Emerald Book Chapter: Organizing Derrida organizing: Deconstruction and organization theory
Andreas Rasche

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This chapter explores the connection between the philosophy of Jacques Derrida (i.e. deconstruction) and organizational analysis from an aporetic perspective. In the first part, I introduce Derrida’s philosophy as a way to expose the aporetic nature of theorizing about organizations. I label this part of the discussion ‘Organizing Derrida’ as I attempt to organize parts of his philosophy. In the second part of the chapter, after reviewing the existing literature on Derrida and organization theory, I discuss three aporias – regarding environmental adaptation, decision-making and rule following – and show how Derridian philosophy can help us to better understand how the experience of the impossible acts as a necessary limit to our theorizing about the functioning of organizations. I argue that the recognition of aporias turns against well-established oppositions within organization theory and helps us to better understand the rich interplay between the formerly separated poles of these oppositions. This second part is labelled ‘Derrida Organizing’ as it
shows what implications Derridian philosophy can have for organization theory.

**Keywords:** Derrida; organization theory; deconstruction; organizational rules; decision-making.

Where to start when there is no origin, as Derrida claims? One possibility is to start with oneself. This is *my* story of Derrida and organization theory. Saying this I realize that there are scholars who might not share this story and understand Derrida in a different way; scholars who highlight other aspects of his extensive body of work and/or disagree with my interpretation of his philosophy. Saying this, however, also means being indebted to those who have discussed Derrida with regard to organization theory and thus enriched our knowledge about what deconstruction can add to our understanding of organizations (recently see Jones, 2007; Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Weitzner, 2007; for an earlier detailed overview see Jones, 2003). Particularly, since Cooper and Burrell’s (1988) series of articles on ‘Modernism, Postmodernism and Organizational Analysis’, of which a discussion of Derrida’s philosophy was one important part (Cooper, 1989), deconstruction has made it on the agenda of what is often called critical management studies. Deconstructive analyses have occurred with regard to a variety of different phenomena, for example, the question of the status of the organization itself (Cooper 1986), the possibility and limits of business ethics (Jones, Parker, & ten Bos, 2005), and the concept of decision-making (Chia, 1994), to name but a few.

Considering the rich pool of literature on Derrida and organization theory, this contribution has two main objectives. On the one hand, I am *Organizing Derrida*, particularly with regard to the field of organization studies. I want to (a) give a summary of certain principles of his philosophy and (b) also take stock of the available literature on deconstruction and organization studies to illustrate how his work has been received by organizational scholars. Necessarily, this will involve a certain degree of replication of already existing arguments. Any iteration, however, as Derrida (1995a) teaches us, also brings about something new, something unique, something contextual. On the other hand, I want to ‘watch’ *Derrida Organizing* by demonstrating how we can understand organizations and organizing differently once we approach important phenomena (e.g. rules) from a deconstructive perspective.

*Organizing Derrida* and *Derrida Organizing* are both concerned with the aporetic (i.e. impossible) operations which are often suppressed in writings on organizations and organizing. For me, as for others (Cooper, 1989; Jones, 2003, 2005; Weitzner, 2007), a deconstructive discussion implies uncovering
the numerous aporias that our discourse on organizations and organizing rests on. Many of Derrida’s (1995b, 1993, 1992a, 1987) writings focus on the inevitable aporias that we ignore to make our world appear to be undeconstructible. Originating in the Greek, aporia entails perplexity, doubt and that which is impassable. Aporias, for Derrida, are a necessity, something that does not involve paralysis but, in contrast, acts as the condition of possibility of (reflected) action (Derrida, 1992a). Considering the aporetic dimension of deconstructive thinking, this chapter supplements, and through supplementing also extends, those contributions concerned with the impossibilities of organizing (Clegg, Cunha, & Cunha, 2002; Czarniawska, 2005; Lado, Boyd-Lillie, Kroll, & Wright, 2006; Lewis, 2000; Lewis & Kelemen, 2002).

Although Derrida’s work has often been discussed under the label postmodernism and/or post-structuralism, particularly in critical management studies (Chia, 1994; Cooper, 1989; Hassard, 1994), I make no attempt to link my perspective on Derridian philosophy to these debates. This is because, as remarked by Alvesson (1995), the word postmodernism has been used in too many ways, often in ways that obscure the message of philosophers such as Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Lyotard, who are conventionally identified with this debate. In addition, as discussed by Jones (2003, p. 35), Derrida never perceived himself as a postmodernist or post-structuralist and in no way identified deconstruction as belonging to what has been labelled postmodernism/post-structuralism. Identifying Derrida as not being a postmodernist/post-structuralist also implies to reach beyond epistemological debates (which postmodernism/post-structuralism is often identified with). For me, Derrida’s philosophy has an effect on many questions which, although influenced by epistemological debates, are not directly concerned with the status and nature of knowledge.

My analysis proceeds as follows. In the first section, I attempt to introduce selected aspects of Derrida’s philosophy. I will focus on those aspects that have influenced Derridian analyses within organization theory and also pay special attention to the role of aporias within his thinking. Necessarily, this attempt on Organizing Derrida is limited and cannot reflect the richness of his thinking and the many details of his own analyses. In the next section, and still being concerned with Organizing Derrida, I offer a brief review of the literature on Derrida and organization theory. This review makes no claim for completeness, but attempts to show how his philosophy has been received in organization studies. Following this section, and attempting to see Derrida Organizing, I introduce three exemplary aporias based on Derrida’s philosophy and demonstrate how these aporias...
relate to organization theory. I close with some implications of deconstructive thinking for future theorizing in organization theory.

DECONSTRUCTION: ORGANIZING DERRIDA

Deconstruction: Against the Metaphysics of Presence

Deconstruction is not an analysis, a method, an act or an operation (Derrida 1985). Faced with the question of what deconstruction is, Derrida (1985, p. 4) replies: ‘I have no simple and formalizable response to this question. All my essays are attempts to have it out with this formidable question’. A good way to start grasping what Derrida means by deconstruction is to recognize that any origin from which we could start exploring ‘the core’ of deconstruction remains insecure. Deconstruction is exactly about questioning the security which we usually attach to categories such as ‘beginning’ or ‘origin’. Considering that the metaphysical question aims to discover the definitive essence of something (an essence which is an origin that is independent of what comes after), deconstruction is, if we want to start this way, an attempt to criticize the metaphysical embeddedness of Western thinking.

Derrida’s critique of metaphysics rests on his belief that any kind of conceptual opposition is problematic insofar as one pole of the opposition is classically conceived as original and superior, while the other is thought of as secondary. One pole of the opposition is conceived of as being ‘pure’ and full of meaning, whereas the other is conceptualized as a derivative of the former and defined in terms of a lack of presence. Oppositions such as environment/organization, decision/action, rule/application and structure/process are thus conceived to be problematic since no part of the opposition can exist as an origin ‘on its own’. To understand the necessity for deconstruction therefore means to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a vis-à-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiological, logical, etc.) or has the upper hand. (Derrida, 2002a, pp. 38–39)

The ambition of the Western culture to view the core of an idea (e.g. the essence of ‘being’ or ‘truth’) in a way that something else appears as secondary is what Derrida (1977) calls logocentrism. A philosophy favouring logocentric thinking conceives an order of meaning as existing in itself.

Deconstruction is an attempt to dismantle the hierarchical oppositions that govern our thinking (Derrida, 2002a). Dismantling does not mean
destroying the oppositions, but showing that by acknowledging their mutual dependence one can create something new. By disclosing the supplementary logic between the two poles of an opposition, deconstruction demonstrates how logocentric thoughts always undercut their own presumptions. Derrida (1977) argues that the supplement, which is the formerly suppressed pole of the opposition, is something that gives rise to the other pole that is apparently thought of as the ‘origin’. The concern is to show how the pole that logocentrism deemed to be a derivation of the origin is needed for the origin to mean anything at all. The deconstruction of an opposition is not the same as its inversion (Dupuy & Varela, 1992, p. 3). An inversion would create another hierarchy, which once again requires overturning. A simple overturning does not move deconstruction beyond its original territory because one remains within the deconstructed system by establishing yet another opposition. It is only the supplementary logic – the thinking of the one within the other – that keeps the deconstructive process in motion and defies its relapse into a static opposition.

For Derrida (1977, p. 12), logocentrism represents a metaphysics of presence as what is defined as secondary is always conceived to be absent, whereas the origin is present in the sense that it is self-defining without reference to ‘the other’ (i.e. the supplement). The idea of a metaphysics of presence suggests that everything has to have a fixed meaning by privileging that which is over the conditions of that appearance. Each identity is thought to denote a presence that is always there; a presence that is full of meaning and represents an undeconstructible origin. Deconstruction, then, is always a deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence, although in different forms depending on what is defined as the metaphysical ‘origin’ (Lucy, 2004, p. 103).

If there is no metaphysical origin in general, there is also no original and fixed meaning. Derrida’s (1982) deconstruction of the opposition signifier/signified gives rise to the neologism ‘différence’. Différence unites two verbs – ‘to differ’ and ‘to defer’ – and points out that differences among signs are held not only in space but also in time: to differ is at the same time to defer (Derrida, 1982). Concerning the spatial dimension, différence represents the creation of differences (to differ) among signs and thus helps to negatively define the sign’s meaning. For instance, we cannot know what ‘organization’ means without knowing its difference to terms like ‘environment’ or ‘society’. As a result, meaning is never present but scattered along the chain of signs.
that negatively define the sign in question. Différence thus states that the meaning of a sign can never be present, but is continuously postponed (to defer). The deferring and differing effects of différence move meaning to a future state that can never be fully grasped; meaning remains ‘to come’.

Because there is différence, there is the impossibility of a metaphysical presence in the sense of an absolute meaning. For Derrida this logic takes the form of a law – a law that not only affects writing or speech but also experience in general. This is why he claims: ‘I shall even extend this law to all “experience” in general if it is conceded that there is no experience consisting of pure presence but only of chains of differential marks’ (Derrida, 1995a, p. 10, emphasis in the original). There is no predefined limit to the applicability of différence. As Caputo (1997, p. 104) claims: ‘différence is not restricted to language but leaves its “mark” on everything’.

Deconstruction and différence can leave their mark on everything because ‘the text’, for Derrida (1995a), is not limited to the written. We can specify this claim by considering that

the phrase which for some has become a sort of slogan, in general so badly understood, of deconstruction (‘there is nothing outside the text’ [il n’y a pas de hors-texte]), means nothing else: there is nothing outside context. [...] Once again (and this probably makes a thousand times I have had to repeat this, but when will it finally be heard, and why this resistance?): as I understand it (and I have explained why), the text is not the book. (Derrida, 1995a, pp. 136–137, emphasis and annotations in the original)

Derrida (1989a, p. 873) specifies this by arguing that the statement ‘there is nothing outside context’ means that ‘there is nothing but context’. Meaning cannot be determined regardless of context; we always find ourselves in a context (Derrida, 1979, p. 81). The interrelation of texts and contexts implies that one of the definitions of deconstruction would be to consider as far as possible the incessant movement of the recontextualization of texts (Derrida, 1995a, p. 136). Recontextualization is a never-ending process because there is an infinite number of possibilities that can identify and shape contexts. No context permits saturation since ‘the-real-history-of-the-world’ is contingent and ensures the boundless nature of contexts (Derrida, 1982, p. 310).

Deconstruction and Aporia: The Insolubility of Arguments

Deconstruction represents a way to challenge hierarchically structured oppositions within a social (con)text and introduces concepts that cannot be adopted into such oppositional structures. To deconstruct something implies to turn oppositions into supplementary relations and by doing so to expose
Aporias. Aporias occur because the supplementary relation can, when attempting to justify one pole of the opposition as a metaphysical ground, be treated as a simultaneous occurrence of both ends of the opposition. Because one pole of the opposition needs the other to be meaningful, we, when attempting to justify one pole as an origin, end up with ‘the other’. This leads to an impassable non-road and thus impossibility, because the simultaneous ‘happening’ of the two ends of the opposition leads to contradiction. Accordingly, Derrida (1993, p. 67) talks about the ‘aporetic supplement’. The most serious consideration of the existence of any supplement adds the impossibility of aporia, while, at the same time, impossibility itself represents a supplement to possibility. That is why, strictly speaking, the impossible remains non-reducible to a form of possibility as such.

Aporias cannot be resolved or even clarified by regular logic: the origin comes before the supplement only because it comes after the supplement. For Derrida, any aporia refers to the puzzling moments of metaphysical statements that cannot be explained through regular logic. An aporia describes an undecidable situation in which we cannot turn to or justify one side of the opposition (Derrida, 1993, p. 12). Since aporias are inevitable and not reducible, Derrida (1993, p. 16) speaks about their necessary and passionate endurance. To experience an aporia means to bear its un-logic with passion, or even more: ‘a passionate suffering’. At least we need to try to experience the impossible (although the impossible itself does not grant access; Derrida, 1992a) and give justice to its existence; we need to try not to become paralyzed but to get to know the necessary limits of reasoning (Derrida, 1992a, p. 16). The impossibility of any aporia, then, is the ‘ultimate’ aporia as such because it remains, and has to remain, incalculable (Derrida, 1993, p. 78).

Because deconstructive thinking reveals the impossibility of fixing one side of an opposition as privileged and self-defining, it needs to pay special attention to concepts that favour a both/and logic to portray moments when meaning cannot be satisfactorily decided. Derrida (1995b, p. 86) calls these concepts undecidables because it becomes undecidable to which side of the opposition to turn. Undecidables operate from within oppositions and destabilize them; they represent the unity of the opposition. However, they cannot be reduced to oppositions because they do not allow for a Hegelean solution. A prominent example for an undecidable is the term différence which means to differ and to defer at the same time. Undecidables represent the sphere/space in which opposites are opposed and in which the meaning of one pole relates back to the other. The resulting concept of rationality no longer starts from a logos that represents the ‘real’ truth of things; it also creates no better theory of truth, but is ‘an intellectual
predisposition specifically attuned to the aporias which arise in attempts to legitimize truth claims’ (Chia, 1996, p. 19). The impossibility of any aporia is a constant reminder that the world of organizations is not based on a pure and safe conceptual ground, but that we need to face the impossibility of organizations and organizing before we can meaningfully start to think about their possibility.

DECONSTRUCTION AND ORGANIZATION THEORY

Existing Applications of Deconstruction in Organization Theory

Although deconstruction has not been extensively applied within the broader field of management so far, scholars in the field of organization theory have adopted some of its central ideas. In the following, I look at and classify the existing literature as these writings relate to and supplement my discussion of aporias later on. I distinguish between four ways in which deconstruction has been applied so far (for a similar classification see Jones, 2003): (1) deconstruction as a strategy for an analysis of ‘classical texts’ within organization theory, (2) deconstruction as a way to discuss the conceptual opposition within the academic discourse on organizations, (3) deconstruction as a way to study the language occurring in organizations and (4) deconstruction as an epistemological and ontological frame of reference. Obviously, all four dimensions are interrelated, often within the same piece of scholarly work, and are distinguished only for analytical purposes.

The Deconstruction of Classical Texts

Deconstruction has been applied as a strategy for a literary analysis of ‘classical texts’ within organization theory. The aim is a deconstruction of oppositions within a particular publication to show that the neglected concept within a text/publication actually is constitutive of the privileged one. While Mumby and Putnam (1992) present a deconstructive reading of Herbert Simon’s (1971) Administrative Behavior to show that bounded rationality constantly undermines physical labour and femininity, Kilduff (1993) offers a fine-grained reading of March and Simon’s (1958/1993) book Organizations. Kilduff ‘opens’ this particular text for the reader to unravel conflicting relationships. By referring to the opposition non-machine/machine model of the employee, Kilduff (1993, p. 17) shows that the non-machine model is privileged for being able to capture what March and Simon
label bounded rationality. Yet the deconstructive reading of the text demonstrates that March and Simon simultaneously criticize and acclaim the machine model as they, according to Kilduff (1993), still understand the human mind as being programmable to perform tasks.

Deconstruction traces the aporia that resides in March and Simon’s text. That is why Kilduff (1993, p. 21) states that March and Simon ‘both accuse their predecessors of treating the employee as a machine and fill the absence they claim to have found in the literature with an updated machine model’. The assumption that human behaviour can be programmed reappraises the machine metaphor that March and Simon wanted to abandon in the first place. The formerly rejected concept – the machine model of the employee – is thus not abandoned by the book Organizations, but only reappraised.

Deconstruction of Oppositions Underlying Organization Theory

Deconstruction has also been applied to expose those conceptual oppositions that the academic discourse on organization theory has produced over time. Scholars of organization theory are used to thinking in an either/or way. Deconstruction has helped to unravel oppositions like organization/disorganization (Cooper, 1986), decision/action (Chia, 1994), resources/application (Rasche, 2007) and structure/agency (Knights, 1997). These dualisms are usually constructed in privileging one side over the other. For instance, decisions are given primacy over action and ‘the’ organization is seen as being superior to any form of disorganization. Organizational analysis when viewed as a deconstructive practice rejects such logocentric thinking, criticizes the existence of pure origins, and thus ‘peels away the layers of ideological obscuration’ (Martin, 1990, p. 340).

To look at one specific example, we can refer to Cooper’s (1986) discussion of the opposition organization/disorganization. Starting with the assertion that many scholars who deal with organizations tend to treat them as ordered systems, Cooper (1986, p. 305) suggests that the work of organizations is focused upon ‘transforming an intrinsically ambiguous condition into one that is ordered so that organization, as a process, is constantly bound up with the contrary state of disorganization’. Refusing the traditional view that organizations appear to be a natural order, Cooper suggests a dynamic boundary concept that distinguishes system and environment, a kind of différence, so to speak. Hence, Cooper views order not as a static concept but rather as an emerging category occurring out of the process of organizing. If organization is the configuration of order out of disorder, there needs to be a situation that makes this process of differentiating between system and environment necessary, a state of disorder that constantly surrounds all.
organizations. Cooper (1986, p. 316) calls this state the ‘zero degree of organization’. This zero degree of organization represents a surplus – what Derrida calls a supplement – that is necessary for order to exist. Disorder and chaos do not destabilize organizations but enable them to be formed in the first place.

*Deconstruction as a Way to Study the Language of/in Organizations*

Some scholars used deconstruction to analyze the language occurring in organizations. Martin (1990, p. 342), for instance, reveals the silences of a story told by a corporate president regarding his organization’s efforts to assist women in balancing the demands of work and home. Martin shows that the organization’s efforts to ‘help’ women sustained the false opposition between public and private spheres of life and, as a consequence, suppressed gender conflict. Because work is conceptualized as being separate from family life, conflicts of working mothers are classified as ‘private’ problems beyond the influence of the corporation.

Deconstruction has also been used to study ‘official’ texts released by corporations. Boje (1995), for instance, presents an analysis of stories within/of Disney and thus reveals marginalized voices. As he mentions, ‘[t]o deconstruct is to actually analyze the relations between the dualities in stories – such as the positive and negative, the central and the marginal, the essential and the inessential, the insider and the outsider’ (Boje, 1995, p. 1007).

A similar approach is used in Boje’s (1998) study of Nike’s storytelling practices. He shows that while the language used by Nike portrays the company as a representative of Western economic development, it, at the same time, suppresses alternative perspectives (i.e. Asian women working under inhumane conditions). Within this case deconstruction is applied to ‘read Nike “texts” both written and practiced, to decenter and otherwise unmask problematic centers. These centers have become reified or frozen, taken-for-granted and privileged’ (Boje, 1998, p. 462).

*Deconstruction as an Epistemological and Ontological Frame of Reference*

Deconstruction has also been applied as an epistemological and ontological frame of reference. Scholars following this approach try to establish a deconstructive perspective for conducting organizational analysis, but do not base their arguments on particular oppositions. Chia (1996), for instance, uses deconstruction as a strategy to obtain a different understanding of the assumptions underpinning organizational research in general. He distinguishes between ‘upstream’ and ‘downstream’ thinking. Downstream thinking is identified with the epistemological position of representationalism,
the belief that organizational scholarship can truthfully represent reality ‘as it is’. Organizations are taken to be identifiable objects existing ‘out there’ (Chia, 1996, p. 4).

To overcome these problems, Chia proposes an upstream mode of organizational analysis which highlights the contextuality of actions and views organizations not as things but as an emergent process. This process is based upon the premise that linguistic constructs (like organizations) cannot be objectively described because reality is not static and representable (Chia, 1996, p. 172). Chia refers to deconstruction as one possible way to show that meaning structures in organizations are never fixed, and hence representational, but subject to difference and thus depended on the differing and deferring effects of signs. Organizations, then, are not the supposedly ‘pure’ phenomena we are searching after.

Aporias: Deconstruction and the Impossible Possibility

Although it is certainly dangerous to dump authors into ‘boxes’, as I have attempted through my review, the four dimensions give a good overview of how deconstruction has been applied in the field of organization theory. While there is much value in these studies, Derrida’s emphasis on aporias has only recently been acknowledged, although it has been ‘with us’, at least in an implicit manner, ever since. Jones (2005, p. 228), for instance, discusses the aporias related to business ethics and in particular corporate responsibility (see also Jones et al., 2005, pp. 121–124). Likewise Weitzner (2007, p. 45) discusses the ‘“impossibility” of the ethical moment’ while referring to Derrida’s writings. Drawing on these (and other) contributions, I aim to unravel further exemplary aporias that relate in particular to organization theory. This way of ‘using’ deconstructive philosophy constantly reminds us of the self-contradictions of metaphysical arguments within organization theory; it also acknowledges that Derrida himself placed a lot of emphasis on aporias and even defined deconstruction as an aporetic experience of the impossible (Derrida, 1984, p. 27). As Caputo (1997, p. 32) remarks, ‘the paralysis and impossibility of an aporia is just what impels deconstruction’.

In line with Derrida (1993, p. 68), I do not discuss aporias to merely reduce the impossible to some form of possibility. I treat aporias neither as a ‘bad’ thing nor as something that we should avoid at any expense. Rather, I expose aporias as the indispensable limits of knowledge about the functioning of organizations. Aporias are indispensable because they inevitably occur once we acknowledge that the oppositions that academic
discourses are structured around are based on ideologies which suppress one part of the opposition as being a mere derivative of the ‘origin’. Instead of reducing the impossible to the possible, I illustrate that the impossibility of each aporia is the condition of possibility as such (Derrida, 2002b, p. 361). Acknowledging aporias helps us to find a novel ground for theorizing about organizations; a ground which does not conclude that we are stuck with impossibilities, but which considers these impossibilities as necessary limits to our knowledge about organizations and, based on this, allows us to recognize the consequences of the interplay between the (formerly separated) poles of an opposition. I thus agree with Poole and Van de Ven (1989, p. 564) that appreciating impossibilities within the research process implies to ‘discover different assumptions, shift perspectives, pose problems in fundamentally different ways, and focus on different research questions’ (see also Clegg et al., 2002; Lewis, 2000).

THREE APORIAS: DERRIDA ORGANIZING

Environment/Organization: The Aporia of Adaptation

Derrida and the Inside/Outside Debate
‘The market’ and ‘the environment’ are popular concepts among organization theorists. A variety of scholars have treated the environment as an ‘origin’ of their thinking about organizations. Williamson (1975, p. 20), for instance, assumes that ‘in the beginning there were “markets”’, while Lawrence and Lorsch’s (1967) contingency theory of organizations makes the assumption that environmental circumstances dictate what is going on in organizations. This way of thinking leads to an adaptation-based logic which is present in much research on organizations and particularly strategic management (Ansoff, 1987b; Porter, 1981). Organizations are left with the task of adapting and fitting to the environment as well as possible. Adaptation-based research presumes that firms are part of their environment in a way that all actors refer to one reality (Vos 2002). This reality is relevant to all and provides the point of reference for change in organizations.

To discuss the aporetic nature of the adaptation-based logic, we need to recognize that such thinking is based on the opposition environment/organization. The distinction between environment and organization refers to the more general question of how relevant the opposition outside/inside really is. Derrida (1981, 1987) discussed this question several times and
argues that the distinction between inside and outside is a metaphysical thought that is particularly revealed in the study of art.

This permanent requirement – to distinguish between the internal proper sense and the circumstance of the object being talked about – organizes all philosophical discourses on art, the meaning of art and meaning as such, from Plato to Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger. This requirement presupposes a discourse on the limit between the inside and outside of the art object, here a discourse on the frame. (Derrida, 1987, p. 45, emphasis in the original)

The frame distinguishes between inside and outside but is not ‘given’ in a way for us to simply accept the difference. Rather, the frame is undecidable in the sense that it is neither in the inside nor on the outside. The frame is not naturally imposed but constructed through differences that are never complete but perpetuated by difference. Such as there is no predefined limit to ‘the text’, there can be no natural boundary around what we believe to be inside an organization.

If we apply this kind of thinking to the relation between environment and organization, we can argue that the environment exists only because of the organization, while at the same time the organization cannot exist without its environment (Cooper, 1986). The apparent purity of the environment is constantly supplemented by the organization that actively frames its own environment. The supplement is added to compensate for a lack in what is thought to be complete; the organization always adds a new dimension to the environment (Cooper, 1986, p. 315). That is why the conception of the environment cannot be grounded in what Derrida calls a metaphysics of presence. Organizational phenomena (e.g. structures and plans) cannot be derived from an objective and self-present environment, but are the outcome of the relation between organization and environment.

Any adaptation-based logic, which is open to Derrida’s argument that the inside is in the outside and the outside also in the inside, needs to accept that at the limits of our knowledge about organizations rests an aporia. If it is true that the environment consists only because of the organization (i.e. it is a construction of the organization), every adaptation to the environment is only possible as self-adaptation. The implications of this finding lead to an aporia: you cannot distance yourself from the environment (for the sake of adaptation) and at the same time produce this very environment (Vos, 2002). While looking for organizational fit, organizations need to describe the environment that exists regardless of them (as otherwise they could not establish distance), whereas in fact the environment exists only because of the organization. However, the environment cannot exist at the same time
because of and despite an organization. You cannot adapt to something (and take it as a reference point despite yourself) that at the same time exists only because of your own existence.

Implications: The Différance of Competitive Advantage

The aporia of adaptation, like any aporia, remains a limit to our knowledge about the relationship between organization and environment. We cannot simply experience the aporia and thus cross the oppositional line (Derrida, 1993, p. 15). What we can do, however, is to apprehend and endure its existence; we can give reference to the non-track and barred path within our thinking. Giving reference to the impossibility of environmental adaptation implies to rethink, among other things, the way we conceptualize the achievement of competitive advantage. Child (2005, p. 379), for instance, argues that ‘competitive advantage can [...] be gained from a firm’s ability to adapt rapidly to external change’. Competitive advantage, here, is a ‘pure’ concept, something that an organization can and should derive out of its environment via adaptation. Then, the identity of competitive advantage (i.e. what organizational members believe competitive advantage to rest on) is ‘given’. But what identifies a competitive advantage?

To answer this question, we need to turn to the concept of identity. Pondering about the possibility of a ‘pure’ identity, an identity which is simply ‘given’, Derrida (1998, 1992b) suggests that whatever entity is to acquire an identity is caught up in the movement of supplementarity. Identity is not a static concept, not something that imposes itself on us from the ‘outside’. Identity is a constant reinvention and nothing that we can derive from some metaphysical origin. The identity of competitive advantage is a product of the ‘play of differences’ between environment and organization; these differences are not stable but change constantly. Every difference is also a deference of a self-present identity into the future; every identity is subject to différance. Hence, the meaning of an organization’s competitive advantage is always moving, it is never fully ‘there’, because no identity can ever be identical to itself (Derrida, 1992b, p. 9). Accordingly, Derrida (1998, p. 28) argues that ‘an identity is never given, received, or attained; only the interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures’. Identity is identification – competitive advantage rests on identification.

This process view on identity and competitive advantage defers the underlying aporia; the aporia remains in some sense present (as it cannot be defined away) but is less visible because the interplay (and not simultaneous occurrence) of organization and environment is now of relevance. ‘In the beginning’ of competitive advantage is neither the organization nor the
environment, but, to speak with Derrida (2000a, p. 282): ‘in the beginning, there is the and’. Identification is neither a product of the organization nor the environment alone; it occurs as an effect of the relation between organization and environment (Derrida, 1987, p. 61). Identification draws our attention to the interrelatedness of both spheres: the organization creates its environment by the distinctions it draws, while at the same time this environment ‘constrains’ its future actions and thus identity. There is no environment or organization as such, but whenever an environment is framed the organization is framed as well (et vice versa). Such a perspective reveals the limits of adaptation-based thinking as outlined above.

Competitive advantage is not based on ‘the logic which guides the process by which an organization adapts to its external environment’ (Ansoff, 1987a, p. 501), but instead rests on the play of differences (‘produced’ by difference) between organization and environment. There is no ultimate metaphysical origin of competitive advantage – an origin which can be objectively observed through different methods as assumed by Porter (1980). Competitive advantage cannot be simply possessed by an organization (e.g. like a tangible asset), but is enacted over time involving actors who make choices interactively and by doing so refer to their environment (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985).

Decision/Action: The Aporia of Undecidability

Deconstruction and the Impossibility of Decisions

‘Decisions’ and ‘decision-making’ are much-debated concepts within organization theory (Chia, 1994; Langley, Mintzberg, Pitcher, Posada, & Saint-Macary, 1995). While we know about the limits of rational (linear) decision-making (Mintzberg, 1994), we rarely question the deeply held assumption that thinking (‘the decision’) comes before execution (‘the action’). Thus, there is another opposition at work – decision/action – which favours one pole as being full of meaning (i.e. the decision) and treats the other one as a derivative (i.e. action). If scholars reflect on the nature of this opposition, as for instance in the case of Mintzberg and Waters (1990), they tend to reverse it and thus give primacy to the formerly neglected end. This becomes obvious when considering that Mintzberg and Waters (1985, p. 257) conceive of organizations’ strategies as ‘a pattern in a stream of actions’. Yet, overturning the opposition does not reveal the blind spot of oppositional thinking (Chia, 1994, p. 788).
To uncover this blind spot, Derrida (1995b, pp. 386–387) claims that the future is something monstrous, something that we neither can nor should predict.

The future is necessarily monstrous: the figure of the future, that is, that which can only be surprisingly, that for which we are not prepared, you see, is heralded by species of monsters. A future that would not be monstrous would not be a future; it would already be a predictable, calculable, and programmable tomorrow. All experience open to the future is prepared or prepares itself to welcome the monstrous arrivant, to welcome it, that is, to accord hospitality to that which is absolutely foreign or strange, but also, one must add, to try to domesticate it, that is, to make it part of the household and have it assume the habits, to make us assume new habits. (emphasis in the original)

What does Derrida mean by the phrase ‘monstrous arrivant’? According to Royle (2003, p. 111), a monstrous arrivant comes to a threshold – a border that points towards the future – to eventually surprise us. We need to welcome this monstrous arrivant, since no decision would be possible without the singularity that is attached to this monstrosity. For Derrida (1992c, p. 200), deconstruction is about ‘the opening of the future itself’ because a deconstructive thinking necessarily destabilizes any context. This destabilization is a necessary condition for the dangerous monstrosity of the future. As Derrida (1977, p. 5, emphasis in the original) claims: ‘The future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, presented, as a sort of monstrosity’. Derrida asserts that to make choice authentic, one needs to understand that the future cannot be certain, because if the future were certain, there would be no need for an authentic choice anymore. Why, then, is real/authentic choice based on an aporia?

To answer this question, we have to get back to the supplementary logic that is at the heart of any deconstruction. If thinking (i.e. the decision) is not full of meaning, it is constantly supplemented by action. Action adds a new dimension to the ‘original’ (i.e. the decision) – a surplus that can turn out to be ‘dangerous’ because it modifies the premises that justified the decision ‘in the beginning’. Decision premises are not entirely the outcome of thinking but are constituted in the course of action. Not until the decision has finally been carried out does one decide how contingency has been fixed and what justification was chosen. Action constantly supplements, in fact ‘gives-new-meaning-to’, thinking in a way that makes it impossible to fully justify a decision a priori. The justification one chooses prior to action cannot ‘stand in’, at least not in a pure sense, for the decision one is about to make.

These insights lead to aporia: a decision can only be justified with regard to action, but action needs a decision to come about. Decisions are impossible
in the sense that the preferences, which give the good reasons why the
decision is carried out, are fully constituted in actu only. Because the
meaning of a decision is constituted in the course of action, we need to make
decisions if, and only if, they are impossible to justify. The condition of the
possibility of a decision, that is its justification, implies at the same time its
impossibility since there is no full justification until the decision has finally
been executed. In the words of Derrida (1995b, pp. 147–148):

> These are the only decisions possible: impossible ones. [...] It is when it is not possible to know what must be done, when knowledge is not and cannot be determining that a decision is possible as such. Otherwise the decision is an application: one knows what has to be done, it’s clear, there is no more decision possible; what one has here is an effect, an application, a programming. (emphasis in the original)

The defining characteristic of a decision (i.e. its concern with an uncertain future) excludes any form of constraint that would allow for calculable decisions. Decisions deserve their name only if they contain the ‘ghost of the undecidable’ (Derrida, 1992a, pp. 24–25). Every decision remains caught in a ghost that represents the undecidability of an open future.

The undecidable is not merely the oscillation or the tension between two decisions; it is the experience of that which, though heterogeneous, foreign to the order of the calculable and the rule, is still obliged – it is obligation that we must speak – to give itself up to the impossible decision, while taking account of law and rules. A decision that didn’t go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision [...] That is why the ordeal of the undecidable that I just said must be gone through by any decision worthy of the name is never past or passed, it is not a surmounted or sublated (aufgehoben) moment in the decision. The undecidable remains caught, lodged, at least as a ghost – but an essential ghost – in every decision, in every event of decision. (emphasis and German annotation in the original)

The force of difference – which defers the meaning of a decision and thus makes it impossible to arrive at fully justified decision premises that determine action – makes us recognize the ghost that is inherent to every decision. For Derrida (1995a, p. 116), undecidability implies that no completeness of a decision is possible. Every decision is structured by this experience of the undecidable, the limits of decidability, to finally become a decision. The point here is not whether decisions exist or not, but to question in how far a decision can be ‘present’ in the sense that it offers a safe ground for action.

The aporia of undecidability is at the heart of Derrida’s thinking about decisions. Once we recognize the undecidable nature of decisions, we can start asking the question of how decisions come into being (Derrida, 1995b, p. 147). Apparently, there is no moment in which a decision can be called present. That is why, according to Derrida (1989b, p. 79), monstrosity can
only be recognized after a decision, when it has become the norm. However, once it has become the norm, it is no longer monstrous. The very idea of a justifiable/pure/genuine decision is irreducible to itself and owes its existence to ‘the other’ (action). The other, that constantly supplements, possesses a singularity that is forever new and different. Because difference is all about a deferral of meaning that makes presence impossible, a monster never presents itself but always remains ‘to come’. According to Derrida (2000b, p. 534), ‘[d]ifference is a thought which wishes to yield to the imminence of what is coming or about to come’. At first, this sounds devastating for anyone who tries to think about organization theory. Yet, on closer examination, the monstrosity of the future turns out to be the very condition of organizational decisions as such. Without at least facing the aporia of undecidability, every organizational decision remains a programmable calculation – something that is not worth being called a decision.

**Implications: Decisions as Incisions**

The aporia of undecidability remains a limit to our knowledge about organizational decisions. Like any aporia that deconstruction exposes, the impossibility of decisions is limited to the establishment of a metaphysics of presence; in this case a metaphysics of presence refers to decisions that are self-defining. Decisions are not impossible per se, but their rational justification becomes out of reach. The aporia that underlies Derrida’s notion of undecidability arises from the metaphysical desire to justify a decision prior to action. Considering that decisions in organizations, and particularly strategic decisions, call for justification because they include considerable resource commitments and are usually irreversible (Mintzberg, Raisinghani, & Theoret, 1976, p. 246; Schilit, 1990, p. 436), this aporia seems to be much relevant. How, then, should we think about decision-making in organizations?

Decisions cannot be construed as an unproblematic identifiable event ‘out there’ but come into being (just as Cooper (1986) conceptualizes organizations as emerging from the zero degree of organization). Derrida’s aporia requires that we move beyond the uncontested acceptance of ‘the decision’ as the principal focus of analysis (Harmon, 1989). According to Chia (1994), a decision is an operation of ‘cutting off’ parts of reality (i.e. an ‘incision’) helping to configure a version of reality to which we then subsequently respond. Decisions are active operations of reality construction that retrospectively appear meaningful; they are not in any way objectively given but are retrospective objectifications arising/emerging within the flow of
social processes. Whatever we regard as ‘decisions’ within our research are to some extent constructs allowing us to fix our actions (Harmon, 1989, p. 149).

Deconstruction helps us to rethink the status of decisions as such. Neither ‘decisions’ nor ‘actions’ are pure concepts. On the one hand, action already is a part of decision because the very act of decision-making represents a fundamental ontological act of making an ‘incision’ into the flow of experiences. On the other hand, decisions are also part of action since every act involves a decision (i.e. the decision to act in a certain, and not a different, way). To speak with Chia (1994, p. 795), decisions and actions, when viewed from a deconstructive perspective, need to be understood as a becoming process of configuring reality.

This perspective on decision-making helps us to rethink many phenomena that have been of central interest to scholars within the domain of organization theory. Plans, for instance, do not reflect ‘decisions’ which are followed by ‘actions’. Rather, as suggested by Weick (1979, p. 11), plans are ‘excuses for actions’. They provide a fictional ground upon which reality constructing incisions rest. Such fictions reflect the ‘quivering’ ground helping us to cross the abyss of undecidability. Plans are meaningful because they spur peoples’ confidence and thus provide excuses for further incisions. The decisions on which plans rest are by no means objectively given, but represent objectifications of fluid processes which motivate further actions. A similar argumentation relates to organizational values. Simon (1971), for instance, sees values as coming logically first because they reflect the basis for suitable actions. A Derridian perspective not only questions the analytical independence of values from action, but helps us to understand how values are ‘discovered’ in and through the ongoing creation of factual contexts within and beyond organizations. The consequences of such a perspective on decision-making have not yet been fully integrated into our organizational theories.

Rule/Application: The Aporia of Rule Following

Deconstruction and the Impossibility of Iteration

Organizations are made up of rules (Giddens, 1984) and numerous studies have reflected on the role of rules in organizations (Bozeman & Rainey, 1998; Jabs, 2005; Rushing, 1966). In its most general sense, a rule can be characterized as a formalized prescription regulating (and eventually sanctioning) human behaviour (Weber, 1968, p. 217). Rules have one aspect to them which is of central importance when thinking about their nature: they need to be generalizable and thus applicable over a range of contexts
A rule that is just applicable once is not a rule since every rule, by definition, is repeatable.

For any rule to be repeatable (and thus applicable), one would need not only to anticipate its context of application but also to regulate this very context. Can we ‘manage’ those contexts? According to Derrida, contexts always remain open and are thus non-saturable. Deconstruction implies paying the sharpest attention possible to context, acknowledging its limitless nature, and giving reference to the never-ending movement of recontextualization (Derrida, 1995a, p. 136). Contexts must remain open for two reasons. First, every context is not simply given, in the sense of some harder reality that imposes on people, but produced – in fact enacted – through incisions (see above). People, while making sense of their world, fix what belongs to a context and by doing so draw distinctions which cannot be justified in advance. Contexts are not a simple natural ground on which managers can base their activity but emerge because of them (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Accordingly, contexts always remain open to further descriptions, as there is no predescribed limit of what might be included. Second, any effort to describe/codify a context (e.g. ‘the project’) already yields another context that escapes the prior formulation (Culler, 1982, p. 124). In other words, any attempt to describe the limits of a context upsets those limits. Contexts always draw upon previous contexts, which are themselves embedded in still other contexts (Dixon & Jones, 2005, p. 243). This inter-contextual character entails that there is no stability that allows us to completely iterate a context without modification.

Moving towards the aporetic nature of rules, Derrida (1995a, p. 117) discusses the question of repetition (iteration) in some depth. According to him, the perfect repetition that is needed to make generalizations valid is impossible. This, however, does not mean that Derrida abandons generalizations. Deconstruction does not neglect the general but tells us that ‘[t]he singular is in fact always bound up with the general’ (Royle, 2003, p. 120). Every repetition creates a difference that alters and defers the meaning of a rule. Différance is at the heart of repeatability and ensures that the meaning of rules is never fully present.

This relationship of sameness and difference reminds us that repetition is never pure but always leads to alterations. As Lucy (2004, p. 59) argues, ‘[t]o repeat something is to alter it, to make a difference’. The alteration of the meaning of an organizational rule is already included in its repetition, constantly contaminating its purity (presence). If organizational rules were present, it would be a presence without difference, which is impossible (Bennington, 1989, p. 84). This repetition-as-difference enables and limits
rules to make us aware that no organizational rule can exist only for itself in a state of self-presence. What permits pureness to occur is ‘this dangerous supplement’ (Derrida, 1977) which constantly adds a new dimension of meaning to the ‘origin’. In our case, the supplement is application – the action that is required for rules to mean anything at all. We cannot refrain from applying rules as this would make them unessential. Yet application (i.e. reality constructing ‘incisions’) means modification and thus partly destroys rules.

The impossibility of perfect repetition points towards an aporia. We cannot replicate rules in their purest sense, which is to say without modification. The condition of their possibility (which is their iteration), already modifies, alters, perverts, sometimes even replaces them. Rules do not apply themselves; people apply them within a specific context, a context that cannot be perfectly regulated a priori but remains open and thus calls for adjustment. Organizational members need to regulate and, at the same time, need to distance themselves from regulation to ‘invent’ the rule anew. As Derrida (1997, p. 6) argues: ‘So, at the same time, you have to follow the rule and to invent a new rule, a new norm, a new criterion, a new law’. The supplement ‘forces’ the meaning of rules to be contextualized, to be valid for a single case only. But contexts are open and unsaturable and cannot be regulated in advance, at least not in a satisfactory way. To think of perfectly repeatable rules means to establish a metaphysics of presence (i.e. an ‘origin’ that is self-defining and does not need any application to create meaning).

**Implications: The Iterability of Rules**

The discussed aporia that makes generalizations impossible is based upon Derrida’s (1992a) claim that every repetition also brings about alteration. Derrida (1995a) discusses this interconnectedness of repetition and alteration with regard to the term: iterability. Iterability comes from the Latin iter (‘again’) and the Sanskrit itara (‘other’) and is the logic that ties repetition to alteration (Derrida, 1995a, p. 7; Royle, 2003, p. 67). Iterability asks us to think replication and modification together to consider that reproduction/replication is the possibility of singularity. Looking at iterability, organizational rules remain in some sense identifiable within and among organizations, but only in, through, and in view of their alteration (Derrida, 1995a, p. 53). Conceiving of rules as being reproduced by iterability entails accepting that they are modified within and through their repetition.

Iterability implies that organizations do not completely neglect the sameness that makes rules in some way repeatable. Organizations base their actions on an indispensable emptiness of rules, which is necessary for
repetition, and a gradual filling of this emptiness to take specific circumstances into account (Ortmann & Salzman, 2002, p. 212). People in organizations consider general (empty) prescriptions and modify (fill) these prescriptions over time. Emptiness, then, represents the repeatability of rules in principle, while fullness characterizes ‘the other’ that each context brings about and without which no rule gains meaning in praxis. Emptiness implies that rules can be repeated and act as a ground for organizing, whereas fullness points out that this repetition fills rules with contextualized meaning and modifies them to account for the specific circumstances at hand.

Based on this discussion, Ortmann (2003, p. 33) draws our attention to the unavoidable necessity of rule modification within the process of ‘filling’. Because organizational rules need to be applied, they cannot avoid the dangerous supplement that modifies their meaning. Organizational members thus need to know that to break with a rule is not necessarily a bad thing, but often indispensable to address the context they face. Pfeffer (1994, pp. 3–4), for instance, shows that one cannot simply adhere to Porter’s five forces framework (i.e. a strategic rule) to make out competitive advantage because competitiveness is a dynamic concept that changes over time. He argues that when identifying the five top performing US firms for the 1972 to 1992 period, which according to Porter’s logic of competitive advantage should be in industries with high barriers to entry and patent protection, one ends up with a list of organizations that operate in industries characterized by massive competition, widespread bankruptcy, and almost no barrier to entry. The point is not to believe that Porter offers a false analytical tool, but that the general nature of his framework does not present a reasonable explanation of competitive advantage in every industry and country.

The application of organizational rules is not a secondary operation that can simply be deduced. Application acts as a Derridian supplement that may be restricted (but not determined) by existing meaning structures. Rule application necessarily leads to modification that puts the rule into a unique context and thus preserves peoples’ capacity to act. Like signs, which are unstable and only gain meaning in and through social praxis (Derrida, 2002a), to know a universal rule by itself in no way guarantees that its general nature is enabled in the context of application. The supplement always undermines what we think is generally valid. Like a parasite, the social practices of people constantly recontextualize and revise rules. That is why Derrida (1995b, p. 234) remarks ‘deconstruction is always a discourse about the parasite’.
This chapter aimed at introducing the consequences of Derrida’s deconstructive philosophy for organization studies by putting a special emphasis on the role of aporias. While many things could be said about possible implications of deconstructive thinking for theorizing about organizations (see, e.g. Jones, 2003; Knights, 1997; Martin, 1990; Ortmann & Salzman, 2002), I would like to highlight (1) the necessity of future research to face and discuss the impossible moments of organizations and organizing and (2) the need to put more emphasis on the political and ethical dimension of Derrida’s writings when thinking about deconstruction and/as organization theory. While the latter aspect may seem decoupled from the points raised within this chapter (at least at first glance), I intend to show that it is the recognition of the impossible which calls for an engagement with Derrida’s political and ethical writings.

Theorizing Organizations and the Importance of the ‘And’

Although we have called up some of the aporias that organization theory tries to suppress, there are other oppositions which separate: resources/application, knowing/not knowing, control/flexibility, self/other, old/new. Deconstruction is an invitation; an invitation to experience these aporias and pay serious attention to them within the process of theorizing and, based on this, start thinking about the possibility of organizations and organizing from a different perspective. Considering aporias requires to more radically acknowledge the ‘and’ within organization theory – the word which connects oppositions not in a linear but in a mutually enhancing manner. As Derrida (2000a, p. 285) remarks:

Wondering what the ‘and’ is, what and [...] means and does not mean, does and does not do, that is perhaps, before any enumeration of all possible titles of the type ‘deconstruction and ...’, the most constant task of any deconstruction. (emphasis in the original)

Paying the most serious attention to the ‘and’ reveals a deconstructive position, one that takes aporia as a starting point to think about the conditions of the possibility of organizations and organizing.

Recognizing the importance of the ‘and’ implies to not treat the impossibility of an operation as negative or something we should avoid,
but requires us to consider the impossible acts as a precondition for the possible. Without acknowledging the impossible moments of organizing, we may arrive too quickly at the possible and thus forget about the conditions of its occurrence. Powell (2006, p. 220), while discussing Derrida’s thinking, argues in this context:

The gift of the impossible is the precondition for the possible to occur, for how can anything happen at all, how not be machinal and pre-programmed, spectral, if everything is pre-possible and simply possible.

Too often there is no discussion of the pre-possible moments of organizations and organizing while building theories. We take the pre-possible for granted and hence forget about the impossible conditions upon which our nice and elegant theories rest. The impossible, as argued throughout this chapter, is not supposed to bring about paralysis or should hinder theory building. From the perspective of deconstruction, any acknowledgement of the impossible makes us think about whether we did not too easily accept an ‘origin’ as given without challenging the conditions of its existence. As Mitroff (1995, p. 750) argued 15 years ago: ‘One of the reasons why I find the current literature on management so repulsive is that for the most part it eschews paradox’. Recognizing deconstruction’s link with the impossible presents an excellent opportunity to give more voice to aporias within the process of theorizing.

Having said this, we should accept that the aporias which deconstruction uncovers are not negative. Deconstruction’s critique is strongly affirmative (Jones, 2003, p. 42); it is about ‘welcoming’ the supplement, not to suppress the former origin but to show that one cannot exist without the other. As Derrida (1995b, p. 83) notes, deconstruction ‘is not negative, even though it has often been interpreted as such despite all sorts of warnings. For me, it always accompanies an affirmative exigency, I would even say that it never proceeds without love …’ To treat deconstruction merely as critique would reinscribe another opposition (i.e. positive/negative) into the process of theorizing (Derrida, 1995b, p. 211). Deconstructive organizational analysis is affirmative because it is about thinking the possibility of organizations and organizing from another, non-metaphysical, border. Deconstruction thinks about the possibility of organizations and organizing by displacing an either/or and applying a both/and logic. The point is not to distance oneself from the phenomenon under deconstruction, but to give it the possibility of being thought in another way. Paradoxically, this passage is paved by the impassage of aporia.
Deconstruction and the Impossible Moments of Justice

An appraisal of the impossible as the condition of the possibility of organizations and organizing leads us directly to another implication: organization theory not only suppresses the aporias inherent to the operation of organizations, but also does not pay adequate attention to the impossibility of justice which Derrida (1992a, 1992b) discussed in some of his writings. In a time where the responsibility of corporations and the ethical dimension of business are debated in the context of organization theory (see, e.g. Wempe, 2008), we should not risk neglecting this part of Derrida’s philosophy but treat it as one promising contribution to organization studies. Although the ethical dimension of Derridian philosophy has been discussed recently (Jones, 2005, 2007; Jones et al., 2005), I agree with Weitzner (2007) that more can be done to tease out the implications of Derrida’s writings for studying the ethics in/of/beyond organizations.

Once again, this brings us to the impossible moments of organizing as for Derrida authentic justice is impossible. His thoughts, expressed in the essay Force of Law (1992a), are based on the argument that law and justice are different. Justice by itself can guide the application of the law; however real/true/genuine/authentic justice remains impossible. As Derrida (1997, pp. 16–17) remarks in an interview:

But justice is not the law. Justice is what gives us the impulse, the drive, or the moment to improve the law, that is, to deconstruct the law. [...] A judge, if he wants to be just, cannot content himself with applying the law. He has to reinvent the law each time.

If justice cannot be ensured by the law, it remains locked in an aporia (Derrida, 1992a, p. 25). Justice becomes incalculable and thus undecidable because the idea of justice (in its purest form) cannot be reduced to some sort of pre-programmed law. Hence, the aporia of undecidability acts as the condition of the possibility of justice. This aporia opens up the singularity and unique context of each case. As with any aporia, the impossibility of justice remains a limit which does not allow passage (Derrida, 1992a, p. 16). In practice, however, the aporia highlights the need to question ‘easy’ solutions regarding organizational justice and thus makes us consider the contextual circumstances of just decisions to the largest possible extent.

I believe that Derrida’s thinking should inspire our discourses on whether and how organizations exercise justice and how they can be held accountable for their doings and omissions. In a time where standards for organizational accountability are proliferating (e.g. the recent ISO 26000; for an overview see Waddock, 2008), Derrida’s thinking about the impossibility of justice
seems both necessary and timely. Deconstruction, then, calls for questioning the desire of standards to pre-regulate justice in a universal way. Future research on organizations needs to critically examine whether and to what degree standards are helpful tools to hold organizations accountable. Examining the limits of standardizing the exercise of justice gives the application of Derridian thinking a very practical and timely twist. Such research could show the significance of deconstructive thinking for contemporary problems in organization studies and thus counter De George’s (2008, p. 85) argument that ‘the relevance of Derrida to CSR [Corporate Social Responsibility] and business ethics remains tenuous and elusive’ (annotation added).

Prospects …

Deconstruction has always been with us because it is nothing that we can define away (although we can suppress it). We have to think of organizations as being always already in deconstruction. Acknowledging this helps us to uncover the unstable ground upon which some of our theories about organizations are built. ‘Applying Derrida’ is nothing which is brought in from the outside, although it might sometimes appear as if this were the case. Deconstruction already is at work in the ‘inside’ of our theories and thoughts about organizations and strongly affirms what is ‘to come’. Thus, a deconstructionist organization theory – but there is no such thing – could not be the result of a successful application of Derrida’s theory. Deconstruction has always already begun (Derrida, 1987, p. 19, 1986, p. 123); it is happening and does not wait for someone to complete a theoretical analysis (Derrida, 1995b, p. 356); it is existing in many more critical, yet affirmative, contributions to organization theory than we think.

Hence, we need to broaden our understanding of deconstruction and not limit it to the writings of/on Derrida. There are many writings which ‘bear’ deconstructive effects in them without exclusively focusing on Derridian philosophy (see, e.g. the discussion by Chia, 1996). Hence, there is no ‘hard core’ of deconstruction which could be uncovered and then turned into some sort of method. Even my necessarily simplifying argument that deconstruction is about destabilizing oppositions and uncovering the belonging aporias cannot and should not be treated as a pre-programmed solution to ‘perform’ deconstruction. Derrida and Norris (1989, p. 75) recognize in this context that each deconstruction speaks with a single voice.
Every deconstruction can be deconstructed (Agger, 1991). Neither authors nor readers have privileged access to the meaning of texts. In this sense, a text, like this one, is always beyond our control. It carries a burden of meaning that constantly escapes, slips away and breaks out. We then have to ask: Can there be an end to an article on deconstruction? Derrida (1977, p. 18) refers to the idea of the book as a ‘natural totality’ that is alien to the différence of meaning it carries. Is not the end of a journal article its beginning and its beginning the end? Maybe the best way to end this chapter is the recognition of the ‘and’.

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**Andreas Rasche** is Assistant Professor of Business in Society at Warwick Business School. He also acts as a consultant to the United Nations Global Compact Office in New York and is visiting professor at European Business School, Germany. He holds a PhD (Dr. rer. pol.) degree from European Business School, Germany and a Habilitation (Dr. habil.) from Helmut-Schmidt University, Hamburg. Andreas regularly publishes in leading international journals on topics related to organization theory and corporate responsibility.