at the highest political levels, and expected to be able to act to fix things. The chief executive is framing an understanding of organizational realities - this is how it is” (ibid).
The final vignette was one drawn from the formal interviews and is called Bishop in the works. The story was told by the chief executive of a large county council in England who is recounting and reflecting on a conversation they had with the local bishop. Some local councillors who were reluctant to support the council’s position on recognising LGBT rights. The chief executive recounts, “this is a true story … It was about Christmas time and I went up to see the Bishop. I went into his study, sat down in this beautiful old-fashioned Georgian house, fantastic book-lined study, fire raging, you know. While he was waiting for a cup of tea, he waved this bit of paper and said ‘Look at this, look at this! Pages of it! Ten pages here—from one of my colleagues, a fellow Bishop, basically ranting about gay people.’ ‘I don’t know about you’ he said, ‘I don’t think God cares what we do in the bedroom, do you? And it was just such a lovely line that I used that story with some of our politicians. It was a very good way of defusing what would have been a quite difficult discussion” (ibid).

The analysis in the works was limited to saying that the “story was used as a resource to moderate the views of particular politicians and to encourage them to move away from extreme policy positions” (PAR2 p.523).

The works also contained data drawn from chief executives reflecting on their own practice and their own use of stories. One put it like this (later in the thesis I will refer to this one as Warm Influence):

“Leadership requires storytelling. It requires empathy, it requires imagination and pictures … without that we can’t manage people. We can get their compliance, but we can’t ever get their commitment… If you want to shift people’s perceptions of what we’re doing from cold control to warm influence, then you’re going to need techniques like storytelling” (PAR2 p.521).

**Themes of relationality in the works**

The works picked on the distinction between “compliance and commitment” (ibid) suggesting it captured the difference between “hierarchical authority and collaborative effort” (ibid). We interpreted the data as showing “effective leadership entails others feeling aligned with the same aims” (ibid) and the “explanation of his practice captures how stories allow chief executives to project empathy, to connect emotionally, and to encourage commitment to shared goals in ways that traditional authority models cannot achieve” (ibid).

The works identify four thematic categories (see figure 1, p14 above)):

These four thematic categories were grounded, we said, “in a relational ontology and in Uhl-Bien and Ospina’s encouragement to focus on collective aspects of organisational action” (PAR2 p.524) Theoretically, therefore, the works claim to use relationality to illustrate “the invisible threads that connect actors engaged in leadership processes” (Uhl-Bien and Ospina 2012: 23) (quoted in PAR2 p.524).
The first category - inviting an emotional connection and commitment to public service - we described as highly relational. “Storytelling enables chief executives to propose a recasting of relationships with the public and a realignment between colleagues in different parts of the organization. This can be approached by connecting staff to what Perry and Hondeghem (2008) describe as ‘the call of public service.’ Such storytelling aims to produce an emotional response among diverse employees” (ibid).

Of our second thematic category - making sense of organisational realities - we described this as analysing “how a collective sense of the organizational landscape is constructed. Within a network of relations, chief executives engage in storytelling with the aim of co-interpreting a changing environment, raising awareness of the significance of others’ expectations, or mobilizing action. An aspect of relationality here is that they must do so in the face of competing narratives and interpretations” (ibid).

The third category - provoking reflection on practices and assumptions - we thought “perhaps suggests a more pronounced picture of chief executives’ agency within their networks. The stories are explicitly interventionist and challenging, unsettling colleagues’ everyday professional routines. Or they try to change the assumptions about practices. The stories offer critique and aim to generate change, but their tellers anticipate a skeptical audience” (ibid).

The fourth category - managing political relations with council leaders - concerned a particularly important dimension of the chief executives’ work: their relationship with politicians. We said that our “data show how practitioners use terms such as ‘political storytelling’ and ‘constructing the narrative’ interchangeably. Through a relational lens, we analyze the role that narrative practices play in managing this critical officer - member relationship. The data demonstrate how chief executives manage interactions to help leaders get what they need and ensure that the collective is not vulnerable to a lack of political discipline. The data accentuate that political narratives, policy making, and strategy formation are coproduced” (PAR2 pp.524-5).

We can see from the treatment of relationality in the works that we were attracted to the way in which it presents leadership as the product of human and social relations, rather than as being determined by heroic efforts or perfect traits of rare individuals. We can also see at times the idea that individual agency and the external world are not just in conflict but that they in some way structure the leadership task for chief executives. But while this thought appears briefly in the works, in retrospect it appears underdeveloped, under-theorised and its analytical and explanatory potential is left unrealised.

**Relationality and social construction**

This weakness in the notion of relationality is reflected in the indeterminate account of social construction. The works assume that organisational realities are constructed but there is no account of what might explain the nature of the construction (e.g. power, ideology and...
history). What is socially constructed, what is not? If everything is constructed by stories, then is organisational life simply an indeterminate panoply of stories? There is a post-structuralist reading of the world that may hold that to be a case, but the works do not make that claim explicit. If the works studiously avoid any normative discussion of organisations and their cacophony of multiple narratives and stories, then what are the implications for leadership?

Might the implication be that the most popular story wins out? Or the storyteller with the loudest voice, access to the most effective technology, the means of communications and other resources will have their story dominate over others. Ought the “moral” storyteller seek to dominate in this way? That possibility appears moot in the works as a result of the theoretically weak account of the grounds of possibility of human agency and how they relate to structures of history.

It is by problematising the central concepts of the works - reflexivity and relationality - and by examining through the lens of recognition that this thesis wants to explore in chapter 5 whether there is a more satisfying epistemological and ontological explanation that would support the empirical observations documented in the works.

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6 While this may be the case for political demagogues, it is not what the data tells us about professional leaders.
4 (ii) Decentred Leadership

In addition to the account of relationality in leadership, the works also explored leadership in relation to dilemmas in a decentred environment. Decentred in the works is taken to mean a rejection of a naturalist or realist sense of policy analysis, in favour of a particular kind of non-conventionalist or interpretive approach (Rhodes 2018, pp1-7).

This section draws on both the original programme of long-term research and engagement with the socio-professional networks of chief executives as well as a specific phase of research of interviews regarding policymaking and dilemmas.

These latter 18 interviews (2016–2017) moved from an open-ended interest in storytelling and leadership practices to a set of research conversations with a particular interest in the role of stories and narratives as part of the policymaking process. However, we said, “we also revisited our data set as a whole and interrogated those earlier interviews for insights into this topic, paying particular attention to material relating to policymaking and relations with politicians and council leaders” (NPA p.202).

We then used our data to provide an illustration of how chief executives “engage with members to explain the realities of political influence - the opportunities and limitations of their mandate” (NPA p.207).

In this new work we found “a commitment to stories and narratives amongst our chief executives, who recognise it as an important part of their practice in relation to policymaking” (NPA p.210). We discussed how our “interviews offer us examples of where the chief executives are authoring stories in interventionist ways to influence the action” (NPA p.210). But we also argued that the chief executives we observed were “alive to the importance of others’ stories”. We extrapolated that their job was “to listen to and understand the beliefs, concerns or aspirations that play through these” (NPA p.210).

**Decentred stories**

Taking the first of these, the interventionist storytelling, we concluded “the chief executives’ practice is underpinned by a quest to offer meaning amidst the chaos of different voices, demands, disruption and changes in the local government arena. In that context, a reliance on dry facts is seen as insufficient” (NPA p.210):

“Evidence is never enough, you’ve got to find meaning in all the noise. And storytelling is the best way of doing that, and you’ve got to connect people to a purpose, because it’s complicated. You know, you can’t describe all the technical aspects and the richness of it all, it’s too long and too dull. You’ve got to find a way to encapsulate what your policy journey is about and engage people, because it’s about culture and
values... that’s the level of engagement you need it to be on really, so I do think it’s very important” (NPA p.210).

Indeed, NPA set out the fragmented, complex and constitutionally weak position of chief executives, who were “charged with managing in this decentred environment, and tasked with supporting the elected members who themselves are confronted with the tribulations of a decentred political arena” (NPA p.207).

We described how a chief executive “tries to enable officers and members to understand the wider context in which they operate and to be better able to navigate the different stakeholders and interests at play in that environment.” We noted that: “She describes this in terms of embracing humility (or a more circumscribed view of their own autonomy) but also in terms of apprehending that their influence is located within a wider system of distributed autonomy” (NPA p.207).

The vicissitudes of officer–member relations (Weber 1978 p.983; SOLACE, 2005; Stewart 2000, p. 59) was a recurrent focus of chief executive leadership practice. The works interpret many of the interviews as pointing “towards dynamics of relationality, in which policy positions are arrived at through interactions between the two groups. For chief executives, a key relationship is with the leader or mayor. The chief executive simultaneously manages the corporate body of professionals and senior managers, whilst also providing support, advice and resources to the elected members to facilitate the formulation and implementation of their programme. Entwined in this relationship are traditions of management, of professionals and of democracy, and the continuities and disjunctions between those webs of belief” (NPA p.212).

One chief executive offered “a relatively harmonious picture of these local officer–member relationships and of a close cooperation between chief executive, senior management team and the elected members” (NPA p.212):

“Although it’s been hard work it’s been a breath of fresh air... to be able to have an agreement with the Leader that this is kind of co-produced now. We have moved away from a very strong Leader model where the Leader says, ‘this is the policy, can somebody just write it for me?’; to genuinely lead policy officers with the lead director... who work with the portfolio holder and kind of thrash out the early ideas... It is much more a kind of co-produced effort.” (NPA p.212).

Another chief executive told us how they try “to work with” different officer and member perspectives in a way that offers more scope “for officers to provide and members to accept professional challenge and insight” (ibid):

“I think there’s a lack of confidence about the challenge... So what I’ve said to Members and to professionals here, nobody’s right or wrong - you know that cartoon
about is it a six or a nine? It depends what side of the number you’re stood at” (NPA p.213).

Other chief executives emphasised their role in providing policy challenge was not limited to members and applied to officers too. One described how she “tries to curtail the enthusiasms of her officers as much as the politicians” (NPA p.213):

“We employ lots of people who come up through professional routes, who not only are interested, they’re passionate and some of them are zealots, right? I am the person who really challenges critically whether this idea is going to work, and I say, actually it’s a national policy you’re dressing up locally, trying to solve this local problem and actually aren’t they doing this in Tadchester? But our population is fundamentally different, so this might not work here. What I don’t want is single-minded policy zealots who believe this is definitely going to work, and then they’ll stick with it even for three or four years, wasting millions.” (NPA p.213).

Referring back to our previous works on the significance of participants’ constitutive stories about local government (PAR2) we placed policy dilemmas in the context of chief executives engaging in a variety of “narrative work and storytelling to manage their interactions with others” (NPA p.209).

**Stories and the world**

The works lean on Roland Barthes’ comment that “The narratives of the world are numberless” (1977, p79; PAR2 p516) and interpret narratives “as part of human strategies for dealing with change” (NPA p. 214). Referencing Ricour (1983) the works say “[Narratives’] representations of change (threat, positive transformation, failure, triumph) can highlight particular and perhaps hitherto obscured aspects of particular situations, and the stakes involved. In doing so, they can bring dilemmas to the surface by a new framing of a predicament in ways which call for new ways of thinking or acting” (ibid).

We answered our question of how local government chief executives engage with policy dilemmas by suggesting they used storytelling and narrative practices:

“Narratives offer bridges between the past, present and future. Some seem safe and solid, others more precarious or weatherworn. Policy makers are implicated in processes of trying to bridge present-day ‘realities’ and the potential of the future. An interest in narratives points towards an understanding of policymaking as a creative and interpretive process in which stories can engage different people and voices in shaping these future possibilities.

Our interviews suggest the significance of networks for understanding the practices of local government chief executives in relation to policymaking. Within these networks, their

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7 The works’ misquoting of the translated passage has been corrected.
accounts frame dilemmas of political values, officer–member relations, relations between members of the council and wider stakeholders and interest including central government and inspectorates” (ibid).

Furthermore, “Chief executives emerge as actors responding to the flux embedded in policy networks, as they interpret and respond to the competing expectations, actions and experiences of others” (NPA p.215).

We went on to say that:

“Our study offers a way of understanding the politics-administration conundrum that casts the relationship between politicians and administrators as dialogical rather than dichotomous. Chief executives emerge as co-authors, sounding boards, co-developers of strategy, challengers and co-interpreters of political vision” (ibid).

As references we nodded to what Demir and Nyhan (2008) call politically active public administrators, “adding value to democratic processes through purposive use of narrative in relation to political guidance and policy leadership” (NPA p.215). And added that “This insight fits well with Stone’s (1997) observations of how public managers and politicians craft stories, to construct reality in ways that represent their interests and further their goals. In this way, sensemaking, or giving meaning to situations and dilemmas, is a means by which leaders ‘ascribe values or highlight some aspects of a situation, while ignoring or downplaying other aspects of the same situation’ (Bean and Hamilton 2006: 325)” (NPA p.215).

Importantly for the current thesis we concluded by saying that:

“This engagement with a decentred theory of policymaking enables an appreciation of how chief executives mediate their policy networks and help us to understand the everyday production and reproduction of political power and influence through stories and narratives. […] Our study suggests that an important way in which they do so is by engaging with the discursive realm in which the politics and dilemmas of policy can be examined and explored together. In this way, stories and narratives enable organisational actors to understand and formulate responses to new and unfolding policy dilemmas” (NPA p.215).

The works are alighting upon the idea of (some actual, or a future possible) leader as a creative mediator between competing accounts, a listener to different demands and various voices found in organisational realities. Yet the account remains focused on the role of stories and narratives and does not place these tools into the wider context of leadership’s purpose and role.

In the works we pay particular attention to what we call the narrative practices of chief executives and to the dilemmas they encounter and interact with. We place this in the context of “decentred theory, and the related idea of the state as cultural practice, [where] narrative
practices are ‘meaningful’. They are meaningful in that they draw upon, and contribute to, the creation, recreation and disruption of traditions” (NPA p.205). In exploring the “narrative practices involved in how policymaking is accomplished” (NPA p.199) we say that it is “an approach that pays attention to the contested and contingent aspects of the setting. [...] The task for fieldworkers engaging with decentred theory of governance is to engage with the local reasoning and situated agency of those involved” (NPA p.199).

The idea of sharing and taking stories seriously in this account appears oddly power-free, as if they were unfolding in a Habermasian Ideal Speech Situation (Habermas, 1973) where discourse and stories are shared by actors following shared rules enshrining equal rights and mutual respect: an environment where actors share on neutral ground and the best idea wins out. While the works tend to characterise the stories as rich and meaningful accomplishments that emerge but stop short from seeking to explain or understand what is rich, what is meaningful and what emergence means. This thesis argues that this interpretation does not follow from what our participants told us and is not what our data show.

In the remaining chapters I develop the notions of speculative reason, recognition and struggle to suggest a different and more explanatory reading of the data and more practical approach to thinking about leadership.

In the remaining chapters of the thesis I set out how a speculative reading of the data might have further explored the extent to which the researchers considered themselves binary opposites, or representing different forms of knowledge (Levi Strauss 1966; Freeman 2007) and to what extent they found themselves negotiating their diremption in the broken middle between opposing tribes (Rose 1992).

In the next chapter I connect with Gillian Rose’s revival of a speculative reading of Hegel and her concept of the broken middle. This exposition then provides the platform for my own account of speculative leadership.
5 Understanding speculative reason

Key to my reading of Hegel are two connected concepts; speculative reason and recognition. This section examines the potential of speculative reason for our re-reading of leadership while also touching on the other themes of local government reform, research and consultancy practice in the works. The following section will consider how the concept of recognition can critique and deepen the explanatory power of the works’ use of relationality and reflexivity.

My approach owes much to the interpretation of Gillian Rose who sought to re-read Hegel speculatively (Rose 1978, 1981, 1984, 1992, 1993, 1996), by taking seriously Hegel’s own injunction to do so in the framing prefaces and introductions to his major works. Rose’s project, of which Hegel contra Sociology is the key text, offers an interpretation of a radical Hegel who could be read as offering new possibilities in philosophy as well as in political and social theory. Her re-reading of Hegel as endlessly open-ended has generated an influential and provocative counterpoint to the conventional reading of him as the closed and totalistic philosopher whose teleology had been the harbinger of Nazism, that he had become for some.⁸

I also seek to make connections from this reading of Hegel to other theorists, perhaps more familiar in the social theory canon, who can be read within the same tradition of open-ended, undetermined, speculative account of reason, knowledge and being.

Kant was famously awoken from his slumber by Hume’s work on reason being a slave to the passions. Similarly, Hegel’s work was written in conversation (accented by both admiration and frustration) with Kant and his ambitious theory of reason as the sole access to truth and knowledge. Understanding Hegel therefore requires some understanding of the principal arguments of Kant to which he was responding. While this is not the place to outline the depth and breadth of the similarities and differences between Kant and Hegel’s approaches to philosophy, it is crucial for the aim of this thesis to establish a critical difference in their epistemology, and the implications this has for their ontology and subsequently their political philosophy.

Kantian philosophical dualism

The heart of Kant’s philosophical project was to establish the conditions of possibility of knowledge, a consequence of which was to limit the claims of philosophy only to those which

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⁸ Haym (1857) is taken to be the first serious published criticism of Hegel’s accommodation with the Prussian state. In the 20th century Haldane (1922), Adorno & Horkheimer (1997), Lukács (1971) and Karl Popper (1966) all to some extent equated Hegel’s understanding of the social nature of being with totalitarianism. By contrast, see chapter 6 of Avineri (2012) for a deep and illuminating historical reading of Hegel through the lens of vacillating perceptions of Prussian and German nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See also Kohlmann (2021) and Brooks (2021) also provides a brief discussion.
could be justified within his framework of reason (Kant 1929, 1970, 2019; Hutchings, 1996; Pippin 1989). Kant believed that we only understand the world as it is in-itself in certain limited and rare circumstances and our moral and political intuitions are illegitimate grounds for knowledge. In doing so Kant accepts an opposition between reason and being, the rational and the actual, what is and what ought to be, and takes them as irresolvable dichotomies.

Hegel sees this approach as existentially limiting and in denial of what we know and what we are, and which condemns us to never fully understand the world in which we live.

Philosophically for Hegel, Kant’s error is driven by mistaken theories of being and of knowledge. Because Kant believed in a noumenal world (i.e. a divine, immutable and ahistorical sphere of existence which exists beyond human perception), he maintained that almost all knowledge of it was inaccessible to humans. For Kant, the phenomenal world that humans access through perception is flawed and limited; not a reliable representation of the way things are-in-themselves. Therefore, because humans cannot know the world in which they exist, Kant’s ontology casts human beings as ignorant and unable to trust their own senses, their consciousness, even what they believe to be themselves.

Kant’s approach adopts modern philosophy’s Cartesian “foundational dualism” (Pippin 1989: 67) that imagines the bodiless mind to be reflecting on the possibility of knowledge. In this tradition, the modern mind subjects itself to a critical eye, examining any unreflectively held beliefs, including its existence, its activities, other minds and the outside world.

For Hegel, this bodiless reason is not just “self-limiting” but a profound form of alienation, at the heart of modern philosophy (and Rose [1981] argues in modern political and social science, sociology and social theory). Hegel sees this as not just the alienation of subject and object (self and other) but also of the subject from itself, its own thoughts, beliefs and desires. In other words, Hegel sees the Cartesian/Kantian logic as leading to an unnecessary, undesirable and unbridgeable gap between who we are and who we are allowed to think we are.

**Hegel’s phenomenological logic**

Hegel sets out in the Phenomenology of Spirit, the story of consciousness’s journey as it goes along the road of potential modification and change (Hegel, 1977: s78). The story he recounts in the book incorporates a history of philosophy and major political events and interweaves contemporary affairs with a conceptual analysis of successive waves of scepticism, modification, despair and occasional hope of improvement. He writes sociologically and psychologically about this continual search for truth where “consciousness suffers this violence at its own hands: it spoils its own limited satisfaction ... [and] finds no peace” (ibid, s79) each time that it realises it has not fully grasped it.
The journey he describes models an iterative and dynamic process of trial and error, which has no guarantee of success. What is more, the inevitable failure in the course of experience he describes is full of pain and negativity; the tearing of one’s being. He anticipates that facing such struggle, some will entrench themselves in idealistic fantasies, philosophical wishful thinking or seek false satisfaction rather than carry on the struggle of inquiry.

For Hegel, meaning arises only from actual human experience, and the search for understanding and meaning is, therefore, an unending search and struggle. For those who wish to understand the world, it involves an effort to see, to understand, to relate to others, to communicate and to resolve inevitable misunderstandings.

As Heidegger - an inspiring guide to Hegel’s work - observes: “As a course, an examination ... pain, labour, the experience of consciousness is always also and everywhere a cognizance and a taking notice” (Heidegger, 2015 p.80) an “emergence” (ibid p.95).

The logic of these movements between self and other, the individual and the collective are generated by Hegel’s dialectic method which in turn underpins his approach to speculative reason.

The structure of Hegel’s dialectic (his science of logic) has three sides, or moments (Hegel, 1969: s79). The first moment is the moment of the understanding in which concepts or forms are understood to have stable definition or meaning (i.e. the determination) (ibid s80).

The second moment - the “dialectical” (ibid s79 & s81) or “negatively rational” (ibid s79) moment - is the moment of contradiction, of negativity that leads to instability, uncertainty and indetermination.

However, both these moments - the two premises - are one-sided and binary. They stand in opposition to each other. As Hegel argues:

“A one-sided proposition therefore can never even give expression to a speculative truth. If we say, for example, that the absolute is the unity of subjective and objective, we are undoubtedly in the right, but so far one-sided, as we enunciate the unity only and lay the accent upon it, forgetting that in reality the subjective and objective are not merely identical but also distinct.” (ibid s82)

The third moment - the “speculative” or “positively rational” (ibid s79 & s82) moment - grasps the unity of the opposition between the first two moments, or is the positive result of the dissolution or transition of those determinations (ibid s82). Importantly, Hegel “is rejecting the reductio ad absurdum argument, which says that when the premises of an argument lead to a contradiction, then the premises must be also discarded, leaving nothing” (Maybee 2020). As Hegel suggests in the Phenomenology, such an argument “is just the scepticism
which only ever sees pure nothingness in its result and abstracts from the fact that this nothingness is specifically the nothingness of that from which it results” (Hegel, 1977 s79).

In other words, Hegel’s logic insists that while the first two moments are in contradiction - are different from each other - they are also in relation to each other and therefore share some element of identity. Their contradiction does not lead to nothing, but to something. Through their coming together they experience a mutual modification.

This third moment of positive rationality is the basis of speculative reason and synthesis. Speculative reason, in my reading of Hegel, is the way in which reason responds to challenge and contradiction by modifying both the premises in ways which retain and change them at the same time to produce a synthesis and new opportunities for reason and action.

Speculative thinking enables the shifts in consciousness, which for a being “to become an other than itself - is the ability for a being to become its own “immanent content.” A being’s immanent content means the potentiality, the possibilities that lie within that being. A being becomes its immanent content by “unfolding” its new immanent existence into itself and by becoming “something determinate” (Hegel, 1977: 53). In other words, the movement of consciousness is an alteration, a modification, perhaps a transformation, of a thing/being based on the grasping of other ways of being, of something other than itself.

More formally, the determinate being is challenged by an external negativity which causes uncertainty, self-questioning and instability. If the being is to survive this interaction successfully and to understand the challenge as legitimate, to experience the negation positively, then it must sublate (in German Aufheben which has contradictory meanings, all at play, for example, to assimilate and abolish, to cancel and preserve, to lift up and transcend) the negativity and emerge or become a new determinate being.

By applying intuition, practical knowledge and past experience to imagine past or future possibilities, speculative thinking suggests ways in which reason can shape opportunities for change, modification and transformation.

**Speculation, imagination and new ways of being**

Hegelian speculative thinking is, therefore, the opposite of either/or, binary thinking. Speculative thinking embraces aporias, fragility and brokenness (Schick 2022; Davis 2018; Caygill 1988) and contains elements of, and movement between, both identity and difference. Speculative philosophy never finds a single best way. It is always a journey of tension and

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9 The notion of speculative reason itself is inherited from Plato who at the end of Book VI of the Republic describes “that other sort of knowledge which reason attains by power of the dialectic, using hypotheses not as first principles, but only as hypotheses - that is to say, as steps and points of departure into a world which is above hypotheses.”
transformation, of change and becoming, struggle and conflict. And out of these temporary
and temporal resolutions - timebound possibilities - synthesis might emerge.

We can see that speculation, or being speculative, in the Hegelian sense is quite distinct from
the weak, common sense meaning in English of being “conjecture rather than knowledge” (or
as Rose puts it, the illegitimate use of correct principles [Rose, 1981: Location No. 1095]).
Rather, speculative reasoning is the “positively rational” third moment in Hegel’s dialectical
triad. Speculation is synthetic, problem solving, future focused and open-ended rather than
transcendent, backward looking or closed. Speculative thinking, while currently
unfashionable in Anglo-American analytic interpretations of Hegel, is highly influential in
other traditions. For example, Kierkegaard’s use of irony (Kierkegaard 2013), Nietzsche’s
Strauss on modes of knowledge (Lévi-Strauss, 1966; Freeman 2007) and Foucault’s
archaeology/genealogy and the history of the present (Foucault 1974, 1979a; 1979b, 1980,
Barnett et al 2019) can all be read as speculative expositions of the contradictions in
modernity and the ways in which these contradictions and limits can be reframed to offer
new readings with imperfect and temporary possibilities for thinking and action. As Heidegger
says of those in this tradition, in which he saw himself, we should not understand them as
philosophers in the typical sense. They are concerned not just to provide foundations for
existing knowledge but rather with the future possibilities of being (Heidegger, 2015: 10-13).

In Anglo-American social theory, there is perhaps an echo of this speculative thinking in Mills’
idea of the sociological imagination. Mills writes that he does not know how the imagination
“is spurred to put all the images and facts together, to make images relevant and lend
meaning to facts,” but that “the sociological imagination ... in considerable part consists of
the capacity to shift from one perspective to another.” It is this imagination, he adds, that sets
the social scientists apart from the “mere technician” (Mills, 1970 p.232).

Without wanting to overinterpret Mills’ loose playfulness of the non-expert in mediating
between different perspectives, the role of the sociological imagination suggests a possible
common premise: namely, to imagine future possibilities in research and in society one must
be able to imagine, to intuit; to think speculatively. This idea of the ‘sociological imagination’
is incredibly influential and we see its impact in modern sociological futures, ethnography and
design thinking which we review in chapter 6.

While Kantian epistemology holds that we can know nothing through imagination, Hegel and
Mills (and Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Foucault et al) believe that humanity’s possible
futures are not determined by what can be proved through Cartesian logic, but rather that
the imagination, speculative thinking, has both epistemic and ontological implications.
Hegel's speculative philosophy of state

Unsurprisingly for a philosopher such as Hegel his political philosophy is underpinned by the interconnectedness of his ontological and epistemological claims. His political philosophy is further inspired by his understanding of ancient Greek ethical life - what he calls *sittlichkeit*. As Hegel sees it, *sittlichkeit* - the social, public ethics of a society - create the immanent possibilities of the present and the future. The possible futures of society do not derive ex nihilo outside of politics, society and history. Rather, these institutions, inheritances and structures of society are present in the shared moods - the zeitgeist, the shape of spirit - in different times and places.

Thus emerges the idea that the state and society are interrelated and mutually dependent forms of organised life. There is nothing eternal about institutions in Hegel’s political theory of state. He believes that in free, modern states civil society and institutions will emerge from and be animated by the culture, the community, and the concrete, social ethics which both influence and arise out of the politics and policy of their time (Pelczynski, 1971; Bennett, Bennett & Bennett 2005).

In his last work, the Philosophy of Right (Hegel 1991), Hegel set out a speculative reading of government, and political science through his telling of emerging European statehood in the shape of the Prussian state. In the preface to the work, Hegel once again emphasises the worldly, socially-situated nature of his philosophy. He repeats that his exposition presupposes the “the nature of speculative knowledge” set out in the Science of Logic (Hegel, 1969). He ridicules the “setting up of a world beyond which exists God knows where” and argues for a philosophy that undertakes an “exploration of the rational” and therefore a “comprehension of the present and the actual” (Hegel 1991: 20).

Hegel emphasises this speculative point with one of his most significant - or notorious - propositions:

“What is rational is actual;

And what is actual is rational.”

Read literally, this proposition may appear as “philosophical quietism” (Rose 1981, Location No. 1745), a conservative, perhaps totalitarian, justification of state power.

Read speculatively, as Hegel urges us to do, the proposition becomes something more interesting and laden with immanent potential.¹⁰ Hegel argues that when philosophy tries to transcend its own time and build a world “as it ought to be” (emphasis in the original) then this world will only ever exist in the author’s opinions (Hegel 1991: 22).

¹⁰ See also Rose 1981 Location No. 1096; Verene 2007.
Just as Kant’s dualism is one form of alienation, philosophical “wishful thinking” (Hegel 1991) is another historical conceit. Although put forward as a metaphysical theory of forms, Plato’s Republic was therefore no more, Hegel says, than the embodiment of a certain kind of Greek ethics of its time. Plato could not transcend his time and:

“It is just as foolish to imagine that any philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as that an individual can overleap his own time or leap over Rhodes.” The task of philosophy is to comprehend the present while maintaining one’s “subjective freedom in the realm of the substantial” (Hegel 1991 p22).

All philosophers are children of their time, Hegel argues, and to pretend otherwise is vanity.

Far from endorsing Candide’s over-optimism about politics being the best of all possible worlds, Hegel’s identification of the actual with the rational is seeking to ground reason and politics in a worldly analysis of today and to explore new and hidden possibilities that may emerge.

As Kohlmann argues, Hegel tries to frame the actuality of the state in ways which suggest immanent understandings:

“Hegel’s reference to the state’s rationality announces something like an immanent criterion that makes it possible to evaluate the degree to which given institutional structures correspond to the philosophical concept (Begriff) of the state. Approaching the state as the realization of an idea, Hegel indicates, lays it open to rational inquest and progressive transformation” (Kohlmann 2021, p. 38).

Furthermore, Hegel adds, history - the zeitgeist, shapes of spirit - can only be fully grasped in retrospect. As he says:

“When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk” (ibid).

In painting the grey in grey, I interpret this to mean that when we seek to understand the world, we are always looking at that which has been. We are looking at a world we have come to know, where the colours are fading through our own experience of them. Philosophy is concerned with the world that is already made. Wisdom is only achieved by understanding – recognising – where we stand in relation to others in the world. Contrary to the common teleological reading of Hegel that projects forwards to an idealistic utopia, we are always in history (Hutchings, 1991).

To put it more formally: by the time thought emerges, the world is already actual (this is the determinate moment). However, while philosophy may arrive too late to issue instructions, it is never too late to provide challenge and critique (the indeterminate moment) and then by
grasping both determinate and indeterminate propositions to imagine new possibilities (the speculative moment). By grasping the immanent content of a time, a place, a situation (identity), philosophy can articulate the critique (non-identity) and then point towards a sublation or positive resolution (synthesis) in which the new being unfolds and becomes another being than itself.

Some have read Hegel’s notion of the end of history teleologically (Fukuyama, 1992) as a goal that perfectionist, participatory and moral politics could deliver. Others have read it religiously (Taylor, 1977) as a depiction of divine realisation. A speculative reading is grounded and temporary, struggling to make human and imperfect steps forward in current time and space, not progressing towards some imagined utopia.

Just as the best kind of life in the ancient Greek world “is to be in sync with the gods” (Dreyfus, 2011, p. 60) for Hegel a successful life (and by extension for this thesis, a successful leader) must make sense of what is already given, be attuned to the present (the gods, the zeitgeist, the shared moods or vibes of the time). Understanding the present and to some extent getting in sync with the present is a condition of being able to operate successfully within the present in order to change it.

This speculative reading of Hegel opens up a rich tradition stretching through the philosophical canon to present day theorists.

**The speculative tradition**

The principal thinkers in the Hegelian speculative tradition are those who can read human existence as open-ended rather than limited by existing thought and experience. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra smashes the tablets of laws that define Man’s limits and issues a call to create new values that redefine human possibilities. Human reason, he argues, is a historical and worldly creation. “Truly, men have given themselves all their good and evil. Truly, they did not take it, they did not find it, it did not descend to them as a voice from heaven” (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 85).

Kierkegaard elevates poetry over history as opening up what could be, rather than what has already happened (Either/Or in Kierkegaard 2014; de Paula & Silva 2013). Likewise, he presents a dynamic notion of “repetition” which is the idea, distinct from static recollection, that the same events could hold different meanings in future than in the past (Repetition in Kierkegaard 2014; McDonald 2017).

Following Hegel, Heidegger develops what he calls his relational ontology of “being in the world” in which meaning for a human being (dasein) is based on relationships to others in the ‘clearing,’ the area of its being (Wheeler 2020). For Heidegger, being’s relationality entails an idea of ‘care’ for others and supporting them to anticipate or prepare for the future - the so-called “leaping ahead” (Glendenning 2007).
As part of this taking care, and thinking ahead, Heidegger’s speculative understanding of the world is based on a particularly concentrated paying attention; a “looking on”. This “looking on” is not passive but rather a pre-condition of philosophically intelligent action. Taking us to the Latin root of the word, speculari, he sees the looking on, the looking ahead, the pointing out of other ways of being as the essence of speculative thinking. The pointing out of the object is not an immediate knowing but rather a beginning to grasp; a laying open of the object. If the object is opened up and shows itself, speculative reason helps it emerge into subjective experience (Heidegger 2015: 95).

This is related to the idea of *nous* (NOΣ). Homeric poems are full of leaders with *nous* - those who can sniff out or nod towards (von Fritz 1943) strategically important information (Bennett, 2008). While Heidegger’s looking on is a concentrated struggle to know, not an immediate knowing, *nous* is a physical, earthy concept, based on indirect perceptions. Like Heidegger’s speculari, “*nous* penetrates the surface and gets beyond appearances” (ibid). They are both connected to vision - literal and metaphorical. They can sometimes “make far off things present” and allow people to visualise situations which are remote in space and time (ibid). The idea of *nous*, like the idea of speculation, accepts that there will be different strategic appraisals of any situation. They both contain the ideas of action based on the struggle to understand through close observation. In other words, speculation and *nous* are not just common sense; they are the capacity to imagine future opportunities that are not idealistic fantasies but which are grounded, earthly possibilities. It is an ability to see the world as changeable and unpredictable - and the will to intervene and attempt to alter it.

The speculative philosopher, or leader, tries to be attuned to the emergent possibilities of the actual. This involves looking ahead, sniffing out, looking on, nodding towards and crucially, knowing “how to listen to what history has to say and having listened attentively, [knowing] how to assess the story philosophically” (Söderquist 2012: 103).

Foucault, following Nietzsche, uses a genealogical method to problematise originalist readings of culture, law and institutions which are “imprinted by history” (Foucault 1984: 83), and “moulded by a great many regimes” (ibid 87).

The genealogist, he says, “studies the emergence of a battle which defines and clears a space. Subjects do not pre-exist and later enter into combat or harmony. In genealogy, subjects emerge on a field of battle and play their roles, there and there alone. The world is not a play which simply masks a truer reality that exists behind the scenes. It is as it appears” (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982: 109).

Foucault articulates powerfully this sense of being’s contingency, its historicity and its social situatedness. We hear clear echoes of the Kant/Hegel debate – and we see on which side he sits – as well as the Heideggerian inheritance. Far from there being an eternal and sovereign cogito, the human condition is historically constituted and in a constant state of
misunderstanding and change. Foucault captures the speculative spirit of the dialectic in his characterisation of a human as “the locus of an empirico-transcendental doublet … a paradoxical figure whose mode of being provides both knowledge of self and conditions to undermine that being always open, never finally delimited and constantly traversed” (Foucault, 1974: 322). Human nature and human reason are not one-sided and eternal. They are multi-faceted and capable of change, within history, not outside it.

Placing Rose’s contribution in context, Howard Caygill notes that her speculative re-reading of Hegel provides a wholly original approach that points to a new way of interpreting continuity and change in philosophy from Hegel through to Foucault.

“Instead of accepting the absolute opposition of freedom/necessity, autonomy/heteronomy, they [those in the speculative tradition] regard it as the historical work of a community and dedicate their thought to narrating this history” (Caygill, 1998).

**A speculative exposition of an idea, a situation, or of the past is therefore an imagining of possibility and potentialities, of what is contained within those (their immanence) and an attempt to unpack, to unfold, to frame or reframe what could be or could have been the case. Yet a necessary condition of speculative reason is the negative moment - the failure of the first determination. All reason, all leadership and all of being, are bound to inevitable failure. The starting position is misrecognition, alienation between self and other and this is only proceeded from if consciousness has the will to reason speculatively rather than through binary oppositions.**

**Why recognition?**

While speculation sets out the unfolding of the open-ended logic of reason, recognition is the driver of that logic.

Recognition begins with the first determination, the first perception of the other. Inevitably this first knowing is a misrecognition. It does not understand the world sufficiently and is faced by a challenge of the second negative moment. It is the need for recognition - to better understand the world - that drives consciousness to think speculatively. That is to use reason and intuition to find a positive resolution or synthesis between being (first moment/determinate) and the world (second moment/indeterminate).

This process of recognition is inherently social.

French philosopher Jean Hyppolite (one of Hegel’s early twentieth-century revivalists) spoke about Hegel’s ontological understanding of the “non-separation of parties” (Hyppolite
Rather than being individuals crushed by an authoritarian state, Hegelian social beings, their purpose and actions are constituted by understanding the relationship between self and others; of who we are and what is to be done for mutual benefit and shared value.

For others the ontological account of recognition “both shatters the natural solipsism of the self, and ‘pulls’ it out of its natural solipsism. The analysis of recognition therefore is also and at the same time a story of self-overcoming, through which an enlarged ethical-social mentality (to use Hannah Arendt’s term), or Geist, is attained” (Williams 1997: 50).

Hegel’s thought draws attention to the fundamental intersubjectivity or interconnectivity and non-separation of the differing aspects within a multiplicity of being; “to see the I as We and We as I” (Hegel 1977: s171). We are inescapably social beings.

For Hegel, the concept of recognition is the idea that we recognise our own self in the “being of other persons, in my relation to them, and in my recognition by them which is mutual” (Hegel 1969: 490). "Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness" (Hegel 1977: s175). Again: “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that it exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged” (ibid s178).

The story Hegel tells in the Phenomenology of Spirit is how consciousness develops through a series of existential exchanges with others. Ethically - morally and politically and in terms of social theory - mutual recognition has spawned a rich history, using recognition in a range of different ways.

Evolving relationships with the world arise out of the struggle for recognition. Those that pursue this struggle reach modified or transformed consciousness only with the realisation that "they will have to set themselves in some kind of intentional relation with others; they will have to accept that their consciousness of themselves is mediated in one way or another, by how others regard them" (Bernstein 1984 p18).

As Schick puts it:

“Recognition theory has in the past few decades experienced a revival of such proportions that it has spawned its own industry in political theory. It is largely captured by moral rationalism, which casts recognition as a powerful tool that might be deployed in the service of justice. It is primarily outward looking, advocating more respect and understanding of others, the bestowal of equal rights, and the removal of barriers to participation” (Schick 2015).

11 Author’s translation
Francis Fukuyama is perhaps the most well-known of Hegel scholars who have developed a theory of recognition in the politics of international relations along the lines of moral rationalism. On this account, recognition is not just the motor of history, but it is also the driver of freedom and moral progress. The more mutual recognition, the more freedom, the more justice in the world. In his recent book, Identity, Fukuyama writes:

“The only rational form of recognition is ultimately the mutual recognition of master and slave of their shared human dignity” (Fukuyama, 2018: 40).

But Fukuyama misrecognises the brokenness at the heart of this matter. This story of mutual recognition is far from a utopian tale. Rather it is one built on a fissure, on a fragile temporality, an immanent emergence and inevitable human weakness. “Ultimate mutual recognition” is a teleological fantasy. Hegel’s speculative is a never-ending history of necessary misrecognition, failure and struggle.

The power of recognition as a concept of analysis therefore is that it captures the constant struggle with non-identity, difference, alienation in what we can know and what we are. As Gillian Rose put it, “Recognition is, by definition, re-cognizing of non-identity” (Rose, 1981 Location No. 1353).

And as Schick puts that, “For Rose recognition is an agonistic concept that emphasises the ongoing process of recognition, which implies cognition followed by re-cognition or coming to know again” (Schick 2015: 96).

(Mis)recognition is therefore the ontological and political motor that both disrupts and transforms, that creates the connection between self (us) and other (them), that overcomes or at least partially and temporarily modifies opposites and aporia. Hegel’s story in the Phenomenology of Spirit is in essence about this changing structure of misrecognition in society (Rose, 1981, Location No. 948), a deeply social and historical phenomenon, with different shapes of spirit evolving through time and history.

The works capture the play and interplay of relationality and reflexivity but leave the philosophical underpinnings of those concepts unexamined and offer no way of thinking about, explaining or resolving the aporia and the, sometimes tragic, dilemmas they capture. As a consequence, they raise a number of underlying ontological, epistemological and ethical questions that are left unaddressed and obscured under the blanket of social construction. My argument here is that the concept of recognition both contains the ideas of reflexivity and relationality but further, it is rooted in an explanation of how recognition works epistemologically and ontologically. Brought to bear on the works this therefore deepens our understanding both of the data and ultimately of leadership in the world. “Speculative leadership” offers a framework for leaders to think about and alter or transform their dilemmas.
In the next chapter, the implications of speculation and recognition for leadership are used to re-interpret the data in the works.
6. Implications for leadership, local government and practice

Rose’s reading of Hegel’s concept of recognition as radical and struggle-filled provides a rich framework for reinterpreting the works and for thinking about leadership more generally.

Hegel and leadership

The leadership literature on Hegel mirrors the wider interpretative traditions of Hegel but is somewhat limited and undeveloped. Hegel himself talks about conflicted “world-historical-individuals” who can be both heroes of an epoch, recognised for their greatness and “willed to satisfy themselves, not others” (Hegel 2014, p.28). But ultimately such lives are one-sided, unhappy, short and in the end “fall off like empty husks from the kernel” (ibid). Their weakness (but also their power and influence) is their devotion to “one goal regardless of all else” (ibid p30) and their inability to take into account other relevant considerations. Hegel sees these individuals as having been produced by the spirit of their times. They come to embody the irresistible urge of collective “national” mood or identity (ibid p.49) but while some leave their mark in history, they are ultimately transient actors, to be surpassed and resolved into the ever-shifting shape of historical spirit.

Hegel writes elsewhere of the statesman as someone of experience and culture who “knows how to steer the middle course” and who “deals with the whole extent of the case before him and not one side of it” (Hegel, 2019 p678). However, while these appear to lend themselves to some rich re-readings, the literature has not explored them in the depth they deserve.

The literature identified as part of this thesis includes the influential reading by Richard Haldane, MP, philosopher and Minister for War who wanted to create a “Hegelian army” (Haldane, 1929) comparable to the rival Prussian fighting force. In Haldane’s authoritarian version of state institutions, citizens and soldiers would subsume their subjectivity entirely into the state and no individual “had any title to set himself above his social surroundings (Haldane, 1901). Not only did this top-heavy and authoritarian version of Hegel tarnish Hegel’s popular image in Britain, but Haldane’s version of Hegel’s leader flattened “the dialectical progression of the forms of Sittlichkeit into a linear historical teleology: ignoring the function attributed to critique and speculation in the works […] Needless to say, Haldane’s reading of Hegel as a champion of Prussian-style militarism bore about as little resemblance to the exploratory and speculative spirit of British Hegelianism as Stalin’s Diamat of the 1930s did to Marx’s revolutionary dialectic” (Kohlmann, 2021, p69).

12 The literature search is based on searches of the University of Edinburgh library database, the British Library catalogue, the Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain and a wider Google search of the internet.
If Haldane’s Hegel was authoritarian, the literature also contains a highly normative, liberal reading of Hegelian Sittlichkeit to frame an argument about the “moral corporation” against which to critique managerialist failings (Klikauer, 2016). There is also a post-modern reading which concentrates on the construction of the leader’s subjectivity between master and slave (Harding, 2014) and others also note how Hegel departs the “leader-follower dyad” (Cawthon, 2002, p. 75). Others have written about the phenomenology of leadership, without reference to Hegel, taking phenomenology as a first-person perspective (Souba, 2014), perhaps more like the Hegelian notion of sense data than a dynamic, speculative phenomenology of reason.

Amiridis uses Hegel’s account of tragedy as “a conflict between good and good” and where “tragic opposition arises when the conflicting sides are equally justified in the pursuit of their moral ends” (Amiridis, 2018, p.23) as characteristic of modern ethical life. He uses Hegel to challenge “binary oppositions that underlie certain normative approaches to ethical leadership and to challenge their vision of a possible ethical reconciliation and harmony in the business domain” (ibid p.26). This reading of ethical leadership as bound to failure suggests an open-ended and speculative reading of leadership ethics, not one which is based on goodness algorithms or simple philosophical maxims.

More useful is Mulgan’s recent work on the “synthesis gap” (Mulgan, 2021). Mulgan’s diagnosis is that the absorptive and synthesising capacity of governments is often weak and he focuses on useful practical measures such as mediated action: negotiating between opposing, irreconcilable and incommensurable ends. Again, not explicitly speculative, but there are clear connections and some acknowledgement of Hegel as a relevant source in these ideas.

The leadership literature on Hegel is small, often superficial and based on limited reading of the primary and secondary texts. This review highlights those areas of most relevance to the current thesis. While these sources touch on Hegel’s holistic approach, the insufficiency of one-sided thinking and the inevitable partiality, temporality and tragedy of leadership, none makes the direct link with speculation and speculative logic. That forms part of the contribution of this thesis.

The wider public administration and policy literature also appears to be silent on the notion of speculation explored in this thesis. There are, however, a number of connected concepts, which, though not Hegelian by tradition, are worth briefly reviewing. One such is the notion of “puzzling” in regulation as a mode of governance that both controls and liberates (King, 2007) and more widely as a mode of governmentality in central-local relations (Griggs and Sullivan, 2014). These are useful and connected explorations of wicked policy issues (Rittel & Webber, 1973) and the limits of narrow, technical and one-sided thinking.
A separate literature is found in psychology regarding counterfactual thinking and “simulation heuristics” (Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky 1982), where “imagining alternatives to the real world and mentally playing out the consequences” can inform real world decisions (Spellman & Mandel 1999, p.120. See also Gilovich et al 2002; Goerke et al 2004; Trabasso & Bartolone, 2003). This includes how “pre-factual” thinking can inform how people think about the future, especially planning for success and hedging against failure (Epstude, et al. 2016).

There is a related “futures focused” literature which employs a notion of speculation in order to inform imagining or forecasting particular scenarios. This of course covers commodity hedging for alternative economic regimes and scenarios (Hirshleifer 1977) but also more recently design thinking in technology (Dunne & Raby 2013) and experimental or futurist sociology (Candy & Kornet 2019; Fischer & Mehnert 2021).

I find this literature interesting and relevant but it is outwith the scope of the thesis to explore in greater depth. Unlike the Hegelian approach explored in this thesis, the heuristics and futures literatures have no explanatory equivalent of the dialectic and the broken middle.

**Ethics, immanence and speculative leadership**

It is Rose’s conception of the broken middle which frames this thesis’s contribution to rethinking leadership theory and practice.

Rose conceives of the metaphor of the ‘broken middle’ to conceptualise the way in which the binary poles of both the universalist claims of the liberal Enlightenment and the particularist, identitarian critique of freedom are one-sided.

Recalling Hegel’s philosophical painter from the Philosophy of Right, Rose argues:

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13 While the concept and phrase of the broken middle is universally credited to Rose, Arendt uses a strikingly similar phrase in Between and Past and Future (Arendt 2006). Arendt’s formulation occurs in talking about a man, a being in time, not as an uninterrupted succession between the past and the future but as being “broken in the middle, at the point where ‘he’ stands; and ‘his’ standpoint is not the present as we usually understand it but rather a gap in time which ‘his’ constant fighting, ‘his’ making a stand against past and future keeps in existence” (Arendt, 2006, p10).

There is startling similarity not just in phrasing but also an interesting parallel between the brokenness expressed by both Arendt and Rose. For Arendt history, tradition and time are broken, creating a space into which each of us finds ourselves inserted “between an infinite past and an infinite future” (p12). For Rose, the middle, ‘painted grey in grey’, is the site of humble, equivocal and temporary struggles, doing the work of incrementally less misrecognition, mediating between opposition and contradiction. While Rose and Arendt alight from different stories, they have a common interest in the speculative possibilities presented by breaks in time, understanding, being.

Interestingly, although Rose references Between Past and Future in numerous places in the Broken Middle, and has a section dedicated to discussing her work, she does not quote or reference that passage. And although Arendt’s passage seems well known, I have not been able to find any attribution of the phrase or any connection of these sections being discussed in any of the secondary literature.
Grey in grey warns against philosophy’s pride of Sollen [must/ought], against any proscription or prescription, any imposition of ideals, imaginary communities or ‘progressive narrations’. Instead, the ‘idealizations’ of philosophy would acknowledge and recognize actuality and not force or fantasize it. They act as the third, the middle, their own effectivity at stake between the potentiality and actuality of the world and engaging at the point where the two come into a changed relation: not ex post facto justification, even less a priori rejuvenation, but reconfiguration, oppositional yet vital – something understood.” (Rose, 1992: xi)

While Rose accepts the postmodern critique of Enlightenment’s prescription (Sollen), she rejects postmodernism’s refusal to struggle and to judge. The so-called Enlightenment ideals are too often interpreted as universal and eternal holding themselves over and above history’s actuality. The ideal of freedom is unreal and unattainable, and modernity’s awakening of self-determination has undermined our sense of collective endeavour and the claims of authority. This diremption, or separation, between self and other, reason and emotion, ideal and real marks modern life and experience. Rather than theory standing outside of history, theory builds on the achievements of practice (Browning, 1988). Because reason is grounded and created by history, “genuine thinking is always accorded with the present, or the actual” (Kervégan, 2018 p.56). Leaders - all of us - must operate in this broken middle seeking to mediate and create relations between the two poles, with inevitable equivocation, risking action that will be imperfect and flawed.

Leadership’s dilemma reflects this broken, tragic spirit of modernity. Working in this restricted space of the broken middle, leaders must try to re-imagine what is possible when their professional frameworks are insufficient.

A striking example of speculative leadership in this area is that of Dr Barry Quirk, as observed by the author in a period following the production of the works during my professional practice.

Reflecting on the aftermath of the Grenfell fire in the journal Local Government Studies, Quirk, who had become chief executive of Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) to lead the recovery after the failed response, set out the philosophical dilemma for public services operating in the face of disaster:

“In the delivery of public services and the allocation of public goods, there are two main types of approaches to operationalising the concept of fairness. The first is a rules-based normative approach which is predicated on establishing norms and thresholds and assessing individuals and families against these norms and thresholds. In local government,

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14 Quirk was seconded from London Borough of Lewisham to fill the post of Town Clerk and Head of Paid Service on an interim basis in the days following the Grenfell fire disaster. He became chief executive on 19 July 2017 and served until 30 October 2022.
this operates principally in adult and children’s social care. By contrast, the second approach is based on an appraisal of the likely consequences of alternative policies or practices. This approach tends to be operationalised through options analysis and/or discounted cost–benefit analyses: this approach is most usually found in planning, housing and regeneration.

The point is that neither approach is useful for dealing with those fairness issues that arise in the immediacy of a disaster. Questions of norms and thresholds, and the comparable flows of costs and benefits, are of little value in arriving at solutions that are fair and equitable to those most affected by the disaster.”

Quirk’s point is that in certain highly unusual and complex circumstances there are no deontological or teleological approaches which provide a guide to action. On the one hand, because the circumstances are so radically outside useful professional experience there are no rules or norms which are adequate. On the other hand, because the variables are so wildly unknowable and not under the authority’s control or influence, there is no formula, or way of calculating and knowing the consequences of different scenarios. Professional frameworks are all based on these two approaches and in the face of leadership dilemmas, these deontological and teleological frameworks are of little or no use.

Quirk’s experience was that there were no ready-made professional decision-making frameworks that provided a way of satisfactorily weighing and judging the different claims of justice the Council was facing.

Elsewhere Quirk tells Amartya Sen’s story of three children arguing over who should possess a flute as an illustration of the impossibility of comparing and calculating different claims to justice. Anne’s claim is based on the fact she is the only one who knows how to play it. Bob’s claim is that he lives in a very poor family and he has no toys nor musical instruments to play with. Carla claims the flute should be hers because she made it. Sen argues that who gets the flute depends on incommensurable claims of justice and that institutional arrangements are of limited use in helping us resolve this dispute in a universally acceptable and just manner.

Quirk concludes, ”Algorithms cannot resolve incommensurable claims or incompatible values—that’s why we need elected politicians to reconcile differences and enable ethically based compromises to be achieved” (Quirk 2019a, p.103).

The approach Quirk sought to use in RBKC is in stark contrast to the traditional incident management model of “leadership in the hot seat” (Wells 1996) or the dominant model of

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15 Quirk, 2019b  
16 Drawn from Quirk B. (2019a)
the armed forces leadership training (Adair 1983). Quirk’s approach was not situational (Hersey and Blanchard 1993) or adaptive (Heifetz 2009) it was much more iterative and exploratory, based on the premise of the unknowability and unpredictability of the situation at any given time (Grint 2005a, 2005b). Having observed the leadership of Quirk closely in RBKC, and having spoken to those who worked with him during this period, I suggest that it was an example of speculative leadership, based on imaginative and intuitive readings of the immanent possibilities of the organisational and socio-political possibilities in time and place.

**Leadership in the works**

While leadership in the works emerges as a social practice that is constantly influenced and shaped by interactions with people, politics and others’ purposes, this thesis has sought to develop and deepen its philosophical account and then to articulate what the real and present issues are for leadership given this epistemo-ontological context.

The works evoke a so-called “relational ontology” and, following Uhl-Bien and Ospina, claim to use relationality to illustrate “the invisible threads that connect actors engaged in leadership processes” (Uhl-Bien and Ospina, 2012, p.23 - quoted in PAR2 p.524).

In many places, the works seek to find a way of describing analytical categories that “embrace the collective and relational and yet allow for individual agency” (see PAR2 p.524 for full passage).

The contribution of Hegelian speculative reason and recognition allows us to place this relational aim on an altogether different plane by both unpacking the ontology of why our participants - the chief executives or indeed ourselves in the research team - find ourselves to be the way and where we are. Furthermore, by introducing the notion of speculative leadership struggling to improve the state of recognition we can better explain the reason that leaders use storytelling, and how they use it as a leadership practice.

In the works, storytelling is recorded as an activity chief executives use. In the next section of this thesis, I seek to articulate my understanding and explanation of what it is about leadership that has made storytelling a useful and/or effective tool in the data. By comparing the interpretation in the works with a speculative reading, I show how this theoretical approach provides a deeper philosophical understanding but also a significantly different – and arguably richer - reading of the original data.

The works’ key findings on leadership, local government reform and practice relate to these key themes.

1. Inviting an emotional connection with public service

2. Making sense of organisational realities
3. Provoking reflections on practices and assumptions

4. Managing political relations with council leaders

5. Decentred leadership

6. Consultancy and practice

7. Local government reform

I use these themes to relate my reinterpretation of the data in the light of this thesis’s exposition and in doing so offer a more developed reading.

**Emotional connection**

The first category—inviting an emotional connection and commitment to public service—we describe as “highly relational” because of the way storytelling aims to produce an emotional response among diverse employees.

The works also contain data such as the Warm Influence vignette quoted above in which the chief executive suggests that storytelling is one way of seeking commitment rather than compliance. The chief executive is explaining that while the organisation as employer has some levers that can enforce compliance, this is neither a necessary or sufficient condition for public service and good leadership.

While the works focus on the idea of an emotional connection as motivating colleagues to public service, a speculative exposition of the data suggests that the leader understands there is a state of misrecognition and difference between the leadership and the employees. In recognising this diremption between the two poles, he is not just suggesting that stories are one way of mediating between the two sides, he may also be suggesting that he can see identity in their difference. Thinking speculatively, he is imagining the possibility that a different approach to other people - the use of warm influence rather than cold authority - can create a modification, a (partial and temporary) synthesis of the original positions.

**Making sense of organisational realities**

In seeking to explain the phenomena in the data as leaders making sense of different and conflicting organisational realities, the works suggest narrative is “central to relationships that are inherently communicative” (PAR2 p.517). This view supports the attention to the communication practices, such as stories and narratives, through which, the works contend, organisational and leadership “realities” were constructed. Following Uhl-Bien the works reject a traditional atomistic view and instead see leadership as a relational process.

Rather than looking for traits, competencies and styles, we instead focus on how leadership emerges in organisational and social settings. In this way, we say, “leadership is accomplished
collectively, within communities of practitioners, through local everyday interactions, and mediated by stories and narratives (ibid).”

Reading in retrospect and having considered the foregoing consideration of Hegel and Rose this account appears at once to suppress human agency through the assumptions of social construction while at the same time suggesting a naturalistic account of collective meaning and leadership which arises without problem from an unproblematic community and everyday interactions.

A speculative re-reading of the data would identify areas in which the struggle for meaning was evident through conflict and misrecognition.

The Bishop story is an example of where in our search for relationality, the works miss the struggle. The story exemplifies different moments of determination and indetermination between the bishop and his colleagues. There is a battle of ideas between different philosophies of right. One representing the ideas of family and traditional religious community, the other representing Enlightenment ideas of universal rights and personal freedom. The story also perhaps shows the chief executive seeking to use Bishop’s testimony in a moment of struggle to reimagine new opportunities within the council’s own policy and politics.

A speculative reading of the data could have drawn out further that the sensemaking role of leadership is reframing the past and the present and in order to try to imagine future possibilities. Rather focusing on reflexivity and relationality as forms of indeterminacy, a speculative approach takes challenge and disagreement onboard, and uses different ways of being as a possibility to forge a new temporary synthesis.

**Provoking reflections on practices and assumptions**

In the third category - provoking reflection on practices and assumptions - the works suggested that stories offer critique and aim to generate change, among a sceptical audience.

The data also captured chief executives’ own reflections on why and how they and others used stories (see PAR2 p522).

The works’ interpretation of the data suggests that “This example concerns narrative building rather than stories. It shows how the chief executive acted to mediate the relationship between the council leader and staff members” (ibid).

Another chief executive reflects that “to convince someone of anything you need to articulate their truth in a way which is probably better than they could” (see PAR2, p 523 for full quote).

Here we say the chief executive is “putting himself in relation to others and trying to generate a joint critique of practice and a shared way forward. His aim is for colleagues to agree with
the need to change. But there is an appreciation that such a mutual understanding is an emergent process accomplished in a network of perspectives. Unsettling some assumptions along the way is seen as a necessary part of the job” (ibid).

There is much to agree with this in this interpretation but a speculative reading of the two reflections would bring out more of the dynamic of struggle and movement in the stories. In both stories the chief executive is recognising that there is difference between two important determinations and seeking to operate in the broken middle in between. In both cases the chief executive is committed to the struggle. They do not just acknowledge difference, they are fighting for the validity of their judgement. They are not agnostic about the outcome, but they realise that mediating requires relationality and recognition: an immanent unfolding of shared reason.

In the first example the chief executive urges the leader to connect to the professionals’ programme. We are not there to analyse in detail how deeply and sincerely that was done. But we see the chief executive struggling for a consensus.

In the second example the chief executive wavers between an acknowledgement of different truths and the need to impose his own on the other. This struggle to articulate the mediation that he is describing ebbs and flows in his reflection. He is struggling for his own truth but he knows he is reliant on others to accomplish it.

Managing political relations with council leaders

The fourth category - managing political relations with council leaders - concerns a particularly important dimension of the chief executives’ work: their relationship with politicians. We say that our “data show how practitioners use terms such as “political storytelling” (ibid) and “constructing the narrative” (PAR2 p.525) interchangeably. “Through a relational lens, we analyze the role that narrative practices play in managing this critical officer–member relationship. The data demonstrate how chief executives manage interactions to help leaders get what they need and ensure that the collective is not vulnerable to a lack of political discipline. The data accentuate that political narratives, policy making, and strategy formation are coproduced” (PAR2 p.525).

As one chief executive explained, “This is not something you want to be ostentatious about, but you’re also ‘doing the narrative’ back to the politicians. When I arrived there was no habit of the chief exec going to political groups to talk about what the challenges were. And we’ve been doing a lot of that... and the focus is the narrative - getting them to realise where they are, where they’ve been, where they’re going (PAR2 p.523).”

In another reflection a chief executive told us:
“So we constructed a narrative about becoming the “commissioning council”... as a means of delivering the members’ transformation stuff and... engendering order. It was chaotic... So we wrapped it all up into a coherent story and said to them, “Isn’t this what you’re saying to us?... Right then here’s a program, do you agree it?” I think it is their story - we just needed to help them construct a narrative” (PAR2 p.524).

While the works reflect on the relationality and the co-production and draw a distinction between narrative generation and storytelling, a speculative exposition of the data offers different perspectives. Both these reflections again show chief executives as speculative leaders seeking to open new possibilities and ways of thinking and acting. They are recognising the validity in what the politicians are seeking to do but seeking to synthesise that with policy and technical know-how. In the first extract, the chief executive draws attention to the change in practice meaning that they attend political group meetings. This immediately breaks the binary opposition and puts them in the broken middle seeking to manage the diremptions - expert and non-expert, appointed and elected, employed and employer - that structure so much of management and leadership roles in a political environment.

In the second extract we see the chief executive literally describe the act of synthesis they were attempting. In the first moment the council determines a political decision. In the second moment the officers experience the policy objectives as chaotic. They try then to re-frame the two moments into a positive resolution that creates a synthesis that is no doubt imperfect and temporary. In this example we see the speculative logic in action where both initial moments are preserved and modified into a new determination.

**Decentred leadership and dilemmas**

While the themes above are covered mainly in PAR2, this section comments on NPA which was based on interviews with chief executives on the role of storytelling and policy making dilemmas.

The works set out the chapter’s theoretical stance by arguing: “There is no essentialist account of the state, of governance, or of policymaking. Instead, social scientists need to pay thoughtful and critical attention to the stories of the participants in these processes. In this chapter, we embrace the potential of a decentred approach to policymaking, one in which we listen to and learn from accounts (stories of storying) of a particular group of front-line actors - chief executives of local councils. We suggest that the polyphony of policymaking can be understood through appreciating the importance of the beliefs and traditions of those involved” (NPA p.198).

Applying the Hegelian lens, this explanation is too one-sided, focusing on the lack of determination, avoiding knowledge claims and shying from judgement. In particular the account of decentred governance is framed as a polyphony rather than as a negotiation where our interviewees are participants with particular roles and responsibilities. The underlying
thinking in the works seems to be one of passive equality between participants rather than a site of struggle between different determinations and identities.

While the works expound an account of decentring that emphasises complexity and the indeterminate play of multiple forces, a Hegelian reading provides a stronger analysis.

A speculative response to the data in this chapter would have been to show how leaders struggle, negotiate and deploy a range of different strategies for governing where goals are not always compatible, uncertainty reigns, agency is limited, capacity is strained and where conflict is inevitable. These strategies will be limited, imperfect and temporary. Despite these constraints, speculative leadership is about how possibilities and opportunities are found, and enacted, in the grounded actuality of organisational life.

The works also record that we “found a commitment to stories and narratives amongst our chief executives, who recognise it as an important part of their practice in relation to policymaking. Our interviews offer us examples of where the chief executives are authoring stories in interventionist ways to influence the action. But the chief executives are also alive to the importance of others’ stories. Here their job is to listen to and understand the beliefs, concerns or aspirations that play through these. They include examples of stories that exert a catalysing effect in the policy process and become a focal point for the mobilisation of organisational action or local political change” (NPA p.210).

Much of this remains pertinent in a speculative analysis, but by focusing the analysis on the surface-level story, rather than the underlying logic of why, the exposition misses opportunities to explain. The excerpt captures the chief executives’ role of both intervening and listening but misses the opportunity to put them in relation to one another.

The works also produce some rich data that capture chief executives’ own reflections on their practice. One reads:

“Evidence is never enough; you’ve got to find meaning in all the noise. And storytelling is the best way of doing that,” (NPA p.210).

Another chief executive articulates the actuality and limits of policy making:

“It really feels as if we’re trying to do more complicated things now than perhaps we were. We know how to build things, we know how to invest in the expansion of a service, we know how to make things more efficient. But we’re really in a world now where we’re trying to care about outcomes in a serious way, we’re trying to do complicated things like demand management and they are more complicated deliverables. And they require partnership working where you’re not in control of everything” (NPA p.206).
The first excerpt captures the limits of pure reason as a force for explanation and governance. The chief executive recognises that evidence and technical information is necessary but not sufficient. They also suggest that in the actuality of deciding and governing leaders must use their intuition, their emotions to convey speculative thinking.

In the second excerpt the chief executive is describing a real time and actual struggle. She recognises that the organisation is being asked to modify itself and seems unsure whether it can be achieved. The organisation is in the process of losing its determination, becoming indeterminate in the face of challenge, forcing it to transform in ways that accommodate both moments. She is struggling to grasp what a positive resolution may be and lacks the control, and ideas to be sure she will be successful. Interestingly she frames the challenge in both epistemological and ontological terms. They do not know what to do or how to do it and the world around them is changing constantly.

**Management consultancy, thinking for others and speculative reason?**

In the work on consultancy and practice (K&P) the work sets out an account of management or strategy consultancy that reflects my own practice as a consultant. It distinguishes itself from the “one best way” consultants by concentrating on the role of knowledge at the heart of my practice.

Beginning with Plato’s idea of knowledge in the Theaetetus, where he develops his ‘aporia - pathless paths’ that lead to puzzlement and open-ended questions, rather than resolution the works argue that:

“...In consultancy we are often working on issues which resemble open-ended questions, where there is no established operating manual based on a proven body of knowledge about the conditions or causes of success. Thus even where there is experience about what has worked in some places - i.e., how to lead, develop and motivate people, how to change organisational culture, how to build democratic organisations, how to design and implement policy that achieves its objectives - it has not always worked in all places and it is not always clear why not. In other words, our limited experience falls short of a knowledge that can universally be put into practice without reference to other factors such as the people, politics and culture of the particular context.

Often it is not a consultant’s role to bring new knowledge but rather to problematise what it is to know, what knowledge about management problems might be, and then to provide the conditions for new ways of thinking about the challenges faced by the client. This version of consultancy seems to owe more to a Socratic dialogue than to a
Taylorist\textsuperscript{17} approach. Perhaps consultancy’s relationship to knowledge could be conceptualised as addressing open-ended questions, a form of aporetic reasoning, stimulating a process of dialogue and debate: collectively worrying our way towards new ways of seeing the management challenge.

... consultancy is not in essence about being a subject expert. It ought to be much more about stimulating critical reflection on practice and about increasing critical-thinking capacity. This is about being able to understand the strategic organisational, policy, political issue, formulate the challenge and the open-ended questions (the aporia), and stimulate thinking about how to change, how to reframe the challenge so the impasse can be overcome” (K&P pp.227-8).

While the conceptual framework is not explicitly Hegelian, speculative reasoning is clearly running through the argument and exposition. The problematisation of knowledge, the aporia, the open-ended thinking about new possibilities are all themes that are deeply embedded in this piece.

What is missing are the notions of misrecognition and struggle which, while perhaps detectable sotto voce, are not sufficiently developed.

**A speculative exposition of localism and local government reform**

The works NCLG and LGR examine the consequences of the rise in localism and decline in interdependence between local and central governments.

The works set the context describing how for decades many in and around local governance in Scotland (and England) have argued for a much fuller framework of partnership between national and local government that enshrined mutual recognition and shared responsibilities in ways which respect the overlapping constitutional, political and inter-governmental responsibilities of local and national government (Midwinter & Mair, 1987; Mair & Bennett, 1998, 2001; McAteer & Bennett, 1999; Bennett & Fairley 2003: Kenealy & Parry, 2018).

As the works argue, “A key argument was that strategic planning and budgeting should accommodate these partnerships - and promote mutual trust and understanding - avoiding the mundane conflict of indifference that had undermined many other previous efforts” (LGR).

\textsuperscript{17} Taylor believed the formula for successful management was based on: ‘high wages and low labor cost’ (Taylor 1967 p.9). This formula was buttressed by two key assumptions: first, that men can be motivated best by the prospect of material gain; and second, that management can direct well paid workers to eliminate a whole host of problems that constitute inefficiency, which Taylor identifies with the ‘awkward, inefficient, or ill-directed movements of men’ (ibid p.5).
While the idea of joint planning was not new, the novelty was suggesting in some detail how groups could be coordinated and conflict could be reduced.

An early evaluation of the impact of devolution in Scotland on local government found that devolution had not yet delivered the ‘joining up’ of public services that some had held out as a key aspiration (Bennett, Fairley & McAteer, 2002; McAteer & Bennett, 2005). More than 10 years later the Audit Commission judged that implementation had not been successful and in early 2020, the Accounts Commission raised very similar criticisms of the new wave of City Deals (Accounts Commission, 2020).

In England, the idea of partnership has been largely rejected by both sides. Now some senior people in local government are beginning to regret the alacrity with which the sector swallowed the idea of ironic localism - my term for promoting localism in order mask cuts in local government’s central government funding (NCLG) - in exchange for the abolition of external review by the Audit Commission. Local government has found that being reduced to the delivery of statutory responsibilities is to exist as an executive arm of government. A far cry from the ambitions of the place shaping traditions (Lyons 2007, Bichard, 2010). To put it in existential terms, local government has found that being-in-and-for-itself is empty of meaning compared to the significance of being-for-another.

On reflection, perhaps the effort that the government and its army of public audit, inspection and regulators made was at least a symbol of respect, an acknowledgment of the essential interdependence of local and central governance around key outcomes; that what local government did had meaning (see NCLG & LGR).

The works argue that local government collectively did not sufficiently appreciate Isaiah Berlin’s distinction between two concepts of freedom, negative and positive (Berlin 1969). One interpretation might be that they grabbed at the chance of what Berlin calls negative freedom, which is the absence of (or freedom from) externalities without enough thought about what this might mean for their positive freedom, the ability to (or the freedom to) act in the way one chooses (LGR). They chose empty localism over the struggle of interdependence.

UK governance is based on a series of interdependencies - involving localities, regions, central departments and agencies, not to speak of devolved national governments and supranational partnerships. Sovereignty, the works argue, is not complete in any of these domains but is shared and based on complex and evolving partnerships. These partnerships can be contested and involve grey areas, but by seeking to become free, local government has become divorced from its partners in governance (LGR).

In this exposition of the works, we can see that while the themes of partnership and interdependence in central/local governance have been an enduring subject of research and writing, the conceptual framework is overly diverse and can be developed further. In the
analysis of ironic localism and on the decline of local government’s role outside its statutory duties (LGR), it is clear that more could be made of local government’s one-sided thinking. While the concept of Berlin’s two notions of freedom illustrated the binary opposites, the argument could have been made more clearly using the framework of the broken middle and the need to negotiate the diremption between the poles.

In local government reform, the speculative reading suggests that local government discourse that emphasise separation or independence, such as soi disant localism discussed in the works, is bound to increase contradiction and conflict rather than a positive resolution. Local government policy and institutional reform needs to focus on freedom to act as much as freedom from constraints. It is a clear example where, read speculatively, the two liberties are intertwined and mutually dependent. In Europe, municipalities with complete decision-making power deliver small scale and low budget services. The binary opposite is decentralised arms of the state which have responsibility for ensuring national standards in local places. Local government in the UK is of course imperfect, but it occupies a middle position of overlapping constitutional mandates and service responsibilities and a high degree of national funding for the delivery of national services (defined as those for which there are national standards or indeed universal human rights that define outcomes). It appears to me that a positive resolution would be for local government to negotiate from a position where it is constitutionally connected to and indeed interdependent with central government. Accepting a twin mandate to improve and deliver both national and local services through local democratic institutions increases local government’s legitimacy rather than diminishing them.

In consultancy, the thesis develops the published works in suggesting that public sector commissioners could perhaps reflect to what extent their consultancy needs are for linear, technical know-how or whether procurement contracting could be more speculative in spirit, in other words, collectively worrying their way towards new ways of seeing the challenge that needs resolution.

In all of these domains covered by the works - leadership, research, local government reform, consultancy - similar patterns apply. Some of the attempted resolutions will work, some will work partially for a limited time, some will fail but provide learning. This is the painful but ethical journey of leadership.

Developing the idea of speculative leadership

The works observe relationality at work in the data but stop short of answering why relationality was significant and how it relates to other factors such as how leaders think, know and how it helps leaders recognise and work upon the dilemmas and challenges they face.
The idea and practice of leadership that emerges from the works is one that is relational and provisional, improvising and adapting to the ethical context. It also challenges some of the orthodoxies of leadership assumed in the literature. A common trait of the leadership literature is that it characterises the challenges and dilemmas that are faced as needing solutions of knowledge, capacity (organisational structure and resources) or capability (skills, training). However, as Heifetz writes, where the leader sets the vision and aligns the organisation: “Leadership is reduced to grand knowing and salesmanship” (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001).

Speculative leadership would therefore require grounded thinking to help unfold the rational possibilities in the actual politics of today, and not lose itself in any fantasies about what must or ought to be, in “any imposition of ideals, imaginary communities or ‘progressive narrations’” (Rose, 1981: xi).

As Schick articulates it: “A speculative negotiation of the dirempted middle does not aim to fix what is broken; that would be euphoria – the easy way. Instead, it works towards comprehension, however partial, of dirempted thought and actuality under modernity. It also reflects on ‘what [...] action] may be ventured’, given this brokenness – knowing that any action will be flawed and result in unintended consequences, but clinging to the hope that something may be learned" (Schick, 2022: 39).

This idea of speculative leadership is an ongoing process, a process of translating between different poles, different worlds (Freeman 2009, 2017, 2019), a continual negotiation and mediation. As Griggs and colleagues have written about democracy it is “as practical and processual, but not procedural ... how it is always incomplete, in process” (Griggs et al 2014: 30).

Speculative leadership begins with an acceptance that leadership, while necessary, is fundamentally limited, failure is inevitable, and that improvements are only possible through struggle. Leaders, who accept their limits, operate in the broken middle between the past the future, certainty and uncertainty, the bounded and the boundless, experience and imagination. Their work in this broken middle is to strive to understand all sides of an argument, competing interests, contested and legitimate claims to justice, incompatible versions of political right and to try, with others, to generate a synthesis, an altered state of affairs that can hold for a time.

As this thesis has argued in detail, it is precisely because we are children of our time that we must struggle to understand it and resolve its contradictions. In contrast to the works’ latent theoretical assumptions, this thesis argues that the social construction account in the works elides two separate arguments. One argument is that reason - the researcher, the leader, consciousness - is historically situated. The second is that this renders our realities unreliable.
This dualist, binary thinking however leads to the alienation of our self from the world - and indeed of our self from our own self as outlined in chapter 5.

Schematically this speculative leadership logic model can be shown as follows:

![Speculative leadership - logic model](image)

The speculative logic model shows an ongoing and perhaps infinite process of how a positive determination (the result of a previous synthesis and process of recognition) is challenged by the negative moment and becomes indeterminate. In time, if speculative leadership is effective, this results in a synthesis which becomes a new positive determination. Taking each of the circles in turn:

**POSITIVE DETERMINATION** – The first step is to understand the organisational reality in the zeitgeist (the positive determination). Practically this might involve a range of techniques from close-up (qualitative) observing and listening but also more long distance (and perhaps, but not necessarily, quantitative) analytical managerial techniques such as surveys, PESTLEOS, SWOTs to provide complementary understandings of the current status. These reports on the situational conditions (like “sitreps” in the management of a major incident) provide a practical understanding of the situation at any given time.

**NEGATIVE INDETERMINATION** - Understanding the challenge, the crisis, the Other (the negative moment) which presents the need for change. Practically this might involve techniques like the HM Treasury’s 5 Case Model (e.g. the high-level Strategic Outline Case [SOC]) or other heuristic tools for understanding the need and appraising costs of change.

**SYNTHESIS** – The synthesis will arise out of imagining the immanent possibilities of the indeterminate moment. This fundamentally involves bringing people together – insiders and...
outsiders – to search for solutions and to imagine different possible options and futures. Practically this might include options analysis and options appraisal tools such as the service design methodologies like the fuller HM Treasury Green Book 5 Case Models (i.e. Outline Business Case [OBC] and Full Business Case [FBC]) (HM Treasury 2018, 2022). These models allow the heuristic simulation and testing of a range of scenarios through a process optioneering to test against Critical Success Factors which have been constructed to capture strategic goals.

In my own practice I have used variations of the anonymised, Outcomes Pathway, below, as a tool to work with local government practitioners to understand the present, recognise the challenge and to imagine possible futures. In the first pillar the pathway uses a PESTLEO as a way of creating a deep and shared understanding of the present. The second pillar provides a framework for capturing challenges to the status quo. The third and fourth pillars capture the resources needed as well as barriers and constraints to a new synthesis. The fifth pillar articulates the outcomes aimed for and a way of judging comparative change to the opening status quo.

The Recovery Pathway is an ongoing process that has its roots in the context prior to the event. This context will impact on and structure the challenges faced by those responding to that event. Understanding the situation prior to the event now faced will create conditions for moving from the emergency situation to improved outcomes and (partial) recovery.
A schema from a different discipline is the Ethnographic Experiential Futures model which is a foresight model aimed at “increasing the accessibility, variety and depth of available images of the future” (Candy & Kornet 2019).

The Ethnographic Experiential Futures (EFX) model begins with existing visions of the future (the possible), seeks to challenge and multiply the thinking about what is possible. The third stage is mediation where the research and design teams try to turn possible futures into concrete examples. The next step is to mount projects, to mobilise resources in chosen scenarios and experiments. The fifth stage map completes and renews the cycle.

The EFX model is significantly limited for governmental, public sector use as it stands. Further research is required but there may be ways in which existing governmental options appraisal tools such as the Green Book’s 5 Case Model can be combined or complemented by something like the EFX model which is more focused on generating foresight.

While the Green Book tools are technical, the EFX model, though severely limited in other ways, appears more intuitive and this may be a fruitful avenue to explore in speculative leadership. As one chief executive said to me recently when facing a stark dilemma, “It became evident to me within a few moments really that what we needed were jazz players not ensemble musicians.” Speculative leadership understands that the world in the future will not be like the world was in the past. It therefore places a premium on the less bounded skills of improvisation and imaginative capacity, technical and professional expertise is not enough.
The development and challenging of this a speculative leadership logic model is the principal agenda for future research arising out of this thesis.

**Limits – and enablers - of speculative leadership**

The works and the data on which they are based do not explore the issue of constraints scientifically, however, it is clear that there are certain enablers of speculative practice.

The first is clear purpose – the need to challenge an existing determination or the need to resolve an indetermination through synthesis. Unfortunately many local authorities and other complex organisations are held back by the lack of resolve due to competing political and professional agendas. This makes the speculative leadership challenge all the more valuable.

The second is the capacity for imagination, reason and intuition based on experience. These key ingredients of critical and constructive thinking require people, time and organisational space. Local government in the UK has systematically cut its corporate thinking capacity over the last 20 years in favour of the misguided “protecting” of frontline services. This short term and ineffective thinking has led local authorities into their current impasse and is one of the key reasons they turn to consultancies like mine.

The third reason is to “hold your hypotheses loosely” (Coleman, 2022). Use speculative thinking and heuristic methods to construct and explore possible avenues that will alter the dilemmas and challenges faced. This kind of dynamic enquiry requires trust, time and a willingness to change the culture (the implicit rules and accepted ways of working) rather than to focus on short-term technical outputs. Not all managers and leaders see the value of the long-term.
7. Conclusion

This thesis has reviewed the published works to offer an alternative, more explanatory and theoretically robust interpretation of the original data.

The result is an exposition of speculative leadership driven by a theory of recognition in which understanding immanent relations between determinate and indeterminate elements can lead to temporary synthesis.

While concepts of relationality and reflexivity are trending in the interpretative approach to leadership theory, public administration and social policy, their ontological and epistemological assumptions remain under-theorised. This thesis has argued that uncertainty on these philosophical principles leads to inconsistency, wavering argumentation and unclear exposition. Furthermore, the lack of a theoretical basis fails to provide leaders with ways of thinking about decisions in the face of inevitable dilemmas.

It is the contention of this thesis that:

1. Leaders never attain perfect (complete and collective) knowledge of what any given situation involves. They are in a state of misrecognition where they neither fully understand the situation they are facing, nor are they fully recognised as being able to lead. This creates an epistemological and ontological contradiction at the heart of leadership.

2. Leadership practice is - or can be - a speculative process in which leaders use a combination of reason, intuition and experience to seek to understand, to recognise the situation they are in, and to address conflict and contradiction. While all attempts at leadership are temporary and bound to be of limited success, the struggle to better recognise the opportunities for change immanent within their context provides leaders with the potential for transformation. This thesis will argue it is precisely because we are grounded in the present that we must resist idealistic conceits and normative fantasies and that only by struggling to understand the world around them can the researcher, the leader, as self-consciousness being, strive to overcome the inevitable failures they will experience. The concepts of reflexivity and relationality in the works are insufficient and weak due to their passivity and relativism in the face of aporia. By contrast, thinking speculatively helps us recognise and alter the dilemmas we confront.

In exploring these themes, this thesis has brought a radical reading of Hegel’s phenomenology to bear on the relationship between reason and reality and the implications for leadership. Building on a range of philosophical and sociological sources, and influenced significantly by the work of Gillian Rose, I have offered a reading of Hegel’s philosophy from the speculative
tradition as a never accomplished process of grappling with necessary and ongoing misrecognitions.

Speculative leaders accept that they never attain perfect (complete and collective) knowledge of what any given situation involves. They are in a near constant state of misrecognition where they neither fully understand the situation they are facing, nor are they fully recognised as being able to lead. This creates an epistemological and ontological contradiction at the heart of leadership.

The contribution of this thesis is to offer a speculative account of the leadership challenge based on an interpretation of Hegel’s struggle for recognition and speculative reason. The Hegelian approach provides the basis for reframing the Kantian dualism in public leadership where the conceptual framework through which leaders perceive and interpret what is to be done become aspects of strategic, self-understanding.

The works’ account of leadership is weakened by its inability to address the epistemological scepticism at its core. This scepticism at the heart of reflexivity disconnects leaders’ from what they think, see and understand as their purpose and offers no theory about the nature of these divisions or how they are to be overcome.

Speculative leadership provides an account of where leaders stand and provides a framework and logic model for thinking about and getting a purchase on their most difficult dilemmas.

Speculative leadership requires sniffing out, listening attentively, looking and observing, trying to see beyond the obvious and imagining what other possibilities might be. One-sided thinking where the leader (or researcher) identifies themselves with one binary pole or the other - authoritarian or laissez faire, Enlightenment reason or postmodern social construction, freedom or equality - may be successful in their lifetime, but in emphasising difference rather than identity, and being unwilling to struggle to synthesise opposing positions, the one-sided position can never be recognise others and never overcome modernity’s contradictions.

Reason takes place within history. Not above or beyond it. Leaders need to use their reason speculatively operating in the broken middle to mediate between and to work on and alter the contradictions they face and, thereby, to perceive new possibilities and ways of being. They will never find these resolutions in utopian accounts of organisations, or in technical manuals based on abstract universal principles.

By grasping the immanent content of a time, a place, a situation (identity), philosophy can articulate the critique (non-identity) and the point towards a sublation or positive resolution (synthesis) in which the new being unfolds and becomes another being than itself.
While relationality and reflexivity tried to describe the world, perhaps speculative leadership can help to change it.
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75


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