

THE LANGUAGE OF LEADERSHIP

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**A Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Cardiff University**

Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University

May 2008

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ABSTRACT

This thesis takes a critical approach to dominant ways of understanding leadership. The context for the study is UK local government where leadership has been popularised as a key feature of the latest phase of public sector modernisation. By drawing on the linguistic turn inherent in poststructuralism, and in particular the work of Jacques Derrida, the thesis challenges the orthodox assumption that leadership is a neutral and stable pre-linguistic phenomenon. In contrast it suggests that any given 'truth' of leadership can be seen as an attempt to control a linguistic system that is inherently undecidable. It is an attempt to 'write' the world in a particular way, which is then forgotten.

The thesis begins by considering orthodox approaches to the role of language in theorising organising in general, and also reviews a range of alternative perspectives that have gone some way towards engaging more fully with its epistemological, ontological and normative-ethical deficits. It then justifies the distinctive contribution to these debates made by the radicalised view of language found in poststructuralism in general, and the work of Jacques Derrida in particular. A review of the leadership literature suggests that it is dominated by an assumption that language is representational. Leadership is also depicted unquestioningly as an individualistic and impartial phenomenon. It is thus argued that the field is ripe for a more detailed focus on the politics of the language of leadership.

The implications of Derrida's work for reading and writing texts, and the (im)possibility of a poststructuralist methodology, are discussed in some detail. In particular, I highlight the need to reflexively problematise the textuality of the truth of this thesis. This is addressed by means of a deconstruction of the assessment criteria for a PhD thesis, which is included in the Appendix. An analysis of the linguistic decisions I made in order to stage an exemplary chapter betrays the discipline exerted by the academy.

The main empirical work is based on a variety of texts from the case study organisation, including interviews with putative leaders, and formal documentation,

such as a statement of leadership competences. These are subject to close reading in the spirit of what has been termed 'deconstruction', focusing on how and with what consequences the popularised truth of leadership is organised through language. Each reading concentrates in turn on one aspect of the leadership truth being promoted in the case study organization, namely leadership that is 'visible', 'strong', 'understanding' and 'shared'.

I suggest that 'leadership' is an unsuccessful attempt to stabilize the play of language around individualism, specific aspects of which serve to privilege the productive power of the *person* of the office holder as part of local government modernisation. The study concludes by suggesting that the very instability of the truth offers opportunities for rethinking both leadership and public sector reform, in ways that are more open to the other.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with a critical reading of the language of ‘leadership’¹, drawing on the work of Jacques Derrida. It is an empirical poststructuralist project designed around the following research question:

What *is* leadership?

In this chapter I present an account of the way in which reflections on my experience as an academic provoked the study, and introduce three key themes: language, individualism and power. The chapter goes on to provide a brief overview of the public sector context for the research, as well as an outline of the theoretical commitments and research aims that have informed the conceptualisation of the resulting study. I then provide an overview of the chapters that comprise the thesis.

BEING TROUBLED BY ‘LEADERSHIP’

Leadership is generally assumed to be a self-evident fact. It seems to appear in early Greek, Chinese and Egyptian civilizations, and since the turn of the 19th century has been an integral feature in the organising of modern industrial work. Despite going through a ‘trough’ in popularity in the early 1980s as an academic topic (Bryman 1996, p. 276), leadership has recently re-emerged as an ‘obsession’ (Storey 2004, p. 12) being portrayed by both practitioners and many academics as the guarantor of success if organisations are to meet the purportedly formidable challenges of twenty-first century society. People frequently point to the vast number of results thrown up by searches of *Google* using the keyword leadership, along with the growth in business press titles,

¹ Normally, quotation marks are used to draw attention to a word or phrase in a text, or where a concept is unfamiliar. It has also become a convention in poststructuralist writing to use quotation marks to signify the precarious and constructed nature of the purported truth being referred to. However, lest this practice become excessive and distracting, throughout this text I have confined this approach to the idea of ‘leadership’ and only when it appears in section headings. On other occasions, I have used quotation marks in the more general sense for highlighting a significant word or phrase.

executive courses and awards for outstanding ‘leaders’ as illustrative of the way in which it has captured the popular imagination. Academia has not been immune to the leadership spin having seen the advent of new specialist courses, conferences and journals devoted specifically to the topic. Also, its panacea-like quality has resulted in leadership being considered essential to a much wider range of situations than ever before, with school leadership, youth leadership, religious leadership and community leadership, amongst others now seen as legitimate fields for practice and enquiry. But exactly because of this ubiquity and ambition there is a danger of leadership being adopted uncritically. It seems to me to be necessary to question leadership’s inevitability, the sort of leadership truth being promoted, and indeed its ethics, issues that typically remain unspoken.

It is impossible to identify a pure originary starting point for this study, but it could be described as a manifestation of the growing scepticism about leadership and language that I experienced in my role as an academic. An example of the way in which this scepticism was provoked can be found in my involvement with a postgraduate leadership development programme designed by my employer, Metropolitan Business School, specifically for an external client, Metropolitan Council. The Sustainable Leadership Programme is typical of many such courses in the way that it involved action learning, psychometric profiling, coaching and a variety of practitioners talking about their leadership experiences. The facilitation of the programme was subcontracted to a firm of consultants, with my role being to reinforce Metropolitan Business School’s ownership of the contract by delivering a selection of slots across the five two-day events that comprised the programme, focusing on aspects of leadership. Aside from considering *how* I was going to deliver the sessions (an issue for critical reflection in itself), my immediate concern was *what* I was going to deliver, anticipating the participants’ expectation that they would be provided with an answer to the fundamental question, ‘what *is* leadership?’

Below, is reproduced a short extract from a digital recording of a two-hour long Taster Workshop designed to give prospective participants a flavour of the forthcoming

leadership programme. Having only recently joined the organisation when the workshop took place, I was an observer at this event, and found that the experience resurrected, once again, many of my ongoing dilemmas concerning the portrayal of leadership in both academia and the workplace.

Facilitator: OK, so you've shared some thinking on Innovation, now lets have a look at the next one on the list, Leadership. There's an interesting debate about this. Just broadly, I mean there's a lot of debate about leadership. Can you think of any leaders?

Participant 1: Mandela, Oprah Winfrey [*laughter from other participants*]... Oh, I mean it!

Facilitator: So, why did you say that? What made you say her name? What made you say her name?

Participant 1: Because I was answering the question, and I'm not being obtuse.

Facilitator: Sorry, sorry, I mean why did you put her in that category?

Participant 1: Because she's an incredible leader...because of the numbers of irons in the fire that she has. What she says is really listened to. She's an opinion former.

Facilitator: So when you hang onto the word 'influence'... So actually, can we all have influence? So I guess if we interpret leadership broadly as influence there's no reason why we all can't do that.

Leadership, and lots of work and courses and things on leadership, came out of the notion of an organisation as a machine...And that's not to say that that form of leadership doesn't work, particularly in task orientated organisations, command and control works very effectively. It still works in the military very effectively; it works in the police very effectively. It works in the fire service very effectively. Any comments on that?

Participant 2: It doesn't always work effectively, particularly in the fire service...or the police for that matter.

Facilitator: So the question is, why are the military trying to change? Because they are!

Participant 3: Because they've reflected on their practice and they've decided it doesn't work.

Facilitator: Yes, it would be interesting to find out why they've reflected on it. Mostly they decide to change because it doesn't work with customers, the people with whom they're doing business, because people are more informed aren't they.

“You can’t tell me this is what I’m going to do, because I’ll say no, unless there’s a particular benefit to me”. So, actually the whole thing starts to shift. I mean it’s really difficult now to find an organisation that doesn’t talk about customers...and what that means is that actually you have an opportunity in an organisation to lead something, to influence someone, if you can’t lead anybody else then we can lead ourselves. So there is a shift and because of the emphasis on the customer, the people bit that you can influence, there’s a massive shift. And the skills required to do this need to be developed for organisations to function effectively. So there’s a strong argument if you like, for developing those skills. Now whatever you call leadership, whether you call it influence, its actually there and it’s worth getting your head around what it might be.

Participant 4: But we’re only talking about the western world aren’t we, there are all sorts of leadership approaches all over the world some of which are very effective for the age at which their country is developing at.

Facilitator: Absolutely, so what we are doing, we will look at that. Lets look at other forms and definitions and how it works. And actually for you, operating in your culture...unless the culture involves some changes all the time, that’s probably, that’s precisely what we’ll do; it’s your meaning that counts.

The problem of shifting from there to there, is in order to do that you’ve got to decide that you’re going to apply your energy in that way; it’s your discretionary effort. Because very often it’s easier to carry on doing this, and that’s why there’s an 85percent chance that any change initiative will fail, that’s the statistics around the world. Because people say, well you know, you’re leading me, tell me what to do and I’ll do it. So there’s a big shift to ‘its up to you, you do it’ and they go “ahhh!” So it’s a big challenge actually, a big challenge, but it’s worth doing.

So then there’s the bit about whether people are managing or leading. **SLIDE**
What are your thoughts?

Participant 2: What’s the difference?

Participant 1: It’s interesting actually, because I’ve never liked the word manager because of the meaning of manager with a small ‘m’, just getting by. But if you look at the things that are on the left are bare minimum sort of things, just about ‘being able’ to manage, and the things on the right are things about taking you to a higher level.

Facilitator: There is a big difference because here you are probably managing things that someone else decided the business or organisation is going to do, and you make it work. And over here you made the decision that you’re going to do things differently. Why are you doing that? Why aren’t we doing this? I am determined to make a difference. So once again, it’s quite a shift for people in terms of their energy.

Here’s another exercise...

The Reality of 'Leadership'

My first concern about the portrayal of leadership provoked by the Taster Workshop relates to the way in which most accounts of leadership take it for granted that the term corresponds with an objectively real and stable social fact, materially embodied in *the* leader as a nominative noun or subject, and as a verb suggesting visible social practices or acts of *leading*. Moreover, leadership is usually located in relation to the accusative noun or object of leadership, namely 'followers' who it is assumed can be tangibly counted and observed being affected by the leader.

However, what emerges from even a cursory reading of the leadership literature is that despite the conviction that leadership exists, the only thing there is agreement on is that there is no agreement on what leadership *is*. Stogdill's (1974, p. 259) observation that 'there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept' is often cited to illustrate the 'contradictory and inconclusive' (Yukl 1989, p. 253) nature of the voluminous literature on the topic. Indeed, Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003a, p. 378) suggest that the existence of such numerous definitions of the phenomenon actually 'undermines any pretense of leadership existing in any specific sense'. This lack of academic consensus, along with the faddish enthusiasm with which the latest leadership theory is embraced by practitioners and promoted in development programmes such as the one described above, actually suggest a distinct lack of substance to this incontrovertible 'fact'.

An explanation for this intangibility may be found in a closer examination of the language used to convey the meaning of leadership. In the extract above, the workshop facilitator's only resource in communicating the idea of leadership as 'influence' is a variety of linguistic strategies that include rhetorical questions, the establishment of a simple causal relationship between solving customer problems and business success, and contrasting an image of those who are prepared to take on an individual responsibility for action and those who audibly shrink from it. However, the confusion over the semantics of language that occurs in the extract, hints at the way in which language is actually more *complicated*. Its paradoxical quality is evident in the misunderstanding

that occurs in the first frustrated interchange between the facilitator and participant one. Later, participant two suggests that while management and leadership are often distinguished as very different phenomena, the words used on the facilitator's slide to describe what each involves are very similar, and could be used to describe *both* phenomena. Subsequently, participant one attempts to overcome such indecision by drawing on the subtleties of grammar (management with a little 'm') to draw clearer boundaries between the two terms.

It seems to me that these everyday examples of linguistic slipperiness represent more than merely instances of occasional mis-communication that can be rectified by greater care in the use of language. Rather, they are illustrative of the problematic behind the recent 'linguistic turn' in social sciences which has challenged the taken for granted model of language as mirror. More discursively orientated theorising has foregrounded the role of language itself in constituting reality, also highlighting the instability of language as a system of meaning, its dependence on context and the way in which it is inextricably intertwined with power. While the linguistic turn has had a significant impact on theorising a number of aspects of organisation (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000), it is noticeable that it has had a limited impact on theorising leadership.

The Truth of 'Leadership'

My second concern about the portrayal of leadership highlighted by the Taster Workshop relates to the kind of leadership truth being promoted. Despite the advent of purportedly post-heroic models of leadership, it has long been taken for granted that leadership is based on individualism (Bolden *et al* 1996, Isles and Preece 2006, Lawler 2008). Individualism has been a key feature of most modern Western institutions over the last 400 years, with the self-conscious subject seen as the primary reality and source of autonomous, rational thought and action, in the pursuit of mastery over objects that exist in the external world. In the extract above, from the Taster Workshop, representations of leadership draw on just such assumptions. For example, the location of the reality of leadership in the physical and mental presence of the individual is evident in the way that the facilitator directly addresses the participants as having the

potential to embody the phenomena, and also when he asks them to identify other individuals who already embody leadership. Individual autonomy is referenced when the Facilitator suggests that formerly participants were ‘managing things that someone else decided’ while as leaders *they* can now make ‘the decision that you are going to do things differently’, they now have the choice or ‘discretion’ as to where they apply their effort. Rationality is referenced in relation to the ability to deduce that a soft influencing style of leadership is more appropriate to a demanding customer environment, than a ‘command and control’ approach common to mechanistic organisations. Agency is referenced by contrasting management that involves ‘just getting by and doing the minimum’, with the heightened capacity for energy inherent in the individual leader. For example, Oprah Winfrey is admired by one of the participants because of ‘the numbers of irons in the fire that she has’. The resulting causal effects are indeed considerable; leaders are ‘really listened to’, having the ability to form the opinions of other people, and take them to a ‘higher level’ to the extent that a palpable ‘difference’ is made and the organisation being seen ‘shifting from there to there’. This latter point also illustrates the sublime quality of leadership; these are exceptional individuals.

However, there has been some consideration of the way the portrayal of leadership as an idealised sovereign individual has had some particularly dysfunctional consequences. For example Maccoby (2000) argues that leadership is an expression of extreme confidence or narcissism that results in excessive isolation and dangerous risk-taking, while Khurana (2002, p. 8) suggests that our tendency to place extraordinary trust in the power of the charismatic Chief Executive Officer (CEO) ‘resembles less a mature faith than it does a belief in magic’. Indeed, the very idea of individualism has not been without its critics. As early as 1856, de Tocqueville (1956) was lamenting the problems of individualism in modern America,

Men (*sic*) being no longer attached to one another by any tie of caste, of class, of corporation, of family, are only too much inclined to be preoccupied only with their private interests...to retire into a narrow individualism.

And, the more recent work of Elias (1991), Bauman (2001), Sennett (2003) and Eliot and Lemert (2006), amongst others, has offered a significant critique of what is seen as a

growing trend in hyper-individualism in modern society. Exaggerated self-aggrandisement is thought to have led to unethical action and detachment from the needs of others in the pursuit of self-interest, evidenced in scandals such as Bhopal and Enron. For some this has resulted in an interest in more communitarian principles, which stress both individual rights and collective responsibilities (Etzioni 2003, Sandel 2005). For others, influenced by the postmodern 'death of man', the issue has become a search for quest for some form of post-individualist mode of being (Willmott 1998a, McInnes and Beech 2005).

The Politics of 'Leadership'

My third concern relates to Alvesson and Sveningsson's (2003a, p. 379) warning that 'much of the leadership industry may produce leadership as something distinct and robust without careful consideration of the reasons for doing so [when in fact] there are strong ideological overtones around the idea of leadership'. Leadership is usually presented as a natural and neutral phenomena: it is an inevitable feature of all work organisations and the status differential between leader and led is seen as arising legitimately from the hierarchy of authority, while any leadership strategies deployed are considered to be merely neutral techniques for the achievement of the greater good of the organisation. However, the ubiquity and imperative surrounding the most recent resurgence of interest in leadership unsettles this view, and begs the questions, 'why leadership?' and 'why now?' and in particular, draws attention to the politics of the association between leadership and individualism. For example, one of the participants in the Taster Workshop cites Oprah Winfrey as a leadership role model, describing her as 'incredible'. While the word suggests that as a leader she is 'excellent and outstanding', the term can also imply that her leadership is 'too extraordinary and improbable to believe' (Penguin English Dictionary 2003). For me, this comment is illustrative of the worrying way in which the sublime or 'grandiose' (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003b) quality of leadership serves to inflate current expectations of what individual workers can achieve.

While the recent popularity of leadership could be explained as a fad or fashion (Grint, 1997; Collins, 2000), the critical literature on power may provide a more comprehensive account. Here, power has long been understood, as something possessed by elite groups in their 'domination' of others. As a property of social relations, such power *to* becomes institutionalised and taken for granted in notions such as 'authority', while various technocratic strategies (Reed 1992a, Hardy and Clegg 1996, Delbridge and Ezzamel 2005) are targeted at the control of behaviour. However, more recently power has been theorised as being more diffusely embedded *in* networks of power relations, which are simultaneously productive and constraining. With power designed into the fabric of the organisation, attention has shifted to the way in which meaning and identity is controlled through the manipulation of cultural symbols and norms, as well as by means of complex forms of surveillance, and indeed *self*-control as employees are positioned within discourses about the workplace which frame what can be thought and done (Willmott 1997, Alvesson and Willmott 2002, Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips 2006).

So, while the Taster Workshop facilitator's message is a positive one about the power of individual leaders to influence followers to solving customer problems, it is possible that this depiction of leadership could also be seen as an example of the creation of a particular power relations and employee subjectivity for the achievement of narrowly defined, and indeed escalated ends. While the study of discourse and identity work as a form of control has become very popular, there has been little detailed consideration of the way in which the 'positive and seductive meanings' (Alvesson and Willmott 2002, p. 620) associated with the language of leadership, and its links with individualism, offer a specific vocabulary that legitimates a very particular expectation of the worker.

'Leadership' in Local Government

This thesis explores these three concerns in the context of a case study organisation from the local government in the United Kingdom. As mentioned above, a distinguishing feature of the current resurgence of interest in leadership is the way in which it has colonised domains previously considered outside its remit, and the UK public sector is a significant example of this.

Since the Second World War, the UK public sector has been the site of ongoing and contested attempts to establish its organising principles and performance expectations. Broadly speaking, reforms by successive governments have variously championed neo-corporatist, neo-liberal managerialist and post-new public management solutions (Reed 2002), with an epochal reinvention in approach (du Gay 2003) being increasingly called for in order to meet the purported social and economic challenges of a globalised economy. However, it must be acknowledged that the philosophies and reforms that have shaped the UK public sector in the last fifty years may not be as 'coherent or unified' (Clarke et al 2004, p. 13) as the following account may suggest.

The post-war welfare state approach was organised following Weber's (1968 [1921]) ideal of bureaucracy that originated in the early years of the twentieth century. Its principles included,

- Rules and procedures: to design and regulate the whole organisation on the basis of technical knowledge.
- Hierarchy: ordered system of superior subordinate relationships determined by office hierarchy and graded authority.
- Impersonality: separation of 'private' person from the 'public' office.
- Specialised division of labour: allocation of fixed and official jurisdictional areas.
- Keeping the files: not concerned with concrete tasks, but keeping the records upon which the control of the work of others is based.
- Expertise: based on appropriate appointment and training.
- Activity: the full working capacity of the official.

Bureaucracy was seen by Weber (1968 [1921]) as an 'ideal' case of the rationalising tendency that underpinned approaches to the coordination of human effort in the large-scale enterprises that were emerging in an increasingly industrialised society. It was later assumed to be *the* dominant structural arrangement for modern organisations in pursuit of functionalist predictability and efficiency and for 60 years effort was directing at 'perfecting' bureaucracy (Heckscher and Applegate 1994, p. 1). However, Weber himself expressed concerns about the 'iron cage of bureaucracy' and the nature of the substantive ends it might serve, and there has also long been a critique of its dysfunctional consequences for functionalism, a critique that grew 'harsher and more apocalyptic' (Courpasson and Reed 2004, p. 6) with the advent of neo-liberal politics of

the 1980s and 1990s. The populist 'bashing' of bureaucracy focused on its inefficiency, irrationality (means displaced ends), inflexibility, unresponsiveness, indifference and the passivity of the bureaucrat. In response various post-bureaucratic organisational forms and practices were championed that involved a flatter, team-based, and empowered approach.

In the public sector, 'new public management' emerged in the 1980s out of the critique of corporatism (Newman 2002). The approach advocated free-market principles and private sector practices to deliver the innovation and flexible use of resources necessary to effect the sort of transformation required by the Conservative government (Leach and Percy-Smith 2001, p. 27) to address the purported crisis of the state. It involved the introduction of deregulation, privatisation, consumer choice and competition between providers, all aimed at cutting costs and raising standards. But in turn, this approach was criticised for its hard anti-collectivism, the fragmentation of delivery and the production of social conflict and inequalities.

The more recent Labour government has couched its concern to modernise the public sector in terms of the need to create social transformation and build a dynamic economy to enable Britain to compete on the world economic stage. The means adopted is a 'middle way' that claims to avoid over-reliance on both the state and the market. A key concern was a desire to create a more inclusive democracy and provide increased autonomy from the state through empowered networks. Thus, 'post new public management' has involved managed markets, more joined up service delivery through networks of partnership and collaboration, personalisation of provision (Leadbetter 2003), and participation by users.

Each of these approaches has also involved a redefinition of the role and responsibilities of the public servant, most notably from administrator, to enterprising manager and most recently, leader. The last five years have seen successive reports, produced by various different government departments, identifying strengthened leadership as being at the heart of good governance. For example,

Public service reform requires support for and development of excellent leaders capable of tackling poor management and inspiring ambitious performance. The Government needs to invest in high quality training and development to help fulfill the potential of all public servants, and in particular current and future leaders and managers. (OSPR 2002, p. 21)

Institutional reforms have been introduced to enable leaders to provide strategic direction. These have included the creation of new mayors and executive head teachers supported by an executive board, such as a cabinet or senior management team. Various national bodies have also been created, such as the National College for School Leadership, the National Health Service Institute for Innovation and Improvement, and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, with devolved finance and a remit to define and develop the role, quality and capacity of leadership in service improvement across different parts of the public sector. O'Reilly *et al* (2007) suggest that these initiatives can be seen as 'a mechanism that controls the production, dissemination and adoption of leadership knowledge' with their ultimate aim being to 'acculturate leaders as change agents' (p. 3) in order to re-invigorate the public services.

In local government there was a call for effective political, community and organisational leadership, with the Local Government Leadership Centre being established in 2004, and the discursive promotion of leadership through a string of reports, such as the white paper *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services* published by the Department of Environment, Transport, and the Regions (DETR 2001), the consultation paper *Stronger Political Leadership, Better Local Government* published by the Local Government Association (LGA 2005), *An Emerging Strategy for Leadership Development in Local Government* by the Leadership Development Commission (IDeA & EO 2005), and *Vibrant Local Leadership* by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM 2005).

The client organisation for the Sustainable Leadership Programme (Metropolitan Council) from which the Taster Workshop extract originated, was clearly a target for the dissemination of this message by central government. However, it had also turned to the idea of leadership as a means of overcoming more localised governance problems originating with a particularly autocratic former Mayor and Leader of the Council,

(Richard Street²) who had pursued what was seen as a personal crusade for transforming the city of Metropolitan. 2003 saw the establishment of a Corporate Governance Commission at Metropolitan Council following a 'difficult period' (Metropolitan Council 2004, p. 10) when,

There was growing concern within the Council and outside that current arrangements and behaviours were not serving the city well...the Council's reputation was being tarnished and its relationship of trust with those it serves put it in jeopardy (Metropolitan Council 2004, p. 2).

In April 2004, a report was published which set out findings and recommendations that claimed to 'radically change the Council's current arrangements and have a direct impact on the life of this city' (p. 2).

Leadership figured prominently in the report. It was positioned as the first substantive chapter of findings, which was also the longest in length. The Report sought to restore an ideal of leadership, an ideal that was purportedly distorted under the influence of Richard Street. While credited with securing some remarkable achievements for the city – his '2020 Vision' was about making Metropolitan into a European capital – his leadership approach aroused considerable concern and public vilification in the local press. In particular, it was felt that leadership was concentrated in the hands of too few, conducted in secretive meetings and characterised by an overbearing style towards Council employees. By making a strict divide between policy formulation and enactment in pursuit of a member-led ethos, Street was accused of having fostered an anti-officer culture. Indeed, the report mentioned the 'the myth or reality of a bullying and intimidating culture, [that] prevents the development of individual initiative, ownership and decision making' (Metropolitan Council 2004, p. 54). An atmosphere of 'blame' (p. 3) and 'recrimination' (p. 3) along with a fragmented silo-mentality was seen as having led to officers becoming under-confident and professionally weakened.

² Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of individual employees and the organisations mentioned though out this study.

As a consequence, the Report's overarching recommendation was that a clear and well-known leader should remain at the top of the organisation to provide a focus for both employees and the public. However, it was acknowledged that the reliance on a single individual could produce problems of continuity, consistency and propriety. In order to facilitate a more 'sustainable' form of leadership it was also recommended that this should be complemented by it being 'shared' more widely amongst employees across the organisation. It was hoped that this would produce 'strong leadership', whereby officers would develop the confidence to make innovative decisions and to engage in debate that would challenge the status quo. This would also necessitate these new leaders taking on a more 'visible' role internally and externally, as well as adopting a more people orientated style, demonstrating that they 'understood' and valued their staff.

In the eighteen months following the publication of the Governance Report a range of initiatives came on stream, all designed to embed this more institutionally acceptable version of leadership. The initiatives included member training, ratification of new corporate values, the development of a Leadership Competence Framework, implementation of a performance management system, institution of a Senior Management Forum, and development of a 'Drivers for Change' action plan. In particular, a 'Sustainable Leadership Programme' was delivered to cohorts of managers through a partnership between the local University and a firm of management consultants, with a pathway into a Masters in Public Administration qualification personally championed by the Chief Executive. It was from the Taster to this course that the opening extract came.

A context such as this provides fertile conditions in which to explore the question 'what *is* leadership?' Indeed, my scepticism about the 'reality', 'truth' and 'politics' of leadership at Metropolitan Council could be connected to an academic interest in the nature and success of post-bureaucracy in the public sector more broadly. For example, there has been some concern that the bifurcation of bureaucracy as bad and the market as good is a 'highly simplistic, optimistic and deterministic reading' (Courpasson and Reed 2004, p. 11). Indeed, both du Gay and Kallinikos have offered positive readings of

bureaucracy. Du Gay (2000) draws attention to the way in which the separation of the person from the office is an important means of protecting the ethic of impartiality and equality, while in contrast he suggests that the enterprise culture has no such morality. Kallinikos (2003) presents a close analysis of the pre-modern historical conditions and social relations out of which bureaucracy emerged. He argues that the separation of 'work' and the 'personal' in a bureaucracy is as a highly innovative and unique way of transcending the contingencies and limits of each 'sphere'.

Others have suggested that the purported post-bureaucratic form is a case of 'old wine in new bottles' with evidence of little difference between post-bureaucratic organisational practices and the bureaucracy they replace. Farrell and Morris (2003) argue that it should be regarded as 'neo-bureaucracy' because 'the locus has shifted rather than faded away' (p. 130). Indeed, du Gay (1994) suggests that a belief in the competitive market and possessive individualism represents an *economic* rather than political form of liberalism, and the resulting focus on performance represents an intensification of the bureaucratic ethos. Moreover, Martin (2007) has observed that the programme of modernisation appears to be informed by contradictory organising principles, in particular the tension between the private sector market ethos and the encouragement of civic responsibility.

These broad debates about the nature of public sector reform are an important background for any critical engagement with leadership. Such an engagement would appear all the more urgent given the observation by O'Reilly *et al* (2007) that there is considerable ambiguity and confusion surrounding the leadership discourse itself in the public sector, with the potential for even greater 'discursive inflation'.

TROUBLING 'LEADERSHIP'

While being troubled by the concerns set out above, for a long time I lacked the conceptual resources to understand clearly or articulate my discomfort. I struggled to find a means to engage with the nature of leadership, language and power, and in turn

issues of ontology and epistemology. The journey can be traced from the early days where I looked for answers in the seeming authority and clarity of dictionary definitions, to a more recent ability to say quite comfortably that I locate myself in the Critical Management Studies (CMS) ‘camp’ and have a radical agenda to challenge the performative assumptions enshrined in capitalist work organisations. In this study, I draw on the poststructuralist work of Jacques Derrida to undertake a close and critical reading of a range of leadership texts. But lest this should sound too glib, in the next section I put these claims into context and explain the nature of the theoretical commitments that provided me with a means of troubling leadership.

Critical Management Studies

CMS is an umbrella term used to describe a range of loosely connected ‘contra’ or ‘critical’ perspectives that have emerged in the last twenty years or so, all broadly concerned with ‘denaturalising’ (Fournier and Grey 2000) some of the unarticulated assumptions inherent in mainstream accounts of organisations that are ‘for’ management and aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the way things are done (Grey and French 1996). Critical approaches are more concerned to undertake studies that are ‘about’ management and organisations as social phenomena, with a political aim of making some sort of difference.

Thus, in the context of the Sustainable Leadership Programme, the Facilitator could be regarded as adopting the standard role of the management consultant/trainer whose trade is in educating the ‘good employee’ in the norms and prescriptions of leadership. In contrast, the scepticism I have broached above, might designate me a critical academic with an anti-performative agenda (Fournier and Grey 2000), more concerned with educating the ‘responsible’ (Grey 2004, p.180) or ‘knowledgeable citizen’ (Cunliffe *et al* 2002, p. 492) and providing a ‘complicated understanding’ (Dehler *et al* 2001, p. 498) of the complex and contested demands of the leadership role.

Despite the family resemblance, members of the CMS community embrace a range of contrasting, if not contradictory, political, ontological, epistemological and

methodological predilections (Zald 2002). For example, many critical views remain within a modernist frame of reference being concerned to articulate ‘a better truth’ (Calas & Smircich 1997, p. xiv), while more radical approaches go beyond just questioning of established wisdom to consider more closely how knowledge is fashioned, challenging both the methodological ‘tools’ and the way in which knowledge ‘serves the interests of some and not others’ (Calas & Smircich 1997, p. xiv).

This thesis follows the more radical orientation, adopting a poststructuralist approach which focuses on the role of language, not as a neutral medium for mirroring a prior singular reality, but as the primary means of organising undifferentiated experience: it is a representational system that produces the objects of which it speaks. Moreover, far from being neutral, language is ‘interested’, concealing the operation of power. This has significant implications for understanding the limits imposed by the language of leadership, particularly in a work context and also, for re-appraising the role of language in the research process itself.

While Jacques Derrida would not describe himself as a poststructuralist, since the ascribing of categories and search for essences, fundamentals or truths is what his work seeks to interrogate, his writing nevertheless bears a relationship with poststructuralism. Derrida was a prolific author of works on philosophy, literature, law, art, politics and psychoanalysis until his death at the age of 74 in 2004. The attraction of his work lies in the way in which he queries what comes *before* a question like ‘what *is* leadership?’, assumptions that might presuppose how we understand *it*. In particular, he explores the role of language in giving the appearance that leadership *is*. His radical interpretation of the work of Saussure, suggested that language is undecidable as a signifying system, but in the face of existential ambivalence, various strategies are employed in an attempt to halt the play of language and impose closure around, and legitimate, particular truths, such as leadership.

Through close reading (commonly but problematically dubbed ‘deconstruction’) Derrida reveals ‘how’ a claim to truth is made (rather than ‘what’ claim is made), the power

concealed in the claim, as well as the inherent precariousness of such artifice. Indeed, the elusive play of possibilities of language presents opportunities for other, different meanings of leadership to be explored, which may provide a means of addressing what critical management theorists such as Bohm *et al* (2001, p. 4) describe as a concern that ‘there is something deeply troubling about the way that the world is organised at present, and some feeling that things might be, in whatever way, ‘better’’. Moreover, Derrida’s concern with the undecidability of language and his refusal to seek closure in his own work, is performed by his use of a demanding narrative style and experiments with text, which raises interesting possibilities for means by which to demonstrate reflexive awareness of the textuality of research texts, such as this PhD thesis.

However, while Derrida’s influence on organisation theory was palpable during the 1990s, current interest appears to have been confined less to the appreciation of his work as an epistemological project, and more to a consideration of its relation to ethics (Willmott 1998a, Patrick 1997, Jones 2003, Rhodes and Brown 2005). Indeed, there has been a dismissal of those who have previously ‘applied’ deconstruction, as a misguided attempt to operationalise an idea that Derrida himself warned was ‘not reducible to a set of techniques’ (Weitzner 2007, p. 44). I suggest that this is in itself a simplistic critique, and there is scope for rekindling interest in the subtleties of Derrida’s work for analysing organising.

RESEARCH AIMS

Having briefly outlined the provocation for this study and its theoretical commitments, I will now clarify the four inter-related aims that address my research question, ‘what *is* leadership?’ My first specific aim is to explore *how* the truth of leadership is organized linguistically in a range of leadership texts originating from the case study organisation. This involves finding a way of putting deconstruction ‘to work’ (Jones 2004, p. 54), being mindful that there are many caveats to be made about deconstruction being understood as a method in the conventional analytic sense, precisely because it is concerned with resisting ‘the seductions of using readily available concepts and

categories that provide the intellectual bases for traditional knowledge formation' (Chia 1996, p. 192). I hope that this deconstructive gesture, or form of reading, will go some way towards realising the underdeveloped potential of Derrida's work amongst the academic community for exploring the linguistic constitution of the 'reality' of phenomena such as leadership.

Having found a means to explore the *how* of leadership, my second aim is concerned to identify *what* particular truth of leadership is being promoted in the specific context of the texts from Metropolitan Council. I have suggested that individualism has been central to orthodox representations of leadership as well as being the subject of a growing critical literature concerning its exaggerated form and negative consequences in twenty-first century society. This study offers a close analysis of the way in which some of the key features of individualism have been deployed in the promotion of leadership in the case study organisation as something that must be 'visible', 'strong', 'understanding' and 'shared'.

My third aim is concerned with identifying *why* it is organized in this way. The recent government agenda to modernise the public sector has embraced leadership in community, political and managerial arenas as a key means of achieving a desired post-bureaucratic state. There is little in the leadership literature in general or specific to local government that engages with or indeed questions the political value of leadership, and indeed the attraction of the idea of individualism in the reform project.

My fourth and final aim relates to reflexivity, and concerns the identification of a way in which I can problematise my own authorial position, and the textuality of my analysis of leadership. Derrida's distinctive style of writing offers some insights into the representational conventions or 'strategic exclusions that produce the analytic text itself' (Pritchard *et al* 2004, p. 219), and while 'textual reflexivity' has been addressed in feminist literature, there has been only limited consideration of the nature of 'writing' in organisation studies. My particular contribution in this field addresses the nature of the academic conventions that produce the truth of a PhD thesis.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In this first chapter I have described the way in which my research question arose as a result of being *troubled* by the issues of language, individualism and control with respect to leadership. I also set out in very broad terms the theoretical position that informs the *troubling* of the language of leadership that is central to this study. The chapters that follow elaborate on these themes.

The second chapter establishes the theoretical context for the first aim by presenting an overview of the changing way in which language has been understood in the field of organisation studies. I explain that despite the taken for granted assumption that language is merely a neutral medium for representing pre-existing reality, there has been an increasing focus on the way in which language functions discursively to construct reality in social situations, to the extent that language is 'not just central to organisation studies but ... indivisibly enfolded in the conception of organisation and the process of organisation theorising' (Chia and King 2001, p. 312). In this chapter, the work of Jacques Derrida is briefly located in relation to this linguistic turn. However, I also indicate some of the concerns expressed about a poststructuralist approach, especially that of relativism, technical obscurity and lack of politics, which are particularly germane to this study.

The third chapter provides a review the literature on leadership. It draws on the theoretical overview provided in chapter two in order to argue that most accounts of leadership demonstrate limited reflexivity with respect to their 'organising activity', with only a few studies reflecting the linguistic turn in any significant way. The first half of the chapter considers approaches that could be characterised as 'modern' in so far as they understand leadership as a real, neutral and individualised phenomenon, the potency of which can be utilised unproblematically for the benefit of work organisations. The second half of the chapter considers some alternative approaches that variously question the 'reality' of the phenomena and the individualistic nature of its 'truth', while others explore the role of power in representations of leadership. I conclude by considering a small number of studies that have embraced the linguistic turn more fully.

In the fourth chapter I consider the work of Derrida in more detail in order to advance the first aim. However, this is a necessarily a selective overview, focusing largely on his early work on the nature of 'grammatology' and some of his later, more overtly political work. It provides a background to what he understands as the responsibility of reading and writing texts. I review various debates about the purported obscurantism, nihilism, relativism and ethics of Derrida's work that serve as a means of discussing the political potential of 'deconstruction'. I conclude by considering the work of a number of writers who have argued for the potential of poststructuralism in general, and the work of Derrida specifically, for organisation studies.

The fifth chapter considers a variety of methodological issues arising from poststructuralism that have influenced the approach I have adopted in this thesis, in particular *alertness*, *viewpoint* and *authority*. I reflect on the way these issues have been addressed in Derrida's own writing and the work of others who have 'applied' his work. I then go on to describe the nature of the texts originating from the case study organisation in which leadership has been written. These include a Report on the Governance of the Council, interviews with putative leaders and other senior figures in the Council, a Leadership Competence Framework, and a Personal Profile used as part of the Sustainable Leadership Programme. I describe the reading strategy I adopted in the study, as well as how I problematised my own authorial position and claims to truth. This involved a deconstruction of the criteria for conferring the award of a PhD (included in the Appendix) that enabled me to reflect on the constraints imposed on my textual choices by my desire to join the academy.

While the preceding chapters set out an explanation and justification for the approach that informs this thesis, the chapters that follow see a shift to an empirical exploration of leadership through a deconstruction or 'unfixing' of the range of leadership text originating from the case study organisation. Chapters six through nine present close readings of the attempt to establish a form of leadership amongst local government officers at Metropolitan Council that is 'visible', 'strong', 'understanding' and 'shared'.

Chapter 10 provides an overview of the main issues to emerge from the four readings, related to my research question and aims. The first section reflects on the textual strategies employed in the texts to (unsuccessfully) fix the meaning of leadership. The second section reflects on the way in which specific aspects of individualism were foregrounded in the texts, aspects that have both positive and negative consequences. The third and final section considers the way in which individualism has been used increasingly to redefine the public sector worker as part of public sector reform in the UK, to the extent that it is an attempt to reverse the bureaucratic principle of privileging the office over the person.

Chapter 11 summarises the main contributions of the study. First, I suggest that it provides an example of a close study of the linguistic construction of leadership. Second, it provides a detailed analysis of the assumptions inherent in post-Enlightenment individualism. Third, it provides a detailed analysis of the power inherent in the language of leadership. Fourth, it contributes a strategy for greater reflexive awareness of academic claims to truth. Finally, after reflecting on the limitations of the study, the chapter concludes by considering the way in which key issues arising from the thesis may be taken forward in future research.

CONCLUSION

This chapter set out to establish the personal and theoretical context for this study. In summary, I am *troubled* by the assumption that leadership is taken for granted as a pre-linguistic fact, the way in which its 'truth' continues to be dominated by the idea of individualism and the assumption that leadership is a neutral phenomenon. This thesis is about the way in which I have more concertedly, explicitly and critically *troubled* leadership from a poststructuralist position, drawing on the work of Jacques Derrida. The chapter that follows explains the study's theoretical assumptions in more detail, focusing in particular on the changing ways in which the role of language has been understood in theorising organising.

CHAPTER TWO: THE LINGUISTIC TURN IN THEORISING ORGANISATION

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with the question ‘what *is* leadership?’ Key to the philosophical underpinnings of this thesis, and hence my response to this question, is the growing acknowledgement that theory must be turned back on itself because ‘accounts of organisations/organisation/organising are products of the organising activity of their author’ (Willmott 1998b, p. 214). The recent ‘linguistic turn’ has been key to this understanding. While orthodox approaches to research have tended to give language a limited role, assuming it to be merely a neural medium for accurately representing the real world in the mind of the researcher, the linguistic turn has drawn attention to the way in which language structures experience, and the politics inherent in any such act of representation. The purpose of this chapter is to locate my research aims more clearly in relation to these changing ideas about the role of language in theorising organisation. As explained in the last chapter, this implies a focus on the following questions:

- How is leadership organized linguistically?
- What particular truth is promoted in the case study texts?
- Why is the leadership truth organised in this way?
- How can I problematise the textuality of my analysis of leadership?

I begin by providing an overview of modernist approaches to theorising organisation that have been criticised for, amongst other things, a reflexive deficit with regard to language (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000). I then briefly outline a number of attempts that have been made to address the epistemological, ontological and normative-ethical problems of modernist theorising, prior to looking at the influence of continental philosophy in bringing about a radical break with modernist assumptions and signaling the emergence of a ‘new sensibility’ (Willmott 1998b) that regards organising as language and language as organising. This chapter provides a framework for the

subsequent consideration (in chapter three), of the way in which research accounts of leadership can be seen as the product of an unreflexive approach to the organising of research activity. It also lays the groundwork for chapter four, where I consider the legacy of the work of Jacques Derrida in relation to the linguistic turn, and for chapter five where I set out my own approach for responding to the research question which focuses on the linguistic organisation of leadership in texts from Metropolitan Council, in the wake of Derrida.

It must be stressed at the outset that the study of work organisations since industrialisation is a highly ‘contested terrain’ (Westwood and Clegg 2003, p. 2) with respect to its political, ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions. Furthermore, as Jones (2002) points out, in his review of Johnson and Duberley, it is easy to be guilty of,

uncritically repeating many of the...assumptions that have been made about various positions in organisation studies – Popper is a tired old positivist, deconstruction is relativistic, critical theory is too simple for a postmodern world, and so on (Jones 2002, p. 481).

I am thus mindful of the problems of oversimplification, and that my representation of different viewpoints is inevitably prejudiced by the stance I am defending.

MODERNIST³ THEORISING

Theories of organisation are informed by different assumptions concerning the purpose of research, and the ontological, epistemological, methodological and explanatory strategies that should be used by researchers in attaining that purpose (Scherer 2003, p. 312). But it is not enough just to acknowledge, or even celebrate this diversity, it is imperative to recognise that what is observed is influenced by how it is observed and moreover, that research is a ‘moral and political process’ (Willmott 1998b, p. 217-8).

³ I use the broad term modernism in this section purely for the purposes of introductory simplification. However, I am well aware that in using the term I am guilty of ‘totalising at least four centuries of post-Enlightenment thought under one pejorative label’ (Parker 1995, p.559), and indeed the misleading unity it invites is antithetical to my poststructuralist sympathies.

Although subject to considerable debate, there is some consensus that the theorization of organising has been dominated by ‘modernity’. This term denotes both a philosophical position and a period of time. For example, it is usually suggested that what has come to be known as the Modern Age emerged in mid-seventeenth century Europe during a period of intense intellectual activity. The new ‘enlightened’ ideas offered a secular challenge to pre-modern modes of thought and social organisation that had been based on traditionalism, authoritarianism and obscurantism (Mautner 2005). This ‘humanist’ turn is described by Cooper and Burrell (1988) as ‘that moment when man invented himself; when he no longer saw himself as a reflection of god in nature’ (p. 94) and signals the way in which the individual has become the fundamental unit of modern western society. Indeed, individualism has become a powerful, pervasive and taken for granted ideal underpinning an array of practices and institutions of Western society.

Ontologically the individual was regarded as sole originator of autonomous action, with social phenomena being derived from the aggregate of individual choices and acts. It offered an optimistic and confident discourse premised on the individual as the force that could shape society and master the world. For example, it is evident in *political* doctrines that champion individual rights and guarantee the independence and development of the individual person. In particular, liberal and libertarian politics are concerned to free the individual from the interference of the state or society. *Economic* individualism is based on the self-interested, utility-maximising behaviour of the individual, and is the basis of laissez-faire capitalism. The doctrine of *ethical* individualism privileges the individual as a morally autonomous creature in pursuit of their self-development. *Religious* individualism is based on the assumption that the individual has prime responsibility for her own spiritual destiny, without the need of divine intermediaries.

Epistemologically, the individual became the starting point for objective knowledge of the world. Key to the Enlightenment project was Descartes’ famous declaration ‘cogito ergo sum’ (‘I think therefore I am’) which served to demonstrate that the only certain knowledge was the existence of the non-material inner consciousness of the self, *reg*

cogitans, quite distinct from the external material body. The mind/body dualism was reflected in the assumption that all objects in the external world (*res extensa*) had a real existence prior to and independent of the mind. However, since the conscious subject does not have direct access to these objects - they can only be *represented* internally in the subject's consciousness - the key to producing true knowledge about their essential attributes and underlying structuring relationships, became a quest to find a process of enquiry that could ensure representation was as accurate as possible. As Rorty (1979) explains, the mind is regarded as acting like a 'mirror' of nature, with more exact representations ensured 'by inspecting, repairing and polishing the mirror, so to speak' (p. 12). Thus, systematic and rigorous scientific method embraced a rationalist tradition that involved a logical process of hypothesizing fundamental general laws about various cause and effect relations between isolated categories or objects in the natural world, along with an empirical tradition whereby truth could be confirmed or refuted by observation and measurement of data.

In this episteme, language is regarded as merely a neutral and transparent medium for unambiguously representing the objects that exist in the world. As Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) note, in almost all empirical research it is taken for granted that in the production of their research design and research text, language is a simple tool that can be strictly controlled by the researcher. Indeed, so taken for granted is the assumption that language is 'truth bearing' that it is scarcely addressed (Gergen and Thatchankery 2004, p. 233).

Overall, the role of such 'positivist' analysis is confirmatory, 'it starts from a position of relative ignorance and proceeds to a position of greater positive knowledge concerning the social phenomenon of interest' (Jacobson and Jacques 1997, p. 46) leading to the incremental revelation of totalizing laws or absolute objective 'truths' that explain phenomenon and enable prediction for problem solving and an overall unfolding progress of society. This intellectual development informed and combined with material developments in a process of 'modernisation'. Over a period of roughly two hundred years, Western society witnessed rapid scientific and technological developments,

combined with the expansion of capitalism as an increasingly global economic system. There were unheard of levels of material production and significant political, social and cultural changes, in particular, urbanisation and the development of large scale organised production. The emerging social sciences were 'born of attempts to chart and understand the social implications of modernization' (Hancock and Tyler 2001, p. 14) and were both informed by and constitutive of modernist culture.

Thus, modernist theories of organising in the workplace have tended to take it for granted that organisations have an objectively real existence *out there*. The functionalist agenda that came to dominate the field assumed that *the* organisation consisted of a coherent and integrated system of component parts, such as production, management, the workforce and leadership, which in turn were nested within a wider political, economic, social and technological environment. The parts exist in an ideal state of equilibrium and the use of rational decision-making processes enable the pursuit of formally defined organisational goals. The ideal functionalist outcome, in an economy dominated by the principles of capitalism, is a utilitarian 'performativity': the efficient and effective optimisation of the inputs/output relationship (Legge, 1995, p. 288), leading to growth and of course 'profitability'. It is assumed that this social phenomena can be studied using natural scientific techniques to collect objective data about the way in which different effects can be attributed to functional causes within the system in order to determine useful, normative, generalisable truths about efficient and effective best practice. While organisational dys-function and deviance may exist, it can and should be restored or institutionalised by programmed interventions in the pursuit of unity and order. This 'top down' (Hoskings 1988) model theorises structures as causally determining the behaviour of participants: the individual employee is attributed with limited independent agency, being subject to prescribed functional roles and socialised to passively internalise pre-determined norms and values. However, there is a tension in this particular aspect of the modernist ideal, between the individual as *subject* who is free to think and act and the individual as *object* located in a pre-determined world, a tension that will become a key issue in depictions of leadership in the texts that form the basis of this study.

With respect to language, functionalist organisation regards it as important only in terms designing effective communication processes and structures to ensure that information can be transmitted efficiently from sender to receiver located in different parts of the system. As Westwood and Linstead explain,

...its ontological status is not at issue, its epistemological role unexplored. Language *per se* was never subject to theoretic problematization and investigation; it was taken for granted and used as an explanatory resource. (Westwood and Linstead 2001, p.1; original emphasis)

CRITICISMS OF MODERNIST THEORISING

The functionalist ideal reached its apogee in the post-1945 period, with the large-scale bureaucratic organisation - whether factory, hospital or local government - located at the centre of what was regarded as a mature industrial society. However, critiques of the Janus-like quality of the experience of social modernism started to emerge at the turn of the twentieth century in a variety of forms, including political and artistic movements. While it's attractiveness lies in the comfort assured by a certain and ordered world along with tangible improvements in the quality of life, the practical consequences of the modernist ideal revealed an oppressive and destructive power, and a failure to deliver more fully and equitably the material progress promised. As Jacobson and Jacques (1997) explain,

World wars, depressions, widening gaps between the rich and the poor, and environmental and nuclear catastrophes both real and potential bear witness to the fact that promises of rational thought and faith in "progress" (as historically embedded in science and the scientific method) have largely been unfulfilled (Jacobson and Jacques 1997, p. 45).

Moreover, with respect to theorising organisation, while it is undeniable that modernist assumptions continued to dominate, since the 1960s a 'bewildering array of alternative approaches' (Reed 1992b, p. 3) have emerged, representing an increasing 'diversity, plurality and controversy' (p. 2) as to the form of response that should be made to the epistemological and normative-ethical deficits (Scherer 2003) of natural science. A number of attempts have been made to represent some of these responses as axes along which different theoretical positions can be delineated, such as Burrell and Morgan

(1979), Grint (1998), Alvesson and Deetz (2000) and Johnson and Duberley (2000). Other attempts have been made to provide chronological or 'genealogical' overviews of the debates within organisation studies, including Reed (1992a, 2006), Clegg and Hardy (1996), and Westwood and Clegg (2003). While the adequacy of any or all of these accounts could be debated, in the overview and discussion of modernist theorising that follows I have used the broad terms 'Interpretive' and 'Critical' to capture the main theses of the two dominant alternative perspectives. However, of significance for this study is the observation that while these two alternative approaches engaged with many of the problems of modernist theorising, both refrain from addressing the nature of modernism itself. As Jacobson and Jacques (1997) point out, it was not until the advent of a more radical approach to epistemology, 'that in Kuhnian terms, the foundational criteria shaping inquiry within the taken-for-granted metanarrative of modernism were questioned' (p. 44-45) more fully.

Criticisms of the Epistemological Deficit

Criticism of the epistemological deficit of modernism was developed by various approaches that came to prominence in the 1970s. This family of interconnected developments includes American symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969, Mead 1934, European phenomenology (Schutz 1967), dramaturgy (Goffman 1958), ethnomethodology (Bittner 1965, Garfinkel 1967), enactment theory (Weick 1979), the 'Action Frame of Reference' (Silverman 1970) and social constructionism (Berger and Luckman 1966).

These approaches focused on the belief that the natural scientific method was inappropriate for the study of *social* phenomena. Rather it was suggested that the focus should be on *understanding* from the point of view of the research object as actor by means of more *interpretive* methods. Thus, rather than taking the realist/objectivist position considered to date, interpretivist approaches favour an idealist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology: while not dismissing the possibility of an objectively real world, the only reality we can know are the multiple 'internal' meanings ascribed by actors to experience (Weber's *verstehen*), through processes of sense making. But

following Kant, it was suggested that those internal meanings are dependent on pre-existing and hypothetical cognitive principles, a 'stock of knowledge' (Schutz 1967) that both derive from and determine how we interpret our experiences during social interaction. The implication is that ontology and epistemology are now more closely related, such that the cognitive and social processes by which we come to know 'reality' actually shapes that 'reality'; reality can be regarded as being 'objectified' rather than objective. Interpretive approaches are thus significant in introducing the possibility that 'the world we inhabit is much more of our own making than we are usually prepared to recognize' (Morgan 1990, p. 21).

In contrast to the formal and abstract nature of a positivist approach, where analysis is concerned with explaining causal connections, interpretivist analysis is 'grounded' in naturalistic observation of social phenomenon as they occur, which enables empathetic appreciation of the rich and nuanced underlying meanings by which the research subjects make unique subjective and shared sense of their lived experience. With respect to theorising organisation, rather than focusing on the reified organisational object, attention turns to the legitimate role of the active sense maker as 'subject' going about the phenomenological process of organising (Hancock and Tyler 2001). There is an interest in developing an understanding of the unarticulated symbolic meanings particular organisational members ascribe to their social roles and interaction rituals during everyday organisational life.

Language plays a much more significant role in interpretivism, reflecting a sophisticated and creative ability of human agents to use a repertoire of symbols in meaning making. As Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) point out, such qualitative⁴ research is concerned that participants express their own opinions, and 'in being able to choose the words themselves, the research participants are presumed to communicate their feelings, thoughts, values experiences, and observations in a way that renders their inner worlds accessible to the researcher' (p. 138).

⁴ Sometimes 'qualitative research' is used as a synonym for interpretivism although strictly it refers to the kind of data being considered, which can be analysed from an interpretivist or positivist orientation.

However, the divergence from the underlying principles of dominant functionalist orthodoxy is ultimately, only partial. Although a preference is now expressed for the legitimation of knowledge according to the criteria of internal and external coherence (agreement and consistency between the different cognitive patterns with an individual's brain and the different cognitive patterns of different individuals) and 'pragmatism' (judging whether a conceptual model 'works' on the basis of viability, adequacy or relevance) this is inherently based on the simple logic of causality and prediction. The enduring utilitarian and unitarist ethos of functionalism is betrayed by a concern that effective and enduring constructions are those that work when people come to act on them, and those which produce consensus. There also remains the undiminished attraction of a true and final understanding of actors' reality, an 'objectivist' impulse to get *accurate* interpretative accounts, despite the imperfect nature of subjectivity. Also, this approach is often referred to as a neo-empiricist because it retains a commitment to the belief that individual sensory experience provides the only secure foundation for understanding. The 'lens' metaphor, so central to an empiricist epistemology, is betrayed by the constant recourse to a vocabulary of 'looking', 'seeing' and 'observing' during the process of sense making.

Interpretivism reveals another enduring tenet of functionalism in its individualistic-rationalist epistemology. A heightened sense of the uniquely purposeful individual is evident in role of researcher *and* in the 'object' of their investigation, as they are now *both* involved in the highly creative process of meaning making. However, while the subject-object dualism is now represented as a subject-subject dualism, there is still a concern to maintain 'a differentiation of the knower-researcher from his/her descriptions of other actors' cultural experience' (Johnson and Duberley 2003, p. 1284). Various strategies are employed to safeguard the objectivity and privileged rational consciousness, or 'immaculate perception' as Van Maanen (1988) calls it, of the researcher, and robustness of the research process. So, for example, many of the protocols of positivist science are adopted, such as a concern with the number of hours of observation conducted or the breadth of subjects interviewed. Here, validity is judged by the extent to which the researcher has ensured full access to participants' meanings,

reliability is determined by evaluating the extent to which similar observations would be made by different researchers on different occasions, and generalisability concerns the likelihood that context specific patterns of understanding can be applied to other settings. Nevertheless, the researcher cannot be regarded as a 'divine spectator' with unmediated access to an actor's 'sense', because she creates reality in turn, via her second order interpretation of the actor's actions and meanings. This interpretation of the actor's interpretations, a double hermeneutics, is based on the interpretive frame of reference used by the researcher that is constituted by the social practices and traditions in which she is embedded.

Also, in focusing on representing an actor's subjective meanings and interpreting social rules and norms, interpretivism simply accepts the position of the actor, and does not attempt to deal with problems of social conflict and legitimisation of social change. It is thus implicitly orientated toward the status quo and a social order, and not at critique or improvement. Indeed, the comfortably liberal sense of plurality inherent in interpretivism fails to acknowledge the embeddedness of interaction in power relations. For example, the use of pragmatism as a legitimator of constructions is not value free. 'What works' and 'consensus' are informed by vested interests and ideological preferences. The focus on creating a unified picture of a consensual culture gives no account of any power differentials and disharmony in the approach. Indeed, as Hatch (1997) suggests, interpretivism does nothing to make researchers 'conscious of our participation in organisational processes' (p. 42). Finally, while language is now viewed as a rich symbolic resource, interpretivist approaches retain the key positivist assumption that language is a *neutral* vehicle for interpersonal expression and recording observation. Indeed, Alvesson and Kärreman (2000, p. 139-40) lament the continued dominance of a 'simple language-as-mirror logic' in most qualitative research.

Criticisms of the Ontological Deficit

As suggested earlier in this chapter, modernist theorising is dominated by ontological individualism. However, Lukes (2006) points out that while individualism appears coherent and unified, this conceals significant heterogeneity, lack of precision and

contestation around the concept. For example, Abercrombie *et al* (1986) suggest that while agreeing on the general principle that individuals are important, different social theories find different qualities of the individual to be significant. For example, Lukes (2006) suggests that the doctrine of political individualism emphasizes the 'unit ideas' of equality, autonomy and liberty, while in contrast economic individualism privileges autonomy and privacy. He also charts national variations in the meaning given to individualism across French, German, English and American cultures. The meaning attributed to individualism has also changed over time. For example, Gergen (1992) argues that there has been a shift from the idea of 'romantic' or expressive individualism in the nineteenth century that celebrates the 'deep interior' of each unique individual as the repository for creativity, emotion and genius, to 'modern' individualism in the twentieth century that is centred on 'reason and observation' as 'the central ingredients of human functioning' (p. 19) within a 'narrative of progress' (p. 30).

Furthermore, while often depicted in a positive way, individualism can also be used pejoratively, with much research focusing on the negative consequences of the concept, and significant championing of its antithesis, collectivism. Some of this critique has focused on the way in which this anthropocentric or man-centred approach is just as chauvinistically arrogant and domineering as the pre-modern God- or King-centred approaches it replaced. Perhaps the most common critique has concerned the anti-social quality of the self-contained individual. De Tocqueville's critique of individualism, mentioned in the introductory chapter, focuses on individualism as a conscious and calculated withdrawal from the responsibilities of citizenship and public life, which denies human connectedness and solidarity. Indeed, there have also been concerns about the way in which individualism is a-social, denying that society exists and abstracting the individual from any social and historical context.

Others have focused on the way in which the concept has not necessarily resulted in greater individual freedom, because of processes of *individuation*. As Abercrombie and Turner (1986) point out, 'it is quite possible that an emphasis on individuals permits greater ease of identification, which in turn allows more efficient surveillance and

control' (p.36). Currently, there is a concern about a trend described as 'hyper-individualism' associated with the so-called era of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman 2000) or 'flexible capitalism' (Sennett 1998) which has purportedly resulted in increased complexity, uncertainty and fragmentation in society. Bellah *et al* (1985) and Putnam (2000) focus their concern on what they see as the resulting agony of isolated privatism. Elliot and Lemert (2006) claim that it inculcates a pathological fear of dependence on others as individuals' experience of society is reduced to 'to self-regulation, self management and self-sufficiency' (p. 41). Along with Lasch (1979), they also comment on the increasingly transitory or disposable nature of the individual, evinced by the trend for the reinvention and instant identity makeovers as people attempt to improve chances of keeping up in a rapidly changing globalised world. Etzioni (1993) is concerned at the way in which excessive, amoral selfishness results in a detachment from the needs of others leading to destruction of social institutions such as the family and neighbourhood, and the common good. Giddens (1991), Beck (1986, 1992) and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) base their critique of individualism on the notion of *individualization*: the increased emphasis on the construction of self-governing and choosing individuals who accept the responsibility for improving the conditions of their existence in their own hands. This demands the active engagement of all individuals, the consequence of which is both empowering and democratic, *and* involves a compulsion to choose and take on new obligations, burdens and risks. Thus, Bauman (1992) suggests human identity is being transformed from a 'given' into a 'task', establishing *de jure* autonomy though not necessarily *de facto* autonomy.

However, despite offering a significant critique of individualism, none of these approaches offer a radical questioning of its ontology; they continue to accept the 'reality' of the individual (and indeed a post-modern epoch). Morris (1995) hints at a more radical challenge when he reminds us that Western individualism does not express the common experience of humanity but might better be regarded as 'an eccentricity' among cultures. Indeed, Lukes (2006) argues that individualism is 'an ideological construct, in the double sense that it embodies and conveys illusions and that these illusions serve partisan interests' (p. 3). Despite Lukes' acknowledgement of the

socially constructed and political nature of individualism, it is the wholesale 'decentering of the subject' by poststructuralists that offers the most significant challenge to the idea of individualism. For example, Foucault's (1972, 1977) problematisation of the individual subject focuses on subjectivity as a set of historically specific habits, practices, or performances that is the *invention* of the Enlightenment. He interrogates the givenness of the subject by questioning the presupposition made in various discursive domains (the prison, the mental institution, technologies of sexuality, and so on) that serve to construct an essential truth of the individual subject.

For Derrida, there is no given individual subjectivity that can be accessed independent of the language we are given. The subject has no ontologically stable form or identity (it is never fully present to itself) because it is 'an effect inscribed in a system of *différance*' (Derrida 1981a, p. 28). Moreover, he is critical of the particular form of individual that has become instituted. We have installed,

[a] virile figure at the determinative centre of the subject, authority and autonomy (for even if autonomy is subject to the law, this subjugation is freedom) are through this schema attributed to man (*homo* and *vir*) rather than to woman, and to the woman rather than to the animal. The virile strength of the adult male, the father, husband or brother ... belongs to the scheme that dominate the concept of the subject. This subject does not just want to master and possess nature actively. In our cultures he accepts sacrifice and eats flesh. (Derrida 1991, p. 114)

Criticisms of the Normative-Ethical Deficit

As explained earlier, the ideal functionalist work organisation is regarded as a neutral sphere of order and unity. Management is regarded as a benign authority focused on coordinating organisational activity in order to rectify any dysfunctional behaviour that may detract from conformity to the organisation's rational plans and goal of performativity. However, 'critical' approaches to the study of organising are concerned to examine the ethics of the assumptions underlying a given 'organised' situation, assumptions that may privilege particular interests in determining what is normal or important.

For example, what has been broadly termed Radical Structuralist analysis (Burrell and Morgan 1979) suggests that rather than accepting consensus as the organising rationale,

organisations should be seen as sites of persistent 'struggle and domination' (Alvesson and Deetz 2000, p. 34) originating from fundamental differences of interest and the inequalities inherent in the underlying social, economic and political structures associated with modernism. For example, Marxian analysis has focused on the opposing forces of capital and labour implicit in the class structure that forms the dynamic dialectic of industrial capitalism, arguing that it has resulted in a workforce experience of exploitation and 'everlasting uncertainty and agitation...where all that's solid melts into air' (Marx and Engels 1986[1848], p. 37). The emancipatory solution was to be found from within the intrinsic tensions and contradictions of capitalism, leading to proletarian revolution and broad social change.

The work of Marx informed what became known as the Labour process (LP) perspective, which has been very influential in offering a critical organisation analysis, particularly since the 1970s with the publication of Braverman's *Labour and Monopoly Capital*. Braverman (1974) developed Marx's argument to suggest that the 'real subordination of labour' was only fully realised in the twentieth century with the advent of monopoly capitalism. While functionalist analysis tends to represent coordination as a cybernetic feedback system for monitoring and adjusting progress towards goal attainment, LP theorists argue that capitalist organisations employ a range of technocratic strategies for the *control* of the worker to meet narrow performative ends. These have been dominated by structural and bureaucratic strategies involving specialised division of labour, standardisation of work methods, formalised procedures and institutionalised hierarchy of power.

Braverman also argued that both blue-collar *and* white-collar workers were now being de-skilled and 'degraded' through routinisation and technology, with the manager now occupying a very ambiguous role, being both controller and controlled. More recent LP theorising has also focused on the way on which advanced capitalist economies are employing an even more diverse and sophisticated range of strategies for maximising control over the behaviour *and* disposition of labour reflecting a move to post-bureaucratic organisational forms. These include responsible autonomy linked to new

forms of work organisation such as team working, sophisticated technological control, increased specification of targets and outputs, and the manipulation of meaning through the specification of corporate values and attitudes.

However, the LP approach has been criticised for the problem of the ‘missing subject’ (Thompson 1993). The overriding determinism attributed to economic structure has resulted in the representation of workers as ‘passive, conditioned victims of “objective” capitalist structures and dynamics rather than active participants in the reproduction of these structures through processes of (class) struggle and accommodation’ (O’Docherty and Willmott 2001, p. 113). Indeed, the agency attributed to management can be seen merely in terms of their control function.

Moreover, as O’Docherty and Willmott (2001) suggest, LP analysis appears unable to fully access ‘the fragile, precarious, complexity and subtlety of the multiple contestations that characterize the processes of contemporary management and organisation’ (p. 124). The root of this issue lies with its firm location in a realist ontology and the tendency to see categories of analysis, such as structure and management, as unquestioned givens that are linked causally. Perhaps most conspicuously, the promise of progress through social revolution offered by this grand narrative has not been realised, with the notion of emancipation being seen as an elitist and patronizing concept. Academic LP work, in particular, has been criticised for its focus on revealing rather than changing employee relations.

What has been termed a radical humanist (Burrell and Morgan 1979) approach focus less on material constraints of modernism, and more on the false consciousness it engenders. It is suggested that while our social life should ‘express our humanness’ (Burrell 1990, p. 22) we have instead become imprisoned by a consciousness informed by the alienating ideology of capitalism. However, they retain a belief that ‘daring to reason’ in the Kantian spirit, may reflexively identify irrationality, and emancipate the world to its authentic rational nature (Cooper and Burrell, 1988).

Burrell and Morgan (1979) characterize the Critical Theorist, Habermas (1987) as such a 'radical humanist' by virtue of his concern with the narrow, instrumental notion of reason associated with economic determinism that has taken over the 'lifeworld', and the crude identification of technological progress with societal progress. He sought to expose science's domination of nature that was subordinating humanity's capacity for critical self-reflection and autonomous action. Moreover, he was critical of functionalism's positivist science for failing to take account of socio-cultural factors influencing sensory experience, suggesting that its purported objectivity was an illusion. He argued that no theory is neutral, but rather conceals different privileged perspectives. Habermas saw the potential for change in making actors aware of patterns of dominance and the 'false concreteness' they ascribe to their social constructions. He retains a strong commitment to the 'unfinished project of modernity' and in particular maintains a faith in the power of reason, but rather than an 'egocentric' form of reasoning of an epistemologically privileged individual, Habermas proposes an inter-subjective or socio-rationality arising from the consensus found when people reflexively and 'democratically negotiate their socially constructed definitions of reality' ((Johnson and Duberley 2000) p. 186) when organisations encourage unconstrained communication and public debate.

However, it is debatable whether Habermas' 'ideal speech situation' overcomes the problem of enduring asymmetrical power relations, and the extent to which it is possible to undertake a neutral adjudication of knowledge claims is also questionable. Having rejected the absolutes of positivism, Habermas flirts with the nihilistic relativism of postmodernism, but he finds a middle ground by trying to hold together structure and agency in a totalizing theory. Moreover, while Habermas' 'ideal speech situation' might also appear to be taking a step towards the linguistic turn, but he continues to rely on the assumption that language is a neutral vehicle for representing reality, suggesting that it provides a standard for knowledge and morality.

RADICALISING THE CRITIQUE

Thus far I have considered what Seidman (1998, p. 248) describes as ‘apologists’ (Seidman 1998, p.248) for modernist theorising, for three principal reasons. First, each approach imposes a totalising explanatory logic; as Calas and Smircich (1999, p. 651) explain, ‘each offers a way toward a more complete understanding or explanation of the world in which we live. Each claims to be the best view of the world “out there”’. Second, they do not fully engage with the complex and contested nature of power and control in the workplace. Third, and perhaps of most significance for this thesis, none accounts for the language by which they are all organised.

Gergen (1992) suggests that while the modernist discourse is far from exhausted, he feels that it has lost its sense of ‘lived validity’ and there are ‘yearnings for alternatives’, alternatives derived from continental philosophy. Some of the tentative developments described earlier did, as Hancock and Tyler (2001) suggest, ‘prepare the academic soil in which the postmodern seed was able to find sufficient legitimacy and encouragement to take root’ (p. 70). However, it was a path that developed from Husserl and Heidegger and then Nietzsche through structuralism and Saussurean linguistics to post-structuralism and postmodernism that new ground was broken in offering a radical challenge to some of the key premises of Western thought since the Enlightenment, being particularly concerned with a more intimate relationship between the subject, object, language and power.

Structuralism

The ‘conceptual’ structuralist movement occurred in mainland Europe during the 1950s and 1960s. This movement claimed to provide an alternative to humanistic philosophy, offering a critique of ‘the excessive subjectivity and intentionality of phenomenology and existentialism and the excessive social and economic determinism of conventional Marxism’ (Calas and Smircich 1999, p. 652). Structuralism could be described broadly as an understanding of the ‘reality’ of society as an organised (rule bound) system of ‘deep’ structural relations between self-regulating abstract elements, rather than as having an objective existence that is influenced by human agency. As Willmott explains,

'in conceptual structuralism, 'structure' is a heuristic for rendering the world intelligible, not a description of the empirical world' (1998a, p. 88). It was seen as a method of analysis that could unify the social sciences, thus Levi-Straus and Barthes applied it to anthropology, Lacan to psychoanalysis, Althusser to Marxism, and Saussure applied it to the study of language in his general science of signs, referred to as semiology or more recently, semiotics.

With respect to the study of language, while it had been previously been assumed that the meaning of a word derived from the object to which it referred, structuralism suggested that it is language itself that produces 'reality'. Saussure proposed that language could be seen as a system of 'signs' constituted by a 'signifier' (the sound pattern of a word) and 'signified' (the object, concept or meaning to which it refers). So, for example, the sign 'leader' is composed of the signifier or sound image of the spoken word leader, and the signified or person herself. But as Belsey (1980, p. 136) makes clear, Saussure suggested that 'the 'signifier' is not preceded by an anterior truth', or 'signified'; there is no essential or intrinsic 'leaderness' inherent in the word, any word would suffice. Indeed, the structural relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary, its meaning derives only from its difference from other signs with which it co-exist in a particular local linguistic system. So, for example, 'leader' is different from 'follower' or 'manager', and Storey (2001) gives another popular example as follows,

Traffic lights operate within a system of four signs: red = stop, green = go, amber = prepare to go and amber and red = prepare for green; there is nothing in the colour green that naturally attaches to the verb 'go'. Traffic lights would work equally well if red signified 'go' and green signified 'stop'. The system works by expressing a natural meaning but by marking a difference, a distinction within a system of differences and relationships. (Storey 2001, p. 59)

Indeed, as Bertens (2001, p. 124-5) points out, 'in other contexts, red may have completely different meanings. The red of red roses has for centuries stood for love, and most certainly not for 'stop''. So, the particular rule concerning 'red' derives from the rules that structure a particular language system, rules that are determined by social or collective convention, and which may change. An oft-cited example used to illustrate this point is that of snow. As Storey (2001) explains again,

When, for example, a European gazes at a snowscape, he or she sees snow. An Inuit, with over fifty words to describe snow, looking at the same snowscape would presumably see much more. Therefore an Inuit and a European standing together surveying the snowscape would in fact see quite different conceptual scenes. Similarly, Australian Aborigines have many words to describe the desert. (Storey 2001, p. 59)

So, if language is a self-referential system of differences, the focus of linguistics is no longer the study of an individual's transparent meanings or intentions behind empirically observable language in use (*parole*). Rather, the focus is on uncovering the unstated rules or *grammar* that informs the totality of language as an independent objective system (*langue*) and which govern what an individual can do with it. As Swingewood (2000) explains,

To understand a text, for example, it was unnecessary to seek out the intentions behind it. Rather than raise the question of who produced the text, structuralist analysis focused on the ways in which the relations and differences between the various internal elements, such as language, produced meaning. (Swingewood 2000, p. 193)

The implication is that there is no unmediated access to reality; rather a speaker or author merely inhabits a pre-existing structure that enables her to speak. Language, or indeed any other structure (sociological, psychological and economic for example) provides us 'with a conceptual map with which to impose a certain order on what we see and experience' (Storey 2001, p. 59) and thereby shape the social institutions and the human condition. Thus, 'meanings control us, inculcate obedience to the discipline inscribed in them' (Belsey 2002, p. 4), and impose limits on what it is possible to think and do.

While the hope for structuralism was that it would provide a more rigorous approach that was 'purged of humanism, essentialism, historicism' (Swingewood 2000, p. 193), nevertheless great value was placed on the use of logical scientific analysis to ensure the rigorous identification of the 'right' uniform and universal structures. It also tended to be 'a "constructive" project intent on identifying linguistic and social *order*' (Seidman 1998, p. 221 emphasis added). Moreover, structuralism tended to de-contextualise its

analysis, focusing on synchronic⁵ at the expense of diachronic processes. As Swingewood (2002, p. 193-194) points out, 'society and history became elusive and shadowy concepts...structuralism failed to address the complex, historical nature of social structures, in their contradictions, conflicts and transformation' In response, *post*structuralism questions the nature of structures themselves, in particular their purported stability.

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism has an affinity with structuralism in its concern with language as the principal site for the production of social reality. They both replace the modernist assumption that a 'real' world exists out there awaiting discovery with the notion that the social universe is in a constant state of flux and movement. The 'existential ambivalence' aroused when we are confronted by 'undifferentiated experience' drives us to organize (Cooper 1989, p. 481) or 'fix the flow of the world' (Hassard 1993, p. 13). The only means we have of 'fixing' our experiences is through language: we do not know what to call our experiences until language defines them for us. As Chia and King (2001, p. 311) explain, 'language as a system of symbolic representation now becomes understood as an organisational template for ordering what would otherwise be an inchoate and undifferentiated mass of vague sensational experiences'. We thus fashion experience retrospectively and rhetorically through various discursive practices. As Lacan (1977: 65) observes, 'it is the world of words that creates the world of things', which implies, most importantly that ontology becomes an issue of epistemology.

However, language is also at the heart of the difference between structuralism and poststructuralism. Poststructuralism does not negate or supersede structuralism; rather it radicalises its assumptions. First, poststructuralism argues that there are no *deep* underlying universal structures, organised around a stable originating centre that give coherence and order to experience, and thus there are no totalising, essential, foundational concepts. Rather, it suggests that structures are inherently unstable because

⁵ A *synchronic* study of language focuses on how it functions as a system at a specific moment in time. This is contrasted with a *diachronic* study, which focuses on the historical development of a language system through time.

the differential relations upon which they are based are precarious, and hence reality is merely the product of discursive or rhetorical attempts to halt the endless play of meaning. Reality is thus a *surface* effect; ontological depth is replaced by ontological illusion.

Second, it suggests that it is impossible to step outside a system to analyse it objectively. Bertens (2001) uses the 'Cretan Paradox' proposed by the Greek philosopher Eubulides in the sixth century BC, to illustrate this. The paradox concerns the Cretan Epimenides who says that 'all Cretans are liars'. This statement must be either true or false. But, if it is true, then Epimenides, being a Cretan, must be lying, so the statement can't be true. On the other hand, if his statement is false, then he can't be a liar, so the statement is true. As Bertens explains,

Here the problem is that it is the Cretan who makes the statement. With a speaker from Albany, New York, the claim would be either true or false. The problem only arises because the speaker is a member of the group – the category – that his statement refers to, so that he is included in whatever claim he makes...Paradoxes such as the Cretan paradox show us that what we need for at least one kind of statement is an outside perspective, an outside point of reference: a person from Albany, New York, so to speak. So if we want to say something about language we ideally want a perspective outside language to say it. With language however, there is no outside perspective. We can only speak about language with the use of language (Bertens 2001, p. 121-2).

Third, structuralism does not consider the role of power in the various structures it analyses, and yet it has established language as a system based on *difference* between signs, which implies that it must be inherently a structure of violence. Poststructuralism acknowledges this, and engages with the way in which language is saturated with power. Experience is interrupted (Derrida, 1988, p. 148) in a linguistic decision, and the judgment involved in responding to a particular con-text inevitably involves power. What is at stake is the politics of signification, the control over the production and maintenance of differential relations between signs. As Westwood (1999) points out,

...establishing legitimate differences further legitimates the exercise of power. The efficiency of the legitimation process lies in its ability to achieve 'amnesia of the genesis' of the current balance of power and the conditions which have given rise to the production of the cultural framework itself (Westwood 1999, p. 219).

Thus, the linguistic turn finally heralds the de-centring or death of the subject as transcendental origin of perspective and producer of meaning. Rather language speaks us, for I can only say “I” because I am located in a system of language that includes a first person pronoun to mark an identity understood as the subject. The existence of any real or ideal objects is revealed as a ‘pretense’ (Deetz 2003, p. 421), the temporary product of the politics of linguistic representation. With respect to theorising, the modernist thesis could be described as a metaphysics of ‘substance’ or ‘presence’ (Chia 1996); the quest to master the world through the endless accumulation of a stock of positive knowledge about the factual truth of the real world that exists beyond history in an absolute system. In contrast, poststructuralist theorising becomes the study of the linguistic-political strategies deployed in the temporary constitution of identity. Moreover, this leads to a challenge of the researcher.

No longer all-knowing, all-seeing, objective or omnipotent, the researcher is forced to re-examine, in a reflexive mode, his or her relation to the research process and the ‘knowledge’ it produces. No longer a disinterested observer, acutely aware of the social and historical positioning of all subjects and the particular intellectual frameworks through which they are rendered visible, the researcher can only produce knowledge already embedded in the power of those very frameworks. No privileged position exists from which analysis might arbitrate. (Clegg and Hardy 1996, p. 3)

It is therefore important to problematise the production of research texts, involving ‘reflection on how a persuasive, authoritative account is put together’ (Alvesson and Kärreman (2000, p. 141).

The work of Jacques Derrida is a particularly distinctive example of someone working through the implications of these issues. While structuralism rejected the existence of anything outside language, Derrida rejected anything inside language that can guarantee meaning by challenging the structuralist assumption that language (or any other system) has a fixed centre that governs the structure of the system. Indeed, he argued that language was a very unstable structure upon which to attempt to rest meaning, because while Saussure had suggested that the link between signifier and signified was an arbitrary one based on a system of differences, Derrida develops the logic of this to suggest that signifiers don’t produce signifieds, only more signifiers. There is thus only an endless deferral of meaning, with any signifier carrying with it the trace of meanings

from other contexts. This implies an abandonment of both synchronic and diachronic analysis in favour of an argument that there can be no final reading of a text, anything we assume to be truth is merely a surface representation or textual materiality; ontology is merely 'putative and circumstantial' (Lucy 2004, p. 126). Any such temporary halt to the endless play from signifier to signifier, is achieved only by 'the pragmatics, poetics, politics and ethics of 'writing knowledge'' (Calas and Smircich 1997, p. xxiii). By means of a reflexive recollection of such process of closure, often referred to as 'deconstruction', Derrida's looks at the differential inclusions and exclusions which suggest the operation of power, and which alert us for the need for responsibility in the decisions we make during our own attempts to fix signification.

Postmodernism

It is perhaps necessary to mention briefly the relation between poststructuralism and postmodernism. While the modernist imperative suggests a tendency to favour simple categorisations (Hassard 1993, p. 1), it is necessarily difficult to provide a simple explanation of postmodernism because of its multiple oblique themes and the absence of an ability or desire to provide foundational meaning. However, Linstead (2004) sets out the commonly understood distinction between the terms as follows:

Post-structuralists...who concentrate on the work of language and discourse and would accordingly include Derrida and Foucault, while postmodernists might be further distinguished into those with a hyphen (post-modernists), who analyse the contemporary social conditions of an epoch and those without a hyphen (postmodernists), who concentrate on the theoretical milieu which has developed to sustain these conditions as a response, or variety of responses, to modernism. The latter group would include Baudrillard, probably as an exemplar of the first tendency and Lyotard, perhaps as an example of the latter. (Linstead 2004, p. 3)

Perhaps the most significant feature of postmodernism is the development of poststructuralist thinking in the direction of disorder. Postmodernism expresses an 'incredulity' towards Enlightenment 'grand narratives' that try to describe the world in rational, empirical and objective terms. The quest for absolute, foundational truths has a totalising tendency which silences what Lyotard (1984) called 'petit recits', those local understandings found amongst groups, often marginalised in society. There is also a questioning of the politics behind the single generalisable truths of an elite, and attention

to ‘that which might have been left outside of ‘truth’ (i.e. its ‘other’)’ (Calas & Smircich 1997, p. xv) which has led to the championing of not just local understandings, but multiple voices. As Jacobson and Jacques (1997, p. 47) explain, the aim is not to find a more accurate truth, but to ‘make contestable and discussable that which has been removed from debate by having only one possible meaning’. So for example, the analytic process that underpins positivist science is regarded as one of a number of competing socio-historically locatable rationalities/stories, and is thus as parochial as explanations furnished by magic or myth. Rather than seeking an objectively true knowledge that will provide the answer to the problem of human existence, postmodernism celebrates the large variety of forms of knowledge that might enable greater social choice, diversity and democracy.

It is important to point out that many writers use postmodernism and poststructuralism interchangeably which can be confusing, and moreover many writers have based their critique of Derrida on the assumption that he advocates the abandonment of truth and suggests that texts can mean anything, when in fact such an association would be problematic, not least because of Derrida’s explicit dissociation with the ‘postmodernism’ in the following terms,

The facile, demagogic, grave error of confusing my work (or even “deconstruction” in general) with postmodernism is indicative...of a massive failure to read and analyze. (Derrida 1996a, p. 263/4)

Critiques of Poststructuralism

It is also important to identify some of the main critiques leveled at poststructuralist research in general, issues that will be considered specifically in relation to Derrida’s work in chapter four. First, poststructuralist analysis appears to offer no contribution to knowledge, focusing rather on merely problematising or undermining knowledge claims, including its own. There is an inherent contradiction in an approach that must rely on the representational practices that it seeks to undermine, such that any attempt to make a truth claim is subverted by the instability of language, and thus produces an endless loop of relativism. A researcher’s awareness of this problem has the potential to produce a reflexive paralysis, ‘an infinite regress – as I think about myself thinking about my

thinking...’ (Calas and Smircich 1999, p. 664). Indeed, Parker (1995) suggests that, if we follow the logic of this criticism, one option will be to stop writing altogether ‘on the grounds that nothing we say has any particular importance’ (p. 556).

Certainly, poststructuralism does not provide a ‘better’ truth in modernist terms, but as Jacobson and Jacques (1997) point out, it does offer the possibility for ‘beginning a useful conversation – a dialogue about the purpose, nature, effects and state of knowledge in any given discipline (p. 44). The potential of poststructuralism is that it,

permits us to think “the unthinkable”, to move, as it were, “outside the limits”, and to consider taken-for-granted knowledge-making operations under very different premises. At their most startling, these analyses promote a temporary state of “disbelief”, which can make us conceive of knowledge and knowledge making as a very different enterprise altogether. (Calas & Smircich 1999, p. 657)

This is akin to Parker’s (1995) second option that concerns re-establishing new grounds from which to pursue academic practice.

A second, but related problem concerns the way in which a privileging of the fluid and precarious fails to deny the materiality of social reality, particularly where the effects of institutionalised social structures lead to injustice and exploitation. In response, it is important to stress that poststructuralism does not deny the empirical reality of lived experience, but rather provides a neglected focus on the way in which the processes by which the truth of the world is produced lead to particular version of the truth: truth and value are never separate. As Alvesson and Kärreman (2000, p. 142) point out, ‘through labeling somebody as a leader, a particular version of the world is created, with political effects’. Since language *does things*, ‘all knowledge projects are thus ‘dangerous’, insofar as any version of truth carries with it a particular freezing of the social world and a configuration of political privileges and should, therefore, be closely interrogated and cross-examined (Alvesson *et al* 2008, p. 485).

This links to a third problem, whereby the seeming preoccupation of poststructural analysis with the ‘minutiae of language games’ (Reed, 1990, p. 38) is regarded as a ‘fatal distraction’ from the proper *critical* business of organisation studies (Thompson

1993). With reality reduced to rhetoric, poststructuralism appears to be rendered practically and politically impotent, offering no grounds upon which to 'make a difference'. As Parker (1995, p. 562) asserts, 'metaphoric and linguistic play is not enough'. However, poststructuralism's strength lies in its ability to problematise taken for granted categories and their political commitments, without privileging another elitist alternative.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to locate the philosophical approach taken in this thesis, in response to the research question 'what *is* leadership?' The chapter started by reflecting on the observation that usually, "what" can be known has been privileged at the expense of 'how' it is known thereby overlooking the effects of its production and limiting the 'what' (Townley 1994, p. 24). In effect theorising can be understood as a political and constitutive act. The overview of different approaches to theorising organisation set out in the chapter may be seen as the story of an ever-increasing understanding of this proposition, with poststructuralism signaling a radical 'new sensibility' with respect to a reflexive awareness of a researcher's 'tools' (Calas and Smircich 1999, p. 664), and in particular the role of language.

Modernist theorising assumes the truth of an object, like leadership, to exist independently of the researcher, but which can be known by the researcher, as subject. Language is taken for granted as merely a neutral vehicle for representing that reality. Interpretivist approaches suggest that the truth of an object is a product of the active sense made of experience in the mind of the research 'object'. Theorising concerns the analysis of rich inter-subjective understandings, with language being a means of expressing such symbolic inner sense. Critical approaches have been significant in moving away from the purported neutrality of functionalism, where any exercise of power is legitimised by the need to maintain order. Instead, they have focused on an examination of the way in which organising involves various structural and psychic

processes of ‘domination’ for the preservation of the interests of elite groups. However, the role of language remains outside its horizon of enquiry.

Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) suggest that the linguistic turn is one of the most profound contemporary trends within the social sciences such that now ‘the proper understanding of societies, social institutions, identities, and even cultures may be viewed as discursively constructed ensembles of texts’ (p. 137). However, I am mindful that in the same year as this potential was being identified, Deetz (2003) was lamenting the way in which the linguistic turn had become taken for granted. He argued that it was being heeded superficially, with research producing little of the original insight that the ‘turn’ promised. The first, and perhaps most fundamental, of a number of specific criticisms he raised was the issue that,

Most of these studies look at texts and talking rather than looking through discourses to see the specific ways the world is produced. The problem of language as the ‘mirror of nature’ that preoccupied the positivists was replaced by simply focusing on the ‘mirror’ as an object. The central ‘turn’ issues of how different worlds emerge, the power relations in emergence, and the mechanisms of protection, got lost. (Deetz 2003, p. 425)

In response, this thesis can be seen as an attempt to re-engage with Willmott’s (1998b) invitation (citing Cooper) to deploy ‘the capacity for critical thinking to reflect upon how the use of the concept of ‘individual’ or ‘organisation’ [or in this case leadership] defines the reality of the world in particular ways’ (p. 219) because of the ‘structures of method’ used, which in turn opens up the possibility that ‘it could be otherwise’ (p. 231). It is exactly in this sense that my research aims are concerned to reflect on how the truth of leadership is organized linguistically in the case study texts, what sort of truth is produced and the politics of such representation. Moreover, my final aim concerns identifying a means of interrogating my own textual tools.

In the chapter that follows I discuss the way in which representations of leadership found in the literature have a tendency to be unreflexive products of particular ‘structures of method’. I then go on in chapter four, to consider the contribution of the work of Jacques Derrida to the linguistic turn in more detail, and its implications for the

way in which I have approached the reflexive analysis of the linguistic constitution of leadership in Metropolitan Council.

CHAPTER THREE: LANGUAGE AND 'LEADERSHIP'

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with the question 'what *is* leadership?' Chapter two made the important point that different approaches to organising theorising are constitutive of different research objects, and that there has been an important and increasing reflexive awareness of the way in which experience is structured linguistically. Consequently, this research question must be approached with care because of the way in which different 'structures of organising' may understand the constitution of the research question itself, and in turn what might be considered an appropriate response to the inquiry. This chapter considers various ways in which this research question has been understood, and answered in the leadership literature. I reflect on their different organising principles, including their approach to epistemology, ontology and power. I argue that only a handful of researchers have engaged with the way in which the role of language in organising may anticipate a very particular understanding and response to the research question.

As explained in chapter one, the case study on which this thesis is based originates from UK local government where leadership has newly emerged as a key feature of the latest phase of public sector reform. However, two things quickly become apparent when reviewing the literature. First, the literature on leadership in local government is particularly limited, apart from consideration of political leadership, a distinctively elected and hierarchical role. There are a handful of studies of leadership in the public sector in general, and pockets of research focusing on leadership in specific sectors, such as schools and health service. Second, there is no theory of public sector leadership *per se*, but it has drawn on models of leadership from the private sector where leadership has long featured as an aspect of business success. As explained in chapter one, despite what are seen as significant differences between the two sectors (Rainey 1991), leadership is the latest in a succession of private sector practices to be promoted as a means of improving public sector performance (Gleeson and Knights 2008). As a

consequence my review of the leadership literature draws examples from both the private and public sectors.

Following the structure of chapter two, I begin by reflecting on the dominant modernist approach to leadership, followed by more interpretivist and critical approaches. I conclude by reflecting on a very limited number of studies of leadership that could be said to have embraced the linguistic turn.

MODERNIST THEORISING OF 'LEADERSHIP'

Theorising about leadership in the business world has been characterised by a succession of approaches, each of which appears to offer a 'reactionary' transformation or 'break away' from the previous (Wood and Case 2007, p. 141); the trait approach was superseded by the style approach which was superseded by the contingency, followed by the transformational and most recently post-heroic approaches. However, as Parry and Bryman (2006, p. 448) point out, 'each of these stages signals a change of emphasis rather than a demise of the previous approach(es)', with evidence of a significant continuity in underlying assumptions. I will begin by providing a brief overview of the different approaches, before reflecting on their common, *modernist* assumptions.

Successive Theories of 'Leadership'

Early industrial theories of leadership were informed by the romantic idea that history is shaped by exceptional individuals (Bass 1990). For example, in 1841, Thomas Carlyle published a book called *On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History* that suggested that leaders were people born in possession special qualities. The work of Galton (1869) on the role of heredity and James (1880) on 'great men' did much to foster the belief that innate biologically determined qualities shape human behaviour. The growth of the discipline of Industrial Psychology and the advent of psychological testing techniques in the early twentieth century informed hundreds of studies during the 1930s and 40s that sought to observe and measure physical, demographic, intelligence and personality information about existing leaders, especially during war time. The

concern was to produce a statistically significant set of generic traits that distinguished leaders from followers across all situations, and thereby enable the selection of those special individuals who had the capability to become leaders in the future.

It is interesting to note that a fascination with *great men* has endured, although the idea of what constitutes greatness is now influenced less by social class and more by issues of wealth, fame or power. For example, Fulop, Linstead and Dunford (2004, p. 327) point out that in the US literature, great men are synonymous with industrialists, popularised in the biographies of business leaders. There has also been resurgence in the use of psychometric instruments for determining the disposition of transformational leaders, most notably Bass and Avolio's (1990) MLQ questionnaire. The more heroic tone of the American original has been adapted and updated for the current public sector context through the work of Alimo-Metcalf and Alban-Metcalf (2004) by including a focus on a 'nearby leadership' dimension that concerns 'what leaders can do for followers'. Recently, emotional maturity or intelligence (EI) has been promoted as *the* key trait of effective leaders (Goleman 2000). There is evidence of this being promoted in the public sector literature by Hopkins *et al* (2007) when they delineate competences for emotional intelligence that would be relevant for members of a school board, as well as by Higgs and Aitken (2003) who linked the measurement of EI with leadership potential in the New Zealand public service.

The advent of the Behavioural approach to studying organisations signaled a change in focus from the personal characteristics of the leader to their behaviour. Of particular interest were those leadership styles that would *influence* employees. Typically, studies at the Universities of Michigan (Katz, Maccoby, Gurin, & Floor 1951) and Ohio State (Stogdill & Coons 1957) sought to measure leaders' behaviour and relationship with followers, and identified two dimensions of leadership influence, generally referred to as consideration (employee-oriented leadership) and initiating structure (production-oriented leadership). Reflecting post-war politics, it was suggested that a democratically orientated behaviour that demonstrated a concern for both 'people' and 'production', was universally good. This approach brought about a change in attention to the training

of leaders, rather than their selection.

Contingency approaches reflected a move away from a static theory of organising and were concerned to acknowledge the variables that impact on the organisation as an open, rather than closed system. Thus leadership involved the ability to select from a repertoire of leadership styles appropriate to the needs of a range of contingent variables in any given work situation. For example, Fiedler (1967) suggested that issues such as leader-member relations, the task structure, and the position power of the leader would determine the type of leadership exercised. Indeed, Kerr and Jermier (1978) extended this line of research to consider the conditions under which leadership may actually be unnecessary as a result of follower capabilities, clear organisational systems and procedures, and other factors.

The term 'New Leadership' is often used to describe a range of approaches to leadership that emerged in the 1980s. Significant to these approaches is a depiction of the business environment as being increasingly ambiguous, unstable and complex as a result of globalised competition, fast paced technological change and increased customer expectations. Bureaucratic organisational forms and practices were targeted as being particularly inflexible and ineffective in such an environment. As du Gay (2000) rehearses, the rhetoric suggested that 'in a world turned upside down, only those organisations which can rapidly and continuously change their conduct and learn to become ever more enterprising will survive' (p. 63). Thus, personal and organisational transformation was required if survival was to be ensured.

With links to the 'Excellence' literature (Peters and Waterman 1982; Peters and Austin 1985) and the management of corporate culture and change (Tichy and Devanna 1986), the 'new leadership' was transformational (Bass 1985), charismatic (House 1977; Conger 1989) and visionary (Westley and Mintzberg 1989), and signaled a shift away from leadership of small work groups to leadership of the organisation as a whole. Drawing on intrinsic, rather than extrinsic notions of motivation, it was particularly concerned with the management of meaning (Smircich and Morgan 1982) and symbolic

action (Pfeffer 1981) rather than transactional influence. Burns (1978) set out an explicit dichotomy between transactional leadership based on the narrow principle of exchange, and transformational leadership based on both leader and led being bound together in a 'mutual and continuing pursuit of higher purpose' (p. 20). As Storey (2004) explains, the idea behind Bass' work is of,

...ordinary people achieving extraordinary things through the influence of the leader. This kind of leader reduces complexity, doubt, cynicism and ambiguity by cutting through to the 'essential' elements, and these are expressed in simple, readily understandable language. Moreover, these simple truths are expressed with conviction. The goal – or better still the vision – is rendered clear and it is made to seem both desirable and achievable. Organisational members are asked to forsake mediocrity and routine and aspire instead to reach a future state of such high achievement that it deserves the willing expenditure of extra discretionary effort and commitment. (Storey 2004, p. 280)

As I explained in the first chapter, a 'big vision' (Bennington 2000, p. 3) of transformation has dominated both the Conservative and Labour governments' public sector reform agenda, and leaders have been depicted as having the ability to 'turnaround' the public sector (Joyce 2004). As Newman (2005) explains, the twin associations of transformational leadership with the business world and the US, from which it originates, invokes images of 'individual dynamism, risk taking and entrepreneurship that have strong affinities with Labour's espoused values, fitting well with its social as well as economic goals' (p. 720). For example, in the schools sector Gunter (2001) describes the way in which heads have been cast in the heroic transformational mould of corporate Chief Executive Officers and required to demonstrate 'impetus', 'vigour', 'drive' and 'enthusiasm' in order to encourage the acceptance of a new belief system that was considered necessary to improve schools.

In the 1990s it was further argued that the increasing complexity and pace of the globalised economy necessitated the emergence of so-called post-bureaucratic organisational forms characterised by flatter, organic structures, autonomous team-based practices and fluid, networked relationships between knowledge workers (Clegg 1990). A continued focus on the heroic individual located at the top of the organisation was no longer considered appropriate and was substituted by leadership being dispersed

throughout the organisation in informal and emergent forms. Thus, leadership came to be seen as a collection of roles and behaviours that could be shared concurrently or rotated sequentially amongst team members at different times for different tasks. There was also encouragement to remove the traditional differentiation between leader and follower through a focus on leading others to lead themselves (Sims and Lorenzi 1992, Kouzes and Posner 1993).

Moreover, there has also been evidence of a growing post-millennial reaction against the entrepreneurial individualism of free market capitalism, and the narrow focus on corporate effectiveness that spawned the transformational approach (Khurana, 2002). Concerns about the ethics of leadership and other organisational practices, including the social and ecological consequences of economic activity came to the fore. There emerged a post-Enron interest in a 'spiritual' and moral theme of integrity (Mangham, 2004) as part of a newly popular communitarian ideology. This became manifest in the promotion of various organisational strategies aimed at increasing inclusivity, partnership, community, democracy, equality, social responsibility and diversity. In turn, various collaborative or connectionist approaches to leadership emerged such as servant-leadership (Greenleaf 1970), followership (Jackson & Delanty, 1995), post-heroic leadership (Heifetz and Laurie 1997), and covert or quiet leadership (Mintzberg 1998) that variously advocated a more circumspect role for the individual leader within the context of a higher communal purpose. For example, Collins (2001, p. 136) describes leadership as involving both intense personal will *and* extreme personal humility in order to transform organisations from 'merely good to truly great'. Leaders are now ordinary, modest individuals who achieve their goals through quiet, patient and restrained determination.

Furthermore, while previously leadership was seen as an activity carried out by an individual, collaborative leadership reframes it as a property existing in relationships between individuals: formerly leadership was done alone (to others), now leadership is done together (with others). Such approaches include connective (Lipman-Blumen

2000), communal leadership (Drath and Palus, 1994), relational leadership (Komives, Lucas and McMahon, 1998) and leaderful organisations (Raelin 2003).

Given that the most recent focus of the public sector modernisation agenda is on more joined-up services and provision that is closer to the community and personalised, these communal models of leadership have become increasingly popular in the public sector leadership literature. For example, Chrislip and Larson (1994) describe collaborative leaders as people who facilitate engagement in a common vision by acting as guide rather than controller, and by motivating rather than directing. Vangen and Huxham (2003) explore the categories of activity employed by managers leading partnerships, while Gronn (2000, 2002, 2003) has based much of his work on distributed leadership in the schools sector. He suggests that leadership involves the pooling of expertise and initiative that is distributed across organisational boundaries in 'conjoint' activity to produce 'concertive' action, an additional dynamic or energy that is greater than the sum of individual actions. This places a new emphasis on interdependence, coordination and reciprocal influence between workplace colleagues.

Having provided a brief overview of populist theories of leadership, the following sections will provide some observations on how these orthodox truths are organised, the nature of the truth promoted and the politics of such depictions.

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF 'LEADERSHIP'

Each of the successive theories outlined above assumes that leadership exists as a real object *out there*, and that it is possible, indeed desirable to identify its essential attributes by means of positive science. As Alvesson and Deetz (2000) point out, orthodox research into leadership assumes that,

Leadership must refer to a phenomenon that can be delimited and ascribed a relatively fixed meaning. It must refer to a core phenomenon that cuts through surface variations. The degree of diversity associated with leadership must be restricted to the benefit of a universal quality. (Alvesson and Deetz 2000, p.52)

Research into leadership has been dominated by the assumption that the researcher is a detached spectator, employing rigorous scientific methods of observation and measurement to identify and isolate the fundamental attributes that constitute a 'leader', and the various activities in which they engage that could be identified as 'leading'. In turn, each successive universal prescription has attempted to enumerate and correlate the causal regularities and relationships between leadership variables and outcomes under particular conditions. Of course language is taken for granted as merely a means of transparently representing the various components.

As Bryman (1996) points out the concepts and methods have changed little since the studies into leadership style conducted by researchers at the Ohio State University in the 1950s. They have focused on formally designated leaders, used experimental research designs and present universal findings that can be generalised across all contexts. This trend has been particularly prevalent in North America. Companies have also fuelled this approach, with their demand for instruments that offer a quick and easy ways to audit and develop their leadership capacity.

However, as Fairhurst (2007, p. 2) reminds us, in the early 1980s Mintzberg called for his colleagues 'to get rid of their constructs before they collected data, throw away their questionnaires and 7-point scales, stop pretending the world could be divided into dependent and independent variables'. Indeed, Parry and Bryman (2006) suggest that the advent of 'new leadership' at this time, with its focus on culture and the leader as a manager of meaning, did result in more qualitative studies emerging, that involved in-depth cases studies and detailed probing of both leaders and their followers. So, for example, the work of Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Tichy and Devanna (1986) employed informal, semi-structured interviews, while Westley and Mintzberg (1989) used documentary evidence as a source of data. However, Parry and Bryman (2006) go on to admit that positivism has tended to remain in the research 'driving seat' with qualitative studies being 'reduced to a source of hypotheses to be taken by quantitative researchers for subsequent verification' (p. 462). Indeed, many studies remained firmly in the positivist tradition. For example, Kouzes and Posner (1995) suggest that

transformational leadership and developmental exchange are the two universal aspects of leader behaviour that are most strongly associated with outcomes such as subordinate performance.

Much of the research into various forms of dispersed leadership also retains an affiliation with positivism. They take the existence of leadership for granted (it just appears in a different form), and it is presented as a universal solution to the demands of the contemporary workplace. While few empirical studies of this latest version of leadership exist, there is evidence that some of these employ quantitative studies to determine its essential characteristics. So for example, Avolio *et al* (2003) attempt to develop a team multifactor leadership questionnaire and Raelin's (2003) notion of the 'leaderful organisation' involves the prescription of 11 role orientations for practising managers which resemble yet another prescription for leadership competences.

Perhaps most significantly, despite the promise of positivist science to reveal the characteristics of the phenomena, there is general acknowledgement that leadership remains poorly understood. I particularly like Statt's ironic observation,

So after a century of work on leadership and many thousands of studies we can now conclude, pretty confidently, that effective leadership depends on a number of things (although we're not sure which ones), and it seems a good idea for leaders to be interested in people. (Statt 1994, p 335)

Positivist studies of leadership have been plagued by inconsistent and contradictory results, disagreement over the dimensions to be studied and the nature of causal patterns, (including the issue of inverse causality - effects leading to causes), the difficulty in proving correlation and prediction, and indeed the overwhelming number of dimensions identified. Complexity is sanitised and reduced to simplistic abstractions, while the tone of this research is authoritarian, with generalised ideal-types of leadership being prescribed across all contexts. Perhaps most significantly for this study, Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) are critical of the way in which a positivist methodology 'too easily encourages a recycling of versions of broadly shared discourses of leadership' (p. 387-8)

which then produces uniform phenomena. These studies have 'in built proofs of leadership' as a result of 'interpolating respondents as leaders and asking them to report about their leadership by completing pre-structured, simplified and standardized questionnaires or answering questions' (p. 361).

A number of studies that have sought to explore how theorising about leadership may be organized in ways beyond positivism, in particular presenting it as more of a socio-psychological phenomena. Rather than understanding leadership as an essential object, these approaches study the 'objectification' of leadership through subjective processes of sense making. Such interpretivist theorising explores aspects of the play between internal (cognitive) and external (social) coherence by which the meanings ascribed to leadership come to be understood. A particular implication of this approach is a reorientation in focus away from the leader and towards the sense making processes of the follower.

For example, Meindl *et al* (1985), Meindl and Ehrlich (1987) and Meindl (1995) suggest that the status of leadership as a social fact does not derive from something that is practised by leaders, but is rather a perceptual phenomenon, being 'in-the-eye-of-the-beholder'. Leadership can thus be regarded as a lay construct and the focus becomes the cognitive process by which followers process information and *attribute* leadership to account for effective performance, and vice versa. They suggest that where causes of events are unclear, we are more likely to attribute leadership as the cause. Moreover, leadership, especially in its charismatic form, becomes a romanticised and larger-than-life notion that followers develop by 'contagion' as it travels through social networks that exist among followers.

In their Leader Categorization Theory, Lord and Smith (1983) suggest that we each develop a 'schema', prototype or implicit theory about leadership based on past behaviours and performance, by which they judge leaders. Once a person qualifies as a leader according to this schema, there is a tendency for them to attribute the leader's behaviour to 'intrinsic leadership ability or charisma' and 'construct a charismatic

leadership personality for that person'. Importantly, Bresnen (1995, p. 499) suggests that if it is accepted that each 'schema' is unique to the multiple beholders then it suggests a potential difficulty in using standardised leadership frameworks around which there is social consensus.

Some subsequent studies have considered the dynamics of the social exchange between leader and followers a little more fully. This is evident in the work of Hollander (1958, 1961) who focuses particularly on the interdependence between the two. Similarly, Hosking (1988) locates leadership within the context of the 'process' of organising, a process that involves participants negotiating and enacting a sense of order that appears satisfactory for guiding human conduct. The leader may not be officially designated and there may be more than one of them, but leadership is assumed to be demonstrated by those who appear to 'achieve most influence in the course of negotiations, who do so most consistently, and who come to be expected and perceived to do so' (p. 154). Another variation on this theme has been developed in Social Identity Theory. It presents leadership as a relational process in the context of group membership (Hogg 2001). Leaders are those who are generally more successful in enhancing a sense of shared identity in any given group context because of their ability to exemplify the values and ideals shared by the group. They derive their leadership from the common identity of the group, and thus could be regarded as quintessential group members.

Smircich and Morgan (1982) propose a *critical*-interpretivist approach. Similar to other interpretivist studies, they suggested that leadership is ascribed to those members who appear to bracket or frame experience, by various means including 'the use of language, ritual, drama, stories, myths and symbolic construction of all kind' (p. 262), in a way that provides a meaningful point of reference for organised action. However, unlike other interpretivist studies, their research also raises concern about the ethics of leadership. They point out that this social relationship involves the operation of power. Occupancy of a formal leadership role carries with it 'the prerogative to define reality' and requires that individuals be 'willing, as a result of inclination or pressure, to surrender, at least in part, the powers to shape and define their own reality' (p. 258).

Leadership thus formalises and legitimises structural relations of inequality, and denies 'the ability of individuals to take responsibility for the definition and control of their world' (p. 271).

The significance of these examples is in the way in which leadership can no longer be regarded as 'unproblematically given' (Knights & Willmott 1992, p. 764). Interpretivist approaches acknowledge leadership as a contextual and socially negotiated phenomenon. However, leadership continues to be accepted as an objective category about which it is possible to find the true and final negotiated understanding in different contexts, so these approaches offer an epistemological, rather than ontological, challenge to leadership. Indeed, the focus on followers' subjective experiences and interpretations has merely reversed the flow of the causal relationship that continues to satisfy an enduring functionalist concern for utility and ordered understanding. Moreover, despite the odd exception, the concern with internal coherence and social consensus overlooks the power asymmetries within which the 'meaning' of leadership is constructed. As Grey (2003, p. 14) observes, 'leadership may be co-fabricated by people but not on equal terms.' In focusing on leadership as a cognitive construct, there is no acknowledgement that the resulting mental models continue to 'reflect and perpetuate orthodoxy' and thus fail to provide 'a fully-fledged alternative perspective on leadership as a normative social construct' (Bresnen 1995, p. 498). As Knights and Willmott (1992, p. 764) point out, 'while attribution theory may *reveal* our dependence upon reasoning, it is powerless to release us from it' (original emphasis).

THE TRUTH OF 'LEADERSHIP'

It is generally acknowledged that the relationship between leadership and aspects of the modernist ideal of the individual is particularly close (Bolden *et al* 1996; Isles and Preece 2006; Lawler 2008). For example, the previous section described the way in which epistemological individualism assumes that the proper explanation of the leadership phenomena is in terms of the cognitive certainties of the individual knower, while ontological individualism informs the way in which leadership is fundamentally located in the individual as the origin of action. As Wood and Case (2007) explain,

...it is leaders who impress others; inspire people; push through transformations; get the job done; have compelling, even gripping visions; stir enthusiasm, and have personal magnetism (Maccoby 2000). It is leaders who engage people, try to promote quality, flexibility and/or responsiveness improvement, ensure commitment to company goals and so on. (Wood and Case 2007, p.141)

It is thus no coincidence that the majority of studies of leadership have originated from the field of psychology; a discipline based on methodological individualism and devoted to the isolation, identification and measurement of the essential, intrinsic properties of individual mind and behaviour. Thus, as Storey (2004, p.15) suggests, leadership is typically seen 'as something embodied in individuals which simply awaits 'discovery' through the appropriate psychometric instrument' and which can then be 'set down' in competence statements'.

Even with the purported advent of more post-heroic forms of leadership, the focus remains firmly on leadership located within individuals, be they one or many. For example, while Manz and Sims (1991) and Kouzes and Posner (1993, 1995) suggest that leadership is not something that can be handed down, they still conceptualise it as an inner capacity or potential that can be liberated in others, whereby anyone can be given responsibility to lead themselves and others towards the achievement of team results. In the public sector literature, it is clear that *both* types of leadership advocated by Hartley and Allison (2000) as necessary to modernize public services, retain a focus on the individual. The first, elected mayor or head teacher role clearly represents the traditional model of the individual at the top of the organisational hierarchy. However, the second form of leadership, while claiming to take a dispersed form, is merely concerned with sharing the role among more individuals lower down the organisation.

However, what is especially significant about leadership is the way in which it represents a particularly exaggerated, or 'grandiose' (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003b) form of the ideal of individualism: leaders are extra-ordinary individuals. This is evident across the varied range of approaches to leadership that have been popularised. For example, trait approaches to leadership suggest that leaders have a particular combination of inner qualities that sets them apart from others. Style theories suggest that leaders have a greater ability to demonstrate behaviour that shows a democratic

concern for both 'task' and 'person'. Contingency theory suggests that they are better able to 'rationalise' the diverse situational demands and adapt a repertoire of appropriate styles to the needs of the situation. Transformational leadership suggests that leaders have a more acute sense of purpose and well-developed ability to communicate. Indeed, celebrity status is often attributed to this larger than life charismatic hero or 'super self' capable of initiating transformational change, manifest in the popularity of Chief Executive success stories. Even purportedly post-heroic versions of leadership focus on the superior ability of individuals distributed throughout the organisation to emerge temporarily from within a team or community to facilitate others. Indeed, as mentioned in chapter one, such is the ubiquity and enthusiasm for leadership that it currently appears to be a panacea for an array of organisational and societal problems; leaders are the people 'who control fate' (Czarniawska-Jorges and Wollf 1991, p. 538), including, it would seem, the fate of public sector reform. This appears to have developed to the extent that a heightened individualism has become confused with the romance of the 'great man' and ultimately with the charismatic hero who possesses such extra-ordinary inner qualities that his following is based on blind faith (Khurana 2002), a form of authority normally considered pre-modern and indeed ir-rational.

However, despite the close link between leadership and individualism, there is little in the leadership literature that offers detailed consideration of the relationship. Moreover, there is only limited attention given to the negative consequences of individualism as it pertains to leadership. The limited leadership literature concerned with the 'dark side' of exaggerated individualism has focused on the leader as villain. For example, Maccoby (2000) has argued that leadership is an expression of supreme confidence or narcissism and that such hubris or 'feelings of grandiosity' (p. 7) can result in leaders being poor listeners and having an over blown sense of their own judgment, arrogance, distrustfulness, and even paranoia leading to an abuse of power. Similarly, Khurana (2002) suggests that the extraordinary trust placed in the power of the charismatic Chief Executive Officer can also lead to dismissal of normal checks and balances and an impatience with and disregard for convention and rules.

An isolated example of the public sector leadership literature engaging in this debate is found in a paper by Lawler (2008) where he sees the recent popularity of leadership in the public sector as a reflection of the growth of individualisation as a broader societal phenomenon, a tendency which he thinks is antithetical to the collective ethos of public service. Following a popular trend, he draws on communitarianism to propose a more distributed or collective form of leadership as an antidote. Although communitarianism appears to promote a balance between individual rights and collective responsibilities, nevertheless it continues to privilege the individual over the other in this relationship.

THE POLITICS OF 'LEADERSHIP'

Leaders are typically taken for granted as being more 'salient', of 'higher status' (Hoskings 1988) or 'privileged' (Wood and Case 2007, p. 141) in some way, while the marginalisation of the passive follower is seen as 'natural' and unproblematic (Gordon 2002). This hierarchical relationship is legitimised as the neutral authority necessary to maintain functionalist order.

Similarly, the means employed by leaders to influence are regarded as neutral strategies necessary to mobilise the required follower performance towards the achievement of the organisation's goals. Whether this involves the adoption of the appropriate style of behaviour to fulfill a performance transaction with the follower, or the use of visions and values to inspire commitment to a transformation in performance, an apolitical approach is alleged. In turn, it is taken for granted that the organisation's goals are the performative requirements of capitalism.

However, critical approaches are concerned to unmask the way in which leadership conceals the deep structural inequalities inherent in capitalism. Thus, leaders can be seen as engaging in a relationship of domination with followers, while acts of leadership are yet another strategy of control. So, for example, Barker (1997) offers a critique of the way in which conceptions of leadership are based on a feudal paradigm of governance and class structure. He describes it as follows,

...an image of a powerful male leader who sits atop a hierarchical structure directing and controlling the activities toward the achievement of the leader's goals. The leader's goals are normally centred about the defense of the kingdom and the acquisition of new territory through waging and winning war. Of course, in the industrial world, territory consists of market share and financial and material assets, and warfare is economic in nature. (Baker 1997, p. 346)

He argues that this formal hierarchical basis for the difference between leader and follower has led to the assumption that 'anyone who holds a supervisory position is a leader, that supervisors necessarily have abilities and traits that set them apart from subordinates, and that moral behaviour is defined by productivity' (Baker 1997, p. 347). In contrast he advocates a more socially constructed understanding of leadership as a dynamic social process of ethical interaction that creates change, with ill-defined leadership roles based on complex relationships marked by competition and conflict. It is a democratic process where everyone shares the role at some point and develops a mutual context specific set of values to guide behaviour.

While useful in surfacing the embeddedness of the taken for granted power relations on which leadership is based, nevertheless, as Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) point out, he perpetuates the portrayal of leadership as something very special and remarkable when he claims that the function of leadership is to create change while the function of management is to create stability. Additionally, his vision of community is idealistic, assuming that the development of a shared ethic will release workers followers from structurally embedded power.

As if in response, Gordon (2002, p.152) argues that while the notion of distributed leadership appears promising, traditional power relations are too deeply embedded at a 'structural' level for the approach to be viable. These unobtrusive historically constituted codes of behaviour order the way in which people make sense of their world and constrain their actions. With respect to leadership, it is assumed that the leader is superior in some way and differentiated from followers on the basis of their legal power. The devolution of leadership power therefore becomes problematic as it contradicts these deeply held and implicit assumptions about power differentials. Moreover, the manner in which the new leaders are empowered suggests a thinly veiled residual

control remains, manifest in prescriptions for 'desired leadership behaviour' (p. 157-8) and exercised at arm's length through a 'network of compliant, so called, self-leaders' (p. 160).

As I explained in chapter two, Radical Humanist approaches are concerned to find ways of overcoming the imprisoning false consciousness inculcated by capitalism, which usually implies a focus on both leadership *and* followership. For example, Kets de Vries (1993, 2001) takes a psychodynamic perspective, and suggests that various psychological pressures on the leader, such as feelings of inadequacy resulting from ineffective parenting, can provoke irresponsible or irrational behaviour, including an exaggerated sense of self-importance and grandiosity. Such 'reactive narcissism' can result in leaders becoming fixated on issues of power, status, privilege and superiority. In turn, in order to cope with feelings of helplessness, followers can demonstrate 'transference' by 'idealising' people who are important to them. In an organisational context, this can result in a destructive mutual dependency or hall of mirrors in which there is little critical reflection.

Freud's (1921) work has been influential in connection with the study of followership. He suggested that the leader embodies the ego ideal of the followers; they project onto their leader all their aspirations. The leader's influence is primarily based on emotion rather than on rationality, and involves a sense of both love and fear (Popper 2004). Thus, as Grint (2000) suggests, leadership:

...performs a ritual that followers appear to require. Whether it actually works miracles or not is irrelevant, because, as long as followers believe they need leaders, leaders will be necessary. (Grint 2000, p. 420)

So for example, Gemmill and Oakley (1992, p. 119) describe leadership as an alienating social myth, a 'social delusion' that allows followers to 'escape responsibility for their own actions and inactions'. They see it as an ideology, the major function of which is to preserve the existing social order by providing both a rationale for dysfunction and something upon which to shift blame.

Vince (2002) suggests that leadership can be understood as the focus of various competing dreams, fantasies and expectations of their followers, both positive and negative. These can be understood as defensive projections by followers of the difficult emotions surrounding their desire for certainty and closure. Moreover, anxiety and self doubt is mobilised in the leader him/her self which gives rise to defensive behaviour and avoidance strategies that preclude the possibility of reflection and criticism. Located at the boundary of the rational and non-rational, he suggests that leadership can play an important role in making visible the dynamic of emotional and political relations by publicly addressing the emotions inspired by the dependency on particular forms of 'imagined stability' that have come to constitute the organisation (p. 1192). In so doing there is once again an idealistic hope in the potential for taking collective responsibility for organisational and social transformation.

While these psychodynamic approaches pay attention to the affective as well as the cognitive aspects of social processes, as Knights and Willmott (1992) point out, they simply substitute psychoanalytic for behavioural characteristics in identifying the traits and styles of different kinds of leaders. They also maintain an enduring concern for the possibility of resolution and harmony, based on greater self-understanding and balance on the part of both leaders and followers.

This review of the leadership literature suggests that some very different *answers* to the research question 'what *is* leadership?' may be elicited from orthodox, interpretivist and critical research. However, while interpretivist and critical approaches offer some significant challenges to modernism, they continue to assume that leadership *is*, variously in the eye of the beholder, an institutionalised relationship of domination or mental cage. However, this final section considers some studies that have started to challenge the assumptions embedded in the research *question* itself. These studies focus on the role of language in organising, and in turn challenge the research question's insinuation that leadership *is*. They offer a more complex understanding of leadership as a contested, and constructed phenomena, and hint at the potential of the linguistic turn to radically expose and subvert modernist assumptions.

THE LINGUISTIC TURN

As I explained in chapter two, poststructuralism sees language as an arbitrary system of signs from which identities are temporarily produced through attempts to govern the grammar underlying a given system, attempts that are inherently political and which reproduce relations of power. Leadership is just such an attempt to halt the play of meaning and privilege a particular signifying structure. A limited number of studies have engaged with the implications of the linguistic turn for leadership, but as I suggest below they do not fully realise its potential.

The work of Mats Alvesson and colleagues at Lund University takes a cautiously sceptical or ‘agnostic’ stance (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2000a, p. 377) towards the notion of leadership in their study of knowledge intensive companies. Their soft⁶ social constructionist approach focuses on the way in which leadership discourses promote particular logics that order the world in specific ways. While appearing self evident, these discourses offer both opportunities and constraints for action. Their work certainly highlights the ambiguous and processual nature of language as a system of meaning. They warn against ‘imputing certainty and order at the expense of openness and indeterminacy’ (p. 364) and suggest that that for managers in their study, leadership could be both ‘everything and nothing’ (p. 375), with robust claims and definitions ‘disappearing’ as managers attempted to explain what it means in practice. Indeed, despite the currently overwhelming number of leadership scripts provided by the popular press and management educators upon which to draw, the managers seem to be ‘caught up in what appears to be almost the opposite, what they themselves refer to as traditional micro-management, that is ‘bad leadership’” (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003b, p. 1442).

Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003c) are also keenly aware of context, suggesting that in the high complexity and ambiguity peculiar to the knowledge intensive industries the

⁶ ‘Soft’ and ‘hard’ are prefixes used to distinguish between two types of poststructuralist approach. The soft or affirmative approach tends to be sceptical of truth claims on the basis that there is little that we can know for certain, but which is not to say that there are no truth claims. In particular, it rejects artificially scientific approaches to reality, such as positivism. Hard or sceptical approaches take the poststructuralist principles to their extreme by denying any absolutes, and is often described as nihilistic.

contradictory use of the discourse of leadership is being used as a means of ‘securing a ‘sense’ of being in charge, ‘proactive’ and ‘significant’ (p. 1442). As they explain, ‘what managers do may not be that special, but because they are managers doing leadership, fairly mundane acts are given an extra-ordinary meaning, at least by the managers themselves’ (p. 1438). They acknowledge that this does appear to have similarities with attribution theory, but the difference here is that it is the managers themselves who are attributing meaning, not the followers. This listening becomes a ‘social symbolic device to elevate their own status among subordinates’ (p. 1453).

Of further significance is the way in which Sveningsson and Larsen (2006) comment on the seductive power of the discourse to target ‘increasing numbers of managers who seem ready to join the aggrandizing bandwagon of becoming all sorts of heroes’ (p. 220), with many failing to appreciate that ‘while they may talk about themselves as leaders in certain contexts (preferably outside work) they remain managers in the actual work context [exercising] relatively little effect in terms of middle managerial influence on decision making’ (p. 220-221). Thus, they suggest that the leadership discourse could be regarded as functioning as a ‘disciplinary device through which a middle manager may be controlled by the identity construction as leader’ (p. 220). Ultimately, the *softness* of Alvesson and his colleagues’ approach does not fully realise the radical potential of the turn to language. Indeed, they could be described as being guilty of one of Deetz’ (2003) criticisms of the legacy of the linguistic turn, the retention of a residual subjectivism and agency as subjects consciously ‘choose’ discourses to pursue particular purposes.

Wood (2005) provides a significant polemic on the ‘false concreteness’ attributed to leadership. Influenced by the work of Whitehead and Bergson, he suggests that an unfolding process of becoming constitutes leadership; it is merely a temporary stability attributed to a pattern of successions of interrelated occasions of experience. However, while highlighting the fluid and arbitrary basis of what we suppose is concrete identity, he does not give overt consideration to the role of language in the punctuating of the process of experience, nor indeed power.

Knights and Morgan (1992) represent an early engagement with the linguistic turn with respect to leadership, influenced by the work of Foucault and ideas about the performative role of language as *discourse*. They see transformational leadership which was popular in the 1980s as a pervasive 'discourse of power and knowledge with specific effects upon the subjectivity of both leaders and led' (p. 180). However, the paper provides little detailed analysis of the nature of the rhetorical strategies that constitute the discourse. They do reflect on the broad social and political conditions in America and Britain that influenced the nature of the particular discursive knowledge or truth of leadership being promoted at this time. They argue that following two world wars, a hard rationalist discourse had dominated the business world, but the 1980s saw the emergence of a discourse of entrepreneurial individualism (p. 183) linked with neo-liberal politics. The leader was seen as the archetypal individual entrepreneur, and the discourse of the 'strategic actor' and 'valued employee' acted as a resource for disciplining the subjectivity and productive power of both the managerial and non-managerial worker to meet the purported competitive challenges presented by the Japanese manufacturing success. However, little detail is provided on the way that specific unit-ideas of individualism are deployed in this discourse.

Similarly influenced by Foucault, Ford (2005) explores what she describes as a number of fragmented, competing, contradictory and complex discourses of leadership in a UK public sector organisation. She provides detailed analysis of the 'macho-management', 'post-heroic', 'professional career', and 'social and family' discourses that serve to shape workplace identity. However, while this paper does identify that individualistic and masculine models dominate, no detailed discussion is provided as to why this should be the case and its consequences in the workplace. Moreover, a Foucauldian analysis such as that adopted by the examples above, has a particular understanding of the research text, seeing it as a trace left after the operation of power in those micro-discursive practices that regulate our activity: power achieves itself and leaves a text. In contrast, Derrida suggests that 'there is nothing outside of the text' (1976, p. 158) so power, like everything else is available only as an experience of interruption: power is

only traceable *in* the text (Derrida 1988, p. 148). This subtle difference betrays the way in which Derrida takes the radical implications of language for organising, to its limits.

Also influenced by the work of Foucault, and implicitly Derrida, Newman (2005) presents a poststructuralist study of the way in which the identity of 'transformational leader' is enacted, negotiated and contested in the micro-politics of delivery in the UK public sector. Rejecting any notion that leadership exists, she argues that leadership merely serves to constitute public servants as key agents in Labour's pledge to modernise the public sector. Indeed, her analysis focuses on the way in which the 'transformational leadership' discourse is constructed linguistically in and through a number of binary divisions, such as failing/successful organisations, uniform/diverse management cadre, stasis/transformation. Moreover, she suggests there is evidence of significant regulation of leaders' delegated power through a range of direct and indirect controls. She also describes the way in which the same actors deploy and partly rework discourses 'into alternative frameworks of meaning' (p. 731) to construct and negotiate the dilemmas they face as a result of shifting and competing policy agendas. However, the ultimate critical thrust of the paper is to suggest that despite claims that managerialism is weakening in the face of the more 'social' politics of the Third Way, in fact leadership represents an extension of management power to new spheres within the public sector: with rational managerial strategies now being applied to social problems as well as organisational problems. This paper makes a significant contribution to understanding the linguistic constitution of leadership in a specific context, drawing attention to the way in which the presence of leadership is constructed out of a particular binary relation of signifiers which necessarily implies the operation of power, and how this fiction is dynamic and contested.

Collinson (2005) provides a close look at the way in which talk about leadership tends to be in terms of artificial and overly simplified binaries, such as leader/follower, hero/villain. He suggests that this is problematic for three reasons, first because there is a tendency for these binaries to become reified as concrete representations of reality, second because their representation as polar extremes underestimates or denies the

ambiguity and interdependence of the asymmetries, and third, there is a tendency for one side of the binary to be privileged, linked to issues of power and control. In contrast he advocates a poststructuralist understanding that emphasises a dynamic dialectical interconnection between multiple binaries. He prosecutes this argument by exploring the complex and shifting dynamics of three particular binaries: control/resistance, consent/dissent and men/women. He identifies a range of contradictions, asymmetries, contestations and commonalities around each. For example, he argues that while consent is normally privileged, it is implicitly based upon the asymmetrical nature of workplace power, which itself can have many unintended and unknown outcomes, just as resistance can be expressed in many forms, including being disguised as consent. Moreover, a poststructuralist feminist analysis suggests the gendered nature of the binaries such that 'even those in leadership positions may engage in resistance' (p. 1435). To further enhance our understanding of the leadership dialectic, he advocates a focus on the multiple, shifting, contradictory and ambiguous identities of 'leaders' and 'followers', exploring how 'these subjectivities are negotiated within contemporary power relations' (p. 1436).

Collinson's paper makes an important contribution, being an example of engagement with the linguistic strategies involved in constituting leadership. However, while the approach he advocates is clearly indebted to the work of Derrida, this is not explicitly stated and he does not explore the binaries as comprehensively as suggested by Derrida's own strategy of close reading. Moreover, the use of the term 'dialectic' suggests that the contradiction inherent in the binaries may ultimately be resolved, when Derrida has argued that language remains always and already undecidable as a system of meaning, and that any necessary decision inevitably involves an act of power. With respect to my fourth aim concerning reflexivity, he does express concern that critical researchers tend to question 'certain aspects of dualism, but in ways that unintentionally reproduce other dichotomies and power asymmetries' (p. 1436). However, this does not go far enough in acknowledging that the inability to stand outside of the system, within which you are constituted, is an inescapable problem inherent to the study of language as a system.

Calas and Smircich (1991) is an example of a poststructuralist analysis that fully engages with Derrida's work. 'Derrida's deconstruction' is one of three analytic approaches they adopt to unsettle the rhetorical and cultural conditions of a number of iconic leadership texts. As they explain,

What we are doing here is re-appropriating public documents – their texts – to show the multiplicity of language at work. Embedded in the multiplicity of meanings of discourse – including ours – are already the traces of other plausible interpretations. (Calas and Smircich 1991, p. 572)

Their approach is particularly interesting with respect to illustrating the way in which language organises, and in my methodology chapter (chapter five) I discuss in more detail the way in which they use a variety of Derrida-inspired 'reading effects' (p. 570) to rigorously engage with their texts, in order to make more apparent the sexual content that they suggest is concealed within them. Indeed, they suggest a relationship between leadership and seduction; leadership at once embodies and denies desire. They claim that,

Leadership is the absolutely necessary creation of desire, a longing, wishing, craving – the creation of sexual attraction that promises to be satisfied through faithful attachment. (Calas and Smircich 1991, p. 575)

Leadership can thus be seen as a form of organisational discipline whereby people are seduced into 'a homosocial order of domination and servitude' (Grint 1997, p. 292).

In particular, with respect to my fourth aim, they are concerned with the problem that organisation theory 'repeats itself'; as Brewis (2005, p. 81) explains, academics work 'within unspoken discursive constraints which mean it is possible only to say certain things in certain ways, making it difficult to really say or do anything different'. What they describe as their 'hysterical writing' thus seeks to challenge closure and subvert the taken-for-granted. This is a significant issue with respect to the textuality of this thesis and the constraints imposed by the academy on the nature of knowledge, an issue I discuss further in the methodology chapter and explored more fully in the Appendix. Indeed, unlike the other pieces mentioned above their papers can be seen as an attempt to *demonstrate* a reflexive awareness of the way in which language has constituted their own 'truth'. However, as I will discuss in chapter four and five, an established criticism

of some poststructuralist work, including Derrida's own writing, is that it can appear impenetrable and inaccessible. It is also important to note that with respect to the politics of signification, Calas and Smircich's work has an overt agenda to reveal gendered interests, although Brewis admits, 'I have myself struggled to accept specific Calas and Smircich claims about other, concealed meanings in the sources they discuss' (Brewis 2005, p. 87).

CONCLUSION

While the previous chapter provided an overview of the broad theoretical context for this thesis, and raised a broad concern for the need to acknowledge that the product of organising is determined by *how* we organise, this chapter reflected specifically on how leadership has been organised. My conclusion is that the literature continues to be dominated by orthodox representations, and while there is a growing number of critical and interpretivist studies, they do not fully challenge the modernist assumptions of the mainstream positivist-psychological approach. Some work has started to engage with the implications of the linguistic turn, but its potential is underdeveloped.

Focusing on my first aim, I began by describing the way in which orthodox approaches assume that leadership *is* a real and universal phenomenon, the essence of which can be known by a neutral observer employing positivist methodologies, so as to correlate leader behaviour with outcomes. The language of leadership is taken for granted as merely a neutral vehicle for mirroring such reality. The limitations of such an approach include its inability to reach consensus about the reality of leadership linked to a simplistic reduction of complexity and an inability to prove causality. Interpretivist approaches have offered a limited response to these problems, suggesting that leadership *is* the outcome of the subjective and intersubjective sense we make of our experiences in organisations. They attribute leadership as a 'special kind of organising', perhaps linked to perceived deficiencies in our selves. While challenging the epistemology of leadership, such approaches are neutral with regard to the ethics of the performative

ends pursued, and fail to acknowledge the 'domination' inherent in the way the leader-follower relationship is formulated.

I went on to reflect on my second aim, and explain that the truth of leadership is closely linked with individualism, a pervasive modernist ideal of the sovereign subject as the starting point for cognition and action that enables the world to be known and mastered. Leaders are presented as *extra*-ordinary individuals; they are an elixir for a range of work and non-work problems. However, various critiques of the idea of individualism raise some significant concerns for this representation of leadership. For example, there has been little consideration of the 'unit ideas' of individualism that inform leadership, and there has been little consideration of the negative consequences of the idea of individualism beyond issues of narcissism and the blind faith of followers. In the light of a growing critique of a growing hyper-individualism in the purported post-modern epoch this would appear to be a significant deficiency.

My third aim concerns the role of power in representations of leadership. I explained that leadership is usually taken for granted as a neutral phenomenon, the hierarchy inherent in the relationship between leader and led being seen as a legitimate aspect of authority, and the leadership strategies employed being intended to coordinate work and ensure that idiosyncratic behaviour does not prejudice the achievement of performative ends. However, some critical approaches have foregrounded the imbalance of power in the leadership relationship, and the use of leadership as a strategy to control labour to deliver the intensified performative outcomes required of capitalist workplace. Nevertheless, while both the labour process and psychodynamic approaches considered did reveal the structural and psychological embeddedness of power, along with the increasingly sophisticated range of control strategies employed in the workplace, they did not fully engage in the subtle, complex and contested nature of politics in the workplace.

In chapter two I argued that the linguistic turn offered a more radical response to the range of interpretivist and critical intellectual traditions that have started to challenge

orthodox assumptions. Poststructuralist approaches pay explicit attention to the tools of organising, such that ontology becomes an issue of epistemology. The linguistic turn suggests that any sense that leadership *is*, derives only from the way in which language temporarily punctuates undifferentiated experience to produce an unstable surface representation. It also considers the contextually embedded nature of the resulting truth and the power inherent in such a fictional identity. Towards the end of this chapter I explained that there have only been a handful of studies that engage with leadership as a context specific, rhetorical and disciplinary resource. Moreover, they suffer variously from a failure to closely examine ‘how’ the precarious textual materiality of leadership is achieved, to explore the nature of a leadership ‘truth’ based on individualism, and to move beyond a narrow, pre-determined interest in the ‘politics’ of signification. This thesis aims to realise the potential of the linguistic turn more fully with respect to the study of leadership. To that end, the next chapter considers the contribution of the work of Jacques Derrida in more detail.

CHAPTER FOUR: JACQUES DERRIDA

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with the following research question, ‘what *is* leadership? As explained in the last chapter, while different approaches to theorising leadership may produce quite different answers to the question, the linguistic turn offers a particularly radical way of understanding the assumptions inherent in the question itself. It draws attention to the ambiguities of language, its performative, power-laden and context-specific characteristics, as well as the inability to step outside language when theorising. However, while there have been some attempts to embrace this turn in studies of leadership, the work of Jacques Derrida provides a particularly enhanced understanding of the potential of this new ‘sensibility’. As a consequence, this chapter provides an overview of the significance of his work and considers how it may inform my specific approach to the research question.

Very broadly, Derrida’s work is often considered to follow that of Nietzsche and Heidegger in their common call for ‘the end of philosophy’. While this can be seen as offering a significant challenge to a wide range of institutionalised social and political practices, Derrida (1995) was at pains to point out that his work is ‘competent, rigorously argued, and carrying conviction in its re-examination of the foundational norms and premises of a number of dominant discourses’ (p. 409). However, Derrida’s work *is* distinctive in that he offers no direct analysis, and indeed no prescriptions for an alternative. Rather it could be said that Derrida’s prolific writings about topics ranging from classical philosophy, literature, architecture to law and psychoanalysis can be regarded as a ‘stance’ (Smith 2005, p. 12) which questions not truth *per se*, but *singular* truth, a truth based on the assumption of presence and acts of closure.

This chapter considers aspects of this ‘stance’. However, I am wary of both simplifying and misrepresenting Derrida, and indeed the impossibility of presenting the entirety of Derrida’s thought. This is due to both the volume of his publications and, perhaps more significantly, because of the way in which his work resembles a ‘theoretical matrix’

(Derrida 1976, p. lxxxiv) which sees an interweaving, interconnectedness and folding back of his themes and argumentative strategies, as well as experiments with typography, punctuation and form. Spivak (Derrida 1976, p. lxxi) points out that while a number of distinctive terms have become associated with Derrida, he 'does not hold on to a single master-word very long...none of these words become 'congealed'...but remain constantly on the move, their definitions being altered by their subsequent use in various different contexts'. The highly provisional, interchangeable and often unfamiliar nature of the terms he employs is complicated and complicating, and deliberately provokes a 'semantic ambiguity which makes a single meaning undecidable' (Wolfreys 1998, p. 53). All these features serve to perform the very point of Derrida's work, which is to question the assumption that objects exist independently of the 'texts' in which we 'read' them (Willmott 1998b). Consequently, any commentator attempting to delineate aspects of Derrida's work finds that his particular preoccupations cannot be listed or reduced in terms of a theory, key idea, or method because this would 'restore the kind of order it puts into question' (Biesta 2001, p. 35).

Various authors who have attempted to present Derrida's work have grappled with the problem that in attempting to be faithful to his work, they are inevitably being unfaithful. For example, Wolfreys attempts to perform Derrida's concern about origins, by complicating the idea of his book having an Introduction: he provides a supplementary Introduction. He explains that this can be seen as a 'self-referential and reflexive' attempt to 'clear the ground, showing the ground as itself a carefully positioned series of interrelated structures, rather than a basis from which to begin' (Wolfreys 1998, p. 3). As explained briefly in chapter one and in more detail in chapter five, I have chosen to draw attention to issues surrounding the structurality of the structure of this thesis by deconstructing the criteria for awarding a PhD (included in the Appendix), while the main thesis remains a conventional narrative.

The first section of the chapter makes a tentative engagement with a number of the 'viruses' that spread throughout Derrida's work, in particular the ideas of logocentrism, *différance*, and deconstruction. I then describe three phases of response to Derrida's

work and develop some of the concerns about poststructuralism in general previously set out towards the end of chapter two, by considering the three main criticisms leveled at Derrida's work: obscurantism, relativism and lack of politics. I conclude by outlining the way in which the potential of Derrida's work for organisation analysis was established by a number of writers during the 1990s. Most importantly, following Jones (2003, p. 233) my aim in this chapter is to 'introduce and make available some of the consequences' of his writing in so far as it helps me to 'imagine how we might read and write after Derrida' (Wolfreys 1998, p. 51). To this end, chapter five outlines the specific way in which I have responded to the question 'what *is* leadership?', after Derrida.

DERRIDA'S THEMES⁷

Arguments calling for the 'end of philosophy' had tended to work on the basis of privileging one philosophical approach over another. So, for example Heidegger rejected all philosophies apart from that dealing with 'being' or ontology. Others had rejected the influence of Western ideology on philosophy and had called for alternatives, such as Marxism. However, Derrida pointed out that none of these had gone far enough, because each new position had failed to escape the very language of philosophy, and in particular the dominance of reason, merely substituting one form of transcendentalism over another. Derrida grappled with the problem of what it was possible to say 'after philosophy', but with an ironic awareness that philosophy could only be questioned using its own terms. His distinctive approach involved the inevitable use of the language of reason, but in such a way as to simultaneously expose its inherent contradictions. As Currie 1998, p. 45 explains 'Derrida never attempts to say anything in his own language but only to show that it distorts, exceeds and resists its own analysis'.

⁷ Putting words 'under erasure' (*sous rature*) involves writing a word and then crossing it out, so as to let the word and the deletion stand – in effect it is both present and absent. It is a device used by Derrida to point to the necessity of using language, while at the same time problematising the nature of positive terms.

He began his exposure of the assumptions underlying philosophy by focusing on the structure that informed the philosophy of structuralism, in a paper called *Structure, Sign, and the Play in the Discourse of the Human Science* that he delivered at a conference at John Hopkins University in 1966 (subsequently included in *Writing and Difference* (Derrida 2001)). He observed that Western metaphysics had long been preoccupied with a 'logocentric' tendency to orientate systems/structures around a central, key concept or transcendental signifier that represents the full presence of meaning. It acts as a singular inaugural truth that by definition can only occur once, and which serves as the ultimate, foundational authority from which everything originates. Wolfreys (1998) explains that, Derrida coined the term 'logocentrism' from,

...two ideas: that of the logos, the Greek term for the Word or Truth (as an unquestionable and desired value, i.e. the rod of God); and center, the concept of a central or originatory point, a moment of absolute beginning from which everything springs and around which all ideas circulate or to which they refer. (Wolfreys 1998, p. 198)

It provides an all-encompassing rationale for a whole structure that provides a 'feeling of mastery over the forces of the unknown that continually besiege us' (Cooper 1989, p. 482).

The invocation of an originatory presence is a taken for granted, pervasive and powerful, as Derrida observes,

The entire history of the concept structure, before the rupture of which we are speaking, must be thought of as a series of substitutions for the centre, as a linked chain of determinations of the centre. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the centre receives different forms of names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix...is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or the centre have always been designated as invariable presence – *eidos*, *arche*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *alethia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth. (Derrida 1976, p. 353)

Derrida did not deny the materiality of the universe, and is not against the idea of truth since 'this is impossible and absurd...we must have [*il faut*] truth' (Derrida 1981a, p. 105; original emphasis). Rather, he was concerned about the way in which these centres

are assumed to be truth *per se*, and remain outside the area of enquiry. The only questions that can be asked are those that are already determined by and predicated on the logic of the central truth.

Moreover, while the idea of a centre is attractive in providing a stable and coherent sense of orientation or structure to a system and a norm against which deviation, variation or dysfunction is detected and marginalised as 'other', at the same time it provides a centripetal movement and reductionist tendency to objectify and compartmentalise. Indeed, such closing off begs the question of what exceeds the structure, and perversely what the philosophy of presence calls its "centre" actually identifies its boundary (Fox 1996, p. 95). To this end, Derrida asked 'why should we mourn for the centre? Is it not the centre, the absence of play and difference, another name for death' (Derrida 1978, p. 297).

Derrida (1981a, p. 40) claimed that 'there is no atom', there is no thing to which we can look to guarantee meaning. He showed the impossibility of the logic of presence as a singular inaugural fact by demonstrating that 'being' and 'meaning' do not coincide, meaning is always *different, differing* and *deferred*. He made numerous, oblique interrogations of this issue as he engaged with the work of Husserl, Hegel, Plato, Valéry, Marx, Heidegger, Freud, and other philosophers, drawing from each paradoxes around interconnected abstractions such *undecidability, iterability, the trace*, and so on. So, for example, Derrida reflected on the way in which the idea of a 'signature' is conventionally conceived of as a mark that is unique to each individual, signaling him or her as a signified. However, he pointed out that its operation denies its singularity because 'a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signified...in order to function, it must be readable, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be detached from the present and singular intention of its production' (Derrida 1988, p. 20). For any truth to have an identity, it must be repeated, but since an absolute repetition is impossible, this puts the very idea of an original identity into question: there can be no repetition without *differences*. Derrida also considered the way in which the idea of the 'supplement' usually refers to a superfluous

addition that is added to something that is already complete, but Derrida pointed out that this actually implies that the object itself is incomplete or lacking in some way. Derrida takes the 'logic of the supplement' to its limit to suggest that the myth of separate and singular originary identity is 'only articulable because of a field of other concepts, principles, ideas which serve in its articulation' (Wolfreys 1998, p.7), in effect 'the meaning of each depends on the trace of the other that inhabits the definition' (Belsey 2002, p. 75). Indeed, not only does identity require these other different concepts to achieve its mythical wholeness, but these concepts are *differing and deferred*.

Culler (1983) provides a useful explanation of Derrida's suggestion that meaning is always *deferred* when he reflects on the paradox inherent in the flight of an arrow. While it is 'in motion', at any given moment it is in a particular position and thus *not* in motion. He suggests that,

The presence of motion is conceivable, it turns out, only insofar as every instant is already marked with the traces of the past and future. Movement can be present, that is to say, only if the present instant is not something given but a product of the relations between past and future. Something can be said to be happening at a given instant only if the instant is already divided within itself, inhabited by the *nonpresent*... [thus] we think of the real as what is present at any given instance because the present instant seems as simple, indecomposable absolute...[but] the notion of presence and the present is derived: an effect of differences. (Culler 1983, p. 94-95)

The here and now of presence is always and already past, but it is exactly the forgetting of the asymmetry that is 'presence' (McQuillan 2000, p. 11). Derrida argued that the idea of 'presence' is only achieved by making an illusory 'incision' into undifferentiated experience. Thus Derrida focuses on the way in which we forget that our representational practices are implicated in how we constitute 'presence' or identity. Every present, in order to be understood as present, carries the trace of an absent that defines it. It follows then that an originary present must bear an originary trace, the present trace of a past which never took place, an absolute past.

This is but a glimpse into some of his meticulously argued and elliptical analysis of taken for granted philosophical assumptions that Derrida prosecuted. His critique of metaphysics found a particular focus in questioning the assumptions about the

functioning of language as a representational system, seeing it as representative of the preoccupation with 'presence' in Western philosophy in general. Below I will consider some of its features in a little more detail, as well as considering Derrida's reflections on the possibility of non-presence.

LANGUAGE

Meaning is Undecidable

As we saw in chapter two, conventional understandings of language assume the existence of a reality or *signified*, the meaning of which can be captured and made fully 'decidable' by means of a signifier. The identity or meaning of a *sign* is thus unproblematically given as self-identical or 'fully present to itself'. However, Saussure had challenged this notion when he suggested that signs do not get their meaning from the 'reality' that words are deemed to describe, but rather signs derive their meaning arbitrarily, by pointing to other words in the language system, which they are not, or as Lucy (2004, p. 27) puts it, 'it is a thing...because it cannot be what anything else is'. Thus binary oppositions become the basic linguistic unit for generating meaning.

Moreover, in pursuing the logic of language as a self referential system of differences Derrida pointed out that if the meaning of a signified points away from itself to another signifier, ultimately meaning is deferred in an endless chain of signifiers. As Derrida explained,

The play of differences involves synthesis and referrals that prevent there being any moment or in any way a simple element that is present in and of itself and refers only to itself. Whether in written or in spoken discourse, no element can function as a sign without relating to another element which is not simply present. This linkage means that each "element" – phoneme or grapheme – is constituted with reference to a trace in it of other elements of the sequence or system. This linkage, this weaving, is the text, which is produced only through the transformation of another text. Nothing, either in the elements in the system, is anywhere simply present or absent. There is only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. (Derrida 1981a, p. 37-38).

This can be illustrated by going back to the traffic light example used in chapter two. Bertens (2001) suggests that the red of traffic lights only makes sense because of its relationship with red and amber, it '...carries 'traces' of amber and green within it, and

is not pure unadulterated red'. Thus, meaning is never present it is always somewhere else; it is dispersed in the constant, ghostly 'flickering of presence and absence together' (Sarup 1988, p. 35). Consequently, Derrida suggested that any sense of unity of identity or presence is only conceivable as a 'stabilizations of something essentially unstable and chaotic' (Derrida 1996a, p. 83); it is a 'particularization' or 'effect'. As Calas and Smircich (1999) so effectively put it, the illusion of truth is only produced as a result of 'a lot of hard work at controlling signification' (p. 654).

Meaning as an 'Effect'

In what could very loosely be described as a theory of meaning, Derrida suggests that presence is 'achieved' by virtue of both a *spatial difference* and a *temporal deferral* between signifiers, both of which become entwined in Derrida's notion of *différance*. While the spatial difference had been assumed by Saussure to be arbitrary, Derrida pointed out that it actually harbours an 'originary act of violence' because one of the two terms in a binary opposition governs, while the other is repressed or excluded. The illusion of the 'property' of a concept is achieved because 'the superior term in the opposition belongs to presence and the logos, the inferior serves to define its status and mark a fall' (Sarup 1988, p. 41). Indeed, the privilege inherent in binary oppositions establishes a conceptual order or hierarchy that can classify and organise objects, events and relations in the world that express relations of power. They can draw boundaries around what is acceptable and what is not, and thus represent 'an ethical and teleological determination' (Derrida 1988, p. 17) of what normal communication should be.

Derrida identified a series of binary oppositions in Western thought that have been key to attempts to order undifferentiated experience and serve as a basis for judging what is real, true and right. They include speech/writing, presence/absence, meaning/form, soul/body, masculine/feminine, man/woman, liberal/metaphorical, nature/culture, positive/negative, transcendental/empirical, and cause/effect. The first term in each pair is privileged; the second is considered subordinate thereby giving the appearance of some originary meaning or logos. Derrida also pointed out that while presence in spatial terms as a result of a violent difference from an absent opposite, at the same time,

it also requires that absent other for meaning to occur. Meaning involves difference *and* deferral. Deferral suggests a *temporal* dimension, because the other occurs as an immanently ‘past or future element in an economy of traces’ (Derrida 1976, p. 57); such that meaning merely ‘puts off until later what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible’ (Derrida 1973, p. 129). So, while for Saussure, a sign is surrounded by differences but not corrupted by the difference, for Derrida, the sign is both divided from itself and contaminated by the immanence of the other. A binary opposition is thus a ‘mutually supportive pivotal point around which meaning turns’ (Linstead 1993, p.111).

Derrida coined the term *différance* to allude to the un-decidable alternation, or *aporia*, across ‘difference-differing-deferring’; the continuous movement of temporal and spatial spacing that makes signification possible...and impossible. This deliberately ambivalent and strange neologism derives from a combination of the French ‘differer’ that means both to differ and defer, and is intended to defy conceptualisation, it is something that is really nothing – a difference, a gap, a trace (Johnson 1981), which enacts what it denotes. *Différance* captures the divided nature of the sign: meaning can only ever be deferred, it is never fully present, but always present and absent. The idea is key to Derrida’s understanding of ‘writing’, as something that incorporates a recognition of structurality, and the differences, which articulate it.

Writing

Writing is normally understood as a graphic signifier that refers to a phonic signifier. It is usually marginalised in preference to the phonic because the spoken word is believed to provide more authentic access a pure, originary centre of consciousness. But, as Smith (2005, p. 43) explains, ‘what the logocentric/phonocentric tradition took to be a contamination introduced by the mediation of writing is, instead, an original condition’. Derrida shows that the traditional concept of speech is itself dependent on just those features that are used to distinguish it from writing: the differ-differing-deferral of *différance* that makes possible an act of signification and the illusion of identity/presence. Derrida thus uses the notion of *arche-writing* to suggest the condition

of possibility for language *as such*, including writing. He suggests that the term writing can be used in a more generalized or metaphorical sense for an entire structure of investigation. For Derrida writing is no longer understood in the narrow sense of linear and phonetic notation but as introducing the very possibility of signification, 'of bringing classificatory difference into play' (Derrida 1976, p. 109); all meaning is thus 'writerly' from the start. As Wolfreys (1998) explains,

Writing becomes a term for Derrida...which announces the structured ('written') condition of all forms of text, including human identity, and also the idea that all forms of such writing are never completely logically coherent or homogeneous, but are in some way marked or traced by what we term alterity or otherness; moments which subvert, contradict the logic, figures, traces, conceptualizations for which we cannot account, which our readings cannot make fit in with the overall structure, and which, because of their heterogeneous nature, announce the structure they inhabit *as structure*.' (Wolfreys 1998, p. 66)

Derrida's notion of "grammatology" suggests that all production of meaning is writing and subject to the infinite play of signification. Both speech *and* writing are the possibilities produced from the general dynamic movement of this writing as difference or trace, structured by difference and deferral.

DECONSTRUCTION

As suggested earlier, Derrida's critique of Western metaphysics is not conducted by means of a strategy of sceptical detachment - taking up a neutral or counter-posing position, or with the use of a conventional (thesis/antithesis) argumentative format, since that would privilege the critic. Indeed, as we have seen Derrida is not 'against' foundations *per se*, suggesting that they are inescapable, but he *is* concerned to unsettle or shake foundations by focusing on 'the 'play' within a system or structure which makes the structure possible and announces the structurality of the structure.

Derrida's distinctively 'sensitive' strategy has been dubbed 'deconstruction'. Rorty (1995) points out that overall the word actually plays a small role in Derrida's writing, suggesting that it is because Derrida was made famous not by his fellow-philosophers but by literary critics as they searched for new ways of approaching texts. Indeed,

Derrida commented that ‘when I chose the word, or when it imposed itself upon me...I little thought that it would be credited with such a central role in the discourse that interested me at the time’ (Derrida 1985a, p. 1).

It is an approach that is characterised by ‘unwarrantable involvement’ (Culler 1983, p. 88), within a text. Derrida practices a very scrupulous, precise and respectful reading of texts that surfaces the blind spots or moments of undecidability that could not be fully mastered, thereby revealing how arguments contain the seeds of their own destruction, how they undo themselves. Thus Smith (2005) notes that,

Deconstruction is not the effect of a master interpreter who comes and does something *to* a text, nor the result of bringing external tools or appliances to work *on* a text. Rather deconstruction happens within texts, from inside, out of their own resources. There is a sense then that we as interpreters are only witnesses...to a text’s deconstruction of itself. (Smith 2005, p. 9)

Such a reading could be regarded as ‘ethical’ in that it approaches a text in its singularity ‘without imposing upon it some ready-made identity, some family likeness, which domesticates and calms down its play’ (Wolfreys 1998: 9).

Deconstruction may be nothing more or less than the response necessitated by the text; it may be nothing, more or less, than taking responsibility for the act of reading, rather than seeking to avoid that responsibility in the name of some institutionally approved method of interpretation. In either case, ‘it’, is not something that we can lay out like the components of some engine in order to assemble a ‘deconstruction-machine which churns out reading after reading in exactly the same manner...good reading may be said to be that which never avoids its responsibility, and which never falls into reading by numbers. (Wolfreys 1998, p.16)

It is best described as ‘exemplary’ or ‘good’ reading, in which each text is encountered on its own terms.

‘RESPONDING’ TO DERRIDA

Despite the ubiquity of Derrida’s name and the terms associated with his work (for example, his name has appeared in a song by Scritti Politti, and ‘deconstruction’ has featured in a film by Woody Allen and as a fashion and architectural style), throughout and beyond his career, there have been varying responses to Derrida’s work, ranging

from exuberant acolytes to virulent detractors (Smith 2005, p. 4). A number of ‘affairs’ very publicly rehearsed these popularised and polarised positions, such as that in 1987 concerning Heidegger’s purported complicity with Nazism, and de Man’s sympathies with Germany, and in 1992 over the award of an honorary doctorate at the University of Cambridge. Indeed, negative caricatures of Derrida’s work have spilled over into mainstream journalism following the ‘demolition-job’ of postmodernism undertaken by Sokol and Bricmont (1998). Indeed, while being awarded many prizes, Derrida had an uneasy relationship with French academia never being awarded a professorship and pursuing much of his career abroad. Even his obituaries ranged from comprehensive and respectful in the UK Guardian to scathing in the New York Times (which provoked a 4000 signatory protest).

However, I suggest below that Derrida’s work has often been *mis-appropriated* to serve alternative agendas, *mis-interpreted* as a result of superficial readings or reliance on secondary sources to understand his work to the extent that he is often mistakenly assumed to represent a postmodern position, or *mis-judged* as a pseudo-philosophical charlatan because of reliance on evaluative criteria that derive from ‘analytic’ philosophy which are antithetical to what has come to be known as ‘continental’ philosophy, and Derrida’s project in particular.

Arguably, Derrida’s work has been received differently across three successive periods. The first, in the early to mid-1970s saw a selective reading of Derrida popularised by departments of literary studies in American Universities. This is evident in the work of Bloom, de Man, Hartmen, and Hillis Miller, members of the so-called ‘Yale School’ of Critical Theory, who in their book *Deconstruction and Criticism* (Bloom *et al* 1979) saw deconstruction as a successor to the formalist style of American New Criticism⁸. But, as Beardsworth (1996, p. 2) points out ‘the literary reception of Derrida’s though overplayed the literary side and, at institutional worst, made it into a practice of literary

⁸ American New Criticism was an approach to literary criticism that had been popular since the end of the Second World War until the 1970s. It sought to systemitise the study of literature through rigorous analysis of the characteristics of the text itself, rather than relying on any external evidence such as the context of its creation, to explain the text.

criticism'. There were accusations that bourgeois liberal North American readings over-emphasised language as an autonomous and self-referential system to such an extent that it eradicated all traces of the political and philosophical from Derrida's work. Following Bass' English translation of *Positions* (Derrida 1981a) some Marxist literary critics (Ryan 1982 and Eagleton 1983, 1984) offered readings of deconstruction that attempted to re-establish its left-wing sympathies. However, Habermas (1987) produced an influential critique of postmodernism in general and Derrida in particular, accusing them of being 'neo-conservative'. He assumed Derrida's work to be a continuation and intensification of the later Heidegger's mystical philosophy that was a form of crude fascism and evasion of politics.

A second movement can be discerned from the mid-1980s with the advent of a number of more conventional philosophical readings of Derrida (Gasché 1979, 1986; Harvey 1986 and Llewellyn 1986). They aimed to correct the way in which Derrida's work has been used by literary critics to reinforce their discipline's argumentative rigour, and at the same time was rejected by philosophers as too literary. Nevertheless in correcting the literary reading, they could now be charged with underplaying the significance of the literary in Derrida's work.

A third movement emerged from the early 1990s that attempted to foreground the ethico-political dimensions of Derrida's work (Critchley 1992; Bennington 1994; Beardsworth 1996). In particular, Critchley established Derrida's debt to Levinas' understanding of ethics, manifest in his thinking of community and his notion of 'democracy to come' in *The Other Heading* (Derrida 1992a).

In summary, criticisms of Derrida's work relate to three issues. Firstly, his work has been criticised for being intentionally obscurantist and difficult so as to create a cult-like following and thereby deliberately disregarding 'the procedures of rational discourse which govern the space of the University' (Smith 2005, p. 4). A second criticism concerns an assumption that his work is a case of anarchic free play, with its anti-foundationalism leading to 'a ruinous irrationalism, and thereby the denial of all

possibility of discrimination or judgment' (Patrick 1996, p. 136). A third criticism concerns the assumption that there is a lack of politics in his work. I will consider each in turn.

Obscurantism

One of the most frequent charges made against Derrida's work concerns the complexity of his style, which suggests a lack of accessibility and failure to meet accepted standards of academic protocol and rigour. With regard to the first of these issues, his complex style, Martin (1990) observes,

Few others would have the time, money or patience to spend their time deciphering deconstructions where, sometimes seems, every other phrase is a neologism, enclosed in quotation marks, embedded in multiple dependent clauses, or expressed in one or several foreign languages. (Martin 1990, pp. 341-2, footnote 3)

However, rather than being deliberately perverse, Derrida's 'textual gymnastics' (O'Doherty and Willmott 2001, p. 464) could be regarded as self-consciously 'performing' his argument about the problem of logocentrism. It is exactly because 'Derrida...finds himself in the uncomfortable position of attempting to account for an error by means of tools derived from that very error' (Johnson 1981, p. x) that he uses a style that seeks to reflexively expose the precariousness of its own assertions. Precisely because he cannot escape the problems with language that his analysis highlights, his writing strategies do not attempt to arrest meaning, but rather to keep it in movement.

In relation to the second issue, his failure to conform to academic protocol, this was illustrated by the 'Cambridge Affair' which involved twenty philosophers from other institutions writing a letter to *The Times* newspaper in the UK protesting at Derrida being awarded an honorary doctorate, on the grounds that he did not meet the 'accepted standards of clarity and rigour' and suggesting that his work consisted of 'tricks and gimmicks similar to those of the Dadaists' (Smith *et al*, 1992). However, as Norris (1988) reminds us there is a 'very real *philosophical* cogency and rigour' to Derrida's work, the issue is rather the programme by which one defines rigour. As Derrida explains,

You also asked me, in a personal way, why people are angry with me. To a large extent, I don't know. It's up to them to answer. To a small extent I know; it is not because people are angry at me personally (well, it happens in private, perhaps); but rather they are angry at what I *write*. They are angry at my texts more than anything else, and I think it is because of the *way* I write – not the content, or the thesis. They say that I do not obey the rules of rhetoric, grammar, demonstration, and argumentation; but of course, if they were simply not interested, they would not be angry. As it is, they start to get involved but feel it's not that easy, that to read my texts *they have to change the rules, to read differently*, if only at another rhythm. (Derrida 2003a, p. 17, emphasis added)

Indeed, as Cooper (1989, p. 481) elaborates, Derrida is concerned that conventional academic coherence 'may actually work against...genuine understanding...since it is implicitly grounded in the idea that knowledge is somehow already clearly structured for us in the 'external world'.

This also relates to the misconception that Derrida privileged the literary over the philosophical, a particular concern articulated by Habermas (1987). While not denying that all language contains some literary and rhetorical elements, Habermas is of the view that these must be 'bridled' because of the intrinsic and essential difference between philosophy and literature based on the former being concerned with reason, logic and truth. However, through his emphasis on 'writing', mentioned earlier, *Derrida* challenges the traditional distinction between the literary and the philosophical, and indeed the real and the fictional. Hence rather than privileging the literary over the philosophical, or vice versa, Derrida is rejecting the distinction, arguing that both are a product of rhetorical strategies. Indeed, as Norris (1988) points out, what defines philosophy as a discipline 'is precisely its reluctance to face this fact; its desire to ignore the omnipresence of figural language in the texts of its past and present' and thus, as Derrida (1984, p. 108) comments, 'my central question is: from what site or non-site (non-lieu) can philosophy as such appear to itself other than itself, so that it can interrogate and reflect upon itself in an original manner'.

Nihilism⁹ and Relativism¹⁰

The charge of nihilism is frequently located in relation to Derrida's often misunderstood claim that 'there is nothing outside of the text' (Derrida 1976, p. 158) which he also expressed as 'there is nothing outside of context' (Derrida 1988, p. 136) and 'there is nothing but context' (Derrida 2001, p. 19). It is frequently assumed that this means that there is *nothing but* text. However, it was not meant to deny the reality of a world outside of texts, as mentioned earlier Derrida has asserted 'we must have [*il faut*] truth' (1981, p. 105 emphasis in original), but rather he points out that it is conditioned and limited by language, and that no appeal can be made to some unmediated, non-contextual, transcendental presence or source of meaning. As Smith explains,

There is no 'access' to either the world or ourselves which is not subject to the differings and deferring of difference, as such, the world and even consciousness are never simply or fully 'present'...There is no aspect of our 'experience' – that interpretive way we navigate our being-in-the-world – that escapes the play of signifiers or the conditioning of difference...there is nothing outside textuality – there is no engagement with or inhabitation of a world which doesn't live off the mediation of signs... the subject is a function of language, that he is a "function" of language. (Smith 2005, p.45)

Currie (1998, p. 78-9) offers the clarification that 'Derrida is not denying that one may be speaking the literal truth when one says such things as 'This pencil is red', any more than he is denying that there are objects we refer to and persons who refer to them. *It is a certain construal of sense and reference that he deconstructs*' (emphasis added). So, it is perhaps better translated as 'there is no outside-text', implying that while an independent, physical world may exist, all that we can know is *text*, constructions of signs in relationship, which are written so as to produce a precarious and deceptive truth. Hence the issue is the need to scrutinise the linguistic condition, and consequences of taken for granted truths as well as the awareness that the condition and consequences cannot be tamed for the purposes of philosophising.

⁹ Nihilism is a position of extreme scepticism that nothing has real existence. It rejects all values and beliefs as meaningless and unfounded.

¹⁰ In its weakest sense, relativism denotes a recognition of variety and difference, while stronger versions suggest that there are no general or universal grounds/criteria upon which to judge the truth or worth of moral schemes or ways of knowing, for example. There are simply different claims from different standpoints.

The accusation of relativism relates to the way in which Derrida's preoccupation with the uncontrollability of language has become confused with the postmodern notion of giving voice to multiple truths. It has also become compounded by the subtle but dangerous substitution of 'indeterminacy' for 'undecidability' in a number of commentaries on Derrida's work. However, undecidability does not imply arbitrariness because the original decision has established clear parameters, as Derrida (1999, p. 79) points out 'undecidability is the competition between two *determined* possibilities or options, two determined duties' within a relation of binary forces.

Ethics¹¹ and Politics¹²

The accusation that Derrida's work fosters an irresponsible indulgence on the part of academics in esoteric language games for an elitist audience of intellectuals, linked with the charges of nihilism and relativism, lead quickly to the claim that Derrida is inattentive to the materiality of social practices that surround texts and provides no ethical or practical basis upon which to ground either the means or ends of any political commitment. For example, critics such as Feldman (1998) express these concerns specifically in relation to organisation studies by claiming that 'postmodernism' is *destructive*, because it unilaterally condemns 'all cultural boundaries' as 'oppressive and to be deconstructed' (p. 59) and fails to see the essential need for cultural authority to give meaning and provide socio-historically determined 'moral order' and 'standards of ethical conduct in organisations' (p. 60). Indeed, even some who are sympathetic to Derrida have seen the need to conjoin deconstruction with some more overtly political position because it appears to be 'lacking a social change project' (Boje 2001, p.19). Others have suggested that if Derrida does have a politics it appears suspect because of his association with other philosophers, such as de Man and Heidegger, who appeared to have sympathies with the morally reprehensible politics of German National Socialism. Such controversy became particularly public following an unauthorised translation of

¹¹ Ethics concerns a set of moral principles or values that govern the conduct of an individual or group that carries a normative impulse, signifying that an action is right or wrong.

¹² While power is conventionally defined as the ability to produce an effect, politics refers to the processes through which competing interests are expressed, defended and negotiated. As explained elsewhere in this thesis, there are different views as to whether power is possessed or dispersed, and in turn whether politics is about actions taken by individuals to influence others, or works through meanings and identities that announce the distribution of advantage and disadvantage.

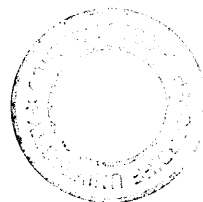
Derrida's work by Richard Wolin that Derrida claimed was an intentionally malicious mistranslation.

However, as Deutscher (2005, p. 20-21) points out, Derrida was very visibly involved in a number of political activities. For example he lists Derrida's membership of the International Parliament of Writers, where he supported the proposal for cities of refuge for persecuted intellectuals. He joined public calls for peace in Algeria and Palestine, and was a frequent presence in French newspapers commentating critically on public affairs, protested at the death sentence for incarcerated African-American journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal, and critiqued the harsh immigration policy in France. Moreover, Derrida has explicitly denied that his work is politically impoverished, commenting that deconstruction should not remain,

enclosed in purely speculative, theoretical academic discourses but rather...[but] aspire to something more consequential, to *change* things and to intervene in an efficient and responsible, though always, of course very mediated way...Not doubtless to change things in the rather naïve sense of calculated, deliberate and strategically controlled intervention, but in the sense of maximum intensification of a transformation in progress, in the name of neither a simple symptom nor a simple cause (other categories are required here). (Derrida 1992a, pp. 8-9; original emphasis)

Arguably, the ethical/political became more overt following the publication of *Force of Law* (Derrida 1992b), and in his later work where he reflected on the nature of decision, responsibility, undecidability, aporia, justice, democracy and the messianic.

However, as he alludes himself above, it must be stressed that Derrida's approach cannot be understood in terms of conventional notions of politics. Derrida has no *essential* 'politics of deconstruction' in the metaphysical sense, and there is no totalising notion of 'the political', or an autonomous 'political subject' (Beardsworth 1996, p. 19) and moreover, he offers no prescription for a new emancipatory horizon. Rather, his politics manifests itself 'in writing (or if you prefer in the future production) of a language and of a political practice that can no longer be comprehended, judged, deciphered by codes' (Derrida 1988, p. 139) because, as he comments elsewhere, 'philosophical activity does



not *require* a political practice; it is, in any case a political practice' (Derrida 1995, p. 70).

To understand this we need to recall the way in which Derrida considers that any (necessary) metaphysical attempt to establish identity requires 'situations to be stabilized through a decision of writing' (Derrida 1988, p.148); it requires a context to be determined by means of a 'certain type of non-'natural' relationship to others...' (Derrida 1988, p. 136). Such experience is always political because it involves an act of repression or exclusion that may be regarded as an 'originary violence' (Derrida 1988, p. 122). Such prescriptive force of decision is usually hidden 'under some claim to naturality *qua* 'theory' or 'objective science' (Beardsworth 1996, p. 10). However, the ethical or *responsible decision* performs a 'lesser violence in the economy of violence' (Beardsworth 1996, p. 12). It involves enduring the trial of the undecidability as 'the competition between two determined possibilities or options, two determined duties' (1999, p. 7). Derrida describes this as the experience and experiment of the aporia, 'a certain experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible' (Derrida 1992a, p. 41). It is un-programmable and involves a more provisional way of thinking, involving 'failure of fluency' or 'hesitation'. As Lucy (2004) explains,

for it to be a decision in a Derridean sense – it must exceed or overrun the conditions of any programme. If it's to be made by an ethical being, rather than a computer, a decision must be allowed to pass through a struggle...within the time and space of which it cannot be known what the eventual outcome will be, because at least more than one possibility remains open. A decision that could not have been otherwise would not be a decision...[Moreover]...every decision must be made afresh, for another first time, with the singularity of the occasion that calls for a decision to be made ...[because the]...very ghost-like quality of the condition of its always being possible for a decision to have been otherwise, keeps decisions from becoming the basis of new laws, new programmes, new attitudes by which to make decisions in the future. (Lucy 2004, p. 68)

As I mentioned at the start of this Chapter, this overview of Derrida's work fails to do justice to what Royle (2003, p. 16) describes as the 'uncanny effect by which one is invited to sense the unfolding of all his thinking starting out from anywhere, from any idea, any word, any thought that happens to be at issue'. But, having made an attempt to outline some of the main ~~themes~~ that flow through Derrida's work, I conclude by reflecting on the way in which the potential of his work has been embraced in the field

of organisation studies in so far as it serves to locate the approach I have adopted in this study.

Consequences for Organisational Analysis

Derrida himself has identified the tendency for two types of response to his work,

Deconstruction is generally practiced in two ways or two styles, although it most often grafts one onto the other. One takes on the demonstrative and apparently a historical allure of logico-formal paradoxes. The other, more historical and more amnesic, seems to proceed through readings of texts, meticulous interpretations and genealogies. (Derrida 1992b, p. 21)

With respect to the first of these responses, Derrida's work has informed what could be described as a period of theorising about theorising in organisational analysis, a trend that has influenced the conceptualization of this very thesis. As explained in chapter three, it is less concerned with 'what' can be known', and more this 'how' it is known. An example of this 'new sensibility' (Hancock and Taylor, 2001, p.82) is found in the work of Cooper and Law (1995) who elaborate on the distinction between a traditional 'distal' mode of analysis and a more radical 'proximal' approach. The former conceptualizes organisations as 'real' phenomena that have a relatively stable existence in space and time and whose essence can be 'measured' by means of traditional scientific research methodologies. It is an approach that privileges 'results and outcomes, the "finished" things or objects' (p. 214). In contrast, the ontology of a proximal approach privileges the 'continuous' the 'unfinished', and 'what is forever approached but never attained' (p. 239). As Hancock and Tyler (2001, p. 86) explain the organisational domain can thus be understood as 'comprising disparate and often uncoordinated acts and processes, open-ended in their nature and bound only by temporary and unstable conjunctions'. In this sense, organisation is an effect of forgotten practices that seek to bring a temporary and precarious halt to continuous process.

Chia (1995) makes a similar distinction between what he describes as a Parmenidian inspired 'being-realism' and Heraclitean inspired 'becoming-realism'. The 'strong' ontology of the former with its focus on the static and concrete, contrasts with the

'weak' ontology of the latter with its focus on 'a transient, ephemeral and emergent reality' (p. 579). 'What is called 'organisations', therefore, is nothing more than islands of relatively stabilized relational orders in a sea of ceaseless change' (Chia 2003, p. 131). In contrast, he advocates the critical potential of an ontology of 'becoming realism', which is concerned with the analysis of the 'the myriad of heterogeneous yet interlocking micro-practices which collectively generate effects such as individuals, organisations and society' (p. 528). This form of analysis would draw attention 'to the ways in which we 'write' order onto flux...what is 'repressed' and 'forgotten' in established ways of thinking' (Willmott 1998b, p. 235-6). Indeed, a handful of authors have embraced this new sensibility to problematise seemingly 'concrete' concepts in organisation theory, such as bureaucracy (Frug 1984), decision (Chia 1996), business ethics (Letiche 1998), organisation culture (Linstead and Grafton-Small 1992), and trust (Knights *et al* 2001).

The second 'style' involves Derrida's approach being 'applied' to specific texts, and it is into this category that this thesis may be placed. There are a number of very different examples of such studies that attempt to elicit and unsettle the structurality of the structure of a range of different texts relating to, or originating from work organisations. Arrington and Francis (1989) undertake a deconstruction of *Organization Theory and Methodology* by Michael Jenson. They offer a highly critical analysis of the dominance of positivist epistemology as 'truth' in accounting research and suggest that the highly institutionalized arrangements for producing and disseminating acceptable knowledge results in 'the possibilities of economic meaning about the organization' being 'circumscribed and closed off' (p. 268).

Martin (1990) deconstructs a story of the support given to a female member of staff while having a Caesarian birth, told by a Chief Executive Officer during a conference interview. While seemingly benevolent and progressive, deconstruction enables Martin to suggest an overbearing and masculinist attempt to suppress the private, female and sexual. Mumby and Putnam (1992) expose the way in which the notion of 'bounded rationality', outlined in Herbert Simon's book *Administrative Behaviour*, constitutes

organising in a very particular, patriarchal and masculine way, that marginalises the emotional and intuitive, 'normally' associated with women. Their deconstruction focuses on the logic of the binaries implicit in the notion of 'bounded rationality'. They present 'bounded emotionality' as a playful 'third voice' to suggest 'an understanding of the organising process that neither term can capture alone' (p. 474), and thereby 'doubt' (p. 469). Calas and Smircich (1991) adopt a number of analytic approaches, including 'Derrida's deconstruction' (p. 568) to unsettle the rhetorical and cultural conditions of several key leadership texts. They employ a variety of tactics to shock the reader into realising that what is conventionally assumed to be gender neutral representation of leadership to be a highly masculinist form of seduction.

In a series of papers, Learmonth (1999, 2001, 2004a, 2005) is concerned to offer sceptical readings of the managerialist discourse in the UK National Health Service. He openly admits to using deconstruction 'as if it were a method of empirical enquiry' but with the proviso that his 'findings' should not be considered as replicable objective facts about what a manager 'is' in the positivist tradition (1999 p. 1001-2). He surfaces the 'others' of management. For example, he shows the way in which management is constituted in rational and masculine terms which marginalises the emotional, when the text inevitably draws attention to emotion and thereby undermines the meaning it asserts (Learmonth 1999). He contrasts the purportedly disinterested language of management with the production of managers as heroic figures in the text (Learmonth 2001). He also emphasises the slipperiness of the word 'trust', showing how certain potential meanings are denied, while others are appropriated for management purposes (Learmonth 2004a). He also argues that the claim to be a manager only makes sense through an appeal *not* to be an administrator, while this denigrated term inevitably remains central to the identity of management (Learmonth 2005).

Just as the above bi-partite classification of the responses to Derrida's work is a simplistic heuristic, so this brief review of Derrida-inspired studies of organisation is not exhaustive, but it does suggest the promise of the following issues for theorising organising: the fluid nature of 'reality', how what we take to be 'reality' is an attempt to

‘write’ order on to this state of constant flux, seeing organisation as text¹³, the need for a reflexive awareness of the constitutive nature of theorising, advocating deconstruction as a means of surfacing the textual strategies that stage meaning, and offering the possibility that things could be ‘otherwise’. At the same time it also suggests a divergence of possible approaches with regard to the nature of the texts selected, the agenda pursued, style of deconstructive reading and approach to reflexivity. I will focus on specific aspects in more detail in the following chapter where I explain and justify the way in which I read a range of texts from Metropolitan Council, in the wake of Derrida.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to look more closely at the work of Jacques Derrida in order to understand how I might encounter the question ‘what *is* leadership?’ in the wake of Derrida. Following Derrida, the very question ‘what *is* leadership?’ may now be seen as presupposing that leadership exists independent of the texts in which *it* is read. It assumes and affirms the full presence of leadership as an orientating centre of meaning. These assumptions are conventionally taken for granted, and remain outside the arena of academic inquiry. However, Derrida is very much concerned with ‘the question of the question’ and focuses specifically on how such an act of closure is achieved as an effect of *différance*, ‘at once the condition of possibility and the condition of the impossibility of truth’ (Derrida 1981b, p. 168). He focuses on the structurality of the structure and the play of signifiers within it ‘by maximum intensification of a transformation in progress’ (Derrida 1992b, p. 8). This approach has informed my own response to the research question, ‘what *is* leadership?’ such that my first aim in this study is to explore how the truth of leadership is organised linguistically in a range of texts from Metropolitan Council, by means of a strategy of close deconstructive reading. Having suggested the potential of the work of others who have previously ‘applied’ Derrida, the next chapter sets out my particular approach in more detail.

¹³ While conventionally used to refer to printed or written words produced intentionally by an author, following Derrida ‘text’ refers to any symbols that organise meaning and impose decidability on the world.

Furthermore, my second aim is to explore the particular truth of leadership being promoted. Following Derrida, this may be seen as a case of 'anthropocentrism', the orientation of the ideal of leadership around the central concept of the individual. As I explained in chapter three, individualism is taken for granted in the leadership literature, and just as with other forms of the logocentric impulse in Western thought, questioning the foundational concept upon which the whole system of leadership is predicated would seem 'illogical, improper, sometimes even indecent' (Wolfreys 1998, p. 24-35). However, anthropocentrism 'does' things, imposing particular limits on the reality of leadership, and closing down the possibility of leadership being otherwise.

My third aim concerns the power inherent in the linguistic representation of leadership. Following Derrida, it could be suggested that a violence is performed in the decision that marks the spatial difference between the signifiers that constitute leadership. My deconstructive readings of the texts reveal the power inherent in attempts to freeze the meaning of leadership by ordering language such that a particular side of a binary relationship between signifiers is privileged and the other subordinated.

My fourth aim concerns the need to demonstrate a reflexive awareness of the textuality of my own analysis. This can be seen as an attempt to fulfill Kilduff and Keleman's (2001) proposal that the field of organisation studies should 'constantly revisit the phenomena that are in the process of being constituted and changed by the texts we produce ...[so that]...we may succeed in addressing the deep-seated processes of change within society, rather than being caught up in the race to produce the next management fad' (p. S59). In the next chapter I review a number of approaches that have been adopted in pursuit of this aim, before explaining my rationale and approach to deconstructing the assessment criteria for the PhD to enable me to make explicit the textual choices that structured this thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The forgoing chapters have established that my response to the research question ‘what *is* leadership?’ involves a critical reading of the language of leadership in texts originating from Metropolitan Council so as to elicit how leadership is ‘written’. The review of the general organisational analysis literature in chapter two and specific leadership literature in chapter three established the limitations of orthodox analysis, linked in particular to a lack of critical capacity to reflect on the way in which our representational practices are implicated in the construction of how we think of a ‘thing’ itself. Following an overview of the work of Jacques Derrida in the last chapter as an approach that focuses more on the textuality of meaning, this chapter moves from intellectualizing and promoting his ideas to accomplishing them in my methodological practice.

As outlined in Chapter Two, poststructuralism denies both an external *and* internal reality. Rather, it is concerned with the way in which language is the principal means of organising undifferentiated experience. Since language is an unstable system, reality can be considered to be a temporary surface effect produced in an act of power. Thus ontology now becomes an issue of epistemology. However, since it is language that also produces empirical research, the issue of methodology, as conventionally understood, also becomes problematic. Indeed, as Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) point out, ‘most postmodernists do not talk about methodology. One could even say that postmodernism is anti-methodological’ (p. 184). Instead, they suggest that the following sorts of issue inform poststructuralist research. First, that research should attend to ‘notorious ambiguities, differences and divergencies of things’ (p.185) in *process*, second that it should avoid a definite *viewpoint* at both the theoretical and interpretive level, and third a concern with the problem of *textual authority* which calls for reflexive awareness of the way in which the purported truth of the text is legitimised.

In reflecting on each of the challenges arising from these issues in this study, I reflect on the nature of Derrida's close (deconstructive) reading, his concern with undecidability and the responsible decision, and the nature of reflexive writing. I also review the extent to which a number of writers in the field of organisation studies, mentioned at the end of the last chapter, have addressed these methodological issues when they have 'applied' Derrida's work. I then set out my own response to the issues. With regard to attentiveness to *process*, my readings of the texts from Metropolitan Council have focused on the relationship of signs that construct a particular, but unstable truth. With regard to *viewpoint*, I understand deconstruction to be political in itself, and third, with regard to textual *authority*, I have chosen to reflexively expose the limits of my own 'writing', by deconstructing the PhD assessment criteria. I use this to uncover the constraints imposed by academia on my textual choices in writing this thesis.

THE ISSUE OF PROCESS

Alertness to process concerns poststructuralism's interest in the precarious linguistic constitution of what we take for granted as reality. As such, the analytic focus is on various attempts that have been made to halt the play of language in ways that are ethically and teleologically determined. As Lather (1993, p. 675) explains 'it is not a matter of looking harder, or more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing', and exploring the limits of these temporary surface effects.

Chapter four introduced ~~deconstruction~~ as a term popularised to describe variously Derrida's philosophy, politics, and analytic strategy. While this distinctive way of reading texts is powerfully demonstrated in Derrida's work, the possibility of its application by others, and indeed in this thesis, as a 'method' to explore the process of language, has been subject to significant debate. Perhaps most telling is Derrida's care to avoid the use of the term deconstruction at all, because it suggests a set of rules or techniques. As Beardsworth (1996) explains,

...[this] carries connotations of a procedural form of judgment. A thinker with a method has already decided how to proceed, is unable to give himself or herself up to the matter of thought at hand, is a functionary of the criteria which structure his or her conceptual gesture. For Derrida...this is irresponsibility itself. (Beardsworth 1996, p. 4)

The absence of any principles or rules of deconstruction has frustrated many, but if we *were* able to 'get a grip on deconstruction' (Spivak 1995, p. 244) we would continue to reinforce the logocentric assumption that signified and signifier are the self same.

Deconstruction might be thought of as an attempt to solicit the rhetorical strategies used in a text that seek to halt the play of language and construct the temporary stability that we mistake for truth. It is about remembering the 'structurality of its structure' (Wolfreys 1998, p. 4) that produced the identity of the text. In this sense deconstruction is already taking place within the text and the 'reader' is merely a witness to it. So, instead of occupying some safe critical position 'beyond' the text, the reader must 'inhabit' the structure of the text,

...operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work. (Derrida 1976, p. 24)

Deconstruction notices the way in which meaning is produced as an effect of spatial difference and temporal deferral. In particular, it involves teasing out those signifying strategies that cannot master the flow of language, which Arrington and Francis (1989) describe as those points that 'burst from the pressure of the rhetorical configurations which can no longer be contained within the wrappings of those mandates' (p. 251).

Derrida describes his reading as a response to or transaction with some particular textual moment that catches his attention, and in the translator's preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Spivak gives an example:

If in the process of deciphering a text in the traditional way we come across a word that seems to harbour an unresolved contradiction, and by virtue of being a new word is made sometimes to work in one way and sometimes in another and thus is made to point away from the absence of a unified meaning, we shall catch at that word. If a metaphor seems to suppress its implications, we shall catch at that metaphor. We shall follow its adventures, through the text coming undone as a structure of concealment, revealing its self-transgression, its undecidability. (Derrida 1976, p. ix xv)

Significantly, such ‘unwarranted involvement’ in each text, means that deconstruction is different in each case reflecting the peculiarities of the con-text at hand. As Derrida (1996b) says, to ‘do deconstruction’ you must ‘perform something new, in your own language, in your singular situation, with your own signature, to invent the impossible and to break with the application, in the technical neutral sense of the word’ (p. 217-8).

Deconstruction necessarily involves a very rigorous form of reading. Derrida (1976) commented himself that a deconstructive reading ‘is not easy and requires all the instruments of classical criticism. Without this recognition and this respect, critical production would be developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything’ (p. 158). In effect, it ‘is nothing more or less than good reading as such’ (Hillis Miller 1990, p. 10).

Amongst those mentioned at the end of the last chapter, who have attempted to ‘apply’ deconstruction in the field of organisation studies, there are many examples of what has been criticised as ‘deconstruction-by-numbers’. For example, Martin (1990: 355) uses ‘nine analytic strategies’ (p. 355) in her study, but defends this oversimplified delineation of her process by claiming that she wants to ‘demystify’ deconstruction for those unfamiliar with the approach. However, despite the seemingly mechanistic manner, her reading is subtle, as she carefully probes non-sequiturs, slips and silences. She offers a particularly effective play on the meanings of the word ‘having’ (including its possessive and sexual connotations) to argue that the unusual arrangements for the caesarean birth of an employee’s child, and their public discussion, have conspired to transgress the boundaries of public and private.

Arrington and Francis' (1989) close and detailed reading draws on many of the strategies employed by Derrida, including identifying the relationship across binary oppositions taking meaning to its literal limits, working with supplements, and exploring intertextuality by means of parallel texts. They do make the point that deconstruction should not be regarded as a set of pre-determined rules (Method with a capital 'M') but rather texts should be read on their own terms. However, in enumerating nine 'moves' by which they 'bore within' the text, the richness of their analysis is undermined somewhat.

As iconic figures in the field of organisational theory, Calas and Smircich (1991) have been an easy target for critics who have disapproved of their 'appropriation' of a deconstructive methodology (Jones 2004, Brewis 2005, Weitzner 2007). However, I find their approach one of the least formulaic of all the examples. As mentioned in chapter three, they deploy a number of Derrida-inspired 'reading effects' to expose the rhetorical limits of 'leadership'. They use Derrida's notion of iterability when they apply multiple meanings of words to re-read the original texts. It serves to show how in spite of an attempted act of closure, infinite con-texts invade and permeate a text, and moreover what seemed reasonable in the original is made to appear outrageous. They also use intertextuality, examining their leadership texts in parallel with a contemporary text on male sexual identity to problematise their equivalence. Mimicry is also used to deliberately appropriate the text for the marginalised other. They rewrite passages as they 'would have been pronounced-alternatively-by male and female leaders' (p. 590). The parody suggests seduction, which further highlights the oppositions in the texts.

My overriding interest in undertaking a deconstructive reading of the texts from Metropolitan Council is to show the inevitable precariousness of the signifying practices employed to halt the processual play of language and produce what purports to be the truth of what leadership *is*. However, as this reflection on the work of Derrida and others has suggested, deconstruction is necessarily impossible to define, while at the same time, neither is it arbitrary: it cannot be denied that there are things that a deconstructive reading finds interesting.

Attending to Process in Texts from Metropolitan Council

What is certain is that my readings did not involve the application of a formalised procedure or specific technique to the texts, for in doing so I would have been accepting the unity of the signifier and signified, and the external procedure would be ‘deciding’ the identity of the texts. Rather, I ‘gave myself up’ to the texts as a sensitive spectator of the structurality of the structure of the texts themselves. By means of exhaustive re-readings, I followed the unique contours of each text in ways that could not be anticipated or calculated, in order to discern the specific strategies employed to ‘write’ leadership in these con-texts.

As explained in the introductory chapter, Metropolitan Council sought to establish leadership as a fact that is ‘visible’, ‘strong’, ‘understanding’ and ‘shared’. Thus, each of the four data chapters starts by setting out a short conventional reading of each of these features across all the available texts, explaining in more detail what ‘visible’, ‘strong’, ‘understanding’ and ‘shared’ leadership means. However, following Derrida, I was more interested in the way in which such reality is an ‘effect’ of *différance* which is ‘at once the condition of possibility and the condition of the impossibility of truth’ (Derrida 1981b, p.168). Thus, in the next section of each data chapter I focus on spatial difference, and the way in which the relationship across a range of binary terms within the texts was conceptually ordered so as to privilege, and thus produce an ‘illusory’ origin that stabilises the prescribed meaning of leadership listed above (Chia 1994:784). For example, ‘visible leadership’ is made the centre by privileging various connotations associated with the visible over the invisible.

Each chapter then moves on to consider the ‘fault lines’ within the texts that reveal the inevitable groundlessness of the meaning they assert. As Derrida (1976) explains, I focus on ‘a certain relationship, unperceived by the author, between what he commands and does not command of the pattern of language that he uses’ (p. 158), and thus my reading could be said to ‘shake’ a text ‘by showing that it is itself always already ‘shaking’’ (Biesta 2001: 39). In effect, the text contains within itself ‘a critique of its own values’ (Belsey 1980: 109). I challenge the fictional boundaries that have been

erected by continuing the disruption already in progress. In particular, I focus on the *temporal deferral* of the marginalised term in the binary that the text sought to conceal, but which returns to haunt the text. For example, in chapter six, I look at the way in which the ‘invisible’ returns in the unseen effort that is required to sustain the visibility of leaders. Indeed, through etymological and definitional analysis, I take the identity of terms to their literal limits in order to reveal the multiple and contradictory meanings that the text has hidden. I also focus on a number of double-edged or undecidable words that escape the authors’ intentions. So for example, I reflect on the way that the metaphor of ‘celebrity’ is at once an elite and lionized phenomenon, and a case of ephemeral drama.

While this approach may well be considered unusual, it is certainly rigorous. The readings are meticulous and faithful to each text, and yet produce something that is a ‘translation, transposition or transformation’ of those texts (Royle 2003); and, in this sense, the deconstructive directions pursued by the text should not be thought of as some arbitrary free play, but as dictated by the concealed structures within the texts.

THE ISSUE OF VIEWPOINT

Conventionally, the purpose of research is assumed to be the accumulation of knowledge that has a positive role to play in the mastery of nature and progress of man. In contrast, a poststructuralist approach suggests that we should be much more circumspect about knowledge. It is more concerned with questioning, raising radical doubt, and subverting the horizon of our thinking, and thus allowing space for ‘openness and indeterminacy’ (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003a, p. 364). The critical aim is to denaturalise taken for granted truth claims and reveal the operation of power, to the extent that it could be regarded as a form of ‘anti-positive’ knowledge (Knights 1992).

As discussed in Chapter Four, Derrida’s work is characterised by just such scepticism. His ‘stance’ is one of radical ambivalence, with deconstruction seeking to unsettle, rather than destruct, taken for granted truths based on the logocentric tendency of

Western metaphysics. Moreover, he offers no alternative, but suggest that where a linguistic decision must inevitably take place, it should not be pre-programmed. Rather, it should be responsible by being without knowledge.

...a decision has to go through some impossibility in order to be a decision. If we knew what to do, if I knew in terms of knowledge what I have to do before the decision, then the decision would not be a decision. It would simply be the application of a rule, the consequence of a premises, and there would be no problem, there would be no decision' (Derrida 1999, p. 66)

Ethical decision-making involves the 'trial' of the aporia, the undecidable, or *différance*; it is an openness to the other.

The publication of some of his later work, and in particular *Spectres of Marx* (Derrida 1994) appeared to suggest to many that Derrida was finally advocating a more tangible emancipatory or enlightenment project. However, his argument is subtler than this. The rationality he as rejecting is that of the market, which he saw as being reduced to an abstract, commodified and mechanistic *calculation*, founded on a sovereign relationship over the other. Rather, he sought to radicalise the spirit of the Enlightenment by anticipating a rationality that is governed by the *incalculable* that is hospitable to every other. In Derrida's own words,

Deconstruction, if something of the sort exists, would remain above all, in my view, an unconditional rationalism that never renounces – and precisely in the name of the Enlightenment to come, in the space to be open up of a democracy to come – suspending in an argued, deliberated, rational fashion, all conditions, hypotheses, conventions, and presuppositions, and criticizing unconditionally all conditionalities. (Derrida 2003b, p. 33-4)

Despite Derrida's own position of scepticism, there has been tendency in some research to link deconstruction with a particular viewpoint, in pursuit of a specific political agenda. This is especially evident in the 'application' of Derrida's work by feminist writers. For example, as Martin (1990) herself points out, while the ethos of deconstruction is to undermine all claims to objective truth, she uses deconstruction specifically to reveal the 'hidden assumptions about gender that can underlie ostensibly benign organisational practices' (p. 341). Thus, she makes an explicit truth claim that

‘women’s interests have been unjustly subordinated to those of men’ (p. 341) and uses deconstruction to expose the way in which the interests of this marginalised group have been systematically suppressed. However, it must be acknowledged that she does admit that the claim she has made, can itself be deconstructed.

Similarly, Mumby and Putnam (1992) have an overtly feminist agenda in exposing the way in which the notion of ‘bounded rationality’ can be seen as a very particular, patriarchal and masculine way of organising, that marginalises the emotional and intuitive, ‘normally’ associated with women. Indeed, they offer ‘bounded emotionality’ as a *reconstruction* or alternative way of organising that is guided less by a technocratic cognitive rationality and more on a relational emotional rationality that involves constraints emerging from responsiveness to others and a sense of community. While clearly pursuing a particular viewpoint, they do acknowledge their own irony in adopting what they describe as a ‘masculine analytic form’ (p. 466) in the traditional rationalist structure in their paper. Also, like Martin (1990), they are aware that the ‘truth’ of the ideological position that underpins their deconstruction can itself be deconstructed.

The work of Calas and Smircich (1991) is similarly preoccupied with the issue of gender. As Brewis (2005: 81) points out, there is a potential tension between their opposition to teleology in organisation theory, and those occasions in their work where they nonetheless appear to privilege one, gendered form of analysis over another. Indeed, such is their focus on gender that Henry Mintzberg, the target of one of their papers, described them as having an obsession with sex (Mintzberg 1991).

Learmonth (2004b) avowedly pursues an ‘emancipatory’ agenda in deconstructing aspects of the managerialist discourse prevalent in the UK National Health Service. However, unlike the previous examples, this emancipatory approach should not be seen as the self-righteous academic releasing others from oppression by the powerful, and in so doing replacing one totalising form of domination with another (Knights and Willmott 1992). Rather, being faithful to Derrida’s use of the term emancipation, the

oppression he fights is the oppression of managerialist language, and the promise he offers is to make more apparent to health service managers that language itself is not a neutral medium for representation but rather the site of contestation. His aim is to nurture scepticism about institutionally prescribed meanings of the language used by managers, which will lead to contestation and the unsettling of established institutionalised interests so that some other way may be found to re-think management.

Viewpoint in Reading the Text from Metropolitan Council

With regard to the issue of *viewpoint* discussed above, I suggested in the introductory chapter that I had an affiliation with Critical Management Studies and its agenda to denaturalise taken for granted assumptions with the aim of making some sort of difference. This is not driven by any specific political agenda about the nature of a better truth, or about a concern to facilitate emancipatory social change in general. Unlike many of the ‘applications’ of Derrida described above, I do not see the need to explicitly champion a marginalised other as part of my engagement in a text, but rather, I see deconstruction as political in itself. Similar to Learmonth’s understanding, I see it as providing opportunities to reclaim the undecidability of the language of leadership so that it has the potential to be ‘re-interpreted, re-stored, reinscribed’ (Derrida 1995:256) in ways that cannot be anticipated, but which are ‘responsible’ in performing a lesser violence.

THE ISSUE OF AUTHORITY

Alvesson and Skoldberg’s (2003) notion of ‘a problem with authority’ in poststructuralist research relates to the need for theory to be turned against itself, with a reflexive awareness of the researcher’s own constitutional practices. This is not a new concern. Positivist-orientated analysis has long been concerned with ‘methodological reflexivity’ (Johnson and Duberley 2003) through the deployment of ‘particular research protocols and associated field roles so as to eradicate methodological lapses’ (p. 1285) or bias on the part of the researcher. More critical interpretivist researchers have acknowledged the provisional and interested nature of knowledge and thus engaged in

what has been termed epistemological reflexivity (Johnson and Duberley 2003) or meta-reflexivity (Chia 1996). This has involved strategies of self-disclosure by the researcher to show ‘awareness of being aware’ (Hackley 2003, p. 98), and the co-production of knowledge to break down the distinction between research subject and object.

Poststructuralist research takes the problem of reflexivity much more seriously. Infra-reflexivity (Chia 1996) requires the researcher to display, and find strange, the process of representation as they engage in it. The focus is on those strategies that are employed to ‘fix signification’, those ‘operations’ that permit us to assert the ‘truthfulness’ of our expert texts (Calas and Smircich 1999, p. 654). It follows that *writing* may be seen as ‘a method of inquiry’ (Richardson 1994). Orthodox approaches to research methodology unquestioningly treat writing as a simple means of recording; it is conceptualized as “writing up” rather than a ‘method of discovery’ (Richardson (1994, p. 517) in itself. However, poststructuralism suggests that social science texts are just like any other literary work in that they ‘will employ explicit literary and figurative devices poised in the space between “fact” and “fiction” where ‘truth’ is manufactured’ (Linstead 1999, p7).

As mentioned in chapter four, precisely because deconstruction is itself undertaken by means of language, inevitably, it also has no solid independent ground upon which to stand. In succumbing to the same blind spots, deconstruction can and must be turned back on itself. While Derrida’s first three major publications conformed to the standard expectations for presenting a thesis, in subsequent writing, most notably *Glas* (Derrida 1986), *The Truth of Paining* (Derrida 1987a) and *The Post Card* (Derrida 1987b) he dispenses with such constraints, and ‘performs’ his themes by means of a variety of unconventional and oblique forms of writing. Derrida’s writing therefore necessarily enacts a ‘rhetorical evasiveness’, (Wolfreys 1998, p. 15) by breaking with conventional linear narrative strategies and presenting multiple experiments with typography, punctuation and pictorial form, all aimed at ensuring that it does not restore the order he puts into question. As Arrington and Francis (1989) explain,

One of the ways in which Derrida resists the logocentric pressure on his deconstructive discourses is through pushing the play of language into idiosyncrasies, apparent but canny obscurantisms, elliptical styles and experiments with phantom voices. He writes words under erasure (using them only to cross them out as a gesture towards their necessity and their impotence); ruptures the language with neologisms such as difference, trace and supplement; juxtaposing two seemingly unrelated texts through split writing as in *Glas*; bracketing signs so as to suspend signification, and punning and parody that self-effaces the seriousness of his texts by refusing to be serious about them in spite of their seriousness. (Arrington and Francis 1989, p. 253)

On other occasions where French words appear in parenthesis, it is to suggest that each word carries with supplementary meanings that exceed and cannot be captured by the sign.

Glas is a powerful illustration of such performance or ‘event’, as Smith (2005) explains, ‘at the first encounter [appearing to be] a bewildering, dizzying work that resists the typical univocal genre of professional philosophy’ (p. 58). The text is set out in parallel columns, with an exposition of Hegel on the left and Jean Genet on the right, and interrupting the columns are snippets from letters, journals and other ‘private’ genres. It certainly does not conform to the conventions of professional philosophy, lacking the traditional apparatus of footnotes and references. As Smith (2005) points out, it should not be interpreted as ‘merely a philosophical frivolity dressed up in literary garb’ (p. 58), but rather offers ‘an expose of philosophy to literature, to its other, *for the sake of philosophy and literature*’ (original emphasis). The juxtaposition of the two columns of text ironically points to what is common between two supposedly different pieces. It also points to the difficulty of privileging the one over the other, or even distinguishing between the two, rather there is a reciprocal contamination.

While not overtly ‘deconstructing’ the topic of their analysis, a number of writers in the field of organisation studies have reflected on the limitations of conventional narrative forms by means of a variety of evocative experimental forms intended to violate convention (Richardson 1994: 520). These have included the use of poetry, drama, letters, performance art, diaries, and photography. For example, Burrell’s (1996) book *Pandemonium* uses two streams of narrative moving in opposite directions, places the index in the centre of the book referred to as ‘Pandemonium Municipal Library’ and

includes illustrations, maps and topics usually ignored in conventional organisational analysis text books. It is specifically designed to be 'disruptive, randomizing and reliant on reader creativity' (p. 2) by removing any sense of authorial control and encouraging multiple readings. In this sense it can be seen as drawing the distinction between a traditional 'readerly' (Barthes 1970) text that attempt to fix a predetermined 'authorised' meaning, and 'writerly' texts that force the reader to produce meaning.

More recently, Grey and Sinclair (2006) intersperse idiosyncratic stories in italicised sections into a conventional academic paper to challenge what they regard as the pompous and impenetrable style assumed necessary to establish the authority of academic writing. They urge academics to consider the possibility of writing 'differently'. In her short autobiographical deconstruction of her position as head of a university department Game (1994) locates herself as both the object and subject of her text. Unlike a conventional academic text, the structure is confused and confusing, moving between personal reflection on organisational problems and philosophical reflection, but as Pritchard *et al* (2004, p. 50) point out 'that is the point! It is a disruptive text'. As she herself concludes, 'I have told a story about the organisation of my work, a story which is itself an organisation of this particular piece of academic work'.

Intriguingly, other writers who have explicitly set out to deconstruct a text have tended *not* to engage in reflexivity with regard to their own text. For example, while Martin's (1990, p. 341) acknowledges that a poststructuralist approach raises issues of subjectivity and reflexivity, the need to 'reveal the 'I/eye/ideology' of the deconstructor as well as the deconstructed', her way of addressing this is merely to use a 'more personal voice to reveal limitations and sources of potential bias' in her account. Indeed, she is perhaps most unlike Derrida in her deliberate use of what she terms a 'direct and didactic style'.

Indeed, while Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) anticipate that the development of new ways of writing 'will turn out to be one of the most powerful and interesting

contributions of post-modernism' (p. 61), as yet the promise remains only partially fulfilled. The reasons for this are partly explained by Richardson (1994) when she points out that while the opportunities for writing experimental texts are 'multiple' and 'exciting' she also acknowledges that, 'the work is harder. The guarantees are fewer. There is a lot more for us to think about' (p. 523). Indeed, Gill (1998) suggests that textual reflexivity has the potential to become 'obsessive' and appear to be 'like picking a scab', the author 'endlessly reminding their audience that they are simply telling stories, ceaselessly deconstructing their own discourse, making sure that no knowledge claim can be allowed to stand without being ironized or undermined' (p. 39). This becomes paralysing 'like trying to chase your own shadow', and makes it impossible to say anything. There have also been concerns that the use of different textual strategies may be regarded as inherently disruptive and reflexive per se, and it is possible that the approach could become the new orthodoxy and thereby lose its effect.

Additionally, the legitimacy of such texts has become an issue because of the way in which it is difficult to question the institution of academia. As Cooper (1989) explains,

The role of the university is to reproduce the control structures of society and that its claim of academic freedom is therefore largely illusory. As a producer of control, the university cultivates a representational mode of research and teaching which, by definition, cannot be radically critical of itself since it rests on logocentric norms of purity and rectitude... (Cooper 1989, p. 495)

Thus, concerns about the 'acceptability' of such self-reflexive writing are reflected in the way that 'in some cases such features have been 'smuggled in' once the familiar textual practices have been rehearsed' suggesting that there is a felt need by the producers of public texts to 'affirm (sedate?) the eye/ear of the journal's accepted audience position, and *then* tempt, provoke or seduce that eye/ear with other 'pleasures'' (Pritchard *et al* (2004, p. 219). A social collective such as academia normalises the researcher (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000; Hardy, Phillips and Clegg 2001) through such legitimating practices as the demands of journals, university tenure, grant awarding bodies, etc. As Westwood and Clegg (2003) point out the discipline exerted by academia is significant,

Professional training, development, and socialization already inscribe practitioners with sharply delineated ideas about research practice, methodology, modes of writing and accompanying stylistics, and a broad ethos with which to approach the research task and generally conduct themselves as professionals within their field. (Westwood and Clegg 2003, p. 16)

Indeed, an important part of ‘becoming disciplined’ as an academic involves learning how to write in a ‘serious’ way, a way that involves,

[a] passive voice; absent narrator; long, inelegant, repetitive authorial statements and quotations; “cleaned up” quotations, each sounding like the author; hoards of references; sonorous prose rhythms; dead or dying metaphors; lack of concreteness or overly detailed accounts; tone deafness; and, most disheartening, the suppression of narrativity (plot, character, event). (Richardson 1992, p. 131)

Arrington and Frances (1989), Kilduff (1993) and Summers et al (1997) have all commented on the self-defeating conservatism of these practices, while Chia and King (2001) suggest that academics are orientated ‘towards utilitarian concerns so that predictability and conformity of views are assured and uncertainty eliminated’ (p. 315). Ultimately, in being reflexive about reflexivity, it is thus possible to identify the boundaries of acceptable reflexive practice as determined by the research community.

The Authority of this PhD Text

Given the poststructuralist spirit of this thesis and the discussion of textual ‘authority’ above, I am concerned not to hide behind the impersonal authorial mask. Rather, as Rhodes and Brown (2005) suggest, if research is understood as a fictional activity, ‘rather than relying on programmatic and calculable truth claims, researchers are responsible for their textual choices in selecting and exploiting narratives of organising’ (p. 470). They see this as an ethics of choice rather than an ethics of rules, which implies that I must reveal the textuality of my own text, the strategic exclusions upon which I have attempted to structure my ‘truth’. However, since this text is unashamedly a PhD thesis, I must necessarily ‘follow rules’ and as identified above, *recognise the boundaries of acceptable reflexive practice* in this context.

Chia and King (2001) make the important point that the enduring assumption that language is representational along with the associated ‘taxonomic urge’ linked with the

rise of instrumental rationality in the West, have informed the ‘paraphernalia of instructions’ that constitute the rubric for submissions to academic journals, and I would suggest, the submission of a PhD. Consequently, I have undertaken a close reading of the criteria used to assess the PhD, and used the issues arising from this to reflect on the textual decisions that have structured one representative chapter from this thesis (see the Appendix). My purpose in doing so is to demonstrate the way in which those textual decisions have been compromised by the institutionalised arrangement for presenting a PhD. My deconstructive reading echoes many of the observations mentioned above, and suggests that the PhD criteria are dominated by aspects of a very conservative rationality: the valorising of the intellectual, a mechanistic focus on order, causality and outcomes, and a faith in the technical. It seeks to erase the emotional, chaotic, continuous and excessive nature of the endeavor.

Mindful that because of the fact that I aspire to join the academy, on those occasions where I have intervened in the tradition, the challenge has been tentative and within parameters of reflexivity deemed acceptable by my academic community (Hardy, Philips and Clegg 2001). This is particularly evident by my choice to locate the deconstruction of the assessment criteria in the Appendix; it is hidden in the shadows of the main body of this thesis.

So far, in this chapter I have explained how in this study, I resolved the methodological issues of alertness to process, lack of viewpoint and the problematisation of textual authority. I will conclude this chapter by reflecting on the texts that were the focus of the analysis.

SELECTION AND ASSEMBLY OF TEXTS

Derrida’s readings tended to focus on pre-existing and seminal material rather than empirical data. Similarly, many ‘applications’ of his approach, particularly those originating in North America, have concerned themselves with polished and influential academic texts (Arrington and Francis 1989; Kilduff 1993; Cooper and Puxty 1994,

Summers *et al* 1997). However, there are examples of the used non-academic texts such as speeches (Martin 1990), policy statements (Peterson and Albrecht 1999), reports (Learmonth 1999) and political cartoons (Wendt 1998). Indeed, there are other examples of deconstruction being applied to material generated by the researcher, which includes interviews (Learmonth 1999), stories (Mumby and Stohl 1991, Boje 1995) and ethnographic observation (Fox 1997; Jacobson and Jacques 1997). My research focuses on both polished and texts derived from interviews, and these are detailed below.

As I explained in chapter one, as a result of my involvement in the Sustainable Leadership Programme at Metropolitan Council, I had become increasingly sceptical about the assumptions concerning leadership being promoted on the course itself, as understood within the Council and as part of the larger modernization strategy being championed by central government. Thus, in responding to the question ‘what *is* leadership?’ I assembled a range of ‘texts’ from Metropolitan Council that were examples of sites in which leadership appeared to be at ‘play’. They areas follows:

- A Report on the Governance of Metropolitan Council (Metropolitan Council 2004)
- Interviews with 17 putative leaders on the Sustainable Leadership Programme
- Leadership Competence Framework (Metropolitan Council 2005)
- The generic section of the Facet 5 Personal Leadership Profile Report (Consulting Tools Ltd 2005)

The Governance Report, Leadership Competence Framework and Personal Leadership Profile Report could be regarded as highly polished work-place texts. The Governance Report represented the culmination of a significant external investigation into the affairs of the Council and contained carefully crafted commentary and recommendations. The Competence Framework was also a self-consciously public document underpinning a new, organisation-wide performance management system. It had been produced after significant and expensive consultation process. The Facet 5 Personal Profile Report

contained formal feedback for each participant on the Sustainable Leadership Programme following a completion of an on-line, psychometric assessment of their leadership ability by themselves, and a small number of work colleagues. A firm of psychometric test publishers devised the type-based personality profile, and the glossy feedback document contained a generic section that explained the nature of the dimensions used in the profile.

The empirical interview texts were produced during a six-month period in the first half of 2005. The interviews were arranged by email, since I was well known to all the individuals concerned due to my involvement in the Sustainable Leadership Programme. The sustainable leaders were all from the first cohort of participants on the course, representing a diverse range of professional specialisms and length of service with Metropolitan Council. Only one of the cohorts was not interviewed due to the time pressures caused by a significant new work project with which she had become involved towards the end of the course. No biographical details are provided of the participants, and neither is any individual identified as the source of the interview extracts used in the next four chapters. This is because I am not concerned with authorial intention, but rather with the textuality of meaning.

All the interviews were conducted in the offices of the interviewees and lasted for between one and two hours. All were tape-recorded and I transcribed them myself. Each interview developed very loosely out of an explanation of my PhD, and an interest in the question 'what *is* leadership?' within the context of their experiences at Metropolitan Council. All the interviewees were keen to contribute their insights, being assured of the anonymity of their contributions.

While the choice of texts all originate from Metropolitan Council, this should not be regarded as a *case study* in the conventional sense, for this would imply that it is a source of data from which generalisations could be made about leadership, as a phenomenon 'out there'. Nor is it intended to enable the in-depth analysis of contextualised patterns of meaning about leadership in a particular situation. Both

approaches see leadership as separate from the text in which 'it' is read. Rather, in this 'case' the focus is on analysing the way in which leadership is constructed 'in' text, texts which all happen to serve to organize a particular work experience at Metropolitan Council.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has set out in some detail the specific approach I have adopted in responding to the research question 'what *is* leadership?' My approach involves a focus on the way in which *it* is achieved as an effect of *différance*. In doing so I adopt no stance, rather my attitude is ambivalent, only seeking opportunities to replace pre-programmed linguistic decisions with ones that have an openness to the other. My strategy of close reading involves a close intimacy with the texts where I become witness to the structurality of their structure, and indeed to occasions where language has not been mastered. The approach is new each time respecting each different context. The approach also requires the adoption of a strategy to demonstrate reflexive awareness of the textuality of my own research text. To this end I have deconstructed a copy of the assessment criteria for the PhD to expose the discipline exerted on my textual choices, by the academy.

Having thus far intellectualized my approach, the four chapters that follow accomplish its promise. In turn they provide close deconstructive readings of 'visible', 'strong', 'understanding' and 'shared' leadership in the texts of Metropolitan Council.

CHAPTER SIX: READING 'VISIBLE LEADERSHIP'

I just feel that management is a little bit of a faceless task really. It's sort of ...if you like I could almost manage everything that we do sat at this desk from a keyboard, emailing people, getting my secretary to chase them up...whereas leadership is all about being out there demonstrating it, participating in it, making it happen and that risk-taking element, being prepared to be a little bit ...say a few things that perhaps go beyond what you expect a manager to say.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the first of four critical readings of the language of leadership at Metropolitan Council. While subsequent chapters focus on the requirement that leadership be 'strong', 'understanding' and 'shared', this reading focuses on the requirement that leaders be 'visible'. I suggest that in this context, the high profile visibility of the individual leader serves to affirm the focus for accountability as the person of the officer holder, rather than in the rules and procedures that constitute the bureaucratic office itself. However, I argue that while having 'profile' and 'being accessible' are privileged in pursuit of this truth, the texts are haunted by images of the insubstantial and in-visible, in particular the shallow ephemerality of celebrity, which undermines the purported substance of leadership.

I begin by providing a conventional reading of *what* 'visible leadership' means in the case-study texts: it is taken for granted that 'visible leadership' exists as a signified independent of the language used to represent it, evidenced by the tangible presence and measurable capabilities of the individual sustainable leaders. However, following Derrida, this can be seen as an example of a logocentric tendency, whereby the privileging of visible as the central concept is achieved as an effect of *différance*; its presence is derived from that from what it differs, the 'invisible'. Consequently the next section provides an exploration of *how* the text means, focusing on the structurality of the structure of the texts in which *it* is produced. I look at the way in which 'visibility' is established by privileging it over the negative associations of the immaterial and insubstantial.

However, as Derrida frequently illustrates, any such pretence of an originary order such as this is illusory. There are fault lines in the text, where it betrays the attempt to hide its dependency on the marginalised term to achieve its meaning; the marginal returns to destabilise the centre. So, the final section considers the way in which ‘visibility’ is only achieved by the return of the support of the ‘other’ that had been made invisible. Arguably, the attempt to increase the profile of the individual office holder through the idea of leadership fails, and the tangible tasks of the bureaucratic office remain a more substantial locus for accountability.

A CONVENTIONAL READING

Chapter one described the way in which the former Leader of the Council, Richard Street, had been credited with ‘a remarkable turnaround in Metropolitan’s fortunes’ (Metropolitan Council 2004, p. 28). However, this had been achieved by means of a very dictatorial leadership style, and Street’s pursuit of a member-led ethos that had resulted in a ‘conscious effort’ being made ‘to inhibit collective leadership at officer level’ (p. 52) to the extent that ‘this has led to the impression in some quarters of an anti-officer culture’ (p. 54). The Report on the Governance of the Council advocated that a more ‘visible’ role for officers (p. 21) should be developed in a way that was ‘more consistent with their service responsibilities and the day-to-day demands of Metropolitan Council’ (p. 57).

Following the publication of the Report a cadre of sustainable leaders were identified as a particular focus for fulfilling these expectations; they participated in a bespoke leadership development course and have been used conspicuously to facilitate brainstorming sessions during a Foundation Conference and monthly Senior Management Forum meetings. Additionally, the Leadership Competence Framework (Metropolitan Council 2005) included the requirement that they ‘walk the talk’, while the Facet Five personality profile (Consulting Tools Ltd 2005), used on the leadership course, included the assessment of the ‘obviousness’ with which they demonstrate

enthusiasm and energy. Thus it would seem that ‘visibility’ appears as a strong underlying assumption as to what constitutes good leadership.

This has much resonance with the idea of transformational leadership identified in the review of the leadership literature in chapter three. For example, two of the four dimensions that constitute Bass and Avolio’s (1985) popular model of transformational leadership include ‘Inspirational Motivation’ and ‘Idealised Influence’. The first relies on the role of the leader as communicator of a compelling vision; the second involves the leader in overtly role modeling their values and beliefs, and is often associated with charisma, a larger than life quality that can build an emotional commitment from followers.

CONSTRUCTING ‘VISIBLE LEADERSHIP’

Having briefly suggested what a conventional reading of ‘visible’ leadership appears to mean in the case study texts, this section provides a close reading of how this particular meaning is achieved by privileging various connotations associated with the visible, over the invisible, as illustrated in the contrasting dictionary definitions below. These positive connotations concern the capacity of the individual to be *real*, *knowable*, *accountable* and *extra-ordinary*.

visible **1** (*also + to*) capable of being seen. **2a** exposed to view. **b** in the public eye; prominent. **3** capable of being perceived; noticeable. **4** tangibly or implicitly present. **5** said of exports, etc: of or being trade in goods rather than services.

invisible *adj* **1** incapable of being seen, whether by nature or because of concealment. **2a** not appearing in published financial statements. **b** not reflected in statistics. **c** of or being trade in services, e.g. insurance or tourism, rather than goods: compare **VISIBLE**. **3** too small or unobtrusive to be seen, inconspicuous.

(Penguin English Dictionary 2003)

Realness

The positive connotations associated with visibility include the assumption that because something is in clear view and easy to see it must have a tangible substance, and thus a real independent existence. In contrast, being ‘invisible’ implies that something is

intangible or insubstantial and thus cannot claim any objective reality. For example, the following quote contrasts *visible* Chief Executives from other authorities, with the current Chief Executive at Metropolitan Council, who is *invisible*. The former is clearly privileged as more 'real' because they are frequently seen, in contrast to the mythic leader at the distant top of the case study organisation,

It's a function of certain local authorities, and we had this at Mitford, that the Chief Exec is someone that nobody knows, they didn't even know what he looked like, but equally, I know in other local authorities over the last few years have made themselves more accessible, they've become real people to their staff. Whereas still if Malcolm walked around this floor people would go "Gosh there's the Chief Exec", even the Corporate Directors. It's a bit of a shock. Now I know they're busy people, there's lots of pressure on their time but if some Chief Execs can make it work and be much more open...

The problem of remoteness and obscurity is echoed in this extract,

I'd like to see our Chief Executive get off that pedestal and actually mix in with, and be seen to be genuinely interested in people at all levels, and give them the impetus to actually improve their methods of working.

There was considerable concern that officers had become in-visible and unproductive under the old regime,

...such a lot of talented people, and they are working to about half of their capacity at the moment because they're frightened to come forward. I say frightened, they aren't the sorts of people to be frightened but they think what's the point of coming forward, its counter productive to put your head above the parapet because it will be shot down.

In contrast, the officers are now very conscious of making themselves more prominent and recognisable. For example one of the officers observes,

I try to have a presence wherever I can at functions so that staff see me; I try to show that I'm around. I try to be approachable.

Another cited a Chief Executive of twenty years previous who very conspicuously went out onto the streets of the city,

...one of these guys who went out with the bin men. I had a similar experience with my own leadership and leading on an event strategy. Actually going out and talking to people and just being seen spoke volumes to those people in that part of the organisation.

There was talk about conscious attempts being made to become accessible and familiar to staff throughout the organisation,

I try and be as visible as possible, doing induction talks and going to different offices and getting myself known with people at all sorts of different levels in the organisation. I think it's about engaging people throughout the organisation.

All these examples focus on the way in which prominent physical immediacy of the body of the leader confirms their manifest 'reality'.

Knowable

When something is difficult to see, its diffuse and obscure quality makes it difficult to comprehend in a way that is similar to the frustrating relationship one of the officers had with the former remote autocratic leader Richard Street,

I don't like being kept in the dark and being issued with orders...it's like putting together flat pack furniture then, what the hell am I trying to do here.

In contrast, when something is visible it can be observed systematically to enable the essential nature of the phenomenon to be known and explained more comprehensively. Here one of the sustainable leaders comments on the way in which she has observed Tony Blair's leadership style very closely,

This week watching Tony Blair has been...I may not agree with him politically and he hasn't always been my favourite person, but it was Monday when I first started thinking, this is a leader, the way he went over to Singapore and then yesterday I was watching him when he was doing things. Well OK, I think the speech where he had the fire place behind him - that had been prewritten some of that, he knew what he was going to say if something happened like that - but I thought that that was just him really leading from the front. Some of the sound bites were Churchillian - fight them on the beaches, etcetera. Yes, I just thought his personal popularity from being so low; he hasn't done himself any harm this week. It's like he did with Diana as well.

There is a knowingness, a sense that she has been able to determine the fundamental properties that constitute his leadership approach, from which can be derived a reassuring simplification, order and predictability. Indeed, under the heading of 'Leading Change' the Leadership Competence Framework stresses the importance of leaders developing 'clarity' for their team members. The term 'clear' is mentioned five times across the three performance levels of the Framework in an effort to dispel the

uncertainty and ambiguity associated with change. In the following extract it is linked with the need for clarity of personal and strategic purpose,

For me, leadership is around people, a person or people who have vision, are very clear about themselves and are able to translate, because of their awareness of themselves and others, that vision into something that means enough to people who are followers, for want of a better word, so that they can engage with what is needed.

Accountable

The inability to know something because it remains hidden, is often taken to suggest a deliberate secrecy or uncooperative concealment that may have underhand intentions, exactly in the way that the in-visibility of the current Chief Executive is associated with covert political maneuvering,

He needs to try to be more visible in the organisation, but there are a lot of politics going on at the moment so he needs to be seen to translate the '2020 Vision' and make sure that happens. Unfortunately in Metropolitan we have a lot of manipulators so a lot of his time is taken up getting around game playing which is really unfortunate, so I try to take things off him so he has more time with the Executive.

This echoes criticisms in the Governance Report of the former leader of the Council for his 'closed' (Metropolitan 2004, p. 22) and 'secretive' (p. 57) decision making that suggested a lack of accountability and absence of 'checks and balances' (p. 177). In contrast, being visible and open means that a phenomena can be held to account and thereby a judgment made of its worth. As the Governance Report clearly states, 'visible leadership' provides everyone with a focus for understanding 'what is happening and who is responsible' (p. 17)

There is an interesting development of this theme through the use of the term 'face' on a number of occasions in the texts. It is derived from the word 'visage' which means expression or countenance, and has etymological roots to the Latin *videre* to see. The texts denigrate management for not being visible,

Half of them sit at their desks all day pen pushing. Being a leader is about... at least what I try to do...is to get out there. It's about being in people's *faces*... (emphasis added)

While in the following extract the sustainable leaders are depicted as being the very ‘face of the Council’,

Again, it’s about recognising that as an individual, you are the face of the Council and you’re not just the job you’re doing. So you can’t bring the authority into disrepute in any way. That’s difficult for a lot of people to adjust to, that way of working and understand there is a certain element of corporate social responsibility you have in working for an organisation like the Council.

The privileging of a high profile personalised public relations role is a significant change in the conceptualisation of the bureaucracy that normally depicts the bureaucrat as *faceless*. The last quote is pivotal in describing the move from officers being secondary to their role - the selflessness of public service - to the new locus of accountability in them as individuals. Indeed, if we now think of the term in the sense of ‘to *make visible*’ this is typically associated with placing something on display, exposing or exhibiting something, enabling it to be gazed upon and scrutinised, which has affinities with definitions of accountability.

Extra-ordinary

Indeed, something can be *so visible*, so distinctively bright or vivid; that it is set apart amongst a range of visible things, suggesting that it is particularly significant or highly prized. It is in this sense that visibility is often used to describe the public attention associated with fame or renown. There are a number of comments made about the importance of overt role modeling by leaders, where particularly distinctive or renowned individuals who have an important job must exemplify their leadership for others to emulate.

There’s very little sense that there’s any team work at the top and if you don’t have a team that sets an example at the top, that works together as a team demonstrating in their interactivity what the qualities of leadership and teamwork are about then to expect people at levels below that to do it is quite difficult.

The importance of highly conspicuous leadership serves to suggest that leadership has an extra-ordinary quality and is greatly valued as a phenomenon,

I think leadership as being about somebody who's upfront leading from the front, preaching and being very charismatic and driving organisation forward. Its fairly much the style that's reflected in the Labour Westminster government and I think the Labour party were going through this issue of what does it take to lead local government and the mayoral debate. So on the political agenda was this issue of charismatic leaders, up front, being identifiable, accountable, the New York style of leaders.

In contrast, being 'invisible' can suggest that something is so dull and plain as to be inconspicuous or ordinary, and thus have little value or significance. The following extract downplays management in just this way,

Just think about it...management is such a lame term. You're saying that you *just* managed; you were barely able to do something. What's the point of that?

The figurehead role is integral to the very common representation of the leader as someone 'in-front', mentioned in many of the officers' texts. A typical example is given below,

My definition is that with leadership you're ahead and you're trying to bring others along with you. It can feel as though you're on your own.

The body of the leader is clearly singled out, and set apart from the main group, often linked to the assumption that they have superior insight derived from their superior individuality,

...they've got the ability; they've got the understanding of what they're actually doing

SHAKING THE TEXT

The last section explored the way in which a variety of the different connotations of the signifier 'visible' have been privileged over the 'invisible' in order to establish leadership as something real, knowable, accountable and extra-ordinary. However, since this identity is achieved rhetorically, it is inevitably illusory. The section that follows 'shakes' the text so as to explore the way in which, the suppressed 'other' returns to destabilise the privileged term.

Un-real

The need to be visible is something that some of the officers struggle with, preferring to remain invisible.

People don't find it easy to stand up and give presentations, and I'm one of those, but by doing it you overcome the fear and others are tending to follow that.

The effort it requires suggests that perhaps leadership is not a real, naturally occurring phenomena; they are 'leaders' simply because of a linguistic re-designation.

Indeed, the idea that a leader is a 'figurehead' can suggest that someone is leader in name only, a front man or token representative, suggesting insubstantiality. Moreover, there are examples in the interview texts of visibility providing the public attention necessary for officers' career enhancement. For example, one of the officers talked about her colleague needing to 'give herself the profile at the right level' in order to make a success of a new job role. While the term 'profile' can be used to suggest public attention, it can also be used to signify a partial side view, contour or outline. While the contour may be sharply defined, it is nevertheless not the whole, and therefore implies a lack or incompleteness. In this sense, her visibility can be seen as a merely a form of impression management; it is simply about being seen to be leading.

Moreover, the term 'sustainable', which is the key premise for wanting more visible leaders in the Council, is a term suggesting that something is so insubstantial or perishable as to need conscious support or maintenance to ensure its continued existence.

sustain *verb trans* 1. to support the weight (of something). 2 to give support, sustenance, or relief to (somebody or something). 3 to cause something to continue; to prolong. 4 to suffer or undergo (something). 5 to allow or admit (something) as valid. 6 to support (something) by adequate proof; to confirm.

(The Penguin Dictionary 2003)

There appear to be such problems with the 'existence' of leadership within Metropolitan Council that the role models mentioned earlier have to be brought in from outside the organisation,

We may need to bring people in from elsewhere because this organisation desperately needs to see this in practice...what this looks like. So that would be my top priority really, to try and bring in some of those role models.

There is a growing sense here of a materiality that is immaterial, the impression of form which lacks substance. This has an interesting resonance with the problematic connotations of celebrity, which is described in one well-known aphorism as that which is 'well-known for their well-knownness' (Boorstin 1961, p. 58).

The substance ascribed to the visible leader becomes even more questionable when contrasted with the tangible efforts of the *invisible* workers performing their offices,

Actually going out and talking to people and just being seen that spoke volumes to those people in that part of the organisation. They realised then that what they were doing was actually contributing. In my view the ordinary people are actually making this thing work. In some ways I've just pieced all these disparate elements together to make sure that it can work whereas essentially they do most of the hardest job and it was just their recognition then, "Yes, we are a small cog in this big machine".

Indeed, the Officer who makes a point of being visible at official functions is nevertheless very concerned about not compromising the work of 'in-visible' managers. Despite her visibility she can't actually 'do' anything outside the task structure:

I'll talk to people, chat to them, but if they try to bring problems to me I'll say, "Have you spoken to your manager?" because they really do need to. And I try not to jump in and take other people's authority away from them, there's a proper way of doing things.

The artifice required to maintain their visibility is suggested by the reminder that the former Leader of the Council's high profile was maintained by an 'invisible' speech writer.

I doubt when Richard Street started twelve years ago or whenever, he was maybe as charismatic. He's had all those years of politics under his belt speaking and he had an exceptionally good speech writer in Peter Baker so you know you get that confidence don't you, so it is a development.

Indeed, there are also examples of the visible becoming invisible. For example, one of the officers talks about having to 'disappear' in order to achieve their work tasks,

But at the moment I am trying to do my communications strategy and business plan, so I took a couple of days off last week trying to get them all done.

Un-knowable

While visibility claims to offer clarity and focus that makes something easy to understand, obfuscation and diffuseness return. For example, prominent individual leaders are difficult to work out, as the following extract suggests,

My role is to guide and support the three people who lead those sections, to help them. But it's difficult; they're so different, from different backgrounds. If I tried to manage the 'leisure' guy the same way as the 'play' I'd be up against a brick wall. He's more confident but I'm not sure I can trust him. It's very frustrating. It gets in the way of the service moving on.

For all her visibility, one of the sustainable leaders has poor self-knowledge and is uncertain about the measurable outcomes of her role,

Our mission is clear, to deliver on our promises, what we say happens. But its great me standing up saying it, it's a lot harder delivering it. You go home and you're all frustrated with yourself because you think you're not doing it. You wonder whether you're up to the job...

While another of the sustainable leaders openly admits to his approach being cautious and unclear and as he deals with complex and unpredictable issues,

I don't devise a plan and say I'm going to sell it and make it happen, I very much say tentatively "what do you think?" I put forward a suggestion. It suits me fine and I feel comfortable with it. I think it works well in a local authority context where there are multiple stakeholders and interconnecting issues.

This inability to know with certainty, individual leaders' personality, style and performance has significant implications for being able to hold them to account, an issue considered in more detail below.

Un-accountable

The sustainable leaders were very alert to the potential for visibility to become overtaken by self promotion and the desire for personal recognition, as one of them put it, 'in the way of 'big me', I've got my name in lights', which involves having to 'stick my chest out and be a show off'. This seems to efface any connection with their accountability for the improvement of public services,

Have worked with some people who hadn't really cared about or wanting to develop in the team, their leadership was really all about self fulfillment and looking after themselves, it was more about their individual ego. Not about achieving goals and taking the team along and sharing the achievements with the team. That was frustrating.

A lot of people who believe themselves to be leaders are often very precious about their own self worth and are not truly leading in the sense of inspiring improved performance in others...

Moreover, while 'visible' leadership seemed to offer a tangible locus for accountability, it is unfulfilled, suggested by the way in which the celebrity very ephemeral. Andy Warhol's famous aphorism 'in the future everybody will be famous for 15 minutes' points to the way in which the public and in particular the media, play a significant role in building up and then shooting down celebrities, often linked to details of their private life, which have nothing to do with their original reason for being famous. Indeed, the texts mention the sustainable leaders feeling 'exposed' and vulnerable in the face of constant public scrutiny,

...and I know that the sustainable leaders have recognized that you get yourself the profile and with it comes something else which isn't necessarily a positive something else and you have to work out how to deal with that. I actually don't think there is an easy solution. I don't know.

The sustainable leaders are only too aware of the ephemerality of their leadership position,

I think there was a danger that the strategic leadership group was being held up at one point, you know we all felt we were being out in the limelight too much and people were going "Oh God, not them again", but I think that was pointed out and they have throttled back from that because it's also about not putting off another cohort, which I hope there is, from participating.

The former Leader of the Council is presented as an example of just such a trajectory,

You will get maybe two or three negative stories but the big horror headline is what people remember, and it's what people remember in here because that's the thing people remember the most, but actually the press are pretty good with us and they're a lot better since Richard went because he was just a dream to any media editor because he was just such a charismatic personality. They'd helped to build him up and they were going to throw everything at him to knock him down and you know, towards the end I did feel terribly sorry of him because it became very personal and very nasty but there's that other element.

Indeed, the pervasiveness of the celebrity phenomena is suggested in the following extract,

...and as you know Chief Executives in local government are like football managers these days, it's one wrong move or one wrong word and people want to change them.

Ordinary

While leadership is constructed as something distinctive and extra-special, this emerges in the texts as a shallow theatricality that has the negative associations of staginess or tasteless ostentation. For example, the texts are littered with the following terms: leaders have to 'stand up in front', be 'in the limelight', 'flag waving', 'treading the boards', performing 'set pieces', 'fanfare', getting their 'name in lights', and 'preaching'. Two officers described their leadership role in terms of having to put on a costume just like an actor,

I still remember that first staff meeting. 'Oh it's me now, they want me to speak'. And you've got to put the coat on, and you've got to wear it because it's expected.

If push comes to shove I have to stand up and do the front piece. We had a fatality in December and the one person who stood up and talked to the men about the process, how they would be feeling, going through the whole counselling thing. Well I took on a role that I'm not comfortable with but it's standing up, giving leadership and the reassurance. Gosh that's horribly close to the Tony [Blair] thing,¹⁴ it was a disaster you know where you do have to put that hat on.

While others see it in terms of playing a role which does not come naturally,

There was a down side of that because you're having to give an image of how you should be to someone and that doesn't always sit naturally, when your in certain situations obviously when you're with your family you can revert back to who you are, but they are different roles, and so I found that quite tricky.

Example and energy are two things that I think are critical, and I feel that I suppose as most people do that I could be on top form all the time. Sometimes I think "Oh I didn't set a very good example there" and I like to get out, unfortunately I am separated by quite a long way from the people who work for me which means I have to make an effort at least every other day to actually go down and walk around and what I like to feel is that I sit down and share a bit of energy and get them motivated and that's leadership to me as well. And if I'm having a good day it works and if not (LAUGH)...

¹⁴ She had started the interview by making reference to Tony Blair making a very 'Churchilian' public speech on the occurrence of a natural disaster. An extract was included earlier in this chapter.

Indeed, the notion of celebrity it is often described as being based on a desire for personal aggrandisement and love of public adulation based on few credentials, perhaps best captured in the aphorism ‘nobodies can be some-bodies’.

Moreover, in the texts leaders become linked with marketing, arguably another example of trying to turn something ordinary into something extra-ordinary. In particular they are mentioned in relation to public relations (PR), an aspect of marketing that could itself be regarded as intangible, being concerned with the generation of publicity stunts to secure free, ‘below-the-line’ press coverage. The former Leader was considered ‘brilliant for PR’ because,

...you could stand him in front of the audience and people would be excited by him, by what he was saying.

Now the sustainable leaders are themselves providing PR for the Council,

We’ve actually put Metropolitan on the map; we’ve actually brought a lot of good publicity, to the extent that you can’t buy that publicity through marketing.

CONCLUSION

This chapter offered a close reading of ‘visible’ leadership in the texts from Metropolitan Council. The reading suggested that the requirement that leaders should be ‘visible’ was achieved by privileging the tangible materiality of objects that can be seen, because benefits accrue from being able to know, and thereby hold to account the essential properties of such phenomenon. High visibility also suggests an extra-ordinary quality, akin to the romance and status of celebrities. In turn what cannot be seen is marginalised as intangible, difficult to comprehend and ultimately unimportant.

However, ‘pulling at the text’ suggests that the attempt to downplay the invisible fails. Individual leadership is not a naturally occurring phenomenon, but one that had to be sustained by the tangible routines of office that the text sought to keep invisible. In turn the lack of any substance in the idea of ‘visible leadership’ was betrayed through its link with the idea of celebrity; the engagement in theatrical acts of self-promotion that

engender an excessively intrusive personalised form of accountability in the hands of a fickle public.

This chapter started with a quotation from one of the sustainable leaders in which he contrasts faceless managers with visible leaders. This contrast captures, very effectively, the way in which the idea of visibility is used to distinguish between the old and new expectations of officers. Managers can become leaders merely by making sure that they are visible, but most importantly this new conspicuousness has the benefit of ensuring that their performance can be closely determined and held to account. At the same time a romance and deference is established by links to the extra-ordinary and the cult of fame. But the quotation also hints at the groundlessness of what is merely a linguistic claim; leadership also appears to be like donning the mask-like face of shallow celebrity.

CHAPTER SEVEN: READING 'STRONG LEADERSHIP'

It's difficult to separate out the individual from the environmental influences. I think certainly Richard Street was in a sense a person in the right place at the right time. I am quite surprised to hear myself say this, because I was not a Richard Street fan, and in some ways I am still not, but one of the things he did have was a clear vision. He was clear about what he wanted. It wasn't 'well if that's all right by everyone'. I think that was the individual as much as the political structure. You can mess around with the structure but actually it was to do with the individuals and personalities involved and Richard started off in the day's of pre-modernisation and in reality I don't think he would do very much different in the new regime.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the second of four critical readings of the language of leadership at Metropolitan Council. While the previous chapter considered the requirement that leadership be 'visible' and subsequent chapters focus on the requirement that leadership be 'understanding' and 'shared', this reading focuses on the requirement that leaders be 'strong'. I suggest that in this context, being 'strong' serves to affirm officers as the source of significant casual impact on their surroundings: they are the agents of public sector modernisation. However, I argue that while having intense 'will' and 'drive' are privileged in pursuit of this truth, the texts are haunted by images of individual weakness and alternative sources of agency that reduce the leaders to the status of mere robots.

As in the previous chapter, I begin by providing a conventional reading of *what* 'strong' leadership means in the case study texts: it is argued that leadership at Metropolitan Council must involve the possession of an inner confidence and determination to make a difference. The next section focuses on *how* this 'truth' is achieved linguistically. I look at the way in which a middle ground of acceptable 'strength' is established by juxtaposing it with the negative associations of both weakness *and* excessive aggression.

However, as we saw in the previous chapter, it is possible to shake the text to reveal the fault lines in the text, where it betrays the attempt to hide its dependency on the marginalised term to achieve its meaning; the marginal returns to destabilise the centre.

So, the final section considers the way in which although the texts appear to champion a strength located in the leaders, other marginalised sources of strength external to the individual return to overwhelm them. Indeed, rather than demonstrating strength, the leaders appear to show signs of weakness as they struggle to meet the performance expectations being demanded of them, turning to structures for strength. In turn, the fear of leadership as a display of excessive individual strength, such as that demonstrated by the former Leader of the Council, is tempered by recourse to a form of remotely controlled strength, with the Leadership Competence Statement determining a display of strength that appears very mechanical.

A CONVENTIONAL READING

The previous chapter started by describing the way in which Richard Street, a former Leader of the Council had exhibited a very centralised and autocratic style of leadership in pursuit of his vision for Metropolitan. Indeed, the Report on the Governance of the Council (Metropolitan Council 2004) went so far as to record that, 'the Commission couldn't envisage any greater concentration of powers in a leader' (p. 38), which had in turn professionally weakened the role of officers. The Report observed that with the expert advice of officers 'not being valued' (p. 41), their 'confidence' (p. 44) had been reduced to such an 'unhealthy' (p. 53) extent that they were 'nervous about making decisions' (p. 54) and no longer 'powerful enough to play their proper role' (p. 219).

Thus, the Report sought to restore officers' credibility by calling for them to exhibit 'strong' leadership in two senses. The first concerned officers developing the confidence to 'experiment, reflect, adapt and learn' (p. 55) and thereby take ownership of innovative decisions. The second referred to a maturity to accommodate dissent and become involved in the healthy debate and 'quality dialogue' (p. 55) that would challenge the status quo and lead to the provision of improved services. The Council's Leadership Competence Framework (Metropolitan Council 2005) elaborated on what was required. The first of the 'Focus Four' Competences is entitled 'Drive for Results' and concerns 'knowing what needs to be done' and 'making it happen'. Putative leaders are encouraged to explore these requirements in more detail during the Sustainable

Leadership Programme. The course involves completion of a self-assessment Facet Five Personal Profile (Consulting Tools Ltd 2005) that includes 'Energy' and 'Will' as key aspects of a leadership personality. 'Energy' concerns high levels of vitality, sociability and adaptability while 'will' concerns determination, confrontation and independence with the 'key' being 'strong motivation based on firmly held beliefs'.

As suggested in the literature review, leadership has long been held up as a crucial determinant the achievement of goals across a range of contexts, including warfare, sport and workplace performance. Indeed, so high are the expectations of the causal effect of leadership action that the leader is often depicted in the literature as 'the person who controls fate' (Czarniawska-Jorges and Wollf 1991, p. 538).

CONSTRUCTING 'STRONG LEADERSHIP'

Having briefly suggested what a conventional reading of 'strong' leadership appears to mean in the case study texts, this section provides a close reading of how this particular meaning is achieved by privileging various connotations associated with strength over weakness, as illustrated in the contrasting dictionary definitions below. These positive connotations concern strength being a potent *inner source* of *decisiveness*, taking *action*, offering a *challenge* and having *drive*.

Strong *adj* **1** having or marked by strong physical power. **2** having moral or intellectual power. **3** having great resources of wealth, talent, etc. **4** of a specified number. **5a** striking or superior of its kind. **b** effective or efficient, *esp* in specified areas. **6** forceful or cogent. **7a** rich in some active agent, e.g. a flavour or extract; concentrated. **b** said of a colour: intense. **c** said of an acid or base forming electrically charged atoms or groups of atoms freely in solution. **d** magnifying by refracting greatly. **8** moving with vigour or force. **9** full of passion or enthusiasm; ardent. **10** well established; firm. **11** not easily upset or nauseated. **12** having a pungent or offensive smell or flavour. **13** tending towards steady or higher prices. **14** in grammar, of or being a verb or verb conjugation that forms the past tense and past participle by internal vowel change

Weak *adj* **1a** deficient in physical vigour; feeble or debilitated. **b** not able to exert or sustain much weight, pressure, or strain. **c** not able to resist external force or withstand attack. **2a** lacking a particular mental or intellectual quality., e.g. decisiveness, judgment, or discernment. **b** not fully decided; vacillating. **c** unable to withstand temptation or persuasion. **3** not factually grounded or logically presented. **4a** not able to function

properly. **b** lacking skill or proficiency. **c** indicative of lack of skill or aptitude. **5** without vigour of expression or effect. **6** deficient in strength or flavour.; dilute. **7a** deficient in the required quality or ingredient. **b** lacking in normal intensity or potency. **8** not having or exerting authority or political power. **9** tending towards lower price. **10** in grammar, of or being an English verb or verb conjugation that forms the past tense and past participle by adding the suffix –ed or –t, or a similar verb or verb conjugation in other Germanic languages. **11** said of a syllable: unstressed. **12** in chemistry, forming ions only slightly in solution: weak.

(Penguin English Dictionary 2003)

Inner Source of Strength

The portrayal of ‘strong leadership’ as an inner source of agency is reinforced by the way in which the psychometric tests used during the Leadership Development Programme assess ‘Energy’ and ‘Will’ as two of the ‘building blocks’ of personality ‘which everybody has to a greater or lesser degree’. In contrast, any other potential sources of strength, such as the structures and systems external to the individual are spoken of disparagingly because of their apparent inability to produce lasting change. The extract below suggests the way in which officer’s potential for action is repeatedly frustrated by an anonymous system,

What we’re going through at the moment is a prime example, this ‘Top Priorities’ new team being set up to deliver a new project and there was some report in Feb/March time that said it was all going to be set up, and then nothing happened...and nothing happened and there was no real indication of why or what. Then suddenly ‘we’ve got to move now, we’re transferring staff’ and then its all gone very quiet again.

The next extract reminds us that the ‘bureau’ was conceived of as being concerned solely with rearranging ‘the files’ originating from the concrete work performed by others,

People will say that local government is about continual change but its not really because in the public sector there are changes but its almost like shuffling a pack of cards, its inherent there that structure, that bureaucracy, the processes.

Potency

As an adjective, ‘strong’ usually signifies that something is distinctive or superior of its kind because of the possession of greater or better power (physical, mental, emotional or intellectual), resources, or intensity. The extract below hints at the immense potential of

officer leadership as a source of strength in the organisation that can achieve results. It also affirms once again that 'true' leadership lies in the effort of 'we' officers, rather than any other source,

And I'm convinced in local government we could double our effort; almost have as much capacity again. I'm convinced of that. And I think that's where we should really be looking. That's where true leadership lies.

As the dictionary definition suggested above, 'weak' is often used derogatively to signify an insubstantial or deficient state of being. It is used in the texts to strike a contrast between strong leaders and others, who display signs of persistent, inherent debility. One extract draws a stark 'us and them' divide,

Not everybody has the will, the capacity or the drive. You know some people are quite happy coming into work at 9 'o' clock and doing what they need to do and going home at five and getting on with their lives.

The excerpt below actually describes the frailty of non-leaders,

There are occasionally down sides when things don't go quite right. You do have situations where people do...I have people, and again I have enormous trust in them, but sometimes if they are under pressure, under strain themselves will react perhaps in ways, they really do panic.

However, overly 'strong leadership' is also unacceptable. The use of the term 'strong' can signify a form that is so extreme or potent as to be offensive, such as pungent smell or flavour, or the wielding of authority in an intimidating fashion. Such force-fullness can appear aggressive and suggest a menacing invulnerability. Richard Street is frequently described in this way. There was much talk of the 'pain' that would be experienced if 'you made a decision or it was the wrong decision': you would be 'shouted at' and he would 'knock your legs from under you'.

Decisiveness

The agency implicit in leadership is manifest in the texts as the ability to choose between options and make decisions that lead to improvement, while management remains merely the implementation. In the extract below, managers are clearly cast in the mould of the diligent but uninterested bureaucratic administrator,

If you're leading then you've got more opportunity to shape the direction that you're going in. That's how I see the difference. Managers just get on and do the job and make sure it's done, but it's not necessarily dictating or shaping the direction. But the leaders are actually saying we need to change direction, I think we should be heading in this direction and getting buy-in to that. So that's the difference for me. Because if I think we need to be moving in a different direction I'll come forward with ideas and proposals and get buy-in to that and take us in a different direction. But my managers that work for me at the next level down I'd say they were mainly managers rather than leaders.

Decision has a number of positive connotations, suggesting a reasoned process of analysing options, a resoluteness of convictions and closure of outcome. The extract below captures the inner source of such leadership along with a palpable sense of the energy around the act of decision-making,

I get frustrated because I want action. I'll say, "come on, we've got to do something about it". So I'll take it on if nobody else has, to get a decision so we can move forward, wherever it is.

A contrast can be seen with someone who is indifferent with respect to action, procrastinates with respect to decision-making and has a lack of clarity or closure with respect to outcomes, all of which can be attributed to a lack of firmness of character. Indeed, people with low scores in the 'Will' dimension of the psychometric test used on the leadership course, are described in the following way,

They don't have strong views and can be talked out of things if strongly challenged. Some may see them as too easily convinced and dependent.

The logical conclusion is that the individual becomes devoid of agency, and 'external' forces, or structures of various sorts determine action.

Furthermore, overly strong individuals are unacceptable because they demonstrate too much will. To 'will' can mean to decree or ordain in a very authoritarian manner that leaves little or no room for dissent. The leadership personality profile used by the Council lists this in the following terms:

- Stubbornness and rigidity of view
- Autocratic and pushy
- Unwilling to listen to others
- Too quick to impose on others
- Argumentative

- Overly aggressive and demanding
- Isolated and inflexible
- Unwilling to bend and adapt
- Only in a team if they are the leader

Richard Street is held up as the epitome of such extreme willfulness. The sustainable leaders commented variously that he operated on the principle that ‘it’s my way or no way’. It was felt that he just wanted officers who would ‘just get on whether you thought it was a good or a bad idea’ indeed one interviewee recounted how ‘I was in tears a number of times, because I was being instructed to do something that I knew was wrong’.

Activity

‘Energy’ is also associated with vigorous activity (‘vitality’), a liveliness (‘vim’, ‘vibrant’) and a ‘get up and go’ or reliance on personal enterprise rather than external support. It is therefore no surprise then to find the texts express the display of strength in terms of physical movement. These include metaphors associated with sport, such as getting to the ‘starting block’ ‘taking up the running’ and ‘its about getting the council to shape up’. This is picked up in a frequent contrast that is made between leadership as activity and management as sedentary. For example,

You can sit at your desk and manage things, but leadership is about taking more of an interest in what happens, walk the talk, getting out and setting an example, showing how you would like things done. It is a difficult differentiation... management is perhaps a bit more passive and leadership is more active and proactive.

The psychometric test describes people with high scores for ‘Energy’ as ‘energetic, alert, active and enthusiastic. They are gregarious, competitive, fun loving and sociable. They are optimistic and excited about new ventures’. Indeed, during the interviews many of the sustainable leaders described themselves as ‘optimistic’, ‘enthusiastic’ and being ‘fairly irrepressible about life’. In contrast those with low scores for ‘Energy’ are ‘quieter, more reserved and private. They keep themselves to themselves, can seem shy and take some time to get to know but make good long-term friends. They don’t like social events and can seem distant, cool and aloof to colleagues who want them to join in more’.

The idea of ‘energy’ can also be used to suggest the capacity (of a physical system) to do work or exert force on another system that has the potential to have a cause effect, and produce change. Interestingly, this is apparent in the suggestion that leaders’ agency is able to transform something from being an intangible idea or mere rhetoric into tangible, physical action. For example, one of the senior officers sees leaders’ work as about ‘making sure that the organisation translates that vision into action’. Others frequently use the popular term ‘walking the talk’ to suggest the same thing.

Of course, excessively high energy is also described in negative terms. The personality profile describes unacceptably high scores for ‘energy’ as follows:

- Over-commitment
- Exhibitionist
- Impulsive
- Too much in need of company
- Quick to interfere
- Socially pushy

Once again, Richard Street is described disparagingly in just such terms,

He was just non-stop, nothing could get in the way of his vision...and it got bigger and bigger. Detail went out of the window. It was “I want this, and I want it now” all the time.

Challenging

A show of strength can also be seen as a very overt, and necessary, act of defiance; an invitation to fight or compete over a disputed issue, which carries with it the ‘risk’ of failure of the enterprise itself or personal harm to the perpetrator. In this vein, the texts appear to suggest that effecting improvement necessitates an enthusiastic willingness to challenge and be challenged,

I suppose the down side is resistance to the changes I might want to put in or whatever. But I’m fairly resilient to that... I like the challenge of changing people’s perceptions about things and about me, about the organisation... I don’t like doing mundane, boring things day in day out.

I like to think I’m open and approachable. I do think that I am and I think people feel confident to come and be able tell me what they think and I’m really happy, really happy, about being challenged, so we can get the right solution for the organisation.

In contrast, failure to display strength can be regarded as an unquestioning compliance with the status quo. Indeed, management is described in the negative terms formerly reserved for the compliant bureaucrat,

I'm just not the sort of manager who says "Well you've given me this job and that's the output and just work though it and do it", I'd always be questioning well is that the right output could we actually by doing it this way get to that output.

Moreover, as the text below suggests, that those who dislike being challenged demonstrate childlike behaviour,

we did an exercise on values, you know vision and values at one of the very early senior management forums and the foundation conference which was one of the exercises that we did as well, where we brought members and officers together which actually did go quite well, although there were some noticeable people missing as you would expect...as an exercise it actually went a lot better than...you know...because you were worried this could so blow up in our faces, people throwing their clothes out of the pram and stomping out.

'To challenge' can suggest a very confrontational defiance played out in violent physical combat. Richard Street's inability to tolerate dissent is described in just such negative terms. Those that did not support him lived in fear of his 'spitefulness'. Interviewees described how he was 'happy to get rid of people who weren't delivering things the way he wanted' to the extent that 'they almost had a beheading block on City Hall green'.

Driving

The requirement to demonstrate 'strong leadership' *persistently* again draws on the notion of an inner capacity of individuals,

I also think I'm quite driven. If I can see that something needs to happen I'll be persistent for that to happen. I won't just give up. So it will happen. So we *will* have performance management in Metropolitan, there's no doubt about it, it's going to happen and people just need to accept that.

The term 'drive' suggests a physical intensity and focus. The idea of fervent and forceful movement is drawn on in the following account of a leader's determination,

...you have to trust in your instincts and do what you believe to be right. And that's where I come from and when we did the Facet 5 work on our different personality traits and the action learning sets on them, they were a bit surprised that my score for determination came up at 10. And I said, "Well yes, I can be quite determined". I don't

cross the road for an argument, I'm not overly confrontational, but if its something I truly believe in I will push and keep pushing.

Similarly, the Leadership Competence Framework describes 'Drive for Results' as involving 'the personal, inner motivation, enthusiasm and drive to meet and exceed targets' and contrasts it with a list of unacceptable behaviours which includes:

- Apathetic about results. Doesn't drive own work through to deliverables
- Criticises performance measures – particularly those that relate to own work
- Unfocused approach – does not prioritise. Procrastinates and is easily distracted.
- Expands work to fill time – contributes to inefficient ways of working, knowingly duplicates effort

So, 'non-leaders' are implicitly portrayed as uncertain about what should be done, have an inner indifference and thus apathy towards achievement, are easily obstructed and thus produce a declining level, or indeed total lack of achievement.

The Competence Framework also uses the term 'courage' to convey a desired 'resilience and integrity to achieve what we want to achieve'. This is marked once again as a disposition possessed by individuals, suggested by the use of the term 'have',

Individuals must have optimism and be able to stay positive and single-minded when faced with difficulty and adversity...This competency is about "walking the talk" – being consistent with our values and those of the Council, treating people with respect and having the courage to see change through.

Unacceptable behaviour includes,

- Reneges on promises
- Treats people unfairly – has favourites.
- Panics or becomes pessimistic when conditions or circumstances are adverse. Pulls morale down.
- Ignores or "goes along" with bad practices.

This extract from one of the texts sets out the contrast simply,

More enthusiasm, a lot less complaining, a lot less worrying and willingness to take risks. That's the type of people I'd like to see.

However, an excessively determined approach is also unacceptable. It can suggest a relentless compulsion, a coercion (to force or ram) to make someone do something against his or her wishes. The sustainable leaders they described Richard Street's

reputation for driving through his personal vision as ‘digging his heels in’. He would ‘carry on regardless’, ‘driving things through whatever the cost’ even if that meant bullying staff or indeed breaking the rules. As one of the sustainable leaders put it,

Perhaps one of the reasons he became portrayed as a despot was that in many ways he’d say ‘Just get out of the bloody way, I’m going to do this’ which was a culture shock for many.

Another section of the text noted,

I think he did a lot of bulldozing. I think he got what he wanted by banging desks and just saying we’re doing it.

SHAKING THE TEXT

The last section explored the way in which a variety of the different connotations of the signifier ‘strong’ have been privileged over the ‘weak’ *and* ‘aggressive’ in order to establish leadership as a potent inner source of decisiveness, action, challenge and drive. However, since this identity is achieved rhetorically, it is inevitably illusory. The section that follows ‘shakes’ the text so as to explore the way in which, the suppressed ‘other’ returns to destabilized the privileged term. A robotic strength emerges where *alternative sources of strength* are posited in the face of personal *weakness, in-decision, in-activity* and a *resistance to being challenged*. Rather than being the driver, leaders are *being driven*.

Alternative Sources of Strength

One of the sustainable leaders observed that ‘I don’t feel compromised in many ways’ suggesting that he certainly feels compromised in some ways, and different aspects of the strong bureaucratic culture at Metropolitan Council emerge throughout the texts. As one of the sustainable leaders put it, ‘I’m not going to say it’s very bureaucratic, but it is. (*laugh*)’.

The rectitude and caution required by the need for accountability to the public is ‘difficult’,

The difficulty is that if you're working in the public sector you're dealing with public money and you have to be very sure in dealing with that money that you are accountable and dealing with it in a responsible way. There's an element of probity to that...Because of that you need certain levels of bureaucracy built in, so that if there is ever any challenge you can protect the officers, that you've followed a set practice.

Accountability to elected politicians is described as exerting an 'incredible' influence. For example, one sustainable leader describes its potential impact on her career as follows,

99.9 per cent of the time in local government you have no interaction with politicians but when you do it becomes part of your day to day existence and it's quite unsettling actually. Quite unsettling in a way that I did say to somebody "if this is local government I don't think it's for me".

The accountability required by the organisation's hierarchical span of control is described as debilitating,

There are people here paranoid about making decisions because of what someone else might think. So all they do is talk about it and talk about it and talk about it 'til "Oh if you think the same as me it's all right now, we'll do it". It's all accountability. But senior officers and politicians seem reluctant to take...unless they can be sure that if something goes wrong it won't be them, it's someone else. In the end you just become bogged down in inertia.

Similar constraints are created by the bureaucratic specialisation of work, with the boundaries between functional silos being keenly guarded,

I like to work corporately, in my service area I like to do 10 or 20 percent of my job working corporately, cutting across a number of service areas, but I've been discouraged from that. I've been actually called up by another chief officer and told that I was stepping on somebody else's toes and that I should butt out. It probably wasn't put as nicely as that.

Weakness

The following extract draws on a significant range of metaphors to communicate the inextricable and overwhelming nature of such structures. The 'drowning in quicksand' metaphor evokes the stifling power of bureaucracy. The 'decaying fruit' metaphor insinuates that the abandonment of harvested produce is akin to the overlooking of individual potential, while the 'tidal' metaphor evokes the desperate futility of individual effort in the face of such a relentless power.

I've never known an organisation that sucks you into what I actually think is quite poor practice, as quickly as Metropolitan does. And you find yourself sitting there thinking, "Oh God, I'm just as bad as I thought I was". It's a really strange experience because I'm enormously busy...I can honestly say I have never worked as hard as since I've been here, never, ever, ever. Even the smallest successes you hold on to. Wow, that took a lot to get to. Initiative just withers on the vine...If we could just break out. I do think it's a capacity thing. We need to have enough people who understand why we're forcing against the tide all the time and dealing with the disappointments and still being able to come back and go again

While the fabrication of leadership depends on establishing weakness as unacceptable, the sustainable leaders hint at the personal toll being paid by the excessive expectations of their leadership role. For example, one of the sustainable leaders described the need to be 'on top form all of the time' as 'terribly, terribly exhausting'. While weakness is seen in terms of an inability to withstand stresses, the following extract reveals the extent of the anxiety experienced by one, if not more, of the sustainable leaders because she does not have the strength to meet the perceived high level of expectation. There is a palpable sense of the mental and physical demands that this individual cannot manage,

You'd be looking at a nervous break down at the minute. I try really hard to be a good leader but you go home and you're all frustrated with yourself because you don't think you're doing it. You think, "I'm not up to the job, what have I actually done". But I've spoken to Peter and Steve and they're all saying similar things, "Oh, how are you finding it?" and I think, I'm so glad, I'm so glad it's not me, I'm not as bad as I thought....it's huge...as you go up the ladder, the jumps get bigger and bigger and bigger and there's not that much support...learning.

Moreover, while bureaucracy was disparaged above, there are examples of formalised processes and procedures being embraced by the sustainable leaders in an effort to overcome their lack of personal strength. Another describes the way in which her lack of success in challenging the organisation's norms has made her think of resorting to use of structural mechanisms to achieve her desired effect,

I'm actually coming around to the feeling that the only way I'm going to effect the sort of change I was hoping to effect, is by doing it through very traditional project management route almost, through meeting the organisation where it's at and that troubles me because I'm not sure I can do that. I find process and structure very inhibiting. However, you have to go with where the organisation is often.

Indeed, in the following extract privileges what is in effect paper record keeping over individual office holders,

For me, I was a really big convert to the quality initiatives, I still am. And I think again it's a really good tool for development. Goodness knows how many times in the past before I was introduced to a quality environment, you would go to somebody argue about it and get them to agree it and you'd go back six months later and there'd either be somebody else there or they'd forgotten it, and you didn't have a structured process to record that in any efficient way.

The sustainable leaders also appear heavily dependent on the structure that results from being given (and in turn giving others) a sense of direction, rather than making decisions on their own,

We haven't even got a set of values, we did put a set of values together about twelve months ago but we didn't have any values up until that point, and when they were put together nobody actually publicised them. It was OK we've done that, lets tick that box. We're not working to them at all, so it's about demonstrating that we are working to a core set of values for the organisation.

Indeed, one of the sustainable leaders mentioned the need for 'direction' sixteen times during his interview.

In-decision

The sustainable leaders appear to be at the mercy of unforeseen ebbs and flows of work and changing priorities. The following extract uses the graphic metaphor of choice of viewing media to convey the indecision that he regards as being endemic in the Council. Intriguingly, his leadership involves him not in *making* decisions, but in smoothing over *in-decision*.

It's like watching TV...someone shouts, 'We want you to get across the room and turn the television off', but five minutes later someone says, 'Oh I've changed my mind now, I want to watch the DVD'. It becomes a difficult thing. Quite often my guys will say "Frank's changed his mind, again" but the change of mind has been up there. That really worthwhile thing we were doing has now got to be put on the back burner and we've got to do this, which is perceived to be worthwhile and my leadership skills have to come in again. 'That was important but this is *really* important'.

In-activity

The texts suggest that leaders' ability to move and be active is only realisable if they are provided with the 'space' or 'freedom to operate', as one of the sustainable leaders explains,

I see it as being given the space to make decisions to take things forward, to trust me to do things in the right way. And then equally, I try to do that with the staff I supervise. I try to give them the space.

The impression is given that there was no 'space' at all under the old regime of Richard Street, because of the oppressive strength of the autocratic former Leader,

When I came here it was very command and control. And it's no secret I would have left because I couldn't cope with the style at all. I felt I had no freedom, no space; I couldn't make one decision at all. Very much the culture from the top was you do it because I've asked you to. You felt nobody listened, nobody would ask for your opinion they just wanted robots to do things.

But even now, there is uncertainty about how many chains remain, with the use of the 'shackle' metaphor suggesting that constraint is focused directly on the person of the sustainable leader.

And I think, you know, there's a huge risk as individuals if we try, I mean we're all beginning to implement aspects of what we are learning – that's what work is to try to improve things, but there is this risk sometimes. How far can I go? It's almost well, going back to the shackles, have I still got that arm tied? Have I got both arms tied? Just one, or – you're never quite sure...we have achieved, I think, but we could achieve much, much more.

Resisting Being Challenged

With regard to 'challenging' one of the very senior managers commented,

I like to think I'm open and approachable. I do think that I am and I think people feel confident to come and be able tell me what they think and I'm really happy, really happy, about being challenged, so we can get the right solution for the organisation.

But a little later on she betrays an autocratic refusal to tolerate any resistance from others, akin to the discredited intolerant style of Richard Street.

So we *will* have performance management in Metropolitan, there's no doubt about it, it's going to happen and people just need to accept that.

Again reminiscent of Richard Street, one of the existing senior leaders spoke with concern about her own increasingly aggressive behaviour, but perversely implying that it is the rigid structure that has induced her to behave in this way.

Before I came to Metropolitan Council I would have never have behaved and acted in this way in terms of making a point (points forcefully with finger) but the frustration of trying to challenge the norms and challenge accepted behaviour has begun to demonstrate itself in the way that I use my personal style, which is a worry...

While challenging and being challenged are valorised, the sustainable leaders describe people who have challenged them in derogatory terms. One in particular referred to an '*awkward bugger*' and '*clown*', while another had difficulty with a '*maverick*' member of her team.

Being Driven

I suggested earlier that the term 'energy' may be used to describe the capacity (of a physical system) to do work or exert force on another system that has the potential to cause change. The discipline of physics reminds us that objects are considered to have energy by virtue of their motion (kinetic energy), position (potential energy) or mass, and since energy cannot be created or destroyed, the driver of energetic processes is not the creator of energy per se, but the transferal or transformation of energy from one type to another (change). Thus, the noun 'drive' refers to the actual shaft or mechanism by which such a force or power may be transmitted. Such connotations are evident in the Leadership Competence Framework with officers being portrayed merely as conduits rather than the source of energy. Close reading suggests that the competence 'Drive for Results' is merely a requirement that leaders' decisions, will and superior results are programmed by a performance management system. While the preamble opens by asserting that 'the council must strive for excellence in all that it does, in meeting our customers' demands and fulfilling our commitments to each other', decisions about what needs to be done at level one of the competence is prescribed as their basic job role or 'tasks at hand', at level two it concerns the setting of 'performance standards' that are 'stretching' and at level three it concerns priorities that have been established 'on the

basis of calculated costs, benefits or risks': all providing very closely defined parameters for the focus of their energy.

While the pre-amble to the competence calls on 'the personal, inner motivation, enthusiasm and drive to meet and exceed targets', at level one 'conscientiousness' and 'focus' are all that are required, at level two drive merely refers to 'improving methods, approaches or ways of working' while at level three drive is expressed in terms of 'commits significant resources and time', all closely constraining the amount of energy displayed. By describing a virtuous nesting of responsibility for 'exceeding' one's own targets, that of the team, the service area and thereby the Council's performance expectations, the potential for excessive achievements is circumscribed. At level one putative leaders are still embedded in the hierarchical structure of the organisation, so can only be expected to 'challenge positively' where they see 'waste or inefficiency', at level two putative leaders are required to monitor a simple linear feedback and control loop: the leader 'establishes ways of measuring performance, benchmarks performance and constantly refers to performance data to drive improvements', and at the third level they are merely required to 'overcome' organisational barriers to deliver better results, with no suggestion of critically challenging or removing them.

This highly targeted, constrained and relentless linear prescription of leaders' 'drive for results' has a cold, formal, and detached, almost inhuman quality. The implication is that while something appears to be self-propelled, it's simplistic or routine quality suggests a rigid mechanical predetermination. The following observations made by a Senior Officer capture the programmed robotic quality behind the show of strength,

For Metropolitan I would want to be picking people who aren't afraid, who are courageous and willing to challenge but also once challenged are willing to accept the corporate way.

Below, I have set out the dictionary definition of the term 'agency', so central to the depiction of leaders as 'strong', along with the term 'agent',

Agency *noun* **1** an establishment that does a particular type of business, usu on behalf of another. **2** the function or place of business of an agent or representative. **3**

intervention or instrumentality. **4** the power or force behind a certain phenomena or effect

Agent *noun* **1a** a person who is authorized to act for or in the place of another, e.g. a business representative. **b** somebody employed by or controlling an agency. **2a** a representative of a government. **b** a spy. **3a** something or somebody that produces an effect or exerts power. **b** a chemically, physically, or biologically active substance

(Penguin English Dictionary 2003)

There is a subtle shift in meaning between ‘agency’ as a power or force and an ‘agent’ as an intermediary, operating within clear and pre-determined boundaries. ‘Agent’ has a Latin origin with the verb *agere*, which means to drive, lead, act, or do. The word also has links with Indo-European verbs such as Greek *agein* ‘drive, lead’, Old Norse *aka* ‘travel in a vehicle’, and Sanskrit *ajati* which means ‘drives’. The return to the word ‘drive’ is intriguing, given the reference earlier in this chapter to a mechanical shaft that transfers energy, and here appearing in the sense of herding animals or going on a trip in a car. Many of the orthodox debates about leadership revolve around the metaphor of the shepherd and whether leaders should be in front or behind their followers (the herd). However, regardless of which stance is adopted, this bucolic metaphor suggests that the path is predetermined: between different pastures or from pasture to market.

Thus, any purported individual agency is valued only in so far as it is a resource, albeit human, that can be channeled to meet the needs of the industrial work system in the form of labour (Bauman 2001). Indeed, the metaphor robot that appeared earlier in the chapter, has only been in usage since the 1920s when a play by the Czech writer Karel Capek, called ‘R.U.R.’ (an abbreviation of *Rossum’s Universal Robots*) was translated into English. The word robot comes from the Czech *robota* that means servitude or forced labour, from *rab* meaning slave. Thus the robot can be seen as a term that captures both the increased effort required of officers (robots have immense strength), *and* at the same time the close control of that effort (robots are pre-programmed instruments for transferring rather than initiating action). ‘Strong leadership’ may be seen as a simple device for inspiring intensified *and* robotic performance from local government officers. Indeed, while one of the sustainable leaders complained that Richard Street’s overly ‘strong leadership’ reduced her to a mere robot, the

organisation's correction to this is no less robotic. As another of the sustainable leaders put it, they have been identified as leaders but are 'not allowed to lead'.

CONCLUSION

This chapter offered a close reading of 'strong leadership' in the texts from Metropolitan Council. The reading suggested that the requirement that leaders should be 'strong' was achieved by privileging an inherent capacity of leaders to be decisive, active, persistent, and results orientated. In turn individual weakness, and any other sources of strength external to the individual are marginalised as ineffectual or inappropriate. Moreover, the display of excessive individual strength is also decried, particularly where it is seen as a threat to the achievement of organisationally approved ends.

However, 'pulling at the text' suggested that the attempt to downplay weakness and alternative sources of strength fails. Structures of all sorts exert a greater impact on performance than anything an individual could achieve. Indeed, there are many examples of leaders' personal inability to sustain the required energy levels. Ironically, the most significant example of a determining structure is that of the Leadership Performance Framework that closely prescribes the nature of the strength officers are able to demonstrate. The ultimately mechanical nature of 'strong leadership' is betrayed through its link with the idea of a robot, a mindless remote controlled strength.

This chapter started with a quotation from one of the sustainable leaders in which he reflected on whether it is possible to make a distinction between strength arising from an individual or circumstances external to the individual. As a sustainable leader it is perhaps inevitable that he will privilege the individual, but the actual dilemma is one that goes to the heart of this reading. In naming leadership an attempt has been made to privilege the agency of officers as opposed to that of a structure like bureaucracy, but only in so far as this action serves ends prescribed by the organisation, set out in exacting performance criteria.

CHAPTER EIGHT: READING 'UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP'

Also I think it's really important to get the balance between not giving the message that what we need to do now is start hugging trees, and being really, really people focused. If we only did that and had this wonderful self-awareness wouldn't we be fantastic people and therefore manage and lead tremendously. It's not that either, but inevitably when there's a lack of something there's a temptation to put it back with knobs and try to counterbalance it that way. But that's not going to work because our job is to deliver to the citizens and community that we serve. You can't do that if you're hugging trees.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the third of four critical readings of the language of leadership at Metropolitan Council. While previous chapters focused on the requirement that leadership be 'visible' and 'strong', and the following chapter on the requirement that it is 'shared', this reading focuses on the requirement that leaders be 'understanding'. I suggest that in this context, the Council's expectation that leaders demonstrate 'understanding' of others can be read as the privileging of a soft emotional engagement with followers over a hard impersonal relationship. However, I argue that while 'valuing people' and 'empathy' are privileged, the texts are haunted by images of the rational and mechanical, in particular the emotional 'intelligence' of leaders casts them as emotional therapists, engineering the display of the 'correct' emotions in others *and* themselves.

Once again, I begin by providing a conventional reading of *what* 'understanding leadership' means in the case study texts: it is taken for granted that 'understanding leadership' exists as a signified independent of the language used to represent it, evidenced by the affective interpersonal skills of the individual sustainable leaders. The next section provides an exploration of *how* the text means. I consider the way in which 'understanding leadership' is established by an emotional and empathetic engagement with others over a disrespectfully impersonal and instrumental transaction.

However, as Derrida frequently illustrates, any such pretence of an originary order such as this is illusory. There are fault lines in the text, where it betrays the attempt to

hide its dependency on the marginalised term to achieve its meaning; the marginal returns to destabilise the centre. So, the final section considers the way in which although constructed as passionate people who have the power to foster close, harmonious and committed relationships with others, the texts also depict leaders as demonstrating a very unsympathetic execution of routinised emotion. Thus I argue that ‘understanding leadership’ represents the rationalisation and colonisation of emotions so as to keep this messy and unpredictable aspect of the person under control, something akin to the functionalist motive behind the need for impersonality in the execution of the bureaucratic office.

A CONVENTIONAL READING

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Governance Report (Metropolitan Council 2004) commented at length on the way in which the office cadre were not valued by the former leader of the Council, which had a detrimental effect on their confidence as professional bureaucrats. In response the Governance Report recommended that the Council make an addition to its statement of Guiding Principles: a fifth should be that it ‘Values its Employees’ (p. 60). This would involve the Council adopting ‘a culture that values its officers and takes pride in them being renowned for their contribution within and outside the authority’ (p. 51). In turn it identified the need to define ‘a recognizable style that the Council would want for all its managers’ in their relations with others, dubbed ‘the Metropolitan way’ (p. 57) and which might be established at a symbolic foundation conference (p. 249). It was suggested that this should be based on the principles of ‘widespread trust, understanding and goodwill’ (p. 36).

Subsequently, participants on the Sustainable Leadership Programme received a Facet 5 Personal Profile (Consulting Tools 2005) that included ‘Emotionality’ as one of five personality ‘building blocks’. ‘Emotionality’ is considered to interact with the other four dimensions and ‘affects stress tolerance, confidence and emotional state’. The ‘amount of each factor’ was assessed by leaders individually and also by selected individuals with whom they interact, the outcomes of which formed the basis of a number of coaching conversations which took place throughout the duration of the leadership

development programme. Also the Leadership Competence Framework (Metropolitan Council, 2005) included 'Understanding Others' as one of its nine competencies that the Council's leaders should demonstrate. Indeed, it is positioned as one of the 'Focus Four' competencies amongst the nine, because the 'need to work together' particularly across boundaries (p. 13) was considered vital for high individual performance and the achievement of the Council's objectives.

The distinction often drawn in the literature between management and leadership is on the basis that leadership is a much softer, more people orientated approach based, than management. Various soft strategies of 'influence' have been advocated to motivate employees, the most recent of which is the idea of Emotional Intelligence (Goleman 2000). Reflecting the need for closer and multiple relationships in a post-bureaucratic networked organisational form, it relies on the ability to manage one's self and one's relationships through the possession of the inherent empathetic capabilities of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skills.

CONSTRUCTING 'UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP'

Having briefly suggested what a conventional reading of 'understanding leadership' appears to mean in the case study texts, this section provides a close reading of how this particular meaning is achieved by privileging various connotations associated with the emotional over the rational, as illustrated in the contrasting dictionary definitions below. These positive connotations concern 'understanding' being an *inner source* of emotion related to *valuing people*, provoking *emotional arousal* and a the fostering of a *caring relationship* with others.

emotional *adj* **1** relating to the emotions. **2** feeling or expressing emotion. **3** inclined to show excessive emotion.

rational *adj* **1** having, based on, or compatible with reason; reasonable. **2** endowed with the ability to think logically. **3** having a value that is a rational number. **4** denoting a mathematical expression that is the quotient of two polynomials with coefficients that are rational numbers.

(Penguin English Dictionary 2003)

Inner Source of Emotion

The language that dominates the 'Understanding Others' competence in the Leadership Competence Framework (Consulting Tools Ltd 2005) conjures a very positive image of a heartfelt, intimate and caring approach by leaders that is privileged over a more detached and mechanistically transactional approach, more commonly associated with management, for the achievement of the organisation's objectives. The overarching sentiment of the competence is that leaders have a fundamental 'belief' that 'individuals matter and deserve to be treated with respect...even when their contribution may be different or at odds with yours' (p. 13). It also involves a 'desire' to 'demonstrate an understanding of others' in leaders' daily practice.

A 'belief' is based on an intangible inner faith or trust in something rather than hard evidence of its merits, and the use of the word 'desire' suggests an intense emotional longing or craving for something, rather than an objective determined by rational calculation. Hence the basis of leaders' approach to subordinates is depicted as having a very subjective, inner emotional source. The emotional intensity and authenticity is conjured by the words 'real' and 'deep'. This can be contrasted implicitly with sorts of understanding that are perhaps insincere and superficial, undertaken instrumentally for ulterior motives.

Many of the sustainable leaders talk in terms of such an inner and passionate source for leadership,

I've never been trained in any of this. So much is innate; it's about getting rapport, making people feel valued and worthwhile.

Anyone can just manage things and keep things ticking over but not anyone can see opportunities and inspire people to see where things have got to go...

If we're not going to be involved how the hell are they going to drive it down because we won't be undertaking a leadership role? It will be imposed upon us as opposed to being part of the change and leading from the heart.

All three quotations privilege leadership as an inherent and deep-seated emotional quality possessed by some but not others. Indeed there are messianic overtones.

Valuing People

The Governance Report depicts the Council's employees as a very special and highly prized asset rather than anonymous cogs in a system. That people 'matter' suggests that they are considered to be important or 'deserving', it merits commensurate treatment that demonstrates very particular attention, consideration or 'respect'. The leaders' texts develop this point,

We need to put some organisational recognition around the combination of needing to get that job done and doing it in a way that respects both you and the people who are around you.

The following quote makes the classic distinction between hard and soft aspects of organising, privileging the latter,

So, the old style which has been rewarded and recognised for some time, is doing a bloody good job getting those roads built, getting those houses done...and that's OK. Through things like corporate governance and other examinations that have been done on the organisation, there's an emerging understanding that that's only half of the story. We may be being effective, and certainly in terms of regeneration Metropolitan has been enormously effective, but what about other aspects of being a good community person and how we treat our own people.

This point is very clearly made by means of the privileging of leadership over management in the leaders' narratives. Management is depicted in classic terms as concerned with maintenance of the status quo and focuses on intangible operational detail. For example,

My current line manager is a manager not a leader...He's not quite a bean counter, but is very focused on tasks and not issues sometimes...Management associates with bureaucracy and the council. Take performance, five months to write something that's important and get it through the bureaucracy of other managers who really have no valuable input to the process purely to determine that it's going through the paths of accountability in the right way.

In contrast, leadership is about taking the organisation forward, with an express concern for people. For example, the extract below suggests that the basis of leadership is the emotional relationship with followers is the valuing of leaders *by followers*,

Managing is about getting a job done but not necessarily inspiring others to do that job, it's perhaps getting a job done not necessarily with the individuals doing the job getting satisfaction from it. But with leadership people feel that they are contributing positively

and they feel that they are getting something out of it as well and they feel really good about it. Whereas with managing, people do a job and think “Oh yeah that’s OK”. They do the job for other reasons rather than the individual. In leadership they’re doing a task to get the approval of the leader.

A contrast can also be made with this new ‘Metropolitan Way’ and the approach of the former Leader of the Council who is perceived to have a distinct lack of respect for staff, with no attempt made to establish any sort of relationship between the leader and his followers,

You know you think well if he doesn’t think that much of officers then he should talk to us and explain where he thinks our deficiencies are and perhaps we can address them, not just to slag us off in public. So the member leadership was very much at an extreme, it was extreme command-control and everybody else just does what they’re told.

Emotional Arousal

The intensity of the emotions aroused by leaders in followers is related to high levels of physical activity in the following extract,

But you would see me there I think talking to staff and receiving questions and demonstrating my commitment to what we were doing and hopefully energizing staff and giving them the opportunity for them to feel that they were part of the exercise as much as I could and that their feedback would be a welcome aspect.

This can be contrasted with the former Leader of the Council’s arousal of intensely negative emotions, which in turn have a negative impact on performance,

When I came here and was shouted at because squash attendance was down at one of the centres, and I really was shouted at about it, you think “Hang on a minute, I haven’t done anything wrong”. The culture was that if things weren’t working you were shouted at and it came down the line, a very macho culture of blame, and therefore control and therefore a lack of any feeling that I had any decision-making responsibilities.

Those emotions that are generated by the former regime are repeatedly described in terms of fear on the part of staff. For example,

The old administration was really quite scary to work in because you really didn’t know if you were going to make a mistake and be out of a job – and that’s not putting too fine a point on it. It really was quite difficult.

Basically I came into HR in the new Council and it was horrific. I felt and a number of people did, that we were bullied. There were times when I was told professionally that

whatever I said I wasn't to do it, I was to do something else. I was in tears, a number of times, because I was being instructed to do something that I knew was wrong.

In contrast, the newer 'caring leadership' that values its staff appears to have created a feeling of relaxation:

We had an open day for new members back in July last year. We set up stalls and they came round and it was a lot more relaxed and whatever. You could see officers were a lot more relaxed... if it had been the old culture I would have been absolutely petrified it would have been blame... Yes there is a difference, the fear factor has gone.

So as an officer I feel more relaxed. You don't feel so worried, you feel that you can do your job and you'll be judged on the job that you do rather than just perhaps something that went wrong that was out of your control which is a much nicer position to be in I think.

Caring Relationships

The overarching competence statement relating to 'understanding others' is cast as in terms of an archetypal 'caring' relationship, whether it be between counselor and patient, mentor and mentee, lover and loved one, mother and child, or in this case leader and follower. 'Care' can suggest a positive emotion extending from having a liking or taste for something, to the provision of a loving protectiveness. Humanist representations of caring usually describe it as involving feelings of interest, concern and indeed anxiety for the welfare of another, to the extent that the carer nurtures and may offer unconditional advice. The resolution of such therapeutic interactions is usually a positive progress towards self-actualization on the part of the client, the gaining of self-understanding and thus personal growth that may lead to greater social adjustment.

Indeed, the 'understanding others' competence suggests that the demonstration of just such 'care', and involves the 'ability' to 'listen to', 'ask about' and 'perceive' the feelings of others, enabling leaders to successively 'recognise', 'acknowledge', 'empathise' and have 'in depth understanding' and 'insight' into the other person to enable advice to be given to the other. These are typical features of the interpersonal skills training that underpin coaching, counseling and other therapeutic relationships,

I think most of the time I tend to edge to the softer management styles, consulting and supporting, rather than the stick and carrot. Occasionally you've got to be decisive and go with whatever you've decided but I'd probably be over towards the soft side.

The supplementary statements in the framework itemise a progressive inquiry process. To 'recognise' feelings is merely a clear identification of their existence as fact, to 'acknowledge' them suggests an additional acceptance of their validity, while 'empathy' takes this a step further to suggest that the feelings are shared. Ultimately, 'insight' implies the ability to discern the true underlying nature of something. This acts as a basis on which to make a diagnosis of the other and prescribe a remedy that will have a beneficial effect, here described in terms of seeking to 'address and change things' and indeed 'educate others' to ensure that 'positive emotions' are produced.

The following extract is a sustainable leaders' account of a relationship with his subordinates couched in just such therapeutic terms,

...and I found that quite hard to deal with at first. Instinctively, it was just very much sit down, a calming influence, let's just get this into perspective, because more often than not it was just exaggeration, it's just human nature I suspect. And a lot of it was just a calming influence, just telling people "Well look we've done it before, I'm confident, don't worry, sometimes plans can go wrong" but if you have flexibility within the group in what you do then there are other ways of delivering outcomes.

Therapy is a well-known medical practice involving the treatment of a disorder by an agent or methods that does not involve drugs or surgery. The focus is the individual who may be troubled or distressed because of mental or physical illness or circumstances such as bereavement. The individual patient is the locus of the problem with intervention by an individual or group to 'talk' through and heal the problem. Ayto's Etymological Dictionary (2003) tells us that the word is derived from the Greek *theraps* that denoted an attendant. From this was derived the verb *therapeuen* to 'attend, administer treatment to'. In turn this produced two derivatives *therapeia* 'treatment', which gave the English *therapy*, and *therapeutes* 'person who administers treatment', source of the adjective *therapeutikos*, from which English gets *therapeutic*.

The contrast drawn with Richard's Street's style of engaging with problem employees is very sharp. The ultimate sanction in such a regime is to coldly and instrumentally

remove, rather than attempt to understand or counsel those who are an impediment to his vision,

But I think that as he became more and more autocratic – I think he started off in a more participative way but he always had that tendency to control – so therefore he wanted to make all the decisions himself and have everything controlled by the centre, was quite happy just to get rid of people who weren't delivering things the way he wanted to and I think ultimately that was his downfall and now he's no longer the leader.

SHAKING THE TEXT

The last section explored the way in which various connotations of the signified 'understanding' concerning the soft and emotional, have been linguistically organized to contrast with the 'disrespectful' as something hard and transactional, in order to establish leadership as an inner disposition to value people, demonstrated in a relationship characterised by emotional arousal and care. The section that follows 'shakes' the text so as to explore the way in which, the suppressed 'other' returns to destabilised the privileged term. A more impersonal and detached approach emerges which assumes an *inner source of rationality* directed towards achieving *compliance* and *mechanical control* of others and *self-control* of the leader.

Inner Source of Rationality

For example, the demonstration of an 'understanding of others' in the leadership competence statement is based on both an intensely emotional 'desire', *and* an 'ability', two very contrasting concepts. An ability is a physical or mental power to do something and is usually thought of as either a natural or acquired skill. Indeed, the elaboration of the specific skills of listening, asking and perceiving in the Leadership Competence Framework suggests that a systematized set of techniques is actually more important for demonstrating, or providing tangible evidence, of understanding than the possession of emotion as a more 'generalized bodily consciousness, sensation or awareness' (Penguin English Dictionary 2003), however strong.

The underlying dominance of rationality is particularly evident in the key term 'understanding'.

understanding *noun* 1 a mental grasp; comprehension. 2 the power of comprehending; intelligence, *esp* the power to make experience intelligible by applying concepts. 3a a friendly or harmonious relationship. b an informal mutual agreement. 4 meaning or interpretation. 5 tolerance or sympathy.

(Penguin English Dictionary 2003)

While the latter senses of the word do recall the soft empathetic qualities discussed earlier, the first two senses privilege understanding based on cognitive skills of logical analysis and reflection. Indeed, the recently popularized idea of *emotional intelligence* suggests that the emotional is colonized by an abstract logic; feeling is a mental ability that can be measured and deployed instrumentally.

Systematising People

While valuing people appeared to be the supreme focus of leadership, taking time to understand others takes second place to managing more pressing task needs, as the following extract illustrates,

But it's also about recognizing that the task is more important than the individuals, you can't always please all the individuals if you have to get a particular task done. It's about recognizing that when the efficiencies of the organisation are such that you can't do things in a consultative way, or necessarily have everybody on board. What leaders do is have the respect of the individuals so they know there's a reason why it's being done in that way, they've explained why they've had to rush things through or done things in that particular way, so there's a rationale behind that decision.

This suggests that once leaders have perfunctorily fulfilled their obligation to 'understand people', they can move on to the business of managing. Similarly, the Leadership Competence Framework states that 'people deserve to be treated with respect', but if respect is understood in this instrumental way it may be little more than a polite formalised expression someone might make when briefly and publicly 'paying one's respects' at a funeral, for example.

Rational Compliance

As the second half of the last extract suggests, reason can be relied upon to save the day in such circumstances. Indeed, while an attempt was made to distinguish leadership from management on the basis of an emotional engagement with followers, a closer look

at the sustainable leaders' language reveals a more cognitive basis to their 'understanding'; their engagement with employees actually concerns their education: making sure that they 'understand' the reasons for and nature of the organisations future direction in the belief that this affords greater commitment and thereby ensures that change is more readily accepted.

So it is about the consultation, involvement, the empowering, it's about ensuring people *know* why they're doing it and why something is important.

Where the leadership bit comes in making sure there's a clear understanding of where we want to get to and why. It's the leadership, as much as anything, that allows people to *know* - make sure that people understand where they're trying to get to.

So, I don't like the idea of transformational leadership, I like the idea of the quiet leadership, people who make things happen by engaging with others, and I think that's the right way to take people on, make people *know* what or why things are happening
(emphasis added)

Indeed engagement with employees is described in explicitly instrumental terms,

Having the time to sit down to people and say look these are the targets we have and we're not doing so well or we're doing really well there or have you thought about a better way we could do this, how much time are you spending on it.

The personal performance stuff is then the starting block for treating people with respect, understanding what's expected of you and how you might be doing against that...

The above extract made a direct link between hard performance management and interpersonal respect, and while the next extract suggests that performance management can actually make people feel valued,

We were doing performance management interviews this morning of the team, now overall they're very effective but you still need to look at each individual and have their own performance objectives to make them feel valued and part of the organisation.

Mechanical Control

Perversely, the following extract captures the emotional high experienced by one of the sustainable leaders when she very consciously led in a way that did *not* involve any 'relational' work,

It's no good having a group of people sat around trying to come up with ideas, somebody's got to put something on paper that you can then progress, even if you reject some of them. I'd go through how and why I decided which health and safety framework we were going to follow, how it when through the various processes and a lot of it I bulldozed because nobody else knew what I was talking about – it was great.

Another of the sustainable leaders appears to get a buzz from a coordinating role and the machine like activity of human workers.

But I find that the leadership type, just being there and being able to steer and pull these additional elements together, that's what I find...I find that quite enjoyable really, quite rewarding. Rewarding because I see everybody else busy working away.

Indeed, the following extract draws on the machine metaphor, to suggest that arousing someone is akin to pressing their 'on' button,

Someone who's able to push your buttons in a way I suppose and they can get your total buy in. And you try to do that yourself, you say OK what is it that we're trying to achieve and how do I get Jo, Mary and Chris who all have totally different personalities, different things that push their buttons, how do I get them to join me in getting there...

The representation of leadership as the mechanical control of emotions is most clearly evident in the section of the Leadership Competence Statement concerning 'understanding others'. For example, despite the third sense of the term 'understanding' (defined above) suggesting that it involves a reciprocal empathy, there is evidence in the Competence Framework of 'understanding' being only *one way*: leaders understand followers. For example, while the document is keen to foster a 'caring' relationship, the term implicitly places the carer in a hierarchical relationship with the cared for, based on a dependency. Indeed, this takes a particularly formal form in some meanings of the term 'care' that relate 'to taking charge of or supervising' someone, taking 'legal responsibility or guardianship' of someone or indeed, to 'deal with' someone or something (Penguin English Dictionary 2003).

Vigilance and protocol clearly replace affection and solicitude in this sense of the word 'care', to the extent that there is little evidence of the fifth meaning of 'understanding' as 'tolerance or sympathy' in the Competence Framework. Indeed, the Framework states that the ultimate aim of the required 'understanding' is to correct 'negative' or unacceptable emotions. This takes a very intrusive and clinical form. The emotions of

the 'other' are subject to very close oral and visual interrogation according to a precisely prescribed process. The leader has to 'ask' and 'consult' so that others 'express' their feelings. As the definition below suggests, in its transitive form, 'asking' places a very overt and exacting expectation of someone,

ask *verb trans* **1a** to call on (somebody) for an answer. **b** to put or frame (a question), to put a question about (something). **2a** to make a request of (somebody). **b** to make a request for (something). **3** (+ to) to behave in such a way as to provoke (an unpleasant response). **4** (*often* + for) to set (something) as a price. **5** to invite (somebody).

While 'consult' suggests a more deferential seeking of opinion or even joint deliberation, it can also mean to serve as a consultant, and thus give advice in a dependent relationship.

The aim is that others 'express' themselves, which can mean to convey or make known thoughts and feelings 'especially in words'. Again, this suggests a rationalizing (or sanitizing) of any physical manifestation of feeling suggested in the concept emotion. Intriguingly, express can also mean to 'force out by pressure', 'clear cut' and 'high speed' which suggests something of the exacting nature of the need to understand.

Indeed, the ultimate achievement of deep 'insight' suggests that the whole of the person is now accessible to view; there is a totalizing and wholehearted thoroughness whereby leaders know the inside and outside of other people, even where their insides are not that well known to the other people themselves. For example, the leaders' texts include much talk about getting the measure of staff,

I think you have to assess the personalities of the people you're dealing with and understand them. Certainly as soon as I got this job, I've got 50 staff reporting to me, not directly, but the first thing I did was to spend a good week just listening to people and I think that that's a very important part of leadership, listening to people find out where they're at before you take a leading role.

Those issues are a very important aspect of emotional intelligence as well as leadership styles, because unless you can read those things and what makes people tick then you can't adapt to your environment which is the key issue for any leader.

The steps delineated in the Competence Framework for facilitating 'understanding', culminate in an 'assessment' of the appropriateness of the 'characteristics' of the

individuals concerned. This suggests a judgment of the worth of someone's emotions, some of which may be regarded as 'strengths' and others 'weaknesses', but none of which must be *too* strong. The evaluative language continues through use of the terms 'positives' and negatives': some emotions are good, helpful and constructive, while others are overtly described as 'disruptive', 'unhelpful' and leading to 'conflict'. The Competence Framework suggests that the Leader must intervene to ensure that all interchanges become systematized and controlled. They are encouraged to 'shape communication', 'sponsor ongoing and regular forums where people can express their feelings', and even 'pre-empts situations where strong, unhelpful emotions will be aroused'.

Self Control

Control of emotions is not confined to the led. There appears to be an acute awareness by the sustainable leaders of their own emotional state. The positive emotions they describe are all related to humanist notions of self-actualization and completeness linked with the achievement of performance goals,

There's never a dull moment, it is fulfilling, you can see what you're delivering...

It can also be very rewarding because you can see the benefit of your outputs; you can see generally what you are trying to deliver.

Excessive emotions are tempered. For example, the emotional intensity of the following extract is diffused by the inclusion of the idea of 'quiet leadership',

Yes it's great, I really, really enjoy [leadership]. I was surprised at how much I kind of relish it. Not in the way of big me, I've got my name in lights, it's just this wonderful feeling...

The negative emotions they describe concern the anxiety associated with the isolated nature of the role, although this is rationalized stoically as the price to be paid for being in the vanguard, or as something to be learnt away through systematic practice.

The leadership aspect I have worked with in Metropolitan is about changing culture – that for me has become a very lonely place.

It can feel as though you're on your own – my definition is that with leadership you're ahead and you're trying to bring others along with you. It could be lonely and there's

the fear factor there, but you grow in confidence – like presentations – and that applies with other aspects of leadership the more confident you are in the role it will come across to others you feel more comfortable and more probably more effective with it as well.

There is much evidence of intense self-monitoring, confession to peers in the leadership network and more senior staff,

Sometimes you feel very exposed when a colleague two or three levels below you has got a far greater understanding of the work you should be in charge of. Sometimes when I stand up and speak I just don't feel the chemistry's right and I think oh dear I've gone down like a lead balloon there, I didn't quite gauge how to pitch that. Sometimes management team doesn't go with a flow, usually it does. I usually find my management team is a real generator of my energy so that's good but occasionally for one reason or another I think, we went on too long or I didn't handle something very well, or something like that.

One officer-leader in particular diagnosed her own state, and that of others, in very negative pathological terms,

You'd be looking at a nervous break-down at the minute. I try really hard to be a good leader

He was quite supportive in that way, so...bless him he had a nervous breakdown in the end so that's not the best example perhaps of working with pressure, so I'm trying to think of anybody else...

There is a final irony. As we saw earlier, the exclusive and disciplined focus of the former Richard Street on his '2020 Vision' was depicted as being far from 'understanding', if not downright disrespectful of his followers. However, this is now being mirrored in the response being made by others to the sustainable leaders themselves, because of their own strongly held visions. While this recurs in a number of the sustainable leaders' texts, perhaps it is most graphically evoked in the following extract. The sustainable leader concerned has sanitised her emotions to the extent that she now appears as cold and demanding as Richard Street,

We have a particular problem at the moment that had to be achieved by a particular time and someone let us down. It wasn't someone in my team and I rang up to find out why it happened and the line manager of the individual I was talking to was in the room. I had spoken to him first, and he said can I put you on conference speaker and the line manager said jokingly "Oh it's that bossy woman on the line again". So yes, there is a down side because you can come across as being a little bossy in some ways, but I think

that's only when you need things done at a certain level and you need it delivered at a certain time. It can be very isolating, very alone. When I was head girl you are the leader of all the pupils and you could probably sense that I took that position very seriously, the responsibility for me was so important, I wanted to do a good job. I had to drop the fun bits and take on the serious role.

CONCLUSION

This chapter offered a close reading of 'understanding leadership' in the texts from Metropolitan Council. The reading suggested that the requirement that leaders should 'understand others' was achieved by privileging the superior emotional intelligence of officers, because it enables the fostering of a more empathetic and caring relationship with employees as valued organisational assets. In turn, the hard and unfeeling approach of management is marginalised as instrumental and disrespectful leading to poor performance. However, 'pulling at the text' suggests that the attempt to downplay the hard and rational fails. Emotional intelligence is merely the execution of a routinised emotional display intended to produce appropriate emotions in both followers, and leaders themselves.

This chapter started with a quotation from one of the sustainable leaders in which she reflects on the difficulty of striking a balance between being people focused and customer focused. Her conclusion mirrors the approach that was marginalised in the texts – the over stated parody of a people focus ('very very', 'fantastic', 'tremendous', 'knobs on', 'hugging tress') represents the fear engendered at the thought of people's emotional needs being over indulged. While officers' new leadership role must give the appearance of understanding people, there is an undiminished concern for the rational and impersonal.

CHAPTER NINE: READING 'SHARED LEADERSHIP'

To get the most out of your people you've got to be able to give them space, you've got to give them a vision, and understanding of where they play a part and I think Admiral Insurance, Engleheart, he'd probably be a really good person for you to speak to because of the lead he's taken because that's a very people focused organisation and apparently when they start they're all given a little piece of jigsaw and they have to carry it with them all the time and they're asked have you got your jigsaw and that's me, that's how I fit in. (Richards)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the last of four critical readings of the language of leadership at Metropolitan Council. While previous chapters focused on the requirement that leadership be 'visible', 'strong', and 'understanding', this reading focuses on the requirement that leadership be 'shared'. I suggest that in this context the 'sharing' of leadership serves to establish a middle ground that privileging relatedness (an egalitarian connectedness and inter-dependence with others) while marginalising *both* an overly separate self-orientation associated with bureaucratic authority, *and* an overly dependent association that might suggest a loss of self in surrender to 'otherness' in collective wholeness. However, I argue that while being 'corporate' and 'crossing boundaries' are privileged in the pursuit of this truth, the texts are haunted by images of the separate and disconnected, in particular the need for boundaries to demarcate 'space' and thereby preserve the elite status of individuals as leaders, and objectify followers.

As in previous chapters, I begin by providing a conventional reading of *what* 'shared' leadership means in the case study: it is suggested that a more sustainable form of leadership is one that embraces others across the Council in a more corporate approach. The next section provides an exploration of *how* the text means. I look at the way in which a middle ground of acceptable 'togetherness' is achieved by privileging it over the negative associations of both isolation and collectivity. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, it is possible to shake the text to reveal the fault lines in the structurality of the structure, where it betrays the attempt to hide its dependency on the marginalised term to achieve its meaning; the marginal returns to destabilise the centre.

So, the final section considers the way in which although appearing to promote the sharing of leadership and the crossing of boundaries, the sharing is very selective and the integrity of boundaries is still closely maintained: the privilege associated with hierarchical status returns. Indeed, the texts portray leaders as an elite cohort, set apart from others, intent on preserving their sovereignty. The purported concern with the equitable expansiveness of a collective whole is betrayed as a preoccupation with closely defining and circumscribing the space available for others in a formal hierarchical structure.

A CONVENTIONAL READING

As described earlier, the Report on the Governance of Metropolitan Council (Metropolitan Council 2004) suggested that the approach to leadership of the former leader of the Council, Richard Street, was overly concentrated in the hands of one individual and his small team. An issue to arise from this, in addition to those already mentioned in the previous chapters was the sustainability of such a centralized model of leadership. The focus on one lone individual was felt to be a 'fragile' and 'perishable' form of leadership (p. 55) and not able to endure beyond changes of administration. Additionally, because decision making was concentrated in the hands of one individual, there was a legacy of unclear roles and responsibilities both vertically and horizontally, with the discontinuities and fragmentation of an insular, silo-mentality exacerbated by the secretive culture.

As a consequence, the Report's overarching recommendation is a desire for the continuation of a 'strong, visible and well-known leader' (p. 101) to provide an overarching focus. However, 'sustainability' was to be ensured by making leadership more 'widespread' (p. 102) so that 'significant strength and power' could be 'shared beyond the leader' (p. 20). An involving and empowering approach was recommended that would promote and encourage 'other leaders rather than followers' (p. 37) at 'all levels' (p. 20); leadership should be located in the Leader of the Council, the Lord Mayor, the Leader of the opposition, the Chief Executive, the senior Management Team

and the Council's officers, indeed it should cover 'everyone involved in the management of the Council, as well as institutional arrangements for collective leadership' (p. 38).

The Report suggested that a 'collective' and 'corporate' (p. 52) approach to leadership would resolve the problematic relationships across the top three tiers of professional management such that 'ambiguities and uncertainties of who does what' were resolved and to prevent initiatives and decision-making running 'into the sand' (p. 53). It was thought that the responsibilities, contributions, and power within and between these different roles needed to be more clearly defined (p. 49) and balance, while the 'interfaces' (p. 43) and relationships between them needed to be 'more rational and respectful' (p. 42) in order to speed up decision making and to build a more cohesive organisation.

This theme is reflected in the Leadership Competency Framework (Metropolitan Council 2005). Beyond the most important 'Focus Four' competencies, 'that should be a feature of all roles', is the competence of 'Partnering and Corporate Working' described as tending to be one (of three) that distinguishes between 'average and outstanding performers' (p. 8). The importance of the competence is described as follows; 'working towards a common goal by sharing information and valuing the expertise of others is crucial to the Council's success in the future. This competency is about valuing, building and maintaining networks and relationships to achieve objectives' (p. 21). Moreover, it is no accident that the leadership development course is called the 'Sustainable Leadership Programme' and the cadre of participants referred to as 'the sustainable leaders'.

This approach also resonates with the recent popularity of post-heroic forms of leadership (Heifetz and Laurie 1997) that see leadership potential in everyone. This is a direct response to the greater emphasis on partnership and collaboration in team-based organisations that is purported to require more inclusive approach that fosters trust and ownership.

CONSTRUCTING 'SHARED LEADERSHIP'

Having briefly suggested *what* a conventional reading of 'shared leadership' to mean in the case study texts, this section provides a close reading of how this particular meaning is achieved by privileging various connotations of being together over being alone, as illustrated in the contrasting dictionary definitions below. These positive connotations concern *sharing leadership widely*, in a *quiet* and *corporate* way so as to *overcome boundaries* and *relate to others*.

alone **1** considered without reference to any other. **2** separated from others; isolated. **3** exclusive of other factors. **4** free from interference. **5** without assistance.

together **1a** in or into one place, mass, collection, or group. **b** in joint agreement or cooperation; as a group. **2** in or into contact, e.g. connection, collision, or union. **b** in or into association, relationship, or harmony. **3a** at one time; simultaneously. **b** in succession; without intermission. **4a** to or with each other. **b** used as an intensive after certain verbs. **c** considered as a unit; collectively.

(Penguin English Dictionary 2003)

Sharing Widely

The language used in the Governance Report draws a contrast between a positive image of leadership being spread 'widely' amongst a broad range of organisational members and the negative image of leadership concentrated 'narrowly' amongst a limited number of people, specifically the former Leader of the Council and his secretive team. Indeed, his singular power was so intrusive that, as one of the sustainable leaders observed, 'even the most mundane decisions had to be vetted by him'.

Breadth is achieved through the device of 'sharing', a concept that establishes the moral high ground by invoking principles of equity, generous selflessness and common linkage as each participant takes responsibility for and safeguards part of a whole. As one of the sustainable leaders put it,

...now I think leadership pops up through the organisation and I think that's good.

The type of 'shared leadership' advocated in the sustainable leaders' texts concerns 'turn taking' based on expertise, common to many theories of team leadership,

What you need to do is make sure that certain people know what your strengths are and get a team around you that leads the organisation together and balances your strengths and weaknesses. You can have people who are incredibly aspirational but have no delivery experience, so your response would be to find someone who's operational. And you can have leaders that are quite strategic and you'd need to balance that. For me it's the leadership team that's important, I don't think anybody can have it all.

The implicit contrast is with a more self-possessed, selfish leadership,

A lot of people who believe themselves to be leaders are often very precious about their own self worth and are not truly leading in the sense if you see leadership as people organisations developing as time goes on. You need to be less precious ...

Of course, Richard Street is frequently suggested as the epitome of such negative self-centred leadership that he spawned the purportedly adversarial and inequitable environment,

But actually working with him could actually be very frustrating because he wasn't a sharing person particularly. He was very much 'it's my way or no way'. This is the big vision and if you're not coming with me I can be spiteful. You may have a good idea but I will knock your legs from under you, it's that sort of thing.

The purported advantage of a shared approach is that leadership is sustainable; it endures in time across changes of personnel. The Penguin English Dictionary (2003) dictionary defines 'sustain' as follows:

sustain *verb trans* **1** to support the weight of (something). **2** to give support, sustenance, or relief to (somebody or something). **3** to cause (something) to continue; to prolong. **4** to suffer or undergo (something). **5** to allow or admit (something) as valid. **6** to support something) by adequate proof; to confirm.

The term is very resonant with contemporary concerns for the environment and evokes organic images of nurturing and nourishment; the 'sharing' of leadership thus appears to be a life-giving endeavor. In contrast, when leadership is located in a single individual it remains a fragile and perishable phenomenon, witnessed by Richard Street's fall from grace that was covered very publicly in the local media.

Quietness

There are a number of quite explicit attempts to describe a humble form of leadership that is considered more appropriate to this strategy of sharing,

I think so, I think it's back to the quiet leader model, of someone who has goals, but who moves towards them in an iterative fashion, quietly, resolutely and if you come to a blockage in the private sector you get the explosives out and move the obstruction but in the public sector you negotiate your way around it. There are good leaders in Metropolitan Council. At the Chief Officer level there are good ones, who achieve their goals, day in day out move forward, keep moving forward all the time, but to look at them they are sometimes invisible, they are the ones that keep the organisation on track.

There is a clear contrast with the more dramatic style of Richard Street, as one of the sustainable leaders puts it,

I think he did a lot of bulldozing. I think he got what he wanted by banging desks and just saying "we're doing it".

Corporate-ness

The ideal outcome of 'shared leadership' is 'integration' of previously 'fragmented' relationships, sections and projects 'at all levels' particularly necessary to overcome what the Governance Report describes as a 'silo-mentality'. The use of the silo metaphor suggests that the parts have become impenetrably sealed from one another, while in contrast integration suggests the blending of such separate elements into a larger whole. Key to the success of integration is corporate-ness, a 'collective' commitment to an overriding purpose, described using musical terms in the following extract,

I quite like the idea of leadership as jazz. Everybody knows that they're doing, at some point somebody comes to the fore, takes the lead, does their bit and then goes back in again, and we've moved on, we've got there. We've gone through a process and got to the end of the song and at some point in time people have made sure that we've stayed on course.

Indeed, the Leadership Competence Framework frequently reminds the putative leaders that their efforts are directed towards the achievement of a 'common goal' and that they should be 'aligned' around the 'common purpose' of service improvement. There is a sense in which the whole is much more important than the shared parts. As one of the sustainable leaders puts it,

I would hope that the leaders that we're trying to develop are people who are looking more holistically at what the organisation is aiming to achieve

The term 'corporate' is used in the Competence Statement to suggest that a successful Leader 'thinks and acts organisation-wide' which is yet another recurrence of the image

of breadth and expansiveness. The use of the term serves to underline the desire for the separate individuals and sections that constitute the organisation to be united or combined and act as one body. Indeed, the word originates from the Latin *corporare* 'to make into a body', from *corpus*, *corpor-*, a body, suggests a satisfyingly secure, tangible and physical completeness.

Common values can even unite the broken body,

At the moment we've got to try and get more from less, so the present leadership is trying to not only get people to deliver the services but also bring their hearts and minds to work and deliver it 150 percent.

The following extract conveys the promise of a corporate approach through the use of some evocative metaphorical language,

The main thing, particularly in terms of the Council, is having a sense of direction and a sense of purpose. I think that cascades through a whole heap of other things, but it's the direction and purpose that actually feed through some issues about values and guide all the decisions and proprieties. Leadership gives the direction and purpose and links that to motivation and they follow the flag, everyone knows where they're going.

'Cascade' suggests an overwhelming downward profusion of flowing water as well as the idea of linkage associated with a series of interconnected waterfalls. The term 'feed through' suggests notions of nourishment, while 'following the flag' is a potent visual image used to convey the triumph of solidarity in pursuit of a common cause. Taken together, they present a powerful image of the submerging of distracting diversity in an organic whole.

This is contrasted with an insular and egotistical form of leadership in pursuit of disparate personal goals,

I have worked with some people who haven't really cared about or wanted to develop in the team, their leadership was really all about self-fulfillment and looking after themselves, it was more about their individual ego. Not about achieving goals and taking the team along and sharing the achievements with the team. That was frustrating.

Richard Street is again presented as the archetype of such a negative approach,

It's difficult because although Richard Street was a very strong leader and got an awful lot done for Metropolitan...he was very strong, very willful, very knowing what he

wanted. He wanted to become an MP and didn't get selected for a number of seats so he was looking after himself.

Overcoming Boundaries

The case study identifies some particularly problematic boundaries that must be overcome, including the 'external/internal' border of the organisation, and the internal barriers across the vertical levels and horizontal functions. There are examples of some boundaries being firmly, and frustratingly closed,

We had an incidence when we moved from being City employees to County employees we were instructed not to speak to members, nobody not even at a very senior level was allowed to speak to members, and members weren't allowed to speak to us either.

Very emotive language is used to suggest the severity of the problem that must be overcome at the boundaries between the significant numbers of layers in the organisation, especially at the top. For example,

There is a wealth of different cultures – 22 service areas, 22 cultures. There aren't many orgs that have quite as many diverse functions and diverse people thrown together in one organisation and expected to work. It's worth remembering that. Even in multi-nationals each bit tends to be quite autonomous, but we're expected to have the same values and consistent and joined-up things across. That is quite a challenge and why there is a bit of a breach between the Chief Executive and political leadership and the service leadership.

The following extract describes internal differences in terms of 'turfism', the protection of a domain or sphere of interest, knowledge or control. Intriguingly, it is often used to describe the part of a city in which a gang conducts illegal activities and which is protected by menace or threats and physical violence. The same extract also describes the difference between the inside and outside of the organisation in extreme terms, being akin to different countries or indeed civilisations,

So it's going to be really interesting to see what the 'Making Connections' stuff actually does in terms of the people strategy for public service, because that is a way that we might actually start to turn things round. There's a lot of turfism going on as well from individual service area to service area and much more broadly to local government to health, to health to ambulance. I'm fortunate I guess that I get to work with a lot of public sector organisations, and the difference and the maturity of the organisations is staggering if you're thinking of the work that's been done in health is very innovative and very forward thinking and so trying to speak the same language is quite difficult. So when you think of things like the 'People Exchange' idea, actually making that idea work effectively so that both participants think they've got the same value is quite a

challenge, because depending on how you work it, it would be like going to another country, another civilization entirely...it may be quite dangerous, I don't know.

Cases of outright conflict are also used to justify the need for closer collaboration across boundaries, in this case political,

At the end of the day it's political point scoring and it's very difficult then because the morale on the organisation...you know... you wouldn't have it with a private company and the board of directors scoring points off each other in a public setting, certainly not on the pages of the press which then impacts on the reputation of the organisation for their service delivery their customer case, you know whatever it may be.

The aim is to 'interface' more, encouraging interaction at these dividing lines. The contrast between a fondly remembered holistic approach of the distant past, and the divisiveness of the most recently past regime that must be overcome, is suggested in the following extract,

I worked for the old Metropolitan City Council which was 3,000 employees, it was delightful, it was like a family, I worked then doing health and safety, I knew nearly everybody, I could go into any office anywhere in the Council. It was great. There was a lot of bad feeling when there was reorganisation in '96. South Metropolitan which was a very different culture, which was a totally different political animal, same parties but different outlooks, it was a lot bigger, you had different services, harder services to manage, it basically overtook the city.

In contrast, some very positive accounts are given of people having successfully crossed traditional boundaries,

I think also there's been a change in local government where traditionally the chief executive used to come from the treasury and that's changed a lot in the last five or ten years, and I think you're getting people from the different cultural backgrounds of the range of service deliveries now who are getting posts as chief exec, and outsiders coming in. I think at Stockton on Tees the woman has come from South Africa I think and I think that's helping because it's changing the culture at that level as well.

Relating to Others

Crossing these boundaries calls on leaders' heightened ability to relate to others.

The sustainable leaders are frustrated that there appear to be vestiges of the old autocratic approach to exercising authority, remaining in the organisation, described disparagingly as 'corrective' in style by one officer and as 'bullying' by another,

It's very...there are some difficult, unpleasant characters around, almost kind of bullies in the way that they operate and because of the sort of person I am I don't cope very well. I get annoyed and upset and I can't understand easily why some people are so pig-headed and so egocentric that they want to lead in a way that is totally against what I feel are the obviously successful parts of leadership which are getting people on your side and working with them, and I think that's one of the frustrations as far as I'm concerned and you can see this happening particularly I think those who are high achievers often have got there because they've had quite forthright styles and that is one of the problems probably in local government that you get a lot of these difficult characters at higher levels.

Other examples are given of the failure of initiatives being due to a fundamental failure of relationships,

It didn't go down well ... difficult one really, I think it was an issue of too much, too quick and she wasn't able to take the politicians along with her.

The most basic performance level of the Leadership Competence Statement requires Leaders to be 'proactive', 'to work with others readily' and ensure that they 'participate effectively', particularly by being 'open', both 'sharing information' and 'consulting' others. So rather than merely watch remotely from the sidelines, leaders are encouraged to take the initiative in actively involving themselves with others and taking part in conjoint working: the 'to and fro' of interchange. The sustainable leaders' texts construct the same image,

My staff are in the next two rooms down. When we have our fortnightly team briefing situations we try and get people together to talk and I think then it's partly me giving information down from the manager and from the top. A lot of that is getting ideas from them and saying what do you think about this, it's actually about involving them and not telling them.

I love working with Sally, she's very focused, she's very inclusive, she's very clear about what it is that she's trying to do, when she's trying to get it done by, how she can involve you, what your views are ...it's that...I don't know what her staff think of her... she gets people on board.

The Competence Statement indicates that subsequent to initiating relationships, leaders must successively 'build', 'maintain', 'foster', 'cultivate', 'forge', 'nurture', 'promote' and 'orchestrate' these relationships. These terms invoke both hard construction and soft horticultural images to suggest the importance of applying effort to organize and support the continuation of relationships, which reinforces the desire for sustainability. Specific

activities mentioned are to 'involve' and 'empower'. The former usually implies the need to engage and include others as part of work activity, while the latter goes further to reinforce the need to explicitly intervene to provide the means or opportunity for others to become involved. Again, this contrasts with the old secretive and insular style of the former leader.

SHAKING THE TEXT

However, as Derrida frequently illustrates, any such pretence of an originary order such as this is illusory. There are fault lines in the text, where it betrays the attempt to hide its dependency on the marginalised term to achieve its meaning; in this case the marginalised autonomous self returns to destabilise the centre. A more authoritarian and divisive approach emerges which assumes leadership is about *constraint, self-centredness*, and maintaining *separateness, policing boundaries* and *patronizing others*.

Constraining

While the verb 'to share' means 'to partake of, use, experience, or enjoy (something) with others' (Penguin English Dictionary 2003) this relies on a process of dividing, distributing or apportioning that something into shares, parts or in this case, turns. Fundamental to this process are decisions about who is to be included amongst those to receive a share, the basis upon which they are entitled to a share and the size of the portion they receive. In critical terms, at issue is where the authority lies for making these decisions.

So, while the Governance report talks in general terms about leadership being shared 'at all levels' (Metropolitan Council: 2004, p. 20), it only explicitly list those in the top three administrative levels of the organisation, and more generally beyond these, it limits the sharing of leadership to those who occupy traditional positions of authority, in effect, 'everyone involved in the management of the Council' (38). Indeed, some of the sustainable leaders themselves appear to have difficulty contemplating literally *everyone* being a leader, as suggested by the way in which the following extract trails off uncertainly and was followed by a long pause,

I think when I put my little sustainable leadership thing together I had found a quote somewhere where they'd said, 'good leadership isn't about making followers, it's about making more leaders' and I thought that's brilliant, that's what it is, it's about you as a leader empowering somebody else not to follow you blindly, but to actually...

Given some time, a correction emerges that rationalises the impossibility of everyone being a leader on the basis that not everyone possesses the inner qualities of 'will', 'drive' and 'ambition'. This is an elitist and individualised distinction. There is a palpable sense of relief in the final sentence that a threat to this leader's integrity has been removed, and indeed represents a complete about face on the topic,

...not everybody has the will, the capacity or the drive. You know some people are quite happy coming into work at 9 o'clock and doing what they need to do and going home at five and getting on with their lives. Not everybody is career driven but it's about getting them working within their little sphere and actually making the most out of that, so when they are actually in work they are getting the most out of their job, they're delivering the best services they can ...oh what a dream world... But no, I don't think it's ever going to happen where you get loads of leaders.

Such elitism is echoed in the following extract that draws a leadership boundary based on the traditional management/worker distinction between thinking and doing,

You don't need everyone to be leaders. I think that was a bit of a myth two or three years ago where everyone was having leadership development. You don't need that because you'd have everyone trying to lead and nobody doing anything.

Those occupying the office of leader, in traditional hierarchical terms, do the sharing of leadership and in ways they prescribe. Moreover, the two extracts that follow suggest that the only motive for sharing is instrumental: to help ease the burden of leaders' jobs because of increased performance expectations,

...the government's very frustrated because it's not seeing results, so now we need leaders that are all things to all people...Really one person can't do all that, so they need to focus on their leadership teams.

You're the one that's ultimately responsible, so you're the one that would know that you're carrying the can but also in leadership I think you have people who you can call on to support you so although you're carrying the can you're very much in control of the resources and therefore there's support there, you're not on your own.

Moreover, the sharing is not unconditional. Dictionary definitions of sharing include a suggestion that there is an implied or explicit consideration that the process of apportioning may be determined on the basis of what is 'belonging or due to' others, 'a fair reciprocal reflection what they have contributed previously'. The following example suggests that being a member of the leadership team is conditional upon delivering the required level of performance, which implies that it can be withdrawn.

The personal performance stuff is then the starting block for treating people with respect, understanding what's expected of you and how you might be doing against that.

Self -Centredness

While there were claims in the texts that the sustainable leaders are conscious that shared leadership requires them to be more self-effacing and take a back seat while their role is shared, nevertheless there is a clear sense that the inevitability of their essential leadership is inescapable,

I'd take over...nothing annoys me more. I've sat through some of these things and I get so fed up with them I say what I think and I realise now that people are actually asking me and looking for leadership, "what is Metropolitan doing?" or, "what do you think?"

So yes I do think I am a leader, that's probably not being very modest, but I do, and I've noticed it on the Sustainable Leadership Course, when things have been said they will look to me first before answering. They're obviously looking for approval and acknowledgement that what they're doing is right.

There is an implication that any failure of 'shared leadership' is thus not because the traditional leaders are reluctant to embrace it, but because others inevitably defer to more capable individuals who possess inherent leadership qualities.

If I just thought about this floor, they would look to certain people, or to somebody. The group would still want somebody to sort out the problem and the issues. I'm a biologist by trade, so I go back to those basic instincts of survival and that you need a pack leader.

Separateness

A commitment to overarching corporate values that will unite the disparate elements of the organisation can also be seen as a key device for *policing boundaries*. For example, it is notable that 'Partnering' is added to the title of the competence statement: 'Partnering and Corporate Working'. While a partnership is defined generally as 'an

association involving close cooperation' (The Penguin English Dictionary 2003), it also describes a legal contract entered into voluntarily by two or more persons whereby each agrees to invest capital into a business and share a fixed proportion of the profits and debts. Unlike a limited liability agreement, a partnership is traditionally viewed as an association of individuals rather than an entity with a separate and independent existence; it cannot exist beyond the lives of the partners, the partners are taxed as individuals and personally liable for any contractual obligations. There is thus a subtle maintenance of an independent separateness amidst calls for collective wholeness.

The competence statement also uses the term 'networks'. Defined as 'a structure of crisscrossing cords, wires, etc, secured at intersections, e.g. by knots' (Penguin English Dictionary 2003), the idea of a 'network' appears to further reinforce the idea of simultaneous need for togetherness and yet separateness of the individuals in the organisation. For example, a network of trains, computers or television stations operate independently but are interconnected to offer mutual advantage and integration. Indeed, the following extract captures the increased opportunities for the coming together *and* drawing apart of combinations of different sections of the organisation. It also draws a subtle contrast between the increased opportunities for relating with others and the reluctance to relate based on fear of the collective power of 'others',

Also what used to happen, Richard was never happy about the chief executive meeting with his senior management team. He always thought they were up to something; they were plotting. It was paranoia gone mad. So now there are regular corporate managers meetings, there are regular chief officer meetings, there are regular joint corporate manger and chief officer meetings, and once every alternative month we have a senior managers forum which brings the chief exec, corporate directors, chief officers and operational mangers, that's 160 odd people, top tier of the authority in one room together with a message.

Indeed, there is a distinct fear of excessive consensus,

Social care used to drive me up the wall. 'We've all got to agree, we've got to consult with everyone' and in fact their health and safety management has always been the worst in the Council, because they want everybody to be friends, and all agree without someone actually saying right, we're going to do this...otherwise you run round and round in circles and don't make decisions.

The new Council is frequently criticized for their over-consultative style,

But they're not prepared to do anything about them on the grounds that whatever you do will upset somebody and so they are slowing things down and want to consult more. They live in an unrealistic belief that if you consult people you will suddenly you'll get consensus and everything will be all right and of course it's not and it never will be. I find it very frustrating. But the new style is definitely a lot more consultation, maybe less decision taking. There's a joke going round that 'The Labour politicians do and the Liberals consult'. I'm sure that the Liberals will eventually *do*.

Moreover, deferral to a collective vision is seen as breeding a dependency and inability to accept the *individual* responsibility involved in decision-making, as suggested by the following comment,

But you really used to feel part of the organisation and feel that you wanted to do that extra mile because he was in control. I think we're desperate for somebody to show us, 'well, this is the way that we really need to go'.

Indeed such is their frustration with the attempts by the current party to foster collective commitment that some of the officers go so far as to cast the former Leader's *singular* pursuit of his vision in a very positive light,

I am quite surprised to hear myself say this, because I was not a Richard Street fan, and in some ways I am still not, but one of the things he did have was a clear vision...It wasn't 'well if that's all right by everyone'.

Metropolitan did achieve great things with him. He actually took difficult decisions. You could argue that if he had tried to do it more democratically those things would never have happened.

Policing Boundaries

As we have seen, the notion of breadth and expansiveness afforded by the removal of boundaries appears frequently in the texts in contrast to the narrowness and closure associated with the drawing of boundaries. In particular, the term 'space' is frequently used, typically suggesting a continuous openness or expanse unimpeded by constraining boundaries, such as the limitlessness of outer space. Such space appears to afford the opportunity to achieve the ideal egalitarian community. However, the term is also often associated with the humanist notion of having freedom, the 'private space' for personal fulfillment. Indeed, it is clear in the following extracts that the provision of 'space' is being used to reinforce the value of individual autonomy rather than the achievement of wholeness,

I felt I had no freedom, no space; I couldn't make one decision at all. Very much the culture from the top was you do it because I've asked you to. You felt nobody listened, nobody would ask for your opinion they just wanted robots to do things.

I see it as being given the space to make decisions to take things forward, to trust me to do things in the right way. And then equally, I try to do that with the staff I supervise. I try to give them the space. They know that they can come to me for guidance and I try to set boundaries, but that they can operate within that. So I think it's about providing direction, it's about trusting people, it's about letting them develop and letting them make their own decisions so that they feel in control of what they are doing and respected.

Moreover, all these reflections on having space are intimately bound up with issues of constraint. The origin of the word 'space' is in Middle English via old French from the Latin *spatium*, meaning area, room, and interval of space or time. As the word 'interval' implies, space is only a gap created between two objects; it is an illusion created by the boundaries that frame it. Thus, since the creation of space necessitates the demarcating of boundaries it produces simultaneously both freedom *and* control, as witnessed by the leaders' complaints about constraint from above, which in turn they exert on those below, as suggested by the extract below,

But it's about getting them working within their little sphere and actually making the most out of that...

This is also evident in the following extract that describes a determined effort to police a particular hierarchical boundary by prescribing specific language use,

And George¹⁵ will recall the idea or the distinction between political leadership and officer leadership, and actually at some point being asked not to use the word leader in anything that we were doing. It's weird. 'Management-leadership' was I think the accepted term. You could have 'political leadership' and 'management leadership' but you can't simply call it leadership.

So, boundaries are important sites for controlling what is included and excluded within its limits. It is thus possible to suggest that while there is a concern about the existence of sizeable and insurmountable boundaries within the organisation, attempts to overcome or remove them so as to integrate what lays either side, are spurious. Rather,

¹⁵ George was the head of the section within Metropolitan University that designed the Sustainable Leadership Course on behalf of Metropolitan Council.

the concern is to colonize the boundaries, thereby ensuring that any boundary crossing is managed so as to preserve the integrity of what lies on the privileged *subject* side of the subject/object dualism. In turn, this reinforces the hierarchical authority of the formal leadership role. For example, when confronted by situations in which the organisation is seen as a collective as in the quotation below, there is a clear dislike of the sense of anonymous wholeness. There is an urge to refine and designate particularity with respect to the location of decision-making,

But sometimes when you hear the criticism that the public give 'The Council' there are times when you want to say "Look, it's not 'The Council'", this is why something has to be done.

Similarly, when the organisation is dealt with as a collective body by the press, one leader wants to dis-connect his section from the whole,

I had one of the operational managers asking me how I was going to respond...there was a particularly negative article in one of the press about the sickness level in the Council and I said how do you think I am going to respond. "Well you know it came from our Scrutiny Report and if our Scrutiny Report is public and if that is what they say there is nothing that is not factual in that". "But" he said, "My service area has got a really good sickness". "Well", I said "I understand that, but the overall average...and it's in the report, and the press will pick it up". And I said, "I know it's frustrating". It absolutely drives me nuts because I am trying to manage the Council's reputation and in the mean time I've got another service area kicking us in the ..."

Thus, each time the sustainable leaders were exhorted to 'make the connections' or engage in 'partnership' and 'collaboration', attention is being draw to the continued existence of the boundaries to be crossed. Connections are made and 'bridges' built between locations that always already remain separate.

The need to control boundaries is reinforced when we remember that boundaries are an undecidable pivotal point, where it is difficult to determine whether the boundary is part of one side or the other. This is illustrated in the extract below (which also appeared in the previous chapter), where the sustainable leader realises that she exists as 'other' to those she 'others',

We have a particular problem at the moment that had to be achieved by a particular time and someone let us down. It wasn't someone in my team and I rang up to find out why it happened and the line manager of the individual I was talking to was in the room, I had spoken to him first, and he said can I put you on conference speaker and the line manager said jokingly "Oh it's that bossy woman on the line again" so yes, there is a down side because you can come across as being a little bossy in some ways, but I think that's only when you need things done at a certain level and you need it delivered at a certain time. It can be very isolating, very alone.

The policing of boundaries is difficult. For example, boundaries are temporary (and moveable) creations, and there are examples in the text of their slipperiness that ultimately makes any attempt to fix and control them difficult,

I don't suppose I have been party to this transition, because five years ago I would have had leader in my title. Five years ago if you'd met me I was a Group Leader, and now I'm an Operational Manager, and in fact Group Leaders have got Team Leaders reporting to them. So, what's in name?

There are also intriguing examples of 'others' who refuse the position of 'otherness' and insist on speaking and acting as subjects. For example, one of the sustainable leaders has a difficult team member,

I call him my maverick and he knows it and he is a maverick. He challenges the institution, which I think is great as well, although it can be very awkward on occasions.

The use of the term maverick is interesting. It originates with a US pioneer Samuel A Maverick (died in 1870), who did not brand his cattle, from which a practice arose of referring to unbranded cattle as *mavericks*. Since the use of different brands helps to categorise a large mass of undifferentiated animals, an unbranded cow is undecidable, existing outside of established boundaries. Usage of the term has subsequently extended to refer to independent, nonconformist or masterless people, the apogee of the autonomous individual. The notion of 'maverick' is a key undecidable term here – used pejoratively to describe someone who does not conform, and will not be branded, while also embodying the post-Enlightenment ideal of independent thought and action.

Patronising Others

The advice offered with regard to cultivating relationship with others appeared to advocate an open and nurturing approach. However, the focus for the exercise of togetherness is one-sided; certain, elite, people (leaders) continue to be legitimated with the authority to cause others to behave in a relational way. In effect, others are objectified and have relating 'done to' them more or less explicitly. They are variously 'brought', 'taken' or 'got' to do things,

It's the ability to inspire and *get* your employees to deliver the objective that you want them to.

It can feel as though you're on your own – my definition is that with leadership you're ahead and you're trying to *bring* others along with you. It could be lonely.

OK...um...it's, leadership is someone who can give very clear direction, they've got a vision in their mind, they know where they're going, they're motivational, they *take* people with them, you totally buy in to where they're going to be. You sort of get it, oh yes, it just makes such sense, and I can buy into that. (emphasis added)

The extract below clearly privileges the ability to 'relate to other people' as a special inner quality of the *self*-aware leader as the justification for patronisingly presenting a 'relationship' founded on the leader having to do things 'for' others.

It's not about the position that you hold hierarchically, but the leaders that I've come across, or studied, or researched typically are very self aware people and demonstrate that in their ability to relate to other people, but their overwhelming gift is one of having that long term view and, because of their awareness of themselves and others, some clear ideas about how that might be translated into action for others.

This assumption is picked up again in an account of the relationship between a sustainable leader and his teams,

It's certainly about working with others and it's not about being on your own and doing your own thing. It's about winning the support and the team working of others to a common end, it's probably about defining and aim and making others understand what that aim is and working with them to achieve it. It's about helping others to get that vision and define how that aim will be achieved and then it's about actually going to them and working with them to make it happen, so you're a leader whose part of the team that's trying to achieve whatever the purpose is.

While claiming not to be working independently, the other members of the team are depicted as being so passive that the leader is *forced* to take the initiative. They can

each claim to be a team members, but this is only in so far as they are required to help the others every step of the way - they must define their aim, help them understand it, help them implement it, etc.

The following extract from the texts certainly picks on the request in the Leadership Competence Framework that leaders 'orchestrate' relationships, but in so doing it reveals once more the way in which the other of the whole orchestra is made subject to the leader as orchestrator,

I suppose it's a bit like the conductor of an orchestra and you see a conductor whose got all the musicians completely working together and he really doesn't have to do anything at the front because he's already done all the hard work with them, he's laboured through the process and he just stands up there completely relaxed and almost enjoys the performance of all those who are taking part and I think that's what good leadership's about. Being able to be actually quite relaxed and if I walked off the podium for a couple of weeks it wouldn't make a scrap of difference and hopefully other people would take up the running...

Alternatively, the texts frequently describe others being expected to metaphorically get on a vehicle being driven by the leader, with no choice of destination, etc.

I think they've recognised that they can't do it unless staff are on board top to bottom, which I think is a very good thing.

The formulaic and patronising approach to staff relations described in the extract below, almost appears to be creating a culture of dependency of others on the leader,

So we knew it [a newspaper story about problem in the Council] was going to hit and I said to Steven we've got to tell the staff. And he was as good as gold and we made a phone call got the staff together over in the harbour authority and went and spoke to them, told them what was happening, told them about the article in the press, not to worry the view was we could work together. Literally it was a technical point...two lawyers not agreeing with one another, which you often get. So it was pretty confident, but also it would be frightening for staff to read, and we actually had comments back how grateful they were that we'd been over there and explained to them and the issue just went, went through very smoothly, staff were kept informed, which I don't think would have happened before. So there are just little things like that.

This is also manifest in the extract below, where the management of relationships is presented as a tightly controlled and mechanistic exchange of information,

But no, it's starting to open. But I think part of it is that people are not quite confident, not quite sure about opening up. I think it's one of those things we're going to develop as a cascade briefing session, which will cascade information a little further down and also putting a monitoring element in so that we know that people have done it. We can test it, and what we've asked for is feedback, so it's not one way. The idea is that we feed the information down and people are then given the opportunity to ask questions in their team meetings and if their chief officer can't answer them, they are fed back up corporate and it goes down again, and we can capture that on the internet site.

CONCLUSION

This chapter offered a close reading of 'shared leadership' in the texts from Metropolitan Council. The reading suggested that the requirement that leadership be shared was achieved by privileging a quiet approach to turn taking and commitment to a common purpose in order to sustain the unity of a fragmented organisation. In turn, a more autocratic and independent approach is marginalised as overly autonomous and divisive, leading to fragmentation and conflict.

However, 'pulling at the text' suggests that the attempt to downplay authority fails. 'Sharing' forgets the continuation of leaders as an elite in the formal hierarchical structure, maintaining the subject/object dualism by policing boundaries and determining the allocation of individual 'space'.

The quotation used at the start of the chapter, in which a sustainable leader invokes the metaphor of a jigsaw to describe the aspiration that each separate individual in the organisation might fit snugly together to form a synergistic whole, captures the radical failure described above. The satisfying image of unity is only achieved by virtue of the existence of the separateness of the pieces. As discrete objects they are thus amenable to control by the subject, who has the authority to prescribe their most efficient location, orientation and combination.

CHAPTER TEN: THE LANGUAGE OF LEADERSHIP

There are extremely capable, technically competent *managers*, some of whom actually demonstrate exceptional leadership capability and so where do we place the emphasis as an organisation in terms of harnessing the capability. I am certainly very conscious that the people who I think will have the greatest leadership capacity are out of scope of what we're doing right now, and that worries me because by the time they come into scope it'll be too late.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to draw some conclusions about the research question 'what *is* leadership?' that informed this study, drawing on the four close readings of the texts from Metropolitan Council set out in chapter six to nine. As explained in Chapter Five, the texts that form the basis of this thesis include a Report on the Governance of the Council, a Leadership Competence Framework, a Personal Leadership Profile used during a rolling Sustainable Leadership Programme, and interviews with the first cohort of putative leaders on this course. Chapter 11 will address the wider conclusions arising from the research and the theoretical implications for studying leadership.

A conventional reply to the inquiry 'what *is* leadership?' would unproblematically assert that at Metropolitan Council leadership *is* 'visible', 'strong', 'understanding' and 'shared', and that this sort of leadership is important for two organisational purposes. First, it is a response by the Council to central government's unquestioned belief that leadership is fundamental to the process of reforming the public services, and second, it is an attempt to distance the organisation from the purportedly highly centralized and autocratic leadership style of a former Leader of the Council, and thereby restore sound governance to Metropolitan. It is self evidently an appropriate and important thing to do.

However, the poststructuralist approach adopted in this thesis is concerned with what comes before a question like 'what *is* leadership?' Such a question is based on a philosophy of presence that presupposes that leadership exists as a truth per se; it is a real phenomenon that can be represented unproblematically on the pages of the various documents from Metropolitan Council, and in the talk of the leaders themselves.

However, Derrida takes issue with such assumptions, suggesting that the naming of leadership is only a textual effect that creates an illusory origin and reduces the potential of the endless play of signifiers that constitute a linguistic system. It is an attempt to 'write' the world in a particular way, which is then forgotten.

The sections that follow set out this more radical response to the question 'what *is* leadership?' in relation to the texts from Metropolitan Council. It necessarily focuses on *how* the truth of leadership is organised linguistically, the nature of the *truth* being promoted and the *power* embedded in this particular linguistic organisation.

THE LINGUISTIC ORGANISATION OF 'LEADERSHIP'

Derrida understands language as a system of arbitrary signs. The ontological act (Chia 1994, p. 804) marks an attempt to constrain the relationship between a range of binary terms within a linguistic system, such that the first term is privileged and the second subordinated, while at the same time the absent other is required, because both terms are mutually supportive to achieve signification. As Chia explains,

The phenomenological flux of lived experience are forcibly carved up, conceptually fixed, and systematically subjugated by the widely practiced organizing impulse of division, naming, classification, and representation. (Chia, 2003, p. 127)

As a consequence, there is an interest not in what the truth *is*, but *how* the apparent self-sufficiency of any claim is achieved linguistically through the deployment of a range of textual strategies that seek to distinguish 'it' from what it is not in a field of difference. However, Derrida also reminds us that such an identity is also vulnerable to failure because of the perpetual possibilities afforded by the endless differing and deferral of signifiers.

In chapter three I reviewed the literature on leadership with particular interest in those studies that had taken the linguistic turn. Only the work of Collinson, and Calas and Smircich appeared to engage in any detail with the textuality of leadership as a truth effects. Collinson (2005) argues for the potential of the analysis of textual strategies for

leadership studies, with a particular focus on the taken for granted binaries that constitute dominant ideas about leadership. However his work discussed the nature of a range of binaries in general terms and provided no exemplary close readings. In contrast, Calas and Smircich (1991) provided an intense analysis of a range of leadership texts, but their readings were focused on the operation of a very particular binary structure, in pursuit of their interest in the gendered basis of leadership as a strategy of control. This thesis both explored a range of binaries that constitute leadership, *and* subjected them to a very close analysis.

In this study, I followed Derrida in employing a strategy of ~~deconstruction~~ to explore the way in which language was organized in the texts from Metropolitan Council, so as to produce leadership. Deconstruction reminds us of the artificiality *and* impossibility of textual incisions into the flow of language. As I explained in chapter five, it should not be thought of as something that I applied to the texts, rather deconstruction works from within them, ‘troubling’ or ‘denaturalising’ the illusion of a stable originary presence in order to reveal the invisible and precarious ‘grammar’, or structurality of the structure upon which meaning depends for its identity. The strategy pays particular attention to the marginal lapses within the structure where the flow of signifiers could not be mastered by such decisions, and the asserted truth was thereby undermined.

For example, the first reading of the leadership texts suggested that the presence of ‘visible leadership’ is achieved by privileging the tangible materiality of objects that can be seen. In turn, what cannot be seen, i.e. what is not leadership, is marginalised as frustratingly intangible, difficult to comprehend and ultimately unimportant. So, for example, Chief Executives who are frequently seen by their staff, are privileged as leaders over those who remain hidden away in their top floor offices, and sustainable leaders make a point of attending public functions and seek to provide ‘clarity’ for others in contrast to the former Leader of the Council who was renowned for holding meetings in an underhand and secretive way.

However, 'pulling at the text' suggests that the attempt to privilege the visible fails, because of the temporal deferral to the invisible. Leadership's lack of substance as a naturally occurring phenomenon is betrayed with the return of the artifice that is needed to sustain the visibility of leadership, that the text sought to conceal. It emerges that considerable unseen effort is required to maintain leaders' high profile: it is the silent ranks of workers performing the routine of their office who make sure jobs get done and who smooth the way for a skilled leadership performance. While there is a desire by the Council for 'sustainable leadership', this necessarily implies that the concept is fundamentally 'insubstantial' if such sustenance is required. Also, the figurehead role emerges as a token and theatrical public relations exercise devoted to self-aggrandisement rather than public service. So high is the profile of leadership that the integrity of the object disappears, offering no substantial locus for determining accountability within the public sector reform project. Through the undecidable metaphor 'celebrity', leadership becomes both an elite and lauded phenomenon *and* a short-lived case of theatrical self-promotion, subject to the overly intense scrutiny and whims of a fickle media and consuming public.

The second reading focused on the way in which the presence of 'strong leadership' as an agentic quality located within the individual is achieved linguistically by marginalising structure. Leaders 'have' an inner resource of decisiveness, energy, challenge and drive, the potency of which can be measured using a psychometric test. In contrast, individual weakness, in the form of indecision, inertia, compliance and apathy, as well as any other sources of strength external to the individual, are marginalised as ineffectual or inappropriate. Implicitly a contrast is drawn between leaders who are able to turn ideas into action to deliver results, and management who are little different from traditional administrators, merely implementing what has been decided, and therefore failing to contribute to organisational progress. Strong individual leadership is further privileged over the display of excessive self-interested individual strength, which would be a threat to the achievement of organisationally approved ends. The enthusiasm, spirit of enquiry and drive of the new cadre of sustainable leaders is also privileged over the aggressive, authoritarian and vindictive

power of the old leader of the Council, who was criticized for the relentlessly compulsive way in which he pursued his personal agenda for Metropolitan.

However, a 'shaking' of the text suggested that the attempt to downplay weakness and alternative sources of strength fails. Structures of all sorts appear to exert a greater impact than anything an individual could achieve, in particular the structure of bureaucracy. There are many examples of putative leaders' inability to sustain their energy levels under the weight of 'the system' and the organisation's expectations of their performance, to the extent that they have to 'work the system' to stave off failure. Perhaps the most significant example of a determining structure is that of the Leadership Competence Framework. It provides a very exacting prescription of the way in which the Council's leaders must demonstrate strength. The metaphor 'robot' harbours the undecidability inherent in the texts, of a leadership that is a source of great energy but which is externally regulated and circumscribed.

The third reading, in chapter eight, focused on the way in which the Council sought to institute a form of leadership that was 'understanding'. This describes the ideal of an affective relationship between the leader and led based on the leader's inner desire to demonstrate sympathetic respect and care for others as valued assets of the organisation. This results in a commensurate emotional commitment from followers. The reading suggested that this particular form of closure is achieved by privileging a soft, emotionally intelligent engagement with followers over one founded on a hard, rational transaction. The emotional source of this concern for others affirms its intensity and veracity, while interaction based on cerebral calculation is marginalised as superficial and instrumental. This is also contrasted with a cold and unfeeling approach, more characteristic of management and the former Leader of the Council, where disrespectful treatment of people as anonymous cogs in a machine failed to deliver sustained performance improvement.

However, a close reading of the text suggests that the attempt to downplay the hard and rational fails; a calculative rationality returns as the putative leaders are encouraged by

the Leadership Competence Framework to focus on more instrumental, cognitive strategies to deliver high performance expectations. While empathetic leadership is promoted, its authenticity disappears, as leadership becomes the rational and mechanical engineering of the 'correct' emotions in both others and themselves. The underlying metaphor of 'therapy' points away from a unified meaning, at once signifying a caring relationship, *and* a totalizing clinical procedure of emotional regulation.

The final reading, in chapter nine, sees leadership promoted as something that is 'shared'. It attempts to anchor leadership as an ability to be self-effacing and unite with others across vertical and hierarchical divides, in a commitment to a common purpose that will unify a fragmented organisation. 'Shared leadership' is achieved by privileging sharing over selfishness, the widespread over the narrow, the quiet over the dramatic, the integrated over the disconnected, boundary crossing over boundary closure and openness over restriction. A quiet and egalitarian approach to leadership as turn-taking is prioritised over a more overt and independent approach, which is disparaged as being overly autonomous and divisive. At the other extreme, an excessively collective and holistic approach is also marginalised, being depicted as resulting in anonymity and the unexceptional. A recurring theme is of breadth and expansiveness, as leaders take the initiative to reach out across boundaries and collaborate with others, which is contrasted with negative images of conflict or self-protective disinterest that is fostered by separation and insularity.

However, a solicitation of the structure of the text suggests that the attempt to downplay autonomy fails as the putative leaders appear to have difficulty sharing very widely, and do so only instrumentally to manage their increased workload. Despite claims that leadership is a self-effacing, 'quiet' endeavor, the self-consciously special nature of leadership returns as leaders find it necessary to 'wade in' and solve problems. Every attempt to cross a boundary between self and other is domesticated to preserve the elite status of leaders as sovereign subjects. While the so-called bullying tactics employed by the former Leader of the Council to attain his selfish ends are condemned, an oppressive and self-interested coercion returns in the way that 'others' are objectified and have

'relating' done to them, in a simplistic and formulaic manner, by the leader. While claiming to 'respect' others, leaders assiduously police the boundary between self and other to maintain their exclusive and privileged status. The recurring metaphor of 'space' is very apposite, at once providing the opportunity for the freedom for self-determined action *and* constraining it by the close delimitation of followers' remit, so as to prevent others from prejudicing the absolute dominance of this elite in the organisational hierarchy.

My readings of leadership texts illustrate the way in which the language of leadership spreads out across an endless and uncontrollable chain of signifiers, despite attempts to establish it as a pure, originary presence. In effect, leadership is a volatile linguistic fabrication. The next section reflects on the nature of the assumptions that inform the particular fiction of leadership popularised at Metropolitan Council, before considering the way in which it is infused with power.

THE TRUTH OF 'LEADERSHIP'

Derrida's work has been concerned with unsettling various 'centres' that have been insinuated by modernist philosophy around which the meaning of our experiences may be orientated. A recurring centre has been that of the individual. Anthropocentrism is a typical example of what Derrida would describe an inaugural truth around which everything is orientated. As explained in chapters two and three, since the seventeenth century, the individual has been championed as the ultimate foundation of cognition and as the sole originator of a causal chain of action, by means of which the world can be both known and mastered. In turn, the leader has come to be valorised as an exceptional individual, with a superior ability to make independent decisions and take action to 'make things happen'; leadership is a heroic panacea.

The idea of individualism has not been without its critics. It has been suggested that understanding individualism, as a generic term is misleading, and that different specific 'unit ideas' of the concept have been drawn on in different national or historical contexts. There is further contestation over its negative consequences. For example,

studies have highlighted the overly domineering impulse of a human-centred world, an a- and anti-social tendency, as well as the pressure placed on the subject in an increasingly individuated and individualised society. In chapter three, I pointed out that there have been no studies of the ‘unit ideas’ exercised in representations of leadership, a deficiency that this thesis sought to remedy, and while Maccoby (2000) and Khurana (2002) have considered some aspects of the dark side of self-interested individualism with respect to leadership, the connection between leadership and individualism is usually accepted unquestioningly in the literature as an obvious and good thing.

Close reading of the case study texts across chapters six to nine suggested that the promotion of leadership as something ‘visible’, ‘strong’, ‘understanding’ and ‘shared’ drew respectively on the ‘unit ideas’ of ontological individualism, agency, rationality and autonomy, each of which had both positive and negative consequences. I will consider each one in turn. First, ontological individualism assumes the individual to be the basic unit of reality. By emphasising ‘visibility’, it precludes leadership from being considered as merely some nebulous abstraction, but gives it concrete form by virtue of the tangible physical presence of the body of the leader, a discrete bounded entity in possession of discernable inner qualities, and performing discernable acts of leading. In the case study organisation, the former Leader of the Council’s concern to separate policy formulation from practice demanded that individual officers remain ‘invisible’, thus precluding them from being leaders. The recent expectation that they now become visible, institutes the legitimacy of their new identity as leaders. Moreover, leaders have a distinctive presence, frequently described in the texts as being ‘in front’ and adopting a high profile public relations role. Thus, this objectively real, social fact takes inflated and special form through the conspicuousness of their visibility. This also serves to disconnect leaders from others, in particular managers, who are denigrated for appearing dull, plain and insignificant as they are subsumed by the tasks of their office. Further, the locatable ‘thingness’ of the individual leader has the benefit of enabling the essence of that thing to be known, it presents the reassuring predictability of permanence *and* offers a fixed site that can be the target for interaction. However, this could also be seen as an example of individualisation, with evidence in the texts of officers now being the

target of the Sustainable Leadership Programme, which involves *individual* profiling, *individual* coaching and *individual* organisational improvement assignments, all of which oblige the participants to meet the accompanying increased expectations of their performance. The visibility of 'leaders' also offers the opportunity for close monitoring and accountability of their actions, an example of individuation. Indeed celebrity status provides a particularly public arena for intimate surveillance and assessment of performance.

Second, leadership is established as a site for agency through the depiction of leaders as being *strong*. As Reed (2003, p. 293) explains, the privileging of individual agency suggests that phenomenon are the 'aggregations of isolated acts of individual calculation relating to a predetermined register of calibrated priorities or ends', and leadership is the celebration of the *heightened* capacity of *particular* individuals to have such an impact on the world. As we saw in chapter seven, leaders are depicted as being the principal source of energy for challenging the status quo and achieving change in Metropolitan Council. Their agency is potent, intense and persistent.

However, criticisms have also been leveled at this aspect of individualism. For example, many have commented on the exaggerated claims made about what leaders can achieve. Khurana (2002) argues that in the recent volatile industrial environment of the 'new economy' there has been a marked tendency for the media to isolate the celebrity Chief Executive Officer as a larger than life, super-hero attributed with sole responsibility for securing the salvation of a company's fortunes. This is echoed in Mintzberg's (2004, p. 2) ironic observation that, 'within four years, Lou Grestner added more than \$40 billion to IBM's shareholder value. *All by himself*' (original emphasis). There are examples in the texts of the way in which this depiction of leaders as 'magicians in pinstripes' once again distances them from others. In particular, managers are cast as weak, indecisive and compliant, having failed to work with sufficient diligence to effect reform. Moreover, the case study texts suggest that the performance expectations of officers are so intensified that these putative leaders have to pay a significant personal toll, in the form of anxiety, aggression and physical exhaustion. Concern has also been expressed

about the overly domineering and aggressive character of such intense agency. For example, the sustainable leaders' agency involves them being both 'challenging' and 'driven'. As the dictionary definition suggests, the first can involve the extremes of confrontation and physical combat while the second can manifest itself in a relentless compulsion, that may involve the coercion of others, and which is reminiscent of the fear invoked by the former Leader of the Council as he bulldozed his initiatives through. Structuralist critiques have tended to reject the privileging of agency in any form, and propose instead that human action is causally both constrained and determined by broader social and cultural processes and institutions. Indeed, chapter seven identifies the return of a number of bureaucratic structures that exert a significant constraint on leaders' purported agency, and indeed, the emerging link with the metaphor of 'robot' suggests that 'strong leadership' is in effect a life-less, remote-controlled performance: their drive has an external rather than internal source.

Third, the promotion of 'understanding' appears to be an attempt to mitigate the negative consequences of excessive rationality. Rationality is usually presented a distinctly individual ability to use abstract rules for the instrumental purpose of calculating the maximization of preferences. However, excessive rationality has been criticised for its hard, calculative logic where the relationship with others is necessarily impersonal and instrumental. In an organisational context, there is no place for the subjective, emotive or impulsive (Putnam and Mumby 1993); feelings became invisible.

Thus the espousal of 'understanding leadership' appears to be an attempt to ameliorate the negative consequences of individuals' capacity for rational thought and action, and establish leadership as a site for emotional empathy. Leaders have an inner belief that their followers are valuable and deserve to be treated with respect. They engage with others at an affective level, drawing on their inner ability to be intuitive and empathetic. A positive image is created of an attentive and caring therapeutic relationship. This is typical of softer humanist approaches in general that claim to appreciate the worker as a more complex psychological being that needs to be understood and nurtured rather than coerced.

Over time, the general preference for a soft humanist or hard rational approach has frequently changed with some accompanying scepticism about the reasons for this. For example, Barley and Kunda (1992) suggest that the tendency for surges in managerial theorizing to alternate within a bi-polar framework between rational and normative rhetoric appears to be rooted in broad cycles of economic expansion and contraction. However, the reading of ‘understanding leadership’ in this thesis supports the views of others who have argued that the dichotomy is spurious, in the sense that the rational inevitably dominates any professed sympathy with the emotional, even to the extent that the emotional is colonized by the rational. As Grey (2005, p. 46-47) points out, human relations theory is ‘not an alternative to, but an extension of, scientific management...the difference between [the two] is a ‘tactical’ one.’ Thus, ‘understanding leadership’ merely represents a different *means* of control; humanization is a technique. Indeed, Fineman (1996) observes that contemporary practices of ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild 1983) indicate an acceleration in the institutionalization of managerial control over emotional display.

Thus, despite appearances, closer reading of the leadership texts suggest that ‘understanding’ is no less rational. The Leadership Competence Framework presents leadership as being about the systematic monitoring and correction of inappropriate emotions, little different from the alleged approach of the former Leader of the Council, who was decried for his hard calculative use of the Council’s employees as a resource to achieve his own ends. Ironically, the emotional and the rational are brought together in the notion of ‘emotional intelligence’, which can be seen here as the execution of a routinised emotional display intended to produce appropriate emotions in followers.

Fourth, the promotion of ‘shared leadership’ appears to be a similar attempt to ameliorate the negative consequences of individuals’ capacity for excessive autonomy. Autonomy is regarded as an important aspect of individualism, because it celebrates the self-contained way in which individuals can voluntarily exert their will and pursue their independent interests, free from the undue influence of others. Socially imposed moral standards such as religion or tradition are rejected in favour of human-centred values

that celebrate self-reliance, self-development and liberty. However, *excessive* individual autonomy has been criticized for being anti-social and negating the way in which we are bound by 'socially embedded reciprocities' (Legge 1999, p. 252); the individual becomes assiduously isolated, private and elitist. The excessively autonomous leader becomes a supremely *self*-confident and dangerously unrestrained independent entity (Khurana 2002), just like the former Leader of the Council, Richard Street, who is claimed to have pursued a very independent and autocratic leadership, deliberately keeping officers at a distance.

Thus, the privileging of 'shared leadership' at Metropolitan Council appears to be seen as a way of ameliorating the negative consequences of individual autonomy. Leadership is cast as a humble endeavor, spread widely across the organisation by means of turn taking, based on expertise. The focus is on encouraging people to relate openly with one another across traditional boundaries, in order to encourage a more corporate or collective organisational response to the reform agenda.

However, despite this appearance, the close reading in chapter nine, suggested that leadership continues to be very much about autonomy: the control of others' autonomy within the organisational hierarchy by leaders. Sharing leadership is a very subtle way of appearing to embrace others on an equal footing, when in fact decisions about what will be shared, and with who remain firmly under the control of those formally designated as leaders. Sharing is confined to the top layers of the organisational hierarchy, and is merely a euphemism for easing leaders' workload, conditional upon the delivery of specific performance requirements. The wholeness sought by collaboration and corporateness is rejected as resulting in the loss of identity of leaders as a distinct and special category. Since 'space' is dependent for its presence on the boundaries that frame it, the laudable provision of 'space' for others by leadership, gives the appearance of providing freedom when in fact it is a strategy that enables close control. Indeed, the boundary between leaders and non-leaders is vigorously maintained so as to preserve leaders' status as subject, and objectify others. The need for 'sustainable leadership' can

be seen less as a dispersion of the role and more as the maintenance of its exclusivity through dividing.

My readings of the leadership texts illustrate the way in which the truth of leadership involves a number of unit ideas associated with individualism. I suggest that while this can serve to affirm the substance and importance of 'leaders' as extra-ordinary individuals who are the originators of particularly potent and independent effort, this may also produce a range of unintended, alternative associations.

THE POLITICS OF 'LEADERSHIP'

As I explained in chapter three, the role of power has received little attention in the mainstream literature on leadership; it is assumed to be a neutral and dis-interested phenomenon. The hierarchy inherent in the relationship between leader and led is taken for granted as a natural aspect of legitimate authority, and the leadership strategies employed serve to coordinate work and ensure conformity to the organisations' stated goals. However, some more critical approaches have paid particular attention to the way in which leadership is a manifestation of an embedded structural and psychological 'domination' of one group over another, with 'influence' being a soft strategy of control to ensure the delivery the performative outcomes required of capitalist workplace. While these are important insights, they tend to be motivated by a righteous political project to educate and emancipate, which is equally domineering in its intent on soliciting the 'correct consciousness' (Lather 2003, p. 230). More recently, the linguistic turn has theorised power as a more subtle, complex and multiply contested phenomena in the workplace. As Hardy and Clegg (1996) suggest, it is 'embedded in the fibre and fabric of everyday life', realising the 'play of meaning, signification and action' (p. 633).

Derrida has a very implicit understanding of power. Since 'there is no thing outside of the text' (Derrida 1976, p. 158), power is achieved in the process of attempting to interrupt a signifying system. The privileging of one side of a binary relationship of

signs can be seen as a violence that reduces the plurality of possibility of language to 'truth'. Moreover, Derrida has no overt political project - deconstruction is not a purpose – for this would substitute one violence for another. Rather, politics 'inheres in the very 'method' of deconstruction' (Bearsdworth 1996, p. 1) by virtue of the way in which it intervenes and unsettles the taken for granted 'truth'. Derrida acknowledges that we can't but organize – texts are a site of political struggle and inevitably involve a violence – but organising presents an opportunity for a lesser violence that marks an ethical responsibility to the other, an undecidable position without reconciliation.

In this final section I reflect on the way that power inheres in the language of individualism *qua* leadership within the broader context of public sector reform. The close readings suggest that the writing of 'leadership' depends on privileging the productive power of the individual *person* of the officer holder as 'leader', and marginalising the unproductive effects of the bureaucratic *office* that erased the individuality of the bureaucrat, while at the same time distancing the officer from the excesses of entrepreneurial individualism. The rationale for this linguistic distinction and the implications it insinuates must be seen in the light of attempts to change the nature of the public sector in the UK.

As briefly outlined in chapter one, successive governments have attempted to determine the purpose and practice of the public sector in the response to economic, social and increasingly, global challenges. Various reforms have been championed, which have included attempts to construct the image of the ideal public sector worker (Newman 2005, p.719). Individualism played a minor part in the neo-corporatist regime. As guardians of public values, the structural arrangements of bureaucracy ensured that the person was separated from their office, and subordinated to impartial process and procedure. The officer was merely a faceless *administrator* of files. However, some of the criticisms of bureaucracy were couched in terms of the virtues of an increased focus on individualism. It was thought desirable to release the individual from the shackles of bureaucracy so that they could show the initiative necessary for more efficient policy implementation. Such thinking represented a 'radical challenge to the separation of the

person from office' that underpinned the original conception of the bureaucrat (Newman 2005). However, intriguingly, other criticisms focused on the negative consequences of the limited individual independence that did exist, associated with the exercise of professional expertise. It was felt that this could result in excessive self-interested allegiance to their professional body rather than demonstrating responsibility to the public.

The first major wave of public sector reform recast the public servant in the mould of the private sector entrepreneur (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). Just like leadership, entrepreneurialism is closely associated with some of the unit ideas of individualism: the entrepreneur is a mythically autonomous figure, highly self motivated to use their business acumen to capitalize on new and potentially risky market opportunities in a very practical way. It offered a significantly enhanced role for the public servant in finding innovative solutions to service problems. It demanded a strategic orientation, proactiveness and risk taking to spot opportunities and mobilize resources in a more flexible and responsive way. It was also facilitated by private sector performance management techniques such as target setting and appraisal. While bureaucracy had always depended on the diligence of the anonymous office holder, entrepreneurial individualism re-interprets that effort as originating in the private motivations of the officer-entrepreneur; as Jones and Spicer (2005, p. 225) observe, it 'hails the subject who then furthers the cause of post-industrial capitalism through their own volition', and as du Gay elaborates,

'[e]mployment is characterized not as a painful obligation imposed upon individuals, nor as an activity undertaken to meet instrumental needs, but rather as a means to self-responsibility and hence self-optimization. Organisational success is therefore premised upon an engagement by the organisation of the self-optimizing impulse of all its members, no matter what their formal role' (du Gay 1996, p. 182).

This 'seductive ethic of the self' (Rose 1990, p. 6) thus encouraged the 'manager' to take risks in stepping outside their official area of jurisdiction and breaking rules in order to deliver increased operational efficiency.

And yet, there was a call for 'renewal' (Ahamad and Brousine 2001) after the perceived failure of 'management' to come out of the shadows of their 'office' to deliver the anticipated level of transformation. Indeed, the case study texts marginalise management in relation to leadership by describing it using terms associated with mere administration. Moreover, it was also deemed to have failed because extreme forms of entrepreneurial individualism had the potential to become overly independent, self-interested and unpredictable, caricatured in the case study texts in the form of Richard Street, the former Leader of the Metropolitan Council.

In response, the most recent depiction of the ideal public servant as 'leader' can be seen as representing both an intensification *and* refinement of the entrepreneurial form of individualism. For example, while entrepreneurial individualism was an attempt to raise the profile of the anonymous bureaucrat, the secretive manner of entrepreneurial deal-making activity often resulted in a not dissimilar invisibility. Moreover, concerns about capricious and irresponsible risk-taking raised concerns about the lack of accountability and corruption in public service. In contrast, there is no doubt that 'visible leadership' places the officer centre stage as celebrity, which serves to guarantee that both office *and* officer can be more closely determined and held to account by a consuming public. Indeed, the celebrity associated with such visibility suggests a particularly intense form of scrutiny, which Redmond (2006, 34) describes as a 'panopticon of fame'.

While bureaucracy had depended on the 'full working capacity of the official' (Weber 1968, p. 672), the constraints of the bureaucratic system had engendered a passive and timid 'bureaucratic personality' amongst officers. In contrast, entrepreneurial individualism emphasised activity and achievement, but even this was deemed to have failed to deliver consistent results (Bottery 2004). The call for '*strong* leadership' continues the focus on the agency of the individual officer as key to reform, but also demands more ambitious levels of effort. The separation of the person from the office is further transgressed as this 'ethic of enthusiasm' (du Gay 2008) encourages leaders to 'own' rather than merely implement policies.

The separation of the person from the office had also been criticized for an impersonal relationship with others. The hard commercial style of engagement of the entrepreneur did nothing to correct this emotional estrangement, based as it was on rational calculation and economic self-interest. In contrast, '*understanding* leadership' re-humanises and personalizes dealings with others. A 'politics of care' necessitates a 'sense of compassion or close identification with others' feelings' (du Gay 2008, p. 336).

Bureaucracy was further censured for the way in which its hierarchical structure presented a restriction on officers' autonomy, by subordinating the individual to the authority and status of others above them in the chain of command. While much of the myth of the entrepreneur idealised their independence as lone pioneers, their *excessive* autonomy, outside of any chain of command was a threat to the ethic of public service. Thus 'shared leadership' refines the creative potential offered by the idea of the autonomy: by providing a more horizontal structure of relationships and egalitarian exercise of authority.

However, despite the use of leadership to re-humanise the bureaucratic office and thereby reanimate public sector reform, the very aspects of bureaucracy that it sought to 'write out', return. While 'visible leadership' celebrates the elevation of the person over the office as a real and important organisational feature, the office returns, as celebrity proves to be merely a theatrical and ephemeral phenomenon. While 'strong' leadership celebrates the powerful inner agency of the individual officer over the machinery of bureaucracy, as the primary source of action that will modernise public service, structure returns to regulate the discharge of that energy: the person is mechanised. While 'understanding leadership' celebrates the capacity of the individual officer for emotional engagement with others over the impersonality of office, hard calculative rationality returns in the systematic intellectualization of the emotional. While 'sharing' leadership celebrates equality and unity across the organisation, over the differentiation produced

by the superior-subordinate relationship and functional specialization of bureaucracy, hierarchy and boundaries return to delimit the autonomy of the office holder.

CONCLUSION

This chapter sought to reflect on the issues arising from my four readings of the leadership texts in relation to my research question. Following Derrida, to ask the question ‘what *is* leadership?’ betrays the very condition of the question as an affirmation of the presence of leadership. Rather, I suggested that leadership could be understood as a precarious linguistic production. The particular leadership fiction being promoted drew extensively on a refinement and inflation of aspects of the post-Enlightenment ideal of individualism. Indeed, the naming of leadership depends on a powerful violence that reverses the traditional basis of bureaucracy, by privileging the *person* over the office. However, this linguistic production inevitably fails – the incessant play of signifiers cannot be mastered - and the traces of *office* return to haunt the text, along with the machinery of structure, rationality and hierarchy. The binary link between the signifiers ‘person’ and ‘office’ is not naturally given, neither is the longstanding privileging of office over person, and the difficulty of controlling the reversal of that hierarchy through the idea of leadership is suggestive of the difficulty of arresting the constant flow of signifiers by any artificially imposed division. Meaning is always in process: ‘person’ and ‘office’ inhabit each other *and* constantly defer to other signs.

In the introduction I suggested that more critical assessments of the waves of public sector reform in the UK had raise concerns about, amongst other things, the simplistic condemnation of bureaucracy, and the evidence of an intensification of bureaucracy to satisfy the demands of economic neo-liberalism. This study contributed to this debate, but not in terms of determining whether public sector reform is working, or whether bureaucracy is better than post-bureaucracy. Rather, it reminds us that the disputed nature of reform results from contestation over the pregnant potential of language. Any ethical possibility of public sector reform requires a rapport with or responsibility to the

other...all the others. In the chapter that follows I consider the broader outcomes arising from the research and the implications for theorising and studying leadership.

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter I outline the contributions of this thesis for both theory and practice. I start by recalling the provocation and overall purpose of the thesis, and then consider the implications of my answers to the research question, ‘what *is* leadership? I also reflect on the underpinning poststructuralist theoretical framework, and the problems of conducting poststructuralist research. I conclude the chapter by outlining the potential for future research arising from the study.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

I started the thesis by recounting an experience from a leadership development programme with which I had been involved. The event had become the focus of my reservations about the way in which leadership is represented in the mainstream academic literature, and by policy makers who are encouraging local government officers to assume the identity of leaders in the workplace. In particular, I was concerned about the way in which it is taken for granted that leadership exists as a *fact* that can be portrayed unproblematically by language. I was also uneasy about the way in which the presentation of leadership continued to have a very individualistic focus, and was assumed to be a neutral phenomenon. My scepticism was grounded in a growing critical poststructuralist stance that has sought to problematise canonical ways of organising theorising. Thus a question like ‘what *is* leadership?’ can be seen to presuppose that leadership exists as a truth that can be unproblematically represented by language, when the linguistic turn and particularly the work of Jacques Derrida has suggested that leadership *is*, only in so far as it is an impression of presence produced by an attempt to halt the flow of language.

This particular response to the research question suggested four aims. The first aim was to consider how the truth of leadership was organized linguistically in texts originating from Metropolitan Council. My four readings of the leadership texts suggested that the language of leadership spreads out in an uncontrollable play of signifiers that have no

relation to any originary signified. Leadership exists in so far it is an attempt to halt this flow, by distinguishing 'it' from what it is not in a field of difference. However, the attempt inevitably fails because language is always and already undecidable; meaning is constantly deferred. My second aim was to identify the particular leadership truth that was being promoted in the texts. My four readings suggested that leadership has been founded on exaggerated and positive associations of aspects of the post-Enlightenment ideal of individualism. My third aim was to consider why the truth of leadership was organized in this way, highlighting the role of power in the fabrication of leadership. I suggested that this particular truth effect reflects attempts to re-engage and intensify the effort of public sector workers, in pursuit of modernisation. My fourth aim was to problematise my own authorial position and the textuality of my analysis of leadership. In particular, I sought to produce greater alertness to the way in which I have been disciplined into making very particular linguistic decisions as a result of submitting myself to the normalizing gaze of the academy. The reflexive strategy I adopted was to deconstruct the assessment criteria for the PhD and use the issues that arose from this to retrospectively highlight the linguistic strategies deployed in this thesis.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study is offered to scholars of leadership and organisation as an example of how the linguistic turn, and in particular the work of Jacques Derrida has foregrounded the way in which language is the principal site for producing what we assume are pre-given 'truths', and prompts the study of the surface effects which result from our attempts to fix the extraordinary and unstoppable flow of language.

For those already convinced of the efficacy and analytical promise of taking the linguistic turn, this study makes its contribution by showing the benefits and potential of Derrida's work in particular. While certainly less popular in the field of organisation studies than his contemporary Foucault for example, the power of Derrida's work in proposing that language 'does not co-operate with any model which seeks to stabilise it, reduce it, or close down its infinite complexity' (Currie 1998, p. 45) is certainly evident

in this study. He alerts us to a way of conducting a form of rigorous analysis that is intimately involved with the language and logic of a text so as to draw attention to the relationship between signifiers that announces the possibility and impossibility of decidability.

This has particular relevance to the study of leadership. While the contributions to knowledge that arise from this study should not of course be regarded as constituting universal truths about what leadership *is*, I do suggest that its sceptical approach to the institutionally prescribed language of leadership has significance for academics who have an interest in raising doubts about the inevitability of leadership, and its ubiquity in the public sector modernisation agenda. Moreover while Deetz (2003) has observed that the linguistic turn has become taken for granted and superficially understood, seeing leadership, after Derrida, as a volatile fabrication certainly 'reclaims' its 'legacy'. This thesis does not ignore dualisms to offer an account of the essence of leadership, neither is it celebrating dualism or attempting to reconcile dualism in the spirit of pluralism. Nor is it prescribing an alternative dualism informed by some preferred ideological affiliation. Rather, by exposing and disrupting conventional linguistic decisions, this work is opening up the possibility that leadership may be otherwise; it is an ethical place that retains an openness to the other for responsible decision.

There have been a significant number of poststructuralist studies of power 'in' organisation. They have been heavily influenced by the work of Foucault, and so tend to focus on the complex web of power embedded discursive practices that both constrains and enables particular forms of subjectivity. I anticipate that this study will extend this literature through the specific attention it pays to the politics of representation and the violence inherent in the act of naming. As my readings have shown, signification involves an attempt to create an originary centre of meaning by establishing a hierarchical relationship between signifiers, a relationship that betrays an act of power.

Such a critical approach is also of relevance for studies of the public sector in the UK. While there is no attempt to generalize about this sector from this particular case, the study can be seen as adding a conspicuously radical perspective to mainstream debates about public sector reform, which have tended to focus on describing, measuring or prescribing strategies aimed at service improvement. This research offers a very critical analysis of the role of leadership in the current phase of reform, depicting it as a smoke and mirrors act to disguise work intensification. It also points to the failure built into a strategy based on strict control of an impossible identity.

This study also makes a contribution to the growing critical analysis of individualism. The mainstream leadership literature is noticeable for its unquestioning acceptance of individualistic representations of leadership, apart from concerns about the hyper-individualism associated with the dark side of transformational leadership. The growing critique of hyper-individualism in contemporary society more generally, has provided considerable insight into the negative consequences of the so called 'me' generation's search for ontological certainty in a globalised world, but have failed to problematise the very existence of a self-determining individual with a secure, or even insecure, identity at the centre of the universe. Poststructuralist studies signal the death of the subject, regarding it more radically as a temporary socio-historic-linguistic artifact. However, such studies of leadership have tended to either focus very broadly on individualism at a macro discursive level (Knights and Morgan 1992) or on identity work at a micro-level (Ford 2005). This study looks in detail at the way in which the presence of individualism is a surface effect, and how specific aspects of individualism have been annexed in order to reify leadership.

Finally, I suggest that the reflexive strategy adopted in this thesis may be of interest to academics who have engaged with the implications of the linguistic turn for their own practice: language turns theory back on itself. In acknowledging that the authorial voice is itself an effect of a linguistic process of inclusion and exclusions, then writing has much potential as a method of enquiry in challenging the taken for granted textual effects that produce the text itself. By deconstructing the assessment criteria for this

PhD thesis I have demonstrated how my claims to truth are rhetorical. But I have also taken this further, and attempted to be reflexive about being reflexive, recognizing the limits imposed on my reflexivity by the academy.

When considering the consequences of this research for practice, I am caught in the familiar 'cleft stick' of critical academics. As explained by Fournier and Grey (2000), should we take private pleasure in our critical academic practice or risk the appropriation of discursive resources for performative ends. Moreover, it is difficult to persuade policy makers and officers to see beyond the short term, the status quo and technical problem solving when caught up within the performative regime of the contemporary workplace. As Chia (1996, p. 48) explains, the 'vener of ready-made explanatory concepts...[such as leadership] serve only to gloss over and reduce complexity of our lived experiences.' Indeed, such are the demands placed upon public sector workers, it is not surprising that 'notions of leadership...are invoked as a kind of magic spell: no one really knows what it is, but they are sure that it is the answer' (Grey 2003, p. 14).

This would suggest an urgent need for more critically orientated studies such as this to provide a means for reflecting on 'how we have become what we are today, which both reveals the limits of what we are and raises the possibility of being otherwise than what we are' (Chan, 2000, p. 1059). Thus, the study will be of relevance to policy makers who are caught up, unquestioningly, in promoting leadership as a good thing, and sustainable leaders themselves who may seek to understand and articulate their own discomfort with the language of leadership within which they are implicated. Indeed, there was evidence, amongst the putative leaders on the Sustainable Leadership Programme at least, of a willingness to eschew the quick fixes of faddism and managerialism and to explore a more 'proximal' way of thinking that was more tolerant of the indeterminate and unfinished (Cooper and Law, 1995).

CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE RESEARCH

The poststructuralist approach adopted by this thesis embraces the radical premise that ontology is an issue of epistemology; it is language that organises undifferentiated experience and produces the objects of which it speaks, in ways that are infused with power. The work of Jacques Derrida has made a significant contribution towards understanding the operation and potential of the linguistic turn. As discussed in chapter four, many have argued for the contribution of his work for organisation studies, and as discussed in chapter five there have been a number of ‘applications’ of his work in order to challenge taken for granted assumptions of various sorts. However, as outlined in chapter five, the lack of point of view in poststructuralism in general, and Derrida’s work in particular, linked with the apparent inability to ‘make a difference’, is an on-going problem for critical management studies. Nevertheless, I suggest that these problems are exactly the virtues of this approach.

Norris (1991) describes Derrida as an ‘arch debunker, a latter-day sophist or wily rhetorician whose special gift is to dance rings around those earnest seekers-after-truth’ (p. 149). But, this seeming irreverence belies a very ‘philosophical’ approach in the sense that, while his style of argument may appear unusual, he is nevertheless problematising knowledge and querying our grounds for truth and ethics. I suggest that it is only the relentlessness with which he questions that appears to indicate relativism. As Seidman (1998, p. 224) explains, Derrida’s work can be seen as a revolt against authority ‘*any authority*’, including his own call to question. He takes questioning back a stage further, exploring the conditions of possibility for any claim to truth. Indeed, he suggests that the University should be,

...the place in which nothing is beyond question, not even the current and determined figure of democracy, and not even the traditional idea of critique, meaning theoretical critique, and not even the authority of the “question” form, of thinking as “questioning”. (Derrida 2001)

In this thesis I have challenged the authority of leadership in Metropolitan Council *and* the authority of my own authorial position. However, at the same time Derrida’s work is affirmative, as he says himself, ‘I love very much everything I deconstruct in my own manner...my relation to these texts is characterized by loving jealousy and not at all by

nihilistic fury' (Derrida 1985b, p. 87). In turn, this thesis does not aim to 'destruct' leadership, but to nurture scepticism, to question what may have been placed beyond question, such as the role of leadership in local government modernisation.

With respect to the charge of lack of praxis, Derrida's work cannot be seen as emancipatory in the modernist sense of providing a totalising answer in the shape of a brave new world, rather by challenging the given and unsettling the inevitable it is a form of emancipation that defies ontological settlement. With no politics of deconstruction in the conventional sense, the political potential of Derrida's work arises from confrontation with the undecidable nature of language (Jones, 2003), and an ethical responsibility towards the in-breaking of the other. Thus, without needing a viewpoint, 'deconstruction is justice' (Derrida 1992b, p. 35).

A common criticism of Derrida's work is the way in which deconstruction appears method-less. However, as suggested in chapter five, the difficulty caused by having to describe Derrida's strategy of close reading, concerns the way in which this would 'fix' what is a unique response to each text. Moreover, the application of a method in the traditional sense would rely on a pre-programmed method that precludes taking responsibility for the act of reading. My readings fostered an intense intimacy with the texts. Working from within them, I was able to follow the structurality of each different structure, and alert to moments of self-contradiction, ambiguity, and blind spots where the text involuntarily betrayed the limits of its act of closure.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The ending of this thesis with talk of the future is significant for a piece of work inspired by Derrida. Being true to the supplementary nature of meaning, any text is always and already incomplete and contingent. It is in this spirit that this thesis could be regarded as having no beginning and no end, but is itself part of a spreading network of incalculable precedents and implications. However, I shall suggest some specific issues that may supplement this thesis.

First, in the spirit that I have troubled leadership, so we must wake other, taken for granted concepts and fashionable buzzwords within the field of organisation studies, from their 'dogmatic slumber' (Critchley 1992, p. 253). For example, the strategy of close reading adopted in this study has arresting potential for nurturing scepticism about the popular practice of 'coaching', frequently used to develop leaders. While taken for granted as a relationship of equals whereby individuals are supported to solve their own problems, there has been little critical consideration of the relations of power in its linguistic constitution.

Second, this thesis provided a detailed analysis of the appropriation of aspects of individualism in the linguistic production of leadership. Following Willmott (1998a) and McInnes and Beech (2005), I suggest that this offers the opportunity for further research that might explore the consequences of post-individualism for as Derrida reminds us, 'the individual is not the mandatory or only way of organising 'infinite'' (Derrida 1996c, p. 86). Intriguingly, this would suggest the end of leadership, as we know it. I sympathise with O'Doherty's (2007, p. 106) observation that, 'it is almost impossible to think that 'the individual' might not exist', but it is necessary to remember that it is an arbitrary linguistic category, of recent invention. Derrida's work would be useful to help unfix the linguistic hierarchy that is drawn between signifiers such as 'I' and 'you', and 'self and 'other', in an attempt to affirm the individual. Moreover, his work also encourages a lesser, ethical violence through greater openness to these others.

Third, Derrida's work has implications for what might be described as a more ethical academic practice, and a re-energising of what it means to be a critical academic. The undecidability that resides at the heart of human experience means that attempts to achieve stability are inevitable and necessary, but it is incumbent upon us as academics to be vigilant as to the violence performed in our own closures. It was in this spirit that this thesis reflexively examined the tools by which it was produced. I suggest that there is potential for a similar strategy being used to 'trouble' the conventions underpinning other academic practices, such as journal articles, conferences, and indeed teaching, to ensure that our own linguistic 'decisions' perform a lesser violence as a result of being

un-programmed and responsible to the Other. Moreover, while deconstruction enables us to recognize our vulnerability to the limits imposed by division, these limits also enable us to act in violation of those norms. In this way, I may also gain the courage to come out of the shadows of academic convention and write otherwise.

Fourth, it is important to remember that local government officers are at the heart of this study, being both producers of and produced by the language of leadership. It is thus important to move away from any sense that Derrida's deconstructive practice is simply self-indulgent word play. Rather there is a role for future research in finding a means for asking local government 'leaders' to think about the limits that have been imposed on the form of knowledge that is leadership. This is not to suggest that they have an inner essence that can learn to resist language, but that a difference may be made through the cultivation of 'critical language awareness'. Recalling that a leadership development programme was a catalyst for this study, I suggest that management education has potential for exploring the way in which experience of work is labeled (and re-labeled) in ways that ignore the arbitrariness of the relationship between signifier and signified, and for considering the power that inheres in particular con-textual incisions, along with the possibility of living with the undecidability or aporia consequent on the way in which signifiers point to other signifiers in a never-ending chain.

APPENDIX: THE CRITERIA FOR THE AWARD OF PhD

‘Whether the discourse and texts that came into our purview had coherence and structure prior to our intervention in assembling them in this form is a moot point. But clearly what this project does do is impose a structure, an organization on those things. We have extracted and worked up an order out of something that, for us at least, was formless before. We have called into being an order, we have constituted a sequence and a set of differentiations, we have introduced linearity, spacings, integrations – all the features of organizing and organization...we are inscribing a space, we are interpolating an organization on something.’ (Westwood and Linstead 2001:5-6)

INTRODUCTION

This Appendix arises from a reflection on the need to problematise my own authorial position and the textuality of my analysis, that formed part of a discussion of methodological issues arising from the linguistic turn, included in chapter five. This addition to the thesis is a reflexive acknowledgement that my aspiration to join the academy has led to my voluntary submission to its discipline. I therefore present a close reading of the criteria for the award of PhD at Metropolitan University in order to make transparent the nature of the violence that has informed the textual decisions that have staged the truth of this PhD.

This Appendix is structured in three parts. The first section provides a conventional reading of *what* the criteria means, followed by an exploration of *how* the text means, focusing on the structurality of the structure of the text in which the criteria are produced. The conventional reading of the criteria suggests that they present an unproblematic account of the conduct and assessment of research as a rational and neutral process. However, the deconstructive reading suggests that while reason is privileged in the pursuit of truth, the PhD criteria text is haunted by images of the emotional. I illustrate the way in which my review of the leadership literature, as a representative chapter, struggles with these self-imposed boundaries. I conclude by reflecting on the way in which the PhD criteria can be read as an exercise in power that affirms the elite status of the academy as a profession.

A CONVENTIONAL READING

The criteria for the award of PhD (included at the end of this Appendix) are listed under point 1 of the University's regulations for higher degrees. The overarching concern is that a period of study and research has resulted in what may be judged to be 'an original contribution to learning'. Five subsections of point 1.1 amplify different aspects of the evidence required to make the judgment. This includes reiteration that the knowledge must be 'new', as well as being substantial and related to existing knowledge. The candidate must have conscientiously followed a systematic process of investigation, from conceptualisation through design to completion. The results generated must have been duly interpreted and used to advance their particular disciplinary area and/or applied to practice. Such requirements are taken for granted as a fundamental *raison d'être* of the academic profession and remain substantially the same in criteria for other formal academic publications, such as journals and conferences.

CONSTRUCTING THE 'CRITERIA' TEXT

A close reading of the PhD criteria suggests that their 'truth' is achieved by privileging reason over the emotional, spiritual or physical. As discussed in chapters two and eight of this thesis, reason is celebrated as a superior intellectual faculty, founded on the principle of objective and logical calculation. It is thought to form the basis of effective decision making for the maintenance of order as well as systematic scientific enquiry that may lead to new knowledge and hence progress. Thus the mind is privileged over the body, and thereby the physical and emotional, as well as any other irrational precept such as faith or superstition.

The privileging of reason is evident in the text in the way that research is depicted as an intellectual endeavor. For example, when listing the stages in the research process the term 'conceptualise' is used to describe the first stage of overall idea or concept formation. Concept is a term used to describe 'something conceived in the mind; a thought or notion' (Penguin English Dictionary 2003). Similarly, the second, 'design' stage is defined as 'to conceive and plan (something) out in the mind' (Penguin English

Dictionary 2003). The outcome of research is described as ‘knowledge’ and ‘learning’. Taken together they refer to the information or facts that have been gained about a subject as a result of a process of study or ‘application of the mind’. Moreover, the new knowledge requires ‘interpretation’ and ‘understanding’, suggesting that the explanation of the meaning of something may lead to the significance of that thing being grasped or comprehended by the intellect.

Reasoning is assumed to be an orderly process, sanitised of emotion or sentiment. Academic ‘enquiry’ (1.1.5) suggests a close and detailed examination of something in the search for truth. By depicting this as a ‘project’ (1.1.4) the size or complexity of the undertaking is emphasised which necessitates that it be organised according to a carefully devised overarching strategy. The ‘systematic’ (1.1.2) nature of the project means that it is organised using a methodical set of steps, which are indeed itemised in section 1.1.4 as involving an initial idea or ‘concept’, and skilled identification or ‘design’ of the elements in a plan that will realise the research goal. Following such careful preparation, the plan is then ‘implemented’ according to these specified requirements, with ‘adjustments’ undertaken to accommodate unforeseen circumstances or to correct any deviance, in effect realigning or rebalancing the components of the plan to maintain equilibrium. The execution of the plan involves the use of suitable research ‘techniques’, precise, specialized and objective methods for arriving at the truth. Ultimately, the process comes to its natural and proper end, with ‘completion’ signaled by the production of a causal effect, namely concrete ‘results’. Indeed, so effective is this process that the outcome is ‘new’ knowledge that advances understanding in the discipline.

By explicitly promoting the positive connotations of the formal, logical, linear, technical and finite, implicitly any thing that does not demonstrate these qualities cannot be considered *good* research. Thus, any superficial and random play of ad hoc ideas would be considered confused, haphazard and lacking in rigour. Spontaneous improvisation that lacks any predetermined purpose would be regarded as careless disorder. Serendipitous opportunities would be feared as haphazard and uncontrollable chaos.

Pauses and the passionate pursuit of tangential ideas would be seen as an indulgent and erratic lack of progress. The continuous play of ideas with no discernable beginning or end regarded as frustratingly incomplete and thus imperfect. Thus the criteria privileges specialised knowledge and technical competence derived from extensive study, diligence, and excellence at meeting peer norms. In contrast, someone would be classed as unprofessional, or an amateur if they possessed only a very general knowledge after limited or indeed no formal study. They would be considered to show an incompetence, indifference or laziness as a PhD candidate and thereby fail to meet the norms for quality established by the academic profession.

New knowledge is a particularly virtuous outcome of rationally conducted research. The word 'new' is mentioned eight times in a 209-word section of the PhD regulations, discounting any of its synonyms. 'Newness' can suggest the recency of the particular piece of research coming into being (successfully examined PhDs are typically in the public domain within three months of their submission) as well as the freshness of something that has never been engaged with before, something novel or innovative, and indeed that it has a contemporary edge. These very connotations are reinforced in this text by use of the supplementary terms 'original', 'forefront' and 'advanced'. The first term suggests that the knowledge is pioneering and unprecedented, a foundational source from which subsequent developments may arise. It would be unacceptable to represent 'old' knowledge that was out of date, and had been superseded. The term also associated with the requirement that the knowledge be authentic; it would be even more unacceptable to knowingly present knowledge that was counterfeit or plagiarised. 'Forefront' suggests that the knowledge be at an important cutting edge, while 'advanced' suggests that the knowledge is ahead of its time, more highly developed and thus of a higher and more elite level. There is an incremental linearity akin to the post-Enlightenment preoccupation with progress.

By depicting research as a purely mental activity, the academic becomes someone who possesses a heightened capacity to intellectualise, and the process of *judging* a PhD submission becomes a particularly distinctive cerebral activity. The criteria state

explicitly that the examiners must 'bear in mind' (1.4) various issues when assessing what is 'reasonable' for a candidate to achieve. 'Reviewing' is the act of close inspection or examination and involves the deduction of the merits of research after the objective assessment of the 'evidence' with respect to the criteria. Notably, these examiners are 'peers' or equal in status, suggesting that the process is even-handed and egalitarian.

SHAKING THE TEXT

However, as Derrida frequently illustrates, any such pretence of an originary order such as this is illusory. There are fault lines in the text, where it betrays the attempt to hide its dependency on the marginalised term to achieve its meaning; the marginal returns to destabilise the centre. So, while the ultimate consequence of privileging the rational is the depiction of research as a highly regularised process based on a mechanical linear causality, with the academic becoming a cold engineer of knowledge, the chaotic and emotional nature of inquiry and the egotistical nature of judgment constantly threaten to undermine it.

Research

First, disorder haunts the text. For example, judgment is based upon the extent to which a period of study 'constitutes' an original contribution to learning. The term 'constitute' is said of a group of things that together compose something such that in their togetherness they now amount to, establish or set up something (Penguin English Dictionary 2003). This implies that the constituent parts of a study may be quite disparate when taken in isolation, and signals the artificiality of the order that must be imposed retrospectively to fabricate the entity that is a PhD. Another example of the underlying disorder is found in the statement that the judgment must be 'reasonable' (1.3). While the term refers to the mental ability to apply logic in arriving at a judgment, and that a candidate's effort must sensibly reflect their output, it also acknowledges very real possibility of that which is not reasonable, thus excess in many forms is a threat that must be curbed. Furthermore, the PhD criteria do not display the logic they profess:

there is considerable repetition and a confused logic to the sequence of stages. Arguably, 1.1.2 ‘understanding of existing knowledge’ should come before 1.1.1 ‘creation of new knowledge’. Moreover 1.1.1 is an overall expectation while 1.1.4 and indeed 1.1.5 are detailing the means of achieving that expectation, rather than being comparable aims.

Secondly, emotion seeps into the criteria. The only overt references to the style of behaviour expected of a researcher are ‘diligence’ and ‘capability’. While describing an apparently non-emotional approach – a quiet and steady persistence – diligence can also manifest itself as charged with feeling, a literally pains-taking zealotry. Similarly, ‘capability’ refers to possession of the required attributes to perform, as well as an inclination, the latter being a particularly non-rational urge or fancy. The ability to ‘adjust the [research] design in the light of unforeseen problems’ is mechanical corrective depiction that occludes the stressful and emotional dilemmas that confront the researcher. Similarly, while ‘success’ denotes the achievement of a desired object or end or the favourable outcome to an undertaking, there is also an implicit affective dimension; the feelings of satisfaction and happiness induced by triumph and possible fame is written out of the criteria. The criteria suggest that peer reviewers need to be ‘satisfied’ with the thesis submitted. While used to suggest that a requirement has been met or complied with, the term can also be used to describe the ‘fulfilling [of] a need, expectation, or desire’ or more potently the giving of ‘pleasure and contentment’ (Penguin English Dictionary 2003). Finally, while research is described as a rational process, the ability of the researcher to ‘create’, ‘generate’ and ‘interpret’ new knowledge is at odds with causally ‘acquiring’ and intellectually ‘understanding’. The latter are part of a logical scientific process of deduction, correlation and mental verification, while the former suggest an almost supernatural ability to bring something into existence and the possession of divine insight into a God-given truth.

The Academy

A profession is ‘an occupation requiring specialised knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation’ prescribed by the profession, while a professional is

someone 'characterised as conforming to the technical or ethical standards of a profession' (Penguin English Dictionary 2003). Such a self-defining and self-regulating association must resort to a variety of strategies to affirm its authority and reputation. In the PhD criteria we see a variety of legitimation manoeuvres in operation.

Section 1 of the criteria twice specifies that a period of 'further study and research' is required in order for researchers to become proficient in their specialised disciplinary area. Students must officially 'register' on a formal 'programme', a pre-determined and systematically planned curriculum or syllabus. The gravitas of the academy is further established by frequent reference to the 'general' and 'substantial' 'body of knowledge' upon which it is founded. The use of the word 'body' suggests the collected entirety of something that is of central importance and sizeable. 'Substantial' suggests that something has considerable or ample proportions, and thereby underlines its concreteness or solidity still further. Therefore, with respect to research, the text is seeking to establish the material reality of the academy, and in particular its strength, size and hence importance. The criteria specifies that a PhD thesis should itself have appropriate 'scope', a term which invokes the issue of range, breadth or area covered by an activity. It must also 'relate' to or make a pertinent connection with the discipline so as to additively enlarge or 'extend' the substance of the academy even further.

This need to link with what has gone before suggests that the academy is a very conservative body. For while the text appears to valorize new knowledge, that knowledge cannot be too obscure or marginal and thus not fit: it must be predictable. The 'general' dominates the text, a term which is defined as 'of, involving, or applicable to very member of class or kind' (Penguin English Dictionary 2003) and suggests a preference for the majority and the universal over the particular and unique.

The gate-keeping function of the PhD dominates the text. For example, it is observed that the degree of PhD 'may be awarded by the University in recognition of the successful completion...' 'May' is a word that suggests only the *possibility* of permission being granted, while to 'award' suggests something being conferred, decreed

or bestowed in a very official manner. 'Recognition' suggests the formal admission of someone as being of particular status or validity, and being 'successful' implies that someone has gained wealth, fame, professional or social standing. Thus, in one short section the academy is established as being very powerful, formally granting or withholding highly valued membership status.

Conformity to its standards is fundamental. For example, point 1.3 specifies that PhD students must be 'capable and diligent', demanding a significant self-discipline in order to meet the exacting demands of the academy. The use of the noun 'discipline' in the text to refer to a field of study reflects its origins in the Latin verb *disciplines* to learn, the noun *disciplina* for instruction or knowledge and *disciplulus* for learner, later emerging as disciple from the Old French *decipile*. However, there has been a gradual development of meaning, such that discipline has come to suggest the maintenance of order necessary for giving instruction. Hence discipline has come to mean either the self-control or the control used by others, for ensuring compliance or obedience. I suggest that this serves as an apposite metaphor for the PhD: a means for disciplining aspiring academics into the form of conduct required for admission into the academic profession. For example, section 1.3 mentions that the thesis is 'submitted', a very common term used to describe work being presented or tendered for publication. While the term implies that the merits of the work will be judged or inspected, it can also suggest submissiveness; someone is knowingly yielding to the authority or will of another.

Perhaps the most telling use of language is that the PhD must make a 'contribution' to the discipline. The term that evokes the notion of selfless gift-giving, reinforcing the principles of openness and equity upon which knowledge is apparently shared in the academic profession. However, contribution can also refer to a levy or subscription paid to acquire membership, perhaps suggesting that the thesis represents a metaphorical payment for admission to the elite academic club.

TEXTUAL DECISIONS MADE IN THIS THESIS

This thesis represents an attempt to conform to the textual decisions preferred by the academy, with any occasional transgressions of the prescribed boundaries of academic writing remaining firmly within the limits of acceptability. I will focus on the chapter that reviewed the leadership literature to provide a few illustrations of the linguistic strategies deployed to structure a truth that would meet the approval of the academy.

The chapter looks very conventional, immediately suggesting that this is a serious intellectual endeavor. Black print appears in neat, 1.5 spaced lines on pristine white paper. There are no illustrations, use of colour or elaborate type. The layout of the text is block justified, suggesting that the content is solid in both appearance and substance.

Indeed, while claiming to be challenging assumptions about the textual act of closure inherent in the research question ‘what *is* leadership?’, the chapter announces logic and order from the very first paragraph. The classic device of reviewing the chapter to come in the introductory paragraphs, suggests a neat linear progression from uncertainty towards resolution and closure. Classic conjunctions are used throughout to suggest the logical unfolding of my argument to its reasoned conclusions. For example, ‘however’ is used 22 times, ‘moreover’ 12 times, ‘rather’ 11 times, ‘thus’ 14 times, and ‘while’ 25 times in this chapter alone. This thesis bears all the hallmarks of a static writing model that teaches us ‘not to write until I knew what I wanted to say, until my points are well organized and outlined’ (Richardson 1994, p. 517).

However, it is also a case of the ‘temporal re-ordering...of a messy and contingent process’ (Gill 1998, p.24). I have made ‘hygienic’ the disorderly and erratic nature of research. The thesis was actually the site of endless cutting, pasting, redrafting and deleting as I advanced, retreated and regrouped my words. It was characterised by irrelevant ramblings, indecipherable musings and ‘writers block’. It involved the enthusiastic and impulsive pursuit of tangents, idleness and panic. Significantly, the indecision and anxiety that accompanied the study is ‘written out’ of the main thesis and contained in a ‘supplementary’ research diary. As described in chapter four, Derrida

observed that a supplement usually refers to an inessential addition to an already complete entity, but precisely because something has been added it points to a lack in the original. The diary purges the thesis of the inevitable, but unsuitable, chaos associated with the research process.

There is no descriptive language in this thesis, no ‘suggestive’ or ‘pungent’ words that are ‘evocative and redolent of what they are describing’ (Grey and Sinclair 2006, p. 452), rather, despite promoting an anti-positivist methodology that rejects the technical and abstract, this chapter is littered with the jargon associated with poststructuralism. I use specialised and esoteric terms such as ‘reflexivity’, ‘discourse’ ‘signification’ and ‘the death of the subject’, and I also distinguish between the numerous varieties of leadership by referring to each by their ‘proper’ name. These words are carefully chosen in order to ‘flex my theoretical muscles’ (Grey and Sinclair 2006, p. 447) and prove that I am no amateur before the academy. As Bohm *et al* (2001, p. 2) assert, ‘none of your low price, inferior academic thinking here. This is critical designer thinking, guaranteed to impress.’ However, my purported precision cannot pin down the multiplicity of meanings that inhabit these signs. As Parker (2001, p. 40) explains,

dictionaries are always useful places to begin spinning words, because they remind you that (even as they define and redefine meaning with their curious precise shorthand) the meanings never end in the entry of entries. The final definition is never available in the dictionary.

Since the chapter is fundamentally concerned with reviewing the literature on ‘leadership’ it necessarily involves significant citation of a relevant ‘body of knowledge’. However, at a very fundamental level, by ‘referring’ to them, I am actually confirming these ‘truths’ as a reality. It can also be seen as another bid to demonstrate my suitability to join the academic community through my mastery of the technicalities of referencing. Later in the thesis, I attempt to secure a space for myself within the ‘body’. The PhD criteria requires that research should ‘relate’ to other work, and the dictionary suggests that this involves ‘showing a causal connection between two or more things’ or identifying ‘an aspect of resemblance that connects two or more things that enables them to be considered together in a meaningful way’ (Penguin English

Dictionary 2003). Ironically, my contribution to the body of knowledge is thus achieved through a structure of similarities and differences between my work and others, which in turn was based on a crisscrossing of references by the authors I had cited, as they attempted to delimit their own place in relation to the body of knowledge. This is precisely how Derrida (1981a) describes ‘writing’,

...no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each ‘element’...being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the text produced only in the transformation of another text’ (Derrida 1981a, p. 26).

In effect all academics are helplessly cast across an endless play of supplements. There is this no final new knowledge only a textile of differences.

CONCLUSION

This Appendix addressed the fourth aim of this thesis, which was to problematise my own authorial position, and the textuality of my analysis of ‘leadership’. It demonstrated a reflexive awareness of my complicity in the violence inherent in the textual decisions that are deemed by the academy to produce the truth of a PhD. I offered a close reading of the PhD assessment criteria which suggested the account of what constitutes academic success privileged research as a rational and orderly endeavor that involves the deployment of precise and specialised techniques, and leads to finite outcomes. In turn, the emotional and chaotic are marginalised as excessive and careless, improvisation is feared as being uncontrollable, and lack of closure is regarded as a threat to academic integrity. This appeal to reason may be seen as an attempt to secure the formal substance of academia as a profession, and which has a disciplinary effect on all academics that wish to secure professional status. As Taylor and Saarensen (1994) suggest, ‘on the assembly line of knowledge, the intellectual produces print, which, in turn, produces the intellectual’.

However, ‘pulling at the text’ suggests that the attempt to downplay the affective and haphazard fails. As the quote at the beginning of the appendix suggests, rather than being a cold engineer of knowledge the academic is the passionate weaver of fiction.

This PhD thesis is 'significant' in that it is a site of signifying work, a 'textile' of shifting displacements and arrangements of signifiers. The 'secret' of the text is dispersed across the ceaseless and infinite play of meaning.

1. Criteria for the award

1.1 The degree of PhD/MD/MCh may be awarded by the University in recognition of the successful completion of a programme of further study and research, the results of which are judged to constitute an original contribution to learning and to give evidence of:

1.1.1 the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline and merit publication;

1.1.2 a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice;

1.1.3 an ability to relate the results of such study to the general body of knowledge in the discipline;

1.1.4 the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems;

1.1.5 a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

1.2 In respect of the award of MD or MCh, the results of the study and research shall be judged to constitute an original contribution to medical or surgical knowledge, and shall afford evidence of originality either by the discovery of new facts or by the exercise of independent critical power. The candidate shall indicate in what respects the thesis appears to advance clinical knowledge and/or practice.

1.3 In judging the merit of a thesis submitted in candidature for the degree of PhD/MD/MCh, the examiners shall bear in mind the standard and scope of work which it is reasonable to expect a capable and diligent student to present after the period of registered full-time or part-time study.

1.4 The degree of PhD/MD/MCh may not be conferred *honoris causa* under these regulations.

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