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Narrating the future: A distentive capability approach to strategic foresight

Abstract

Strategic foresight encompasses thinking and organizing differently within the contingencies of the present in ways that is mindful of the unpredictable future. Building on the Ricoeurian notion of *distentio-* 'the stretching of consciousness through simultaneous attention to memory and expectation', we develop the concept of *distentive capability* as a spatio-temporal process of 'way-finding' that sustains the creative emergence of strategic foresight across multiple time horizons. Emphasizing narratives as the site of strategic foresight, we draw on tropes taken from three of the most popular speeches delivered by Steve Jobs, the American information technology entrepreneur, inventor and founder of Apple Inc. to illustrate how distentive capability as played out in the reassembling of the past, the present and the future, stretched out in time, may contribute to the identification of potentialities and limits for strategic action. Implication for the theory and practice of strategic foresight are presented.

Keywords: Distentive capability, attention, expectation, memory, strategic foresight, Ricoeurian narratives, Steve Jobs,

Introduction

There is a growing awareness of the crucial role of strategic foresight in contemporary organizing. Researchers who study foresight have therefore offered insight into the historical, institutional, and intellectual context within which foresight shapes human action in complex and often fast changing environments (Son, 2015; Gary, 2008; Slaughter, 1998). Nevertheless, there is no consensus among scholars on the locus dimensionality in attributing the source or level of foresight in practice. Some leading explanations give ontological priority to trans-individual actions of inventors, entrepreneurs, and industry captains. These studies have offered insight into how foresight as an elementary feature of the 'competent business mind' (Tsoukas and Shepherd, 2004), empower some executives to

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transgress established boundaries to grab opportunities otherwise overlooked by their peers (Chia, 2008; Nayak, 2008; Gabriel, 1995). On the other hand, a growing number of scholars argue that foresight is a collective sense-making process hence should be theorised as a distributed capability (Darkow, 2015; Bootz, 2010; Eriksson and Weber, 2008). Studies in this area have also shown that the actions and doings of 'ordinary' individuals and groups located further down societal and organizational hierarchies potentially induce (or impede), the emergence of strategic foresight in organizing (Sarpong and Maclean, 2013; 2016; Cunha et al., 2006).

Despite the emerging tribes and often competing perspectives on the locus of strategic foresight, existing studies exploring how elite corporate actors engage the future shares a common focus on emphasizing narratives as a salient site for the creative emergence strategic foresight (See for e.g. Milojevic and Inyatullah, 2015; Weigand *et al*, 2014). In addition, they typically recognize and treat time as an important element in theorizing and articulating the dominant logics of foresight. In this regard, time/temporality is understood as a space of experience and defines the horizon of expectation within the contingencies of organizing (Pickering, 2004; Koselleck, 1997). Elsewhere, while Hassard et al. (2008) proposes two visions of time: one cyclical, and the other linear, that reflects human constructions including culture. However, most foresight scholars in articulating the temporal dimension of foresight tend to focus exclusively on the past, present, or the future. Thus, we observe that the past, present, and the future are often conceptualised as autonomous and independent of one another as a result of their distinctive interpretations of reality. This separation of times, we argue, does not only grasp the temporal emergence of strategic foresight. In the words of Cunha (2004: 136), they fail to consider foresight as an 'instantiation of temporal reflexivity' as a result of their divergence and separation. Excessive emphasis on the past he argues, restrict the ability to spot subtle changes in the present, while over-emphasis on the present frequently also lead to lost opportunities to learn from the past. We add that over-focusing on the future could also impede understanding of the present.

Prioritizing narratives as the site for the emergence of strategic foresight, we build on the Ricoeurian notion *of distention*, to propose that the stretching of consciousness through simultaneous attention to memory and expectation could help us overcome the problem of over-focussing on the past, present, or the future in developing strategic foresight. Following Tsoukas and Shepherd (2004), we refer to this competence as 'distentive capability' and explicate how it may extend our understanding of the creative emergence of strategic foresight in practice. A highly developed distentive capability, we therefore argue is a background skill of 'coping' that maintain a commitment to narratives and thinking in time-streams to identify, explore and exploit potentialities, and limits within the contingency of organizing. Our call for a distentive capability approach to foresight is based on the premise that we risk impoverished theorizing on strategic foresight if we do not emphasize interactions between multiple time horizons to challenge our mind-sets when attempting to invent the future.

Our study therefore contribute to the existing literature, in particular, the foresight as 'trans-individual-competence' paradigm by expanding strategic foresight research beyond its predominantly exclusive focus on the past, present, or future-oriented actions of 'foresightful' leaders and industry captains. In doing this, we provide a new foundation for a more coherent literature that shows how the weaving together of the past, present, and future may sustain the creative emergence of strategic foresight across multiple time horizons. In developing our contribution we draw on tropes taken from three popular speeches delivered by Steve Jobs, the American information technology entrepreneur, inventor and founder of Apple Inc. to illustrate how distentive capability as played out in the reassembling of the past, the present and the future, stretched out in time, contributed to the identification of potentialities and limits for the strategic actions undertaken by Jobs at Apple.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we delineate narratives as the site of strategic foresight to chart our Ricoeurian approach to strategic foresight. Second, we present our distentive capability framework, its dimensions, and how it may come into representation. Third, is a

methodological note and summaries of the three popular speeches delivered by Steve Jobs between the year 1997 and 2011. Fourth, we present the fine details of our analysis after which we present some implication of our study for the theory and practice of strategic foresight in practice.

Narratives as the site of strategic foresight

A narrative in simple terms refers to spoken or written account of connected events. Informing cognition, social practices, and cohering mundane modes of storytelling, Polkinghorne (1988: 18) defines a narrative as:

> A meaning structure that organizes events and human actions into a whole, thereby attributing significance to individual actions and events according to their effect on the whole.

Narratives are therefore mimetic in character as they have the potential to create representations of events and assign meaning (Sandberg and Ugelvik, 2016). As a useful conceptual vehicle for understanding the world, individuals, organizations, states and civilizations have constantly placed the world into narrative form which serves as templates for their future actions (Cobley, 2014). Concurrently prioritising the past, present and the future, narratives facilitates mental time traveling in ways that enable 'humans to mentally project themselves backwards in time to re-live, or forwards to pre-live events' (Suddendorf and Corballis, 2007: 299). From this perspective, Cunha (2004) argues that narratives make us experience time travels through multiple time horizons which allows us to probe and invent their future. This connectionism allows patterns of activation and consciousness among basic units to transpire, which in turn, allows for the encoding of complex patterns, invention of possible futures and the development of ethical frameworks for action. This same temporal dimension is that which enables us to go back in time, foresee plans, and shape specific future (Horn and Steele, 2010; Suddendorf and Corballis, 2007). In this broadest sense, narratives as the site of strategic foresight enable us to visit our futures and by remembering these visits, and contributes in important was to extending our understanding and shaping the future (Schwarz, 2015).

Emphasizing narratives as the site for strategic foresight, Jarva (2014) observes that narratives in the form of scenarios help bridge the epistemic gaps between images of the future and action. As a tool for shaping futures heuristic narratives are frequently employed to probe the future and navigate fleeting business environments in corporate intervention exercises such as scenario planning (Raven and Elahi, 2015; Durance and Godet, 2010). In this regard, Schoemaker (1995) argue that detailed and realistic narratives can direct our wandering attention to latent trends, wildcards, and weak signals that would have otherwise been ignored or glossed over. Less apparent, however, have been the way projected futures are frequently theorised as a force for the reproduction and transformation of the social. In particular, time is frequently treated as a constant rather than a variable (Das, 2004), or privileges future time. Emphasis on a single dimension of time stifles the potentiality of gaining 'communication across temporal and spatial distances' (Ermarth, 1998: 205), needed for foresight. This in turn does not only impede the cultivation of strategic foresight, it also tend to undermine futures prognosis by reducing "the future to post-hoc rationalizations of action abstracted from the human experience of time" (Mische, 2009: 696). Beyond acknowledging the temporal dimension of time and providing some useful corrective to these fundamental problems, we argue that progress can only be made when the multiple expressions of time takes centre stage in unpacking and articulating strategic foresight. We initiate our conceptual exploration by drawing on Paul Ricoeur's classic work on *time and narrative* to show how the temporal dimension of time may extend our understanding of narratives as a resource to unpacking strategic foresight in practice. Two main advantages of using Ricoeur's thesis could be seen for the purpose our thesis. First, consistent with our conceptualization of narratives as the site for strategic foresight, Ricoeur prioritised narrativity as the locus of 'the temporal character of human experience' and expectation (Rosengarten, 2013: 172), to examine the ever-present relations between experience, everyday life, social processes, and historical time. Second, in relying on Heideggerian existentialism to analyse temporality, Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of historical times' converges with Kosselleck's conception of 'temporalization of history' (Picardi, 2017), enabling the conceptual appropriation of horizon to bring together the three

major dimensions of historical times to account for the development of a reflective capacity for strategic action (Pickering, 2004). In the next section, we chart our Ricoeurian approach to strategic foresight in organizing.

Ricoeurian approach to strategic foresight

Ricoeur's theory of narrativity, identity and time was developed in his three volumes on *Time and Narrative* (1983-85 Eng tr1984-88). In this treatise, Paul Ricoeur argues that narrative and time are intrinsically linked. In advancing his thesis, he first examined the reciprocal relationship between narrativity and temporality and observed that language in narrativity comes into existence through the structure of temporality, and that it is this same narrativity that gives structure to temporality, seeing inseparability between the two. A plot, he argues is the junction where temporality and narratives meet and connects events into a story. Having dispensed with how narratives attain significance and temporality gives form to the functional unity of the past, present and the future, Ricoeur draws on the Augustinian notion of *Distentio* to develop a solution to the aporia of the measurement of time and the structural reciprocity between temporality and narrativity. 'Immanent in the action of the mind' (Ricoeur, 1984: 22), he argues that a dispersed and fragmented understanding of past and future emerges through simultaneous attention to memory and expectation. This Ricoeurian phenomenological time made up of the threefold present of memory, attention and expectation, also exists in three times, the present of past things, the present of future things and the present of present things in which a distention of time occurs (Kearney, 2005, p.145).

Figure 1.0 A Ricoeurian approach to strategic foresight
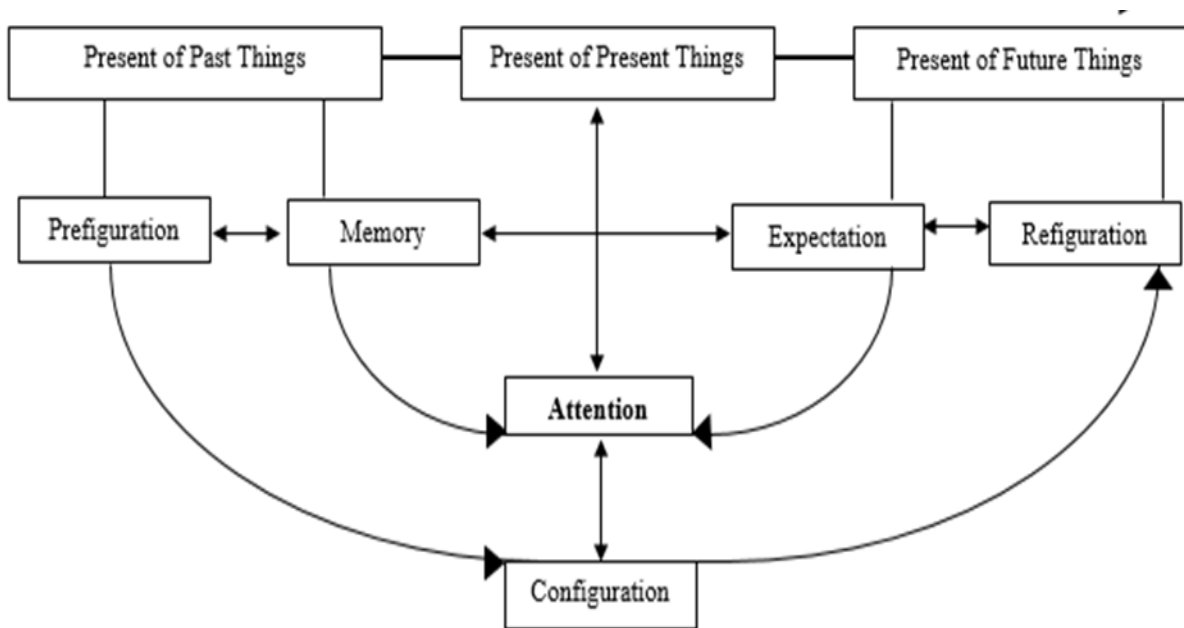
Ricoeur furthers his argument by introducing the notion of *mimesis*. This means when time is articulated through a narrative mode, time becomes human, in which the 'narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence' (Riceour, 1984, p.52). However, because 'narrative is mimetic of human action' (Simms, 2003, p.98), narrative, he argues can imitate life and life can imitate narrative, seeing the emergence of what can be described as a hermeneutic circle which elevates the understanding of life. Nevertheless, as narratives are subject to human time which anticipates the future through 'the retention of the past in memory' (Simms, 2003, p.98), Riceour (1984) put forward a three stage mimesis to ensure each stage makes sense. The three-fold mimesis: mimesis 1, mimesis 2 and mimesis 3, constitutes the mediation between time and narrative.

Mimesis 1 is *prefiguration*, 'the preunderstanding we have of what narratives consist of that we bring to a text when reading it' (Simms, 2003, p.98). Mimesis 2 is *configuration* or *emplotment*- 'the ordering of events and the establishing of causal and other relations between them' (Simms, 2003, p.98), and Mimesis3 is *refiguration*, when 'our understanding of the world is increased by the new

slant on it that the narrative has provided' (Simms, 2003, p.98). Narratives as a basis for sense-making addressed in mimesis 1, 2 and 3 allows for narrative to come into being through time, seeing prefiguration, configuration and refiguration to work in conjunction with memory, attention and expectation of present of past things, present of present things and present of future things. Therefore, it is the completion of narratives that brings structure to the distention of time, circle of mimesis, and simultaneous attention to memory expectation which then allows for a process of reflexivity to emerge (Simms, 2003; Ricoeur, 1984). Engagement with these temporal horizons as a form of 'distance experience' is what constitutes distentive capability. Through this process, "memory and expectation are engaged, they enlarge the consciousness of the present-knowhow is brought forward from the past and extrapolations to the future are made" (Tsoukas and Shepherd, 2004:11). In the next section, we chart our distentive capability approach to strategic foresight.

A distentive capability approach to strategic foresight

Narrative as the site for strategic foresight implies that we enact foresight whenever we attempt to narrate the future. In this regard, strategic foresight becomes a by-product of Industry Captains' thinking and organizing differently in the present, in ways that is mindful of the unpredictable future. Underscoring this conceptualization of foresight, therefore, is a commitment to the Ricoeurian time made up of the threefold present of memory, attention and expectation, which also exists in three times- the present of past things, the present of future things and the present of present things (Kearney, 2005; Cunha, 2004). Using the three-fold present of present of past things, present of present things and present of the future things as the basis of temporal distention, we argue that Industry Captains' who embrace and pay simultaneous attention to memory and expectation to 'enlarge the consciousness of the present' (Tsoukas and Shepherd, 2004: 11), are the ones most likely to bring future possibilities and limits of the future to life.

When our effort is instrumentally and rationally focussed on one dimension of time, say, the future, we miss the opportunities to probe both the past and sometimes the present adequately,

leading to the identification of simple futures and incoherent potentialities and limits. This practical experience of exercising temporal distention is what we follow Tsoukas and Shepherd (2004) to call *distentive capability*. Reflecting a kind of thinking that recognises and embraces perceptual sensitivity, we argue, this capability informed by our memories of the past and unknown future, empowers us to probe our present in more meaningful ways. Drawing parallels with the human visual system, a well-developed distentive capability brings into the field of view objects or movements outside the centre of gaze. Embedded within the peripheries of the foresightful eyes, we argue is memory and expectation, which are made up of the 'present of past things', and the 'present future things' respectively, with our attention fixated on the present of present things. The capacity to stretch of our consciousness through simultaneous attention to memory and expectation while focusing on the centre of gaze is what we term as distentive capability. Figure 2 is a graphical representation of distentive capability as played out in the reassembling of the past, present and the future, and stretched out in time.

Figure2: A distentive capability approach to strategic foresight
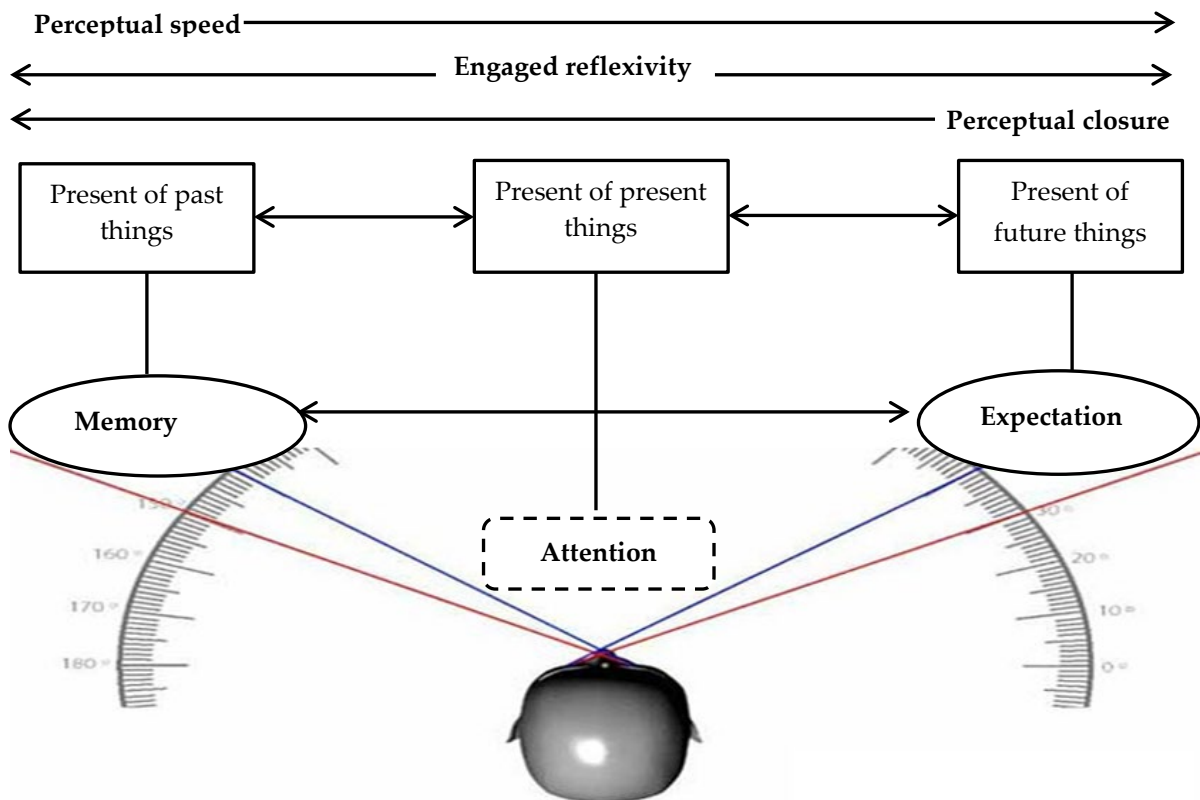
Thus, we define distentive capability *as the ability to attend to immediate sensory engagement while simultaneously engaging with the past and the future*. A highly developed distentive capability, we argue is a self-cultivated form of action and disposition that broaden subsidiary awareness and strengthen strategic foresight. This capability as a spatio-temporal practice of 'way finding' across multiple time horizons, we argue contributes to strategic foresight in three ways: First, the emphasis on 'thinking in streams' induces the cognitive processes of imagination, inviting us to 'think the unthinkable', recognise the unknown futures and bring them into sharp focus. In this regard we are able to sense fleeting opportunities and limits in the present and future. Attending to the inconspicuous and inarticulate social currents, it enlarges our thinking and acting in the present. Second, by vacillating between the three temporal horizons, it broadens subsidiary awareness (Tsoukas and Shepherd, 2004), helping us to avoid strategic blunders. Thus, in broadening our boundaries of perception, our perceptual sensitivity gets enhanced in ways that enable us to also 'see far and wide'. We could, potentially therefore, able to foresee the 'seemingly irrelevant, the apparently unconnected, and the hidden, rendering [them] meaningful and consequential' (Chia and Nayak, 2016). Third, in encouraging 'reconnaissance flights' over the past and future, distention provides the rare window of opportunity to reflect on their past actions so they are able to think and act in fresh ways. This way, we are able to recognise and embrace potentialities and limits in the present and 'judge whether change has happened or is happening or will' (Neustadt, 1987: 257). In order to help us grasp how distention may influence the enactment of strategic foresight, we again employ ideas from visual thinking activities and therefore the 'black box' of subsidiary awareness (Neugarten, 2006) to develop a deeper understanding of how distension in the form of perception may facilitate the 'productive imagination' of the future' and the broadening of the 'field of vision'. We delineate these along the lines of perceptual scanning, engaged reflexivity, and perceptual closure.

Perceptual scanning

The concept of perceptual speed in visual thinking is the ability to see and 'take in' information that surrounds us. Involving perceptual speed, the ability to disperse attention to rapidly compare visual configurations, and identify details located outside the centre of gaze or simply buried in distracting records. With meaning attached to what 'we see', perceptual scanning as used here has little to do with visual acuity. Rather, it is primarily perceptual in nature and the 'capacity for immediate awareness and insight' (Tomasino, 2011). Tempered with implicit filtering, it involves contextual cueing, strategic filtering, and the combination of relevant past, present and future insights drawn from internal and external sources to accurately compare patterns, and contrast alternative options in sets of similar-appearing futures. Drawing heavily on the three-fold mimesis of prefiguration, configuration and refrigeration, it requires retrospective sense making of the past and future in generating a plot for action in the present.

Engaged reflexivity

We refer to engaged reflexivity as an on-going, deliberate and conscious locally reflexive orders of actions that undergird perception, reproduction and transformation of social structures. In this regard, engaged reflexivity as an activity of distention is not an aim in itself, but rather a consequence of taking a 'step back' from technical rationality to question and challenge intelligibly, relevant past, present and future insights generated from perceptual scanning. It involves the development of a disposition to retrospectively and prospectively produce account-able states of affairs and recognise familiar and unintelligent patterns in new situations. Frequently avoiding path dependencies, this coming to judgement involves the formulation of inaccessible hypotheses, sometimes without compelling evidence, to develop visions of the future. Heavily focused on the simultaneous attention to memory and expectation, it allows the movement of internal displacement among the parts of a configuration that one is thinking about that may not be achievable through a systematic process of mimesis. Here, mimesis assists deliberate effort to bringing the past into the present, again, through narratives.

Perceptual closure

Perceptual closure refers to the capacity to form coherent and succinct mental images with limited visual information. Often associated with cognitive structures such as the explicit or implicit memory, perceptual closure affords 'predictability and a base for action' (Webster and Kruglanski, 1994). The concept as used here is about the temporal 'bracketing' or 'freezing' of set pieces of information in 'some segment of on-going flow, and learning to make some portions of it to happen' (Weick, 2012: 7), without knowing the full picture. In our fast moving world characterised by complexity and change, perceptual closure is required help in defining desirable future from which we can work backwards to identify information that will connect the future to the present. In practice, the relevant information required to take such action are often incomplete, and scattered in the past, and yet-to-be-future. From this perspective, perceptual closure in supporting distentive capability as a focal act becomes a generative way of temporarily stabilizing events, 'making do' with incomplete information by synthesising them into a single precept for action. This act of events 'freezing' comes with 'knowing' exactly when to stop searching for additional information and being open to the possibilities of unfolding situations, ambiguities, and paradoxical tensions involved in developing future-oriented knowledge in the present.

Methodological note

Illustrating how distentive capability as played out in the re-assembling of the past, the present and the future, and stretched out in time, may come into representation, we turn our attention to the corporate 'theatre of stump' (Boje, et al., 2003). Methodologically we draw on selected tropes from three major celebrated grand speeches delivered by Steve Jobs, between 1997 and 2011 (Hurley-Hanson, et al., 201; Beahm, 2014). The first was delivered by Jobs at Apple's partnership with Microsoft at Macworld Boston, 1997; the second, his Stanford University Commencement Address in

2005; and the third, the Apple iPad 2 Key-note Address delivered at a special event, held in March 2011.

Our focus on Job's speeches is driven by the world's fascination with him as an icon of a new cultural and technological revolution (Blumenthal, 2012; Markoff, 2011) and his unparalleled 'foresight' and will to make his ideas come to life (Klein, 2015; Nan and Liu, 2013; Cusumano, 2008). While ideologically marked, Jobs's strength to think differently from other managers and give shape to unpredictable futures in these speeches have inspired millions of people around the world because each of them communicates impactful "vision of the future with image-based rhetoric— words and phrases that are readily envisioned in the mind's eye" (Carton and Lucas, 2017:??). Reflecting his cult-following, exemplified wisdom, and courage, these three inspirational and emotional speeches have been unprecedentedly watched more than 30 million times on YouTube, and reprinted by the global print media, including Fortune, Forbes, Guardian, and the New York Times. Transcribed versions of the three speeches are also readily available for download on the internet for free.

Before introducing the speeches, we would like to readily concede that drawing on Jobs speeches does not make, neither do we claim that Jobs handling of distentive capability was hyper-extraordinary that other corporate leaders, and even ordinarily managers do not have the capacity to do so. In fact, the success of high technology firms like Apple, we know, lies in the strength of its technicians, designers, and innovators (Press and Cooper, 2017), who are supported by these type of speeches. In this regard, our objective in using these speeches is to provide what can be termed as a conceptual clarity, rather than an empirical validation of Job's visions of the future. In essence, analysis of the speeches, we argue, makes it possible to apprehend their effectiveness in terms of their strategic extensions of the actions undertaken by Jobs at Apple. We therefore used tropes from the three speeches to primarily help us to develop our thesis rather than offer evidence for them. In the next section, we provide a brief overview of the three speeches.

Speech One: Apple's Partnership with Microsoft at Macworld Boston, 1997

In 1985, a power struggle within Microsoft led Steve jobs to resign and by 1997 Apple had experienced millions of dollars of losses (Arrington, 2009). Implications from Jobs' innovative flair and determination in the past it has been argued that Jobs was able to transform the once failing company to a thriving business. Becoming the CEO of Apple in 1997, Jobs was in search for developing a company that created innovative and modern computers (Arrington, 2009). From Jobs' visionary leadership and change management that is presented within the speech, Apple grew rapidly along with its finances. By joining partnership with Microsoft, Apple was able to expand and diversify its markets and improve their products, proving a turning point in Steve Jobs' career. This speech discusses Steve jobs' plans on the renewal of Apple and how the partnership with Microsoft will benefit the company (Thompson, 2013). He focuses on what the company is going to do in the present to learn from the past and succeed in the future. Drawing on the companies past experiences of struggle to compete against companies with more modern technologies, this speech discusses why they are partnering up with Microsoft and explaining the 'five-year obligation from Microsoft to publish Microsoft Office for Macintosh along with a $150 million investment in Apple'. Jobs is keen to emphasise that for Apple to win, Apple has to be responsible for their own company rather than focusing on the competition and addresses a number of changes that are going to be made to ensure success in the coming years.

Speech Two: Stanford Commencement Address, 2005

Following the return of Jobs to the company after being laid off, Jobs transformed the company from a computer company into a consumer electronics company, paving the way for a new change in the marketplace. After being recognised for his leadership, innovation and persuasion, it became evident that the way Jobs delivered his addresses at product launches allowed for excitement and inspiration to others. With Jobs' ability to engage with the marketplace, products and people of the industry, this speech becomes a notorious example as to how Jobs explains his vision and experience as an example for the future. In this speech, Steve Jobs urges people to pursue their dreams and 'see the

opportunities in life's setback- including death itself' (TED, 2016). He draws on his past experiences at a university graduation event to explain his mistakes, fears and life lessons that have enabled him to become who is today. He emphasises the need for people to love what they do as that is what allows for true success. Seeing the past in a new light, he emphasises that people need to 'connect the dots' looking backward to ensure they are on the right individual path to success, just like he did. He discusses his life about love and loss and how it's shaped who he is in the present and finally he discusses why death is one of the best inventions of life.
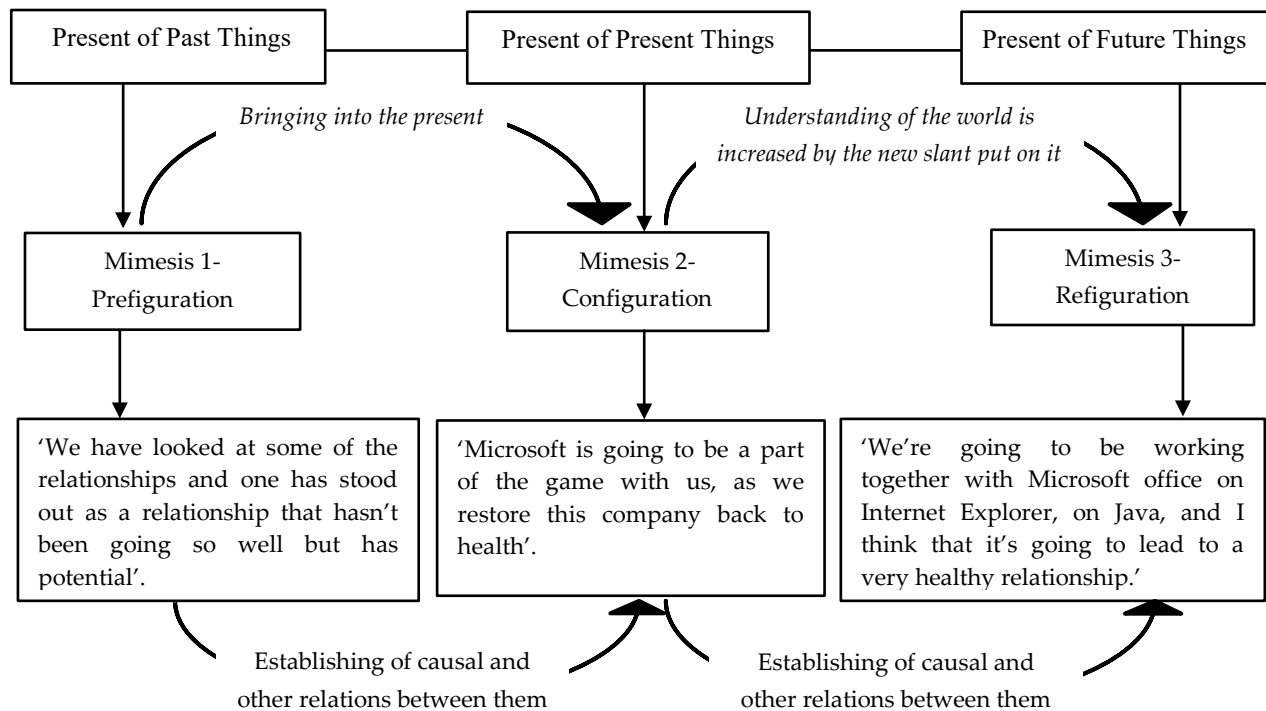
Speech Three: Apple iPad 2 Keynote, Special Event, March 2011

Prior to Jobs' death in 2011, he launched the Apple iPad 2. Within this speech he discusses previous Apple experiences such as growth in iBooks and new up and coming apple products such as 1,000 free or paid applications. This speech marked the improvement in iPad technology with built in gyroscope, rear and front facing cameras, changed aesthetics of the product, whilst also comparing Apples prior years' performances against their competitors. Concluding in this speech, Jobs clarifies the firm's next steps for launching the iPad 2 and foresees that it will be the year of the iPad. This speech was one of his last before his death in October, 2011. Marking his title as a CEO of the decade by Forbes magazine (Elmer-DeWitt, 2009), this speech has become widely recognised as the last example of his inspiration, persuasiveness and innovative approach to the technological market and displays his thoughts and strategy for the future products that will be emerging in the coming year.

Re-assembling of the past, the present and the future

Employing our distentive capability framework (figure 2) as an organizing device, we 'unpack' the literary schemas of Jobs that created figures for human action. Our analyses of the tropes taken from the speeches suggest that action, understanding, being and time could not occur without telling (Vanhoozer, 2002). In this regard distentive capability as a spatio-temporal process of 'way-finding' spans across multiple time horizons which are neither easy to separate or distinguish.

Figure 2: An example of narrative mimesis and temporal dimensions in Steve Jobs 1997 speech

Present of Past Things	Present of Present Things	Present of Future Things

Bringing into the present

Understanding of the world is increased by the new slant put on it

Mimesis 1- Prefiguration	Mimesis 2- Configuration	Mimesis 3- Refiguration

'We have looked at some of the relationships and one has stood out as a relationship that hasn't been going so well but has potential'.	'Microsoft is going to be a part of the game with us, as we restore this company back to health'.	'We're going to be working together with Microsoft office on Internet Explorer, on Java, and I think that it's going to lead to a very healthy relationship.'

Establishing of causal and other relations between them

Establishing of causal and other relations between them

Thus, we organise our case illustration along three lines of attention. The first focuses on the 'present of past things'. Relying on memory, it encompasses the bringing of the past to bear on the present. The second driven by expectations concerns the 'present of future things', or bringing future possibilities and limits to life, and the third dimension which focusses on the 'present of present things' is driven by attention.

Bringing the past to bear on the present

Serving as preparatory function to establishing the causes of events and to learn from mistakes, memory in contributing to distentive capability illuminate the causal dynamics of the past and how it may influence the present. Focusing on the past where the outcome is already known to predict the future, memory actually acts as the prefiguration stage of narrative mimesis, yet the implicit 'pre-understanding' embedded in mimesis1 does not come into being until it is articulated in the threefold present. In the 2005 Speech, for example, Jobs' made the argued that:

> If I had never dropped in on that single course in college, the Mac would have never had multiple type faces of proportionally spaced fonts, and since windows just copied mac, it's likely that no personnel computer would be the same.

Here Jobs is able to establish a relation between the past of present things that lead him to configure that Mac has unique fonts. Carrying on this distention of time and the three-fold mimesis, Jobs then understands the situation in a new light, refiguring that because of his past experience and his action in the present, Mac will continue to prosper in comparison to other computers. The pre-understanding that Job's articulates through mimesis 1 was that in the past there was a relationship that was not working but had potential. By explaining this, Job uses mimesis 1 to mediate the connection between mimesis 1 and mimesis 2, causing a distention between present of past things and present of present things and as a result, Jobs brings the past into the present to establish a causal relation between his action in the configuration stage, stating that Microsoft is therefore going to be working with Apple to help the company prosper again. As a result of this prefiguration to configuration process, Jobs is able to understand the situation in a new light, enabling Jobs to establish another relation between mimesis 2 and mimesis 3 to refigure that the once bad relationship with Microsoft has potential to be extremely healthy and beneficial to the company in the present of future things. Elsewhere, in the 2011 speech, Jobs' stated that:

> So we've gotten off to an exceptional first year and we would like to build on that, what about 2011? Everybody's got a tablet, is 2011 going to be the year of the copy cats? Well I think if we did nothing, maybe a little bit, probably not so much, because most of these tablets aren't even catching up with the first iPad.

By speaking of the company's success in 2010 in the prefiguration stage of the present of past things, Jobs is able to bring the past experience of business into the present to configure that everyone owns a tablet as a result of Apple's past work. Because of this, Jobs uses the present of future things to refigure that their competitors would not be able to catch up with their success as Apple leads the way in the world of tablets. Also in his 2015 speech, Job argued:

> I'm pretty sure none of this would have happened if I hadn't been fired from apple…don't lose faith, you've got to find what you love. Keep looking, don't settle.

By prefiguring his experience in the past he brings his past experience of being sacked from the job he loves into the present, and through the mediation of mimesis 1 to mimesis 2, he makes a connection on giving advice in the present of present things. From this process, he is then able to argue in the present of present things that people should focus their attention on finding something they love which could not have occurred without his recollection of his memory in the past. Thus, following this connection from mimesis 1 to mimesis 2, Jobs is able prefigure that the students he is presenting to can also be successful if they keep looking for what they love in the present of future things. We argue that without this process that stems from mimesis 1, that Jobs would not have been able to prefigure his advice to the students for the future. Thus, through this process Jobs is sees a simultaneous relationship between his narrative and reality (Ricoeur, 1984). In this regard, the personal reflexive stance that Jobs displays through reviewing his past experiences to bear on the present for future action demonstrates an endogenous accomplishment (Cunliffe, 2003).

Bringing future possibilities and limits to life

Expectation as a feature of distention entails the bringing of future things, or what we refer to here as possibilities and limits to the presents. This classic time travelling (Cunha, 2004) of putting oneself in the future in the present places significant emphasis on memory and expectation. It involves the configuring of a plot for action in the present of present things, for the present of future things. This capacity is can be deciphered from the 1997 speech, for example, in which Jobs argue that:

> The era of setting this up as a competition between Apple and Microsoft is over as far as I'm concerned. This is about getting healthy, and this is about apple being able to make incredibly great contributions to the industry to get healthy and prosper again.

Here, Jobs, who is credited for having the capacity to anticipate what occurrences' in the technology world are likely to materialise (Markoff, 2011), pays attention to the memory of past conflict with Microsoft and the unhealthy situation Apple found itself in at the time. Jobs recognises in the 'present of present things' that the attention needed between this memory and expectation is to get healthy,

ultimately ending any conflict that was once present in the past to bring future possibilities of success

to life. Similarly, in the 2005 speech, Jobs states:

> Of course it was impossible to connect the dots looking forward when I was in college… you can't connect the dots looking forward you can only connect them looking backward. You have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something.

The impossibility of connecting the dots when looking into the future is the memory of his past

experience which is brought into the present by speaking of it. By discussing the idea that the dots

will align for everyone in the future, causes the narrative to exist in the expectation stage of the

present of future things. Thus, because of Jobs past experience of the dots not aligning in the past, and

the expectation that everyone's dots will align in the future, Jobs in the attention stage suggests

people look backward at the dots aligning as a result of his own experience. Thus, in the 2011 speech

Jobs states:

> So we've gotten off to an exceptional first year and we would like to build on that, what about 2011? Everybody's got a tablet, is 2011 going to be the year of the copy cats? Well, I think if we did nothing maybe a little bit, probably not so much, because most of these tablets aren't catching up with the first iPad.

By stating that Apple has had an exceptional first year in the past of present things which is brought

into the present of present things through narrative, Jobs configures that everyone has a tablet now

and is aware that competitors are copying their products. Because of these two perceptions in the

present of past things and present of present things, Jobs in the refiguration stage of the present of

future things is able to expect that Apple will continue to prosper due to other company's innovations

being far behind, making a quick perceptual judgement on future developments. Similarly, in the

2005 speech Jobs states:

> Remembering you are going to die is the best way, I know, to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked; there is no reason not to follow your heart.

This quote explains how Jobs believed that if you remember in the past of present things that you are

going to die, then your attention in the present of present things should be on the belief that people

have nothing to lose. Thus, because of this perceptual speed in the present of past things

(prefiguration/memory stage) and present of present things (configuration/attention stage), Jobs therefore expects in the present of future things (refiguration stage) that people will follow their heart and forget about the fear of losing. This same process of perceptual speed consistently occurs in all three of the speeches.

> I think you always had to be a little different to buy an Apple computer. When we shipped Apple2, you had to think differently about these computers. I think you still have to think differently to buy an Apple computer and I think the people that do buy them, do think differently; they are the creative spirits of this world… We are going to think differently and serve the people that have been buying our products from the beginning (Jobs, 1997).

In the past of present things, Jobs prefigures that difference is what allowed Apple 2 to differ from other products whilst also drawing on his memory that the consumers had to think differently too. Through the recognition that Apple has to continue thinking differently to connect with their customers in the configuration stage of the present of present things, Jobs is able to use perceptual speed to refigure that in the present of future things that this strategic decision of 'difference' will continue to meet the desires of Apple consumers. Job was able to see a situation with 'new eyes', recognising the identity of an opportunity or threat when it was seen from a different angle. Again in the 1997 speech, Jobs states:

> Apple has a very decent group of people as the board of directors, they worked very hard for Apple, but I think with Apple in the situation it finds itself, it was time for a change and the directors agreed with that. We have a new board of directors that I would like to announce to you today… I think we have really exciting tasks ahead of us, to help the management team and guide Apple back to health and prosperity.

Here again, Jobs draws on his memory of the board working hard for a long time in the present of past things to prefigure that nothing has changed for a while. Reiterated by a statement in a keynote at the Apple WWDC in 1997, Jobs states that the management team have always emphasized the need to be the best in every aspect that they do, which he believes has damaged the company (Shah, 2011). Through this, configuration into the present of present things occurs, allowing Jobs to identify what action may be needed. Through the assistance of simultaneous attention to memory of this troublesome management team and the expectation of health and prosperity in the future, Jobs is able to see the management team in a new light to create a plot for action. Jobs is able to confidently create

action in the attention stage of the present to change the board of directors and is then able to refigure that he expects this will guide Apple back to health. . He summarizes this succinctly in the 2005 speech when he claimed:

> I didn't see it then, but getting fired from Apple was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything. It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life.

Here he realises in the prefiguration stage that he was being naive to the positivity that lay within being fired from Apple. Through this process he brings the past memory into the present through narrative to create connections with the present of future. Simultaneous to this happening, Jobs is able to consciously engage with his memory of being fired and the expectation of entering creativity, to configure in the attention stage that perhaps he was his own problem. Acting as the space for thinking, the configuration stage allows for the order of action whereby the power of refiguration interrelates to the temporal experiences of time and mimesis (Ricoeur, 1985: 3).

> So, I've said this before and I thought it was worth repeating. It's in Apples DNA that technology alone is not enough. That its technology, married with the liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the results that makes our heart sing. And, nowhere is that more true, than in these post-pc devices, and a lot of folks in this tablet market are rushing in and are looking at this as the next pc…our experience and every bone in our body says that this is not the right approach to this. That these, are post PC devices, that need to be even easier to use than a PC, that need to be even more intuitive than a PC… and so, I think we stand a pretty good chance of being pretty competitive in this market (Job 2011 speech).

Drawing on their memory of technology alone not being enough in their present of past things, and the expectation that they will have competitive advantage in their market, Jobs is able to configure where his attention should lie. By drawing on his memory of this approach working before, it allows jobs to intuitively recognise in the present that this process could work again in post-PC devices, initiating action for the future. Through this reflexive process of experience and using temporal reflexivity of the future expectation Jobs is able to see this approach once used before, in a new light, leading him to believe in the present of future things that this action in the present of present things will lead to success in the future. Another example of this intuitive orthogonal reflexivity-in-practice in practice is in Job's statement in the 1997 speech, stating:

> … Discussions actually began because there were some patent disputes. Rather than repeating history, I'm extremely proud of both companies that they have resolved these difficulties in a very very professional way and this has led, I think, to an overall relationship that we're announcing today that's got several parts to it and we're extremely excited about.

By drawing on their memory of disputes with Microsoft in the past, jobs brings this history into the present to draw connection between the present of past things and present of present things to configure that through their mature handling of a difficult situation, Jobs is able to see the positive in Microsoft. Additionally, with the assistance of the simultaneous attention to the past disputes and the expectation that this relationship with Microsoft will be healthy, Jobs in the configuration stage is able to generate a plot that causes a movement of internal displacement whereby Jobs intuitively sees the potential for success in Microsoft. It is this reciprocal nature of the temporal structures, mimesis and simultaneous attention to memory and expectation paired with narrative structure that enables orthogonal reflexivity in practice. Thus, to clarify, from the simultaneous attention to memory and expectation in the threefold mimesis, Jobs was encouraged to engage in a fragmented understanding of the temporal structures which established a disjointed plot for action in the present. In addition to this, the threefold mimesis assists in creating an ordered sequence of memory attention and expectation over the three temporal structures whereby Jobs was able to clarify the plot and ultimately construct and experience intuitive and intellectual orthogonal reflexivity in practice.

Acting in the latent spaces of mimesis 2 (configuration/attention stage) and mimesis 3 (refiguration/expectation stage), it was evident that Jobs was able to draw on a plot developed in the configuration stage to gain perceptual closure. From drawing on mimesis 1 (prefiguration/memory stage) to mimesis 2 (configuration/attention stage), which allowed for effective action to unfold between the present of present things and present of future things through the process of narrative (Ricoeur, 1985), an unfolding of temporality allowed for the chaotic field in Jobs' mind to be perceptually organised in the last moment of mimesis (Riceour, 1985). Additionally, concurrent to the three-fold mimesis and three-fold present working together, the simultaneous attention to memory and expectation allowed Jobs to bring future possibilities and limits to life to help configure a plot

that would be worthy of action in the attention stage of the present of present things. It is this combination of elements that founded organization of experience, action and expectation that permitted Jobs' to develop perceptual closure. For example, in the 2011 speech, Jobs states:

> Now in addition to preserving the battery, when you add all this stuff together, we have also preserved the price. So we are going to keep the same exact prices, starting at just $499, same exact prices as the current iPad yet a dramatically improved product. Now, some folks are out there saying, oh they're only a little more expensive than us, its $799, just when you take a look at this matrix of these 6 models, 5 of these 6 models are less expensive than $799. You add all this together with over 65000 apps, tuned to the iPad and we think 2011 will be the year of the iPad.

Through the simultaneous attention to the memory of the past successful elements of the product, such as a strong battery life and the expectation that 2011 will be the year of iPad, Jobs in the attention stage is able to configure that they will therefore have a dramatically improved product that is generally less expensive than their competitors ultimately expecting in the present of future things that 2011 will be the year of the iPad.

Seeing the transient present of present things

Occupying the intellectual space between memory and expectation, attention, we argue here brings the temporal connections between, the past and present within the contingency of organizing. Here, the threefold mimesis and threefold present are also simultaneously working together to ensure that the chaotic field is perceptually organised into a single precept. For example, by jobs speaking of the past successful elements, he is able to bring it into the present of present things whereby causal relations between the past product and current product can be made such as the additional apps and improved model. This configuration in the present of present things then allows the understanding of this situation to be increased due to the process of prefiguration and configuration, ultimately leading

to the perceptual closure and refiguration that 2011 will be the year of the iPad. Another example of this can be found in the following statement from the 2005 speech:

> …death is the destination we all share. No one has every escaped it… death is very likely the single best invention of life…your time is limited so don't waste it living someone else's life. Follow your heart and intuition, they somehow already know what you truly want to become.

Through the simultaneous attention to the memory that death is inescapable and the expectation that each person's heart and intuition has a destiny for them, jobs in the attention stage leads action by emphasising that you should live your own life to ensure that a person's future possibilities come to life. Additionally, by talking about the past of present things such as death being something we all share and is one of the best inventions of life, Jobs brings the past into the present to establish causal and other relations between each stage. This distention ultimately leads jobs to configure in the present of present things that time is limited and therefore shouldn't be wasted living someone else's life. Because of this prefiguration and configuration, Jobs understands the situation in a new slant, perceptually closing in the refiguration stage that 'you should live life to the fullest, without compromise'. Again, this can be seen in the 1997 speech when Jobs states:

> We have taken a look at browsers out there and Apple has decided to make Internet Explorer its default browser…since we believe in choice, we're going to be shipping other internet browsers as well on Macintosh, but, we believe that Internet Explorer is a really good browser and we think it's going to make a fine default browser.

Through the process of mimesis, Jobs brings this actual process of foresight into reality. By drawing on his memory, Jobs prefigures that they took a look at browsers out there which then initiated a cycle of configuration that Internet Explorer will be chosen as the default browser which lead to the refiguration that they believe it's the best browser for their device. Supporting this process, Jobs engages in temporal reflexivity to draw on this simultaneous attention to memory of past research of browsers and expectation that their default browser would be 'really good, to configure in the present. For him that choosing Internet Explorer as the default browser is the right choice for success in the future, causing the chaotic field of choosing the right browser for their device to be perceptually organized by Jobs himself. Therefore, rather than seeing perceptual closure as 'a process whereby an

incomplete stimulus is perceived to be complete', it is through the organic unity of the temporal articulation of the threefold present engaging with the three-fold mimesis and simultaneous attention to memory and expectation that creates what Ricoeur calls a plot. The chaotic field of a situation is able to be understood into one perceptual understanding for future expectations. Therefore, this plot can be seen as the 'crossing point of temporality and narrativity' whereby Jobs' stories were made out of an event to the extent that the plot made the events into a story through this ordering. It is the simultaneous functioning of these elements that brings his foresightfulness into sharp focus.

Conclusion

This paper builds on the Ricoeurian notion of distentio- to explore how multiple time horizons intertwine and can contribute to the cultivation of strategic foresight in practice. Prioritizing narratives as the site for the emergence of strategic foresight, and how it may come into focus by stretching consciousness to simultaneously focus on memory, attention and expectation', we develop the concept of distentive capability as a spatio-temporal process of 'way-finding' across different time horizons. Drawing parallels with the human visual system, we argue that a well-developed distentive capability brings into the field of view objects or movements outside the centre of gaze. In delineating how distention may influence the enactment of strategic foresight we also identified three salient drivers of distentive capability -perceptual scanning, engaged reflexivity, and perceptual closure; constitutively combine to form analytically complementary ways to help sharpen strategic foresight. In emphasizing the linkages between narratives and strategic foresight, we draw on tropes taken from three popular speeches delivered by Steve Jobs between 1997 and 2011, to illustrate how distentive capability as played out in the reassembling of the past, the present and the future, stretched out in time, may contribute to the identification of potentialities and limits for strategic action. Our analyses of the tropes from these remarkable speeches suggest how Jobs skilfully and strategically combine insights from the past, present, and the future, and more generally, social and

historical changes to materialize organizationally useful knowledge and action. Driven by reflection and action, his highly developed distentive capability means that even in his dying days, he could still 'join the dots' by looking back and forward, to provide relevant prognosis on the future of his industry. In all three speeches, Jobs exhibited reflexive awareness, delayed perceptual closure in reaching and establishing causal relations between the past, present and future of his industry.

Providing theoretical reflection on time and the relationship between time and foresight, our study has two main implications for the theory of strategic foresight. First, our distentive capability approach to strategic foresight, by virtue of prioritizing multiple temporal horizons challenges our propensity to pauperize strategic foresight we give primacy to simple linearity of chronological time. Second, in placing concurrent emphasis on memory, attention and expectation in theorising foresight, we do not necessarily dismiss dichotomies such as hindsight and foresight, memory and future, periphery and focus, which are frequently theorised as irreconcilable opposites (MacKay and McKiernan, 2004; Hoffrage and Pohl, 2003). Rather, we complements the 'dichotomy' theorising by seeking to cumulatively enrich our understanding of how the past, present and future can be integrated to strengthen our reflective capacity to read future results in present on-goings. Our study also has two main implications for the practice of strategic foresight. First, we do not have to simply point to nature in accounting for distentive capability just because it emphasises the stretching of consciousness and a pervasive mode of being. It is a capability that could be nurtured in practice if we emphasize subsidiary awareness through the weaving the past, present, and future in everyday organizing. Thus, we posit that the cultivation of distentive capability, particularly, in contemporary organizing could help improve our reflective capacity to read future results in present on-goings (Sarpong and Hartman, 2017; Barben et al., 2008). In this regard, we call on foresight scholars and practitioners to encourage people-managers, leaders, and ordinary organizational members to 'think in time streams' and pay attention to the latent spaces of intersection between temporal time horizons when they are invited to 'predict' or engage with the unknown future. In this regard, the cultivation of sui generic acts like routines and practices that places emphasis on lateral thinking, the subversion

of interpretive routines, contextual probing of outliner events and latent social currents that stretches or threaten normative beliefs (Chia, 2008; Cunha *et al*., 2004). In context characterised by ambiguity, complexity, and change, it could help us to rebalance the concurrent need to compete in the present and prepare for the future (Sarpong et al, 2013; Sarpong and Maclean, 2014). Empowering decision makers to get hold of contextual shifts in the future before making leaps, we observe that a well-developed distentive capability sharpens our deliberative attitude- the capacity to engage with the future, without being overwhelmed by the ever-present pressure to act.

Our study is not without limitations, which in turn open up opportunities for further research. First, in prioritising trans-individual practices in developing our thesis, our study could be interpreted as overtly discounting collectives or teams actions and practices as an alternatives source for the cultivation of strategic foresight. In this regard, our study may have inadvertently stoke the raging debates in foresight and future studies on the locus of knowledge, power and what counts as foresightful actions (Tsoukas and Sandber, 2011; Sarpong and Maclean, 2016). Second, our distentive capability framework highlights potential opportunities for further theoretical and empirical inquiry into the cultivation of strategic foresight in organizing. First, further theoretical work may be needed to 'tighten' the framework, and if possible operationalize the concept to ascertain whether additional insights can be o generated. Future research could also go further to explicate and investigate how distentive capability may act to moderate foresightfulness and performance. In summary, we hope that this research in emphasizing how vacillating between the past, present and the future might contribute to foresightfulness might serve as a foundation for further research on the cultivation of distentive capability in organizing.

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