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Abstract: *We argue that existing conceptualizations of the strategy process, while each affording valuable insights, offer only a limited understanding of process issues and leave many important questions un-addressed. This is because process research has gathered around an either/or-logic in which either thinking (decisions) or actions are seen as constitutive elements of strategy formation. The either/or-logic neglects the interrelationship of decisions and actions and therefore fails to take into account important process characteristics such as the double contingency of strategic decisions. To consider these characteristics adequately, we deconstruct the thinking/action opposition to show that thinking already is action and that there can be no thinking without action. The deconstruction of the thinking/action opposition shows that every decision – and thus every strategic decision – remains caught in a ghost that represents the undecidability of an open future.*

We extend this analysis by conceptualizing 'thinking in action' as being based on performative speech acts that constantly carve out the strategic reality of organizations. After all, this conceptualization conceives strategy as a social practice because speech acts represent linguistic practices. The paper closes with a number of research questions concerning the role of strategic decision-making in the overall strategy process.

Keywords: *strategy process, paradox, thinking, action, deconstruction, strategy as practice, speech acts*

1 Introduction – Context and Motivation

Although there are a variety of conceptions of the strategy process (for reviews see Chakravarthy et al. 2003; Lechner/Müller-Stewens 1999; Chakravarthy/Doz 1992; Huff/Reger 1987; Fredrickson 1983), the advancement of the field has been constrained by a dichotomy between formulation and implementation. Especially scholars of the so called 'planning school' follow a notion of feasibility by alleging that thinking (formulation) and action (implementation) are two separable entities (Ansoff 1987; Andrews 1971; Learned et al. 1969). This dichotomy is characterized by what we call the 'primacy of thinking' because thinking is thought to come before action like a cause determining its effect. Not much different, recent process conceptions, as the one by Khanna et al. (2000), are in favor of a linear process perspective. We can thus claim, like Clegg et al. (2004, 22-23) do, that process research faces an *opposition* in which one pole (formulation) is given preference over its seemingly opposite (implementation).[1] Even scholars of the emergent strategy school, like Mintzberg/Waters (1985), who claim to reach beyond the formulation/implementation opposition, get trapped in this dichotomy by privileging action over thinking. This reversal is attempted without considering the deeply held assumptions about the nature of strategizing.

We then need to ask what is all that bad about this opposition? Both perspectives – the linear and the emergent one – create significant problems for theory and practice. The notion of linear planning, that strategic decisions are executed after an appropriate preference order has been established, – a preference order that fully justifies the decision – is a rather idealized version of events because *particularly* strategic decisions underlie what Luhmann (1994, 148) calls double contingency. One organization makes its action dependent upon its competitor's action, and vice versa. None of them knows or can have full knowledge about what the other will do (Ortmann/Salzman 2002, 208). Accordingly, we cannot justify strategic decisions *ex ante* as this indicates that goals exist detached from the decision situation. By contrast, a purely emergent strategy process, of course as such *not* intended by Mintzberg (1979) but still existing as the conceptual counterpart, makes the development of strategic alternatives superfluous as strategies turn out to be *ex post* phenomena – a pattern in a stream of actions. We may claim that strategy scholars *either* favor thinking *or* action when conceptualizing the strategy process.

This either/or-choice between thinking and action becomes necessary as scholars try to get rid of a paradox. Derrida (1992, 24-25) is well aware of the paradoxical logic that underlies every decision: no (strategic) decision can ever reach a final

justification because it concurrently potentializes other decisions (also Luhmann 2000, 142). Any decision (fixation) as opposed to a non-decision (contingency) contains the non-decidable that it cannot analyze away. The paradox points to an interesting insight: a strategic alternative is an alternative because it is potentially possible; however, at the same time the alternative also is *no* alternative because it cannot be fully justified. This does not imply that strategic decisions are impossible *per se*, but that their justification underlies a paradox. To avoid this paradox, researchers give preference to either thinking or action because by privileging one pole of the opposition the paradox *seems* to be dissolved.

If strategy process researchers sustain this opposition by giving primacy to either one of the constituting poles, they, often in an unnoticed way, follow the classic dichotomous approach for coping with the paradoxes we encounter in our thinking (Poole/Van de Ven 1989, 566; Clegg et al. 2002, 485). By regarding the self-contradictions as an either/or-choice, research hopes to either get rid of, or at least evade, the 'dysfunctional' status of paradox. This mode of thinking provides a less suitable alternative because, as Luhmann (2000, 131) reminds us, we cannot simply analyze a paradox away. Striving to solve paradox by looking for a final (metaphysical) ground, we often find ourselves in a situation once characterized by Albert (1985) as the Münchhausen trilemma. According to this trilemma, the attempt to find some final justification results in the, often uncomfortable, choice between an infinite regress, a *circulus vitiosus*, or a dogmatic interruption at an arbitrary point.[2]

If we cannot evade the paradox of decision-making by giving primacy to either thinking or action, we need to look for a way to 'endure' it. This entails that we first need to uncover the paradox to then show how both poles of the thinking/action opposition can be reasonably 'thought as a unified whole' without neglecting their difference. In the following, we employ Derrida's notion of deconstruction to dismantle the opposition between thinking and action in strategy process research. Derrida's (1995; 1982) work is appealing to our analysis as he focuses on exposing and overturning hierarchically structured oppositions. Overturning in Derrida's view does not mean to devote primacy to the so far neglected pole of the opposition. Deconstruction seeks to explore the supplementarity of both poles by thinking the one *within* the other. The *meaning* of one pole depends on the supplementary relationship with its other, and this relationship is never fixed but always reconstituted in space and time. Both sides come into existence by giving reference to their (apparent) opposite. In other words: deconstruction shows how we can endure the paradoxes that we encounter in our thinking.

The objective of this article is thus threefold. First, we show how the opposition between thinking (formulation) and action (implementation) can be deconstructed to thereby expose the paradox of decision-making. We argue that the meaning of strategic decisions is constituted *in actu* because strategy-making is thinking within action (and not thinking prior to action or solely action). Second, we outline the consequences of this mode of thinking by demonstrating how 'decisions in action' can be conceptualized by referring to the theory of speech acts. Third, we highlight the possibility to conceive strategy practice as consisting of a stream of speech acts. By linking a deconstructed notion of the strategy process to practice-based research, we hope to provide a more mundane understanding of how future process research may look like.

To achieve these objectives this article proceeds as follows. In section two we provide a short overview over the various disguises that the thinking/action opposition has adopted within strategy process research. We then illustrate the 'blind spots' of planning and emergent strategy conceptions to highlight the need for deconstruction (section three). A short introduction to deconstruction is given in section four to then discuss how the thinking/action opposition can be dismantled and what this means for strategy process research (section five). We thereby uncover the *unavoidable* paradox that (strategic) decisions rest on. We proceed by demonstrating that this paradox can be endured (but not resolved) when applying speech act theory to a deconstructed version of strategizing (section six). Finally, we show how a conception of strategy that rests on speech acts can be integrated into a practice-based perspective on strategy. We thus hope to add further insights to the research agenda of 'strategy as practice' that was defined by Whittington (2002) and Johnson et al. (2003). We close with a number of research questions concerning the role of strategic decision-making in the overall strategy process.

2 The Either/Or-Logic of Strategy Process Thinking

Strategy process research looks at how strategic decisions are made and put into action while being less concerned with the content of the 'final product' that we label strategy. Following the work of Andrews (1971), scholars distinguish between formulation and implementation, both of which make up the more general process of strategy formation. Whereas strategy formulation is concerned with strategic decision-making, implementation addresses how these decisions are put into action to reach some pre-defined outcome. Chakravarthy/White (2002) show that the interplay of strategy formulation and implementation has been portrayed from differ-

ent angles. Whereas early strategy scholars, like Ansoff (1987) or Hofer/Schendel (1978), stress the rational character and linear sequence of both phases, Eisenhardt/Brown (1998) and Stacey (2003) put a special emphasis on the unintended outcomes that give rise to emergent or even chaotic strategies.

When considering that formulation is much about *thinking* and implementation about subsequent *actions*, we can distinguish two broad approaches scholars follow when thinking about their interrelatedness. Informed by the Cartesian Split between mind (*res cogitans*) and matter (*res extensa*) orthodox process thinking has favored thinking over action (Clegg et al. 2004, 21). The underlying logic has been provided by Chandler (1962, 14) who raises the need for strategic planning by arguing that "structure follows strategy and that the most complex type of structure is the result of the concentration of several basic strategies." Chandler's dictum represents the well-known notion that changes in the environment create the need for new strategic moves (formulation) which in turn require an adaptation of the organizational structure (implementation). This tradition has been integrated into many different process concepts. The Hofer/Schendel (1978, 5) model of the strategy process, for instance, relies on the notion that "organizations need formalized, analytical processes for formulating explicit strategies." Similarly, Ansoff (1987, 22) advises us that "strategy formulation is a potentially frustrating and ineffective instrument if it is uncoupled from implementation." The chain of causality is simple, linear, and governed the field for a long time even up to today's process models.[3]

Being at odds with the notion of formalized planning and aware of the limits of rationality as outlined by Simon (1979), Mintzberg (1979) challenges process scholars' assumptions by highlighting the emergent character of strategies. To operationalize the concept of strategy, Mintzberg turns away from the primacy of thinking and emphasizes the need to view realized strategy as a pattern in a stream of actions (Mintzberg/Waters 1985, 257). Emergent strategies, that are most of the time a part of realized strategy, represent patterns or consistencies in action streams despite, or in the absence of, intentions.[4] In a similar way, Quinn's (1978) notion of logical incrementalism highlights the emergent nature of strategies, however, without adopting a solely action-based perspective. According to incrementalism, strategies emerge from a variety of subsystems that are blended incrementally into a cohesive strategic pattern. Yet another advocate of non-linear strategy process thinking, who even conceives action to be a substitute for strategy, is Weick (1987). Following Weick's (1979; 1995) concept of sensemaking in organizations, action clarifies meaning and that is why *ex ante* strategic plans are nothing more than excuses for people to act and thus to create meaning. Beliefs single out actions and thus bring strategies into being by limiting what is possible. That is why

Weick emphasizes the need for just-in-time strategy; a form of strategy in which actions create the environment and thus limit what is possible. Too much planning, in his view, can only paralyze organizations and keep them from acting (see also Eisenhardt 1997; Crossan/Sorrenti 1997).

In both cases – planned strategy and emergent strategy – one concept (thinking or action) is given primacy over its opposite.[5] This either/or-choice creates a dualism that opens itself for deconstruction.

3 The Blind Spots of Either/Or-Logic

> "For, in fact, the relationship between decision and action can be far more tenuous than almost all of the literature of organization theory suggests."
>
> *Ann Langley et al. (1995, 265)*

Before deconstructing the thinking/action opposition, we demonstrate that by regarding the opposition as something undeconstructible, strategy process research moves towards a dysfunctional state. To discuss the dysfunctional nature of strategic planning and purely emergent thinking, demonstrates that the paradox, which must be overlooked in order to make the dualism seem undeconstructible, cannot be overlooked. The discussion of the dysfunctional state also shows why the paradox of decision-making has been neglected up to this point.

When considering the 'primacy of action' so fiercely promoted by scholars of the learning school, we can argue that strategy research that concentrates solely on action cannot explore or even contribute to our understanding of strategy formation. This is because, as Chia (1994, 786) rightly remarks, the conception of action that underlies the emergent perspective on strategy conceptualizes action without prior commitment. Accordingly, the relationship between decisions (thinking) and action remains unexplored. Strategies are conceived of as *ex post* phenomena – a pattern in a stream of actions. It is argued that actions leave traces which can be observed in an easier way than decisions (Mintzberg/Waters 1990, 1-2).

> "For years, we studied the process of strategy formation based on the definition of (realized) strategy as 'a pattern in a stream of decisions'. Eventually it occurred to us that we were in fact not studying streams of decisions at all, but of actions, because those are the traces actually left behind in organizations (e.g., stores opened in a supermarket chain, projects started in an architectural firm). Decisions simply proved much more difficult to track down."

This, however, leaves us with a question. If strategies are really a pattern in a stream of action and thus only examinable retrospectively, why do we still need managers who take care of the strategy process? In other words, when privileging action over decision we move to an extreme position that does not enable us to explore the nature of the strategy process anymore.[6] We thus may argue that the 'primacy if action' neglects the paradox of decision-making because it prioritizes action in a way that neglects the rich relationship between thinking and action that gives rise to the paradox in the first place.

While looking at the other extreme, the 'primacy of thinking', we can identify another blind spot. As discussed in the preceding section, by privileging thinking one reinforces a causal mentality which conceives thinking as cause and action as effect. According to this view, thought controls action because it provides the necessary intention. Of course, such a conception of the strategy process works perfectly fine in the absence of uncertainty. However, when recognizing that *especially* strategic decisions – because they represent situations of social interaction – face double contingency, there is no possibility to assume environmental certainty anymore. Ortmann/Salzman (2002, 208) characterize a double contingent situation as follows:

> "One firm will make its action dependent upon its competitor's action, and
> vice versa, and none of them knows or can have full knowledge about what
> the other will do – each conditions its actions on the actions and outcome of
> the other and factors in the environment."[7]

According to this perspective, perfect rationality and organizational foresight become out of reach. The bottom line of double contingency is the assumption that the future is always uncertain and cannot be foreseen by means of sophisticated concepts or even managerial competence. Why is that the case?

Luhmann (1995, 123) reminds us that double contingency cannot be neutralized or even eliminated because social interaction needs to be conceived as the confrontation of at least two *autonomous* actors (ego and alter).[8] Double contingency is a consequence not of the mutual dependence of social actors, as Parsons (1951) assumes, but of the confrontation of at least two autonomous social actors that have the capacity to make their own selections with regard to one another. This is because contingency in Luhmann's (1995, 106) sense means that facts are selected from a range of possibilities, whereas the non-selected possibilities still remain (in some sense) possible despite their non-selection. To experience contingency implies that social order, as we experience it, could also 'be otherwise possible'. In the case of double contingency, alter's contingent behavior depends on

ego's while at the same time ego's contingent behavior depends on alter's. This is the basic condition of possibility for social action as such (Vanderstraeten 2002, 81). Because of this immanent circularity of the conditions of double contingency social actions are made indeterminable. In other words, double contingency teaches us that we always face a degree of uncertainty that cannot be defined away by means of analyses.

If we consider that double contingency is immanent in every social interaction, we cannot conceive the strategy process to be a planned undertaking in which thinking precedes action. We can only plan what is already known or at least imaginable in some way. But what is already known? Derrida (1995, 386-387) reminds us that the future is not something we can or even should predict because the future, by its very nature, is monstrous.

> "[T]he 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 house-hold and have it assume the habits, to make us assume new habits." (emphasis in the original)

Strategic planning has tried to tame these monsters without recognizing that a future that is forced into the straightjacket of a plan is not a future anymore. If the future is conceived to be calculable, there actually is no need for planning (and strategists) anymore. We could leave the task of strategic management to computers that enforce programmable decisions. All this results in yet another paradox: if we think of the future as something 'manageable', there is no future anymore.

In summary, we may argue that the blind spots of strategy process research – the 'primacy of thinking' and the 'primacy of action' – provide a limited understanding of strategy formation only, although both perspectives have enriched process research with valuable insights. This is because both blind spots (a) neglect important concepts like double contingency or even reach a dead end by conceptualizing strategy as a pure *ex post* phenomenon and (b) overlook the rich conceptual relation between thinking and action that gives rise to the paradox of decision-making. To explore this paradox, we need to dismantle the thinking/action opposition by means of deconstruction.

4 Deconstruction – Supplementarity and Différance

When confronted with the question 'What is deconstruction?, Jacques Derrida, to whom we owe this way of thinking, replied in the following way.

> "[D]econstruction is not a doctrine; it's not a method, nor is it a set of rules or tools; it cannot be separated from performatives, from signatures, from a given language. So, if you want to 'do deconstruction' – 'you know, the kind of thing Derrida does' – then you have to perform something new, in your own language, in your own singular situation, with your own signature, to invent the impossible and to break with the application, in the technical, neutral sense of the word." (Derrida 2000, 22)

If we introduce deconstruction in the following, we pretend, at least for the moment, that Derrida has a method, and that we can introduce this method in some way.

Deconstruction appeals to our analysis as it focuses on exposing and dismantling hierarchically structured oppositions within 'texts'. For Derrida the text relates to the social world, or as Cooper (1989, 482) specifies: to the interactional text. Derrida's understanding of text differs from the classical view. There are no non-textualized 'real' things that exist fully detached 'outside' or 'beyond' the text – in this sense there can be no outside-text (Derrida 2003, 274). If there is no outside-text, there can be no representation of reality since representation assumes that there is something prior to textuality that can be portrayed.

> "I wanted to recall that the concept of text I propose is limited neither to the graphic, nor to the book, nor even to discourse, and even less to the semantic, representational, symbolic, ideal, or ideological sphere. What I call a 'text' implies all the structures called 'real', 'economic', 'historical', socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents. Another way of recalling once again that 'there is nothing outside the text'." (Derrida 1995, 148).

Understood in this way, strategy-making in organizations is about the production of 'meaningful' texts that can be interpreted. Deconstruction acknowledges *and* overturns the dependence of any text on hierarchically structured oppositions. Concerning the problem that underlies this paper, we may assume that 'thinking/action' represents such an opposition that exists in the 'text' of strategy-making.[9]

Overturning in Derrida's view does not mean to devote primacy to the so far neglected pole of the opposition. Rather, it seeks to explore the *supplementarity of both poles* by thinking the one *within* the other. The meaning of one pole depends on the supplementary relationship with its other. This relationship is never fixed but

frequently reconstituted in space and time. Meaning is constantly in a state of flux and can never be fully grasped. As we argue in the course of this paper, the meaning of thinking depends on the meaning action. Put differently, there is no pure metaphysical origin 'thinking' from which we can derive the meaning of 'action' because thinking is only possible because there is action *et vice versa*. We cannot define what we think without any recourse to a notion of action. There is no 'thinking' on its own just regarding the essence of itself. Thinking, therefore, can never be present to itself in the total absence of action. Why does Derrida make such claims? It is useful in this context to consider his remarks on the philosophy of language.

Since the linguistic turn in the social sciences and philosophy, advocated by writers like Wittgenstein and Chomsky, we are aware that our world is made up of language and that we can only know the world through language. Even radical constructivists like Maturana/Bunnell (2001, 37) recognize that the objects our world is made up of are not simply there but created through language. Derrida follows this view by arguing that any text, and with it also categories like truth or meaning, is *embedded in the structure of language.* His own approach to language is based upon the notion that from the moment there is meaning there are only linguistic signs. We only think in signs. All there is, in fact, are signs. There is no reasoning without recourse to language. Even the nature of cognition wouldn't be what it is without language as the objects of consciousness and the words that are used to indicate them form an inseparable weave (Bennington/Derrida 1994, 107). Everything we can know is text, that is constructed of words (signs) in relationship.[10]

So far we have shown that far from excluding the world from language or reducing it entirely to language, Derrida advocates an imbrication of language and the world. The resulting weave is what he labels 'the text'. This leaves the question how language and the world are interrelated to form 'the text'. Or put differently: How are we supposed to think of the meaning structure of language that constitutes the text? We can discuss these matters by noticing that *language is itself subject to deconstruction*. For this we need to realize that language represents a system of signs. Following Saussure (1967), signs are comprised of a signifier (the sound image of a word) and a signified (the mental concept that relates to that sound image).

Derrida (1986, 54) claims that the *concept of the sign itself* remains problematic because it rests on a hierarchical opposition in which the signified is given preference over the signifier. The signified is conceptualized as independent of the signifier while the signifier is treated as dependent. The meaning of the signified is self-

defining and originary, whereas the meaning of the signifier can only be fixed with reference to the (already existing) signified. According to this logic, the signifier exists solely to give access to the signified and thus submits to the concepts of meaning that the signified inhabits (Culler 1982, 99). In other words, the traditional concept of the sign favors objectivity because the meaning of the signified is simply 'given'. The signifier is not assigned any meaning constituting power as it is conceived as an empty packing, whereas the signified contains the full meaning of the sign.

In Derrida's (1986, 56; 1976, 425) view there is no objective signified that directly yields up a signifier. The distinction between signifier and signified is not fixed because the signified is nothing more than an effect of an endless chain of signifiers, or put differently: in Derrida's understanding every sign is a signifier whose signified is another signifier. We can think of the following example to illustrate this point. If we wish to know the meaning (signified) of a word (signifier), we usually use a dictionary to look it up. However, all we find are yet more signifiers whose signifieds we need to look up again, *ad infinitum*. The process is not only infinite but also circular since signifiers transform themselves in signifieds *et vice versa*. The signified becomes the result of an endless chain of differences among signifiers. Or, to put it in a deconstructive terminology: the signifier acts as a supplement of the signified. The formerly original term (signified) turns out to be a product of its seemingly opposite (signifier). It is impossible to arrive at a final signified that is not already a signifier in itself (Sarup 1989, 35; Norris 1987).

This conception of the sign has far reaching implications because the iterability of a sign cannot be programmed or predicted. Of course, it is possible to iterate a sign as it can be used over and over again. However, it is impossible to use a sign twice in the *same* con*text* because there is an infinite amount of contexts (Bateson 1985) that makes a repetition of exactly the identical context, the sign was used in the first time, unattainable. Signs constantly contain new meaning when used in a different context. This is because, the repetition of a sign in a new context creates new differences – described as constantly moving signifier relations above – which alter and *simultaneously* defer the meaning of the sign. Derrida (1999) calls this combination of differing and deferring, that is constantly at work, *différance*. The iteration of a sign is never 'pure' but always different and forever new – driven by the creative force of différance (Derrida 1999, 325). Meaning is, to put it in a nutshell, context-bound.

If we accept that language produces 'the text' that we use to make sense of the world, but language as a system of signs does not give rise to some form of

objective meaning, we see that différance runs all the way through ideas like truth or presence. Although the deconstruction of the sign is just one exemplary deconstruction, it nevertheless alters all other principles of the conceptual structure of metaphysics (Bennington/Derrida 1994, 45). Because of the natural instability of language there is no reason to assume that one can come up with a fixed and transparent meaning of any given text (a text in the Derridean sense). This is why différance is always and everywhere at work. As Caputo (1997, 104) claims:

> "Derrida also generalizes what was originally a linguistic model in Saussure so that *différance* is not restricted to language but leaves its 'mark' on everything – institutions, sexuality, the worldwide web, the body, whatever you need or want. [...] like language all these structures are marked by the play of differences. [...] Wherever one is, one is placed within a play of differences, 'received' or 'inscribed' within *différance* [...]." (emphasis in the original)

Based on this conception of text, supplementarity, and différance – which in *the context* of this paper stand for the notion of deconstruction – we now discuss how the thinking/action opposition can be deconstructed.

5 'Ghosts' – Deconstructing the Strategy Process

> "The only decision possible is the impossible decision."
>
> *Jacques Derrida (1995, 147)*

To deconstruct the formulation/implementation opposition, we need to realize that linear and emergent process concepts have overlooked the *supplementary* relationship between thinking and action. Thinking cannot precede action because of the deferring force of différance. Decision criteria (preferences) are not full of meaning prior to their application in practice. On the contrary, preferences are fully constituted in the course of making the very decision. Not until the decision has finally been executed one can decide whether and how contingency was fixed and what justification was chosen. Preferences do not exist prior to and detached from a decision but are constituted not until the action, which in the traditional sense is seen as a derivation, has been carried out. What conventional decision-logic deemed to be an 'origin' (thinking – strategy formulation) turns out to be constituted by its apparent opposite 'action' (strategy implementation). We do not face an either/or-choice, in which managers are advised to just 'do something' so that thinking can follow *or* rationally think ahead to then conduct action (Mintzberg/Westley 2001,

93), but a situation in which thinking is action and likewise action is thinking. To consider this circular relation means to explore what Chia (1994, 788) calls the 'actionality of decision' and 'decisionality of action'.

According to this perspective, every decision underlies a paradox that is uncovered by a deconstructive analysis. Because the meaning of a decision is constituted *in actu*, in the course of action, we need to make decisions only in those case where decisions are actually impossible to make. No decision can reach a final definition, and thus justification, because it potentializes other decisions. Thus, any decision already includes the non-decidable (open contingency) by its very nature. If preferences are fully known prior to the decision, we face no monstrous future anymore (Derrida 1995, 387). The decision becomes a calculation, a program, for which, however, we do not need a decision anymore (because everything is fixed in advance anyway). The paradox points to an interesting insight: the contingency of life forces us to make decisions if decisions cannot be made (Ortmann 2003, 139).[11] That is why the paradox of decision-making implies *forced freedom* because the very nature of decisions excludes any form of constraint that would enable us to make calculable and thus rational decisions. This is not to say that decisions are impossible *per se*, but that their reasonable justification becomes out of reach. Yet, particularly strategic decisions call for justification because they include considerable resource commitments and are not easily reversible (Schilit 1990, 436; Mintzberg et al. 1976, 246). By contrast, on the routine level, decisions are usually less reflected and reached pretty quickly (Selten 1990, 652).

This paradox has been discussed by Derrida (1995, 147-148) who argues that forced freedom makes decisions possible if they are impossible.

> "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)

Essentially, Derrida reminds us of the paradox of decision-making that we uncover by deconstructing the thinking/action opposition. For decisions to be decisive, they must include the monstrous future, the incalculable, that which cannot be predetermined. Derrida (1992, 24-25) develops this thought further by arguing that any decision that deserves this name contains the 'ghost of the undecidable'.

"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 till 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; it would only the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process. 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 in the original)

Every decision – and thus every strategic decision – remains caught in a ghost that represents the undecidability of an open future. Hence, the force of différance, that gives us the insight that the meaning of a decision is constituted in the course of action, forces us to recognize the ghost that is inherent in every event of decision.[12] What does this ghost mean for strategic decision-making and thus the conceptualization of the strategy process?

To address this paradox within strategy process research, we need to break with the established either/or (formulation/implementation) logic to give reference to both, formulation and implementation.[13] From this perspective, strategy-making is thinking *within* (and not prior to) action. If we conceive undecidability to be the very condition on which the strategy process rests, we need to concur that 'strategic decisions' deserve this name only if they have to cope with a double contingent environment that forces them to go through the 'ordeal of the undecidable'. When considering that undecidability is the very condition to make any decision at all, strategic alternatives clearly *are* alternatives – because they are 'there', open for justification by management – but at the same time, the same alternatives also represent *no* alternative – because management cannot provide a full justification. The meaning of decision preferences is, as discussed above, constituted in the course of action. Preferences do not exist detached from the action that is undertaken to 'implement' the decision, but instead 'filled with meaning' only in the course of action.

This filling is always a 'dangerous' filling because for Derrida (2003, 249-251), the supplement, in our case action, holds two meanings at once. On the one hand, the supplement 'takes-the-place-of' the original to fill its emptiness with meaning. On the other hand, the supplement also is a surplus that *adds a new dimension* to the original. Considering this, we can claim that the supplement supplements a lack (of

meaning) of the 'original' concept – a lack, however, that cannot be avoided. For strategy-making this means that the meaning of initial strategic decisions is always subject to modification, in an extreme case even replacement, because this dangerous supplement is always at work. The meaning of a strategy is always deferred into the future as indicated by Derrida's notion of différance. All of this does *not* mean that there are no strategic decisions, but that the meaning structure, that underlies these decisions, is constituted *in actu*.

We need to note that this conception of the strategy process differs from the planning as well as the emergent view because it takes into account the relationship between thinking and action. Instead of conceiving strategies to be deliberately planned or consisting as an *ex post* pattern in a stream of actions, we argue that it is thinking within action that needs to be considered when conceptualizing strategy-making in organizations. Although our perspective rests on paradox, and, strictly speaking, paradoxes represent problems that cannot be adequately solved by means of traditional logic, this does not imply that we need to favor an 'anything goes' (Luhmann 2000, 131). How can we think ahead from the 'ghostliness' of decisions?

6 Strategy as Linguistic Structuring – Performatives!

To think ahead we have to consider the altered ontological nature of the strategy process. According to deconstruction, there are no clearly identifiable events that we can call 'the decision' and 'the subsequent action'. We cannot separate the two because as argued above the meaning of a decision depends on its supplement (action). This implies to move from an 'ontology of being' – that conceives decisions and actions as clearly identifiable events 'out there' – to an 'ontology of becoming' – that takes into account the process of configuring reality by exploring their interrelated nature (Chia 1996). If we cannot clearly separate decisions and actions from each other, there is need to look for some conceptual scheme that allows us to describe the becoming process of *'decisions in actions'* – or as the famous writer Heinrich von Kleist (1805/2002, 88-94) once claimed '*the gradual production of thoughts in talking'*. In a similar way, Maturana/Varela (1987, 31) argue that action already constitutes an ontological act of knowing*.* We then need to ask: what is the nature of this ontological act that carves out reality by supplementing thinking with action?

Reality before language is an undifferentiated experience because, as we discussed above, language helps us to 'textualize' reality in way comprehendible for us.[14] Be-

fore our linguistic 'interventions', reality is nothing but an undifferentiated experience. Based on this insight, we argue that 'decisions in action' need to be understood as a *linguistic structuring of reality*; a structuring that is built upon *speech acts*. According to Searle (1983, 29) to speak (a word, a sentence) means to perform speech acts (e.g., make a claim, ask a question) in accordance to specific rules. To speak is a *form of behavior* that is based on rules. If speech acts are behavior, they fall – whatever their medium of performance – under the broad category of action.

Searle distinguishes between constitutive and regulative rules. The latter regulate certain forms of behavior such as the rules of polite table behavior regulate eating. Constitutive rules, by contrast, do not regulate but instead *create* new forms of behavior and thus our social reality. According to Searle (1983, 56) constitutive rules take the basic form: X counts as Y in context C. An utterance of the form 'Our strategy workshop showed that we need a new pricing strategy' represents an action that marks something (i.e., the pricing strategy). Searle's central argument comes down to the claim that speech acts are characteristically performed by utterances in accordance with certain constitutive rules. Accordingly, the speech act needs to be seen as the basic unit of language to express meaning.[15]

We can sharpen our understanding of why speech acts perform actions by discussing Austin's (1980) notion of *performative* speech acts.

> "[T]hey [performatives] do not 'describe' or 'report' or constate anything at all, are not 'true or false'; and the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as 'just', saying something" (Austin 1980, 5, emphasis in the original)

Austin argues that 'performatives' are neither true nor false, unlike what he calls 'constatives'. To use a performative speech act is to perform an action that carves out reality, such as nominating, apologizing, firing, or adjourning. Austin (1980, 94) distinguishes between three levels of action beyond speech acts. He identifies the act *of* saying something, what one does *in* saying it, and what ones does *by* saying it. These alternatives are of special interest to us because they describe how we can do things with words.

Consider the utterance of the form 'We have decided to merge with company Z' that represents a strategic decision. One is performing the act of saying that there will be a merger. In saying this, one is also performing the act of informing others about the strategic move. Whereas the act of informing may or may not result in understanding on the part of the audience, the act also produces a *performative*

effect because the utterance *counts as* an obligation which has consequences – X *counts as* Y in context C. This *counts as*, to accentuate something, is of further interest to a deconstructive notion of strategy-making because strategies need to count in a context to be not rejected. In the words of Austin (1980, 8): "it is always necessary that the *circumstances* in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate*." (emphasis in the original)

Barnes (1983, 524-525) describes the performative character of speech acts by arguing that S-type terms (performative speech acts) *do* something to a state of the world rather than describing it. To *pronounce* an entity an S *makes* this entity an S. This highlights the self-referential nature of performative speech acts. What we properly refer to as an S is something that has been referred to as an S. Within our doing (speaking) we do something to the world that has consequences. By performing speech acts, we make this reality a reality we then refer to. Consider, for instance, the utterance 'We have decided to follow a diversification strategy' that brings about a certain state of the world (a strategic reality in the organization) which is from there on considered to be the point of reference. Put differently, performative speech acts give rise to reality, and thus the meaning structures of reality, in the course of action (speaking). What does this mean for our understanding of the strategy process?

First of all, there is no need to uphold the opposition decision/action because by making a certain decision we already refer to speech acts which are actions. The meaning of a decision (also the meaning of 'the goal' or 'the preference' that the decision rests on) is constituted *in actu* by means of performative speech acts. To carve out reality and to speak about this reality are one and the same thing. Whenever we make a decision, we already perform an action because we rely on performative speech acts. We fix contingency by means of speech acts and thus find *some* justification for our strategic decisions. However, it is impossible to find a justification prior to the decision as this would imply that we decide without performing speech acts (or that we even can separate the construction of meaning from the performance of speech acts, see also Searle 1983, 33).[16]

Strategy becomes a linguistic structuring of reality by means of speech acts. The strategy process does not consist of clearly separated phases anymore, but is conceptualized as a gradual production of thinking in action; a circularity that is best described when considering that what we call 'strategic' in organizations is created and sustained by speech *acts* that occur and attain meaning in a certain context only. This is not to say that strategy equals language because non-linguistic actions

also carve out reality (Ortmann 2004, 51; Austin 1980, 8-9). But that non-linguistic actions become textualized in the sense that they can be interpreted.

Conceptualizing the strategy process as a progression of speech acts may prove useful on a micro-level because it shows how reality comes into being, but is less appropriate when thinking about the strategy process as a whole. To conceptualize the strategy process in the absence of a differentiation between decisions and actions may be misleading to practitioners and theorists, because one may believe that there is no need for actively managing strategy formation anymore. To show that this is not the case, we have to move from a micro-investigation of decisions and actions to a more macro-level one. Notwithstanding the fact that decisions are actions, we can identify 'strategic decisions' (e.g., at least in form of announcements etc.) with subsequent 'strategic actions' in organizations. How does this empirical reality fit to our notion of the strategy process?

By performing a speech act like 'We hereby announce that we follow a cost leadership strategy', we actively carve out a strategic reality because we *make* the strategy a low-cost one. Even though this establishes some meaning for the strategic alternative – a meaning that may be further specified by yet other speech acts – it does not tell us anything about the future meaning of the low-cost strategy because meaning can only be fixed *in actu* by means of yet other speech acts. We therefore claim that strategic decisions represent a *necessary fiction*; a fiction that Ortmann (2004, 208) calls the establishment of an *as if*. This *as if* acts as a point of reference for the actions it produces, however, cannot determine these actions. The *as if* represents a necessary emptiness that can only be filled *in actu* by means of speech acts. To fill the decision implies to fix its meaning in a certain context – X *counts as* Y in context C. To think of strategy as a fiction calls for imagining "the action as an already performed one and thinking about it and its possible consequences *as if* it were performed." (Ortmann/Salzman 2002, 220, emphasis in the original)

When considering that strategies are based on a variety of *as if* decisions, the necessary emptiness of the decision implies that the contextual filling *must* bring about changes in the intended meaning of the decision. The force of the 'dangerous' Derridean supplement modifies, alters, perverts, and in an extreme case even replaces the 'original' strategic decision. Put differently, strategic decisions are filled with meaning in the course of their implementation; a meaning which rests on an agglomeration of speech acts conducted by the members of an organization. After all, we argue that there are two (analytically distinguishable) levels on which speech acts play a role in strategy formation (figure 1). First, decisions are actions because

decisions themselves represent performative speech acts that carve out reality. Second, taking a more macro-view, decisions are necessary fictions that are filled with meaning in the course of action – a filling that is based on speech acts.
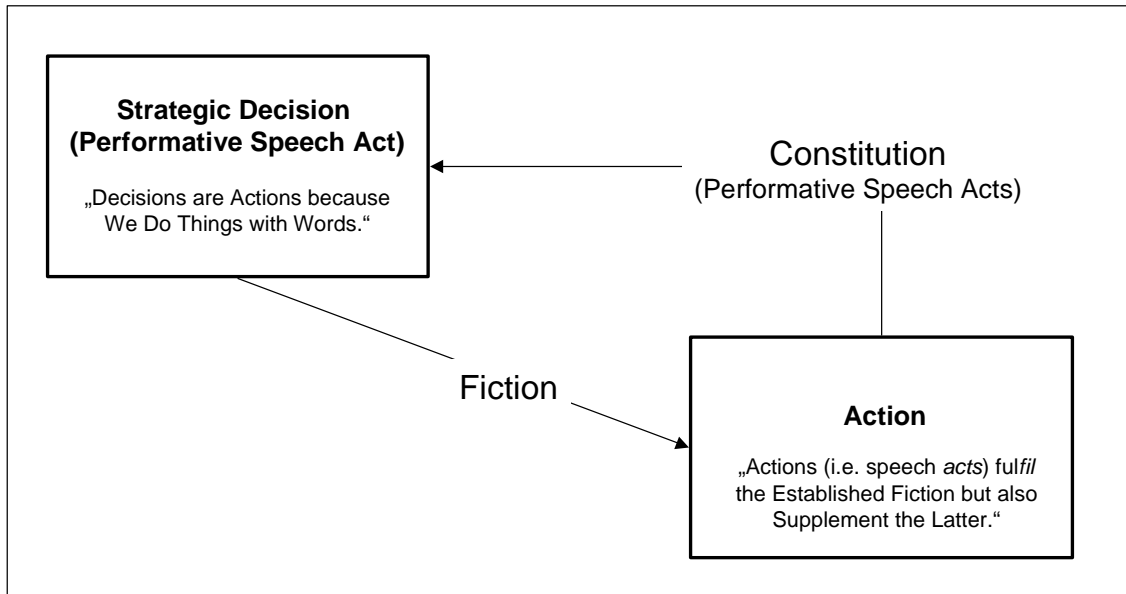

Figure 1: Speech Acts and the Decision/Action Opposition

This perspective takes paradox into account Because the meaning of the decision alternative is fixed in the course of action, an *a priori* justification becomes impossible. The fiction that needs to be established helps managers to cope with this paradox because they are forced to fix contingency, at least temporarily. This fixation is not an arbitrary one but needs to be socially accepted – if not by the unforced force of the better argument (Habermas 2001) then at least via the force of power. Establishing a fiction helps managers to go through the Derridean ordeal of the undecidable. The paradox, however, remains because decisions are based on alternatives that are no alternatives.

In the light of these remarks, how can and should we analyze strategy-making in organizations? To get a grip on the role of speech acts in the course of strategizing, we suggest to embed the proposed conceptualization of the strategy process in a practice-based view.

7 Implications —Strategy as a Social Practice

Practices in a very general sense are socially recognized forms of activity (Barnes 2001, 19). Language, for instance, is a type of (discursive) activity and thus a *practice* phenomenon (Schatzki 2001, 3). We are sympathetic to practice-based theories because they presume not passive actors but active members who constitute institutions through a system of shared practices. When thinking of language as a practice, we can conceive institutions as systems of constitutive rules of the form 'X counts as Y in context C'. The institution we are concerned with, strategy-making, is thus not an object but instead a placeholder for a pattern of practices that give rise to the strategic reality organizations experience.

Strategy scholars have focused on this practice turn in contemporary theory. Whittington (1996, 732), for instance, claims that 'strategy as practice' is concerned with how managers and other actors (e.g., consultants) interact in the strategy-making process. Practice research focuses on how actors 'do' strategy; in our words: how they constantly carve out reality by establishing fictions that are filled *in actu*. Whittington (2002, 3) introduces some terminology by arguing that

> "*[p]ractices* are the 'done thing' in both the sense of accepted as legitimate and the sense of well-practised through repeated doing in the past. *Praxis* is what is actually done, here the work of strategising. *Practitioners*, of course, are the doers of strategy, the strategists." (emphasis added)

By distinguishing between strategy practices and praxis, we can sharpen our understanding of strategy as a social activity. Strategy *practices* can be the legitimized planning routines on the organizational level but also the application of well-known strategy concepts (e.g., portfolio planning or the notion of core competences) that are provided by the wider societal context. Strategy *praxis*, by contrast, is about the real work of strategists as they draw upon, reproduce or even shift their practices during strategy meetings, strategy workshops, or management away-days. The practices/praxis distinction is vital because to speak of strategy as an activity by itself is less helpful if we neglect the tools, techniques, concepts, rules, etc. that are applied in the course of strategizing.[17]

Whittington (2002, 120) reminds us that to think of strategy in terms of practices and praxis does not imply to look at the strategy process as a whole, but instead to explore the micro-activities that constitute the 'internal life of the process' to go deeper into the black box of the everyday work of strategists. He thus poses the question: *How is strategizing work actually done?* From our perspective, strategy praxis consists of a variety of performative speech acts. These speech acts are the

micro-ingredients of the strategy process because meetings, workshops, and away-days are much about 'strategy talk' (Chesley/Wenger 1999; Liedtka/Rosenblum 1996) – a talk that constantly constitutes the meaning of strategy. But also strategy practices cannot do without speech acts because the meaning of certain strategy concepts and analytical tools can only be fixed *in actu* as the opposition '*concept/application of the concept'* also underlies the force of différance. Strategy practices thus need to be enacted by strategists. En*act*ment, as the word already implies, is about acting that brackets and constructs portions of the flow of lived experience (Weick 1979, 147). To understand the enactment of strategy practices and strategy praxis as being based on performative speech acts may thus be one possible answer to Whittington's question.

The deconstruction of the strategy process fits the practice approach to strategy, because it (a) highlights the importance of speech acts as constituents of the strategy process and (b) shows that strategy practices and praxis can be interpreted as consisting of speech acts whose performance represents a socially recognizable activity. We can thus not research 'the strategy' as a certain clearly identifiable macro-phenomenon, but instead, need to focus on the everyday praxis of strategists that is shaped by and subject to speech acts. This perspective stands in contrast to traditional strategy process theories that predominantly focus on strategy as a *macro-level* phenomenon and thus treat organizations as a whole. It also extends the existing strategy as practice agenda to look deeper into the praxis of strategy and the constitution of practices. If we wish to give recommendations on how strategists can improve their day-to-day activities (Johnson et al. 2003, 11-12), we first need to understand what these day-to-day activities are made up of. Speech acts may be a viable alternative because they (a) are easier to identify than decisions (often we do not find that moment of 'choice'; Langley et al. 1995, 264) and (b) unites the concepts of thinking and action in meaningful way on a micro and macro-level.

What does of all of this mean for strategy as practice? First, it means that strategy practice and praxis can be defined as everyday situated performative speech acts that are performed by organizational members in order to make strategy. Second, it helps us to understand that actions and 'strategy talk' cannot be analyzed as two separate kind of practices (Czarniawska 1997). We thus propose to pay more attention to the narrative embeddedness of practices because narratives may be the 'real world' output of speech acts. Narratives, just like speech acts, treat talk as action and not merely as talk. As Czarniawska (1998:, 11) claims

> "texts are actions (strictly speaking, material traces of such, but they result from action and provoke further action), and actions are text in the sense that they must be legible to qualify as actions at all not movements of behaviors."

This includes to conceive strategy-making not only as what strategists produce by means of speech acts (e.g., memos, plans, budgets), but also to look at how these narratives are 'consumed' by other members of the organization (de la Ville/Mounoud 2003, 111). We may conclude that to view strategy as a social practice consisting of an agglomeration of speech acts, which can be interpreted as narratives for the sake of analysis, demonstrates that deconstruction *has* something to say about strategy-making in organizations. Deconstruction may be another possible, but by no means the only, theoretical ground on which to rest practice-based research on strategy. It remains a challenging task for future practice-based research to fully leverage these conceptual insights.

8 Final Reflections – Retrospect and Prospect

This paper addresses Pettigrew's (1992, 10) claim that we need to encourage more explicit thinking and writing about the conceptual assumptions which underpin strategy process research. Based on the opposition thinking/action, we unlock strategy process research by arguing that the underlying either/or-logic of planning and emergent process models overlooks a variety of 'blind spots'. By referring to the either/or-logic, scholars neglect a paradox that is inherent in every decision. Deconstruction reveals this paradox by showing how thinking and action mutually constitute each other. This brings about a conceptualization of 'decisions in action' because the meaning of a decision can only be fixed *in actu*. To explore the thinking/action-relationship, we suggest to consider speech acts as the 'ingredients' of decision making. Accordingly, strategic decisions are *necessary* fictions (based on an *as if*) that are filled with meaning while uttering speech acts that contain a performative character. Speech act theory enhances our understanding of 'strategy as practice' because practices and praxis can be understood as consisting of a variety of speech acts. In this sense, deconstruction helps us to open up the 'black box' of strategy practices to realize that performatives constitute practices *in praxis*.

Based on the conceptual contribution of this paper, we can outline a number of research questions for future investigations. In terms of empirical research, the importance of everyday strategy talk has been benignly neglected up to this point (for exceptions see de la Ville/Mounoud 2003 and Liedtka/Rosenblum 1996). We thus need to ask where strategy talk is occurring, what forms it might take (from infor-

mal to formal narratives), and who is engaged in its production and consumption. We should research the strategy process not as an *ex post* pattern in a stream of actions and neither as an agglomeration of clearly identifiable decisions but as a gradual production of decisions *in* action via speech acts. This means to put more emphasis on understanding how strategic decisions (fictions) become modified or even replaced in the course of action. Necessarily, this implies to adopt a new perspective on strategic control, one that does not 'control' whether the strategy has been implemented as planned, but instead is a counterbalancing activity to strategy-making itself (Schreyögg/Steinmann 1987). Related to this suggestion is the claim to follow strategy processes in real time (Langley et al. 1995, 276). Real time process studies can reveal the messy realities strategists have to cope with in order to 'fill' strategic decisions with meaning. Strategy practice scholars may find it useful to not only focus on practices but the becoming process of practices – i.e. their contextual filling. Such research shows why the analytical useful distinction between process and content research (Schendel 1992; Rumelt et al. 1994) is not much useful in practice. Strategy content is not the outcome of an analytical process, but instead constantly (re)produced in the process of strategizing.

Deconstruction explores the messy realities strategists have to cope with in their everyday life. To use a metaphor from Ortmann/Salzman (2002): thinking about strategy in an deconstructive way is more like groping in the darkness of the competitive jungle; a stumbling without falling. We leave it to others to show the contributions of yet other underrepresented theory perspectives that may enrich our understanding of strategy (Jarzabkowski 2003; Hendry/Seidl 2003). Among these perspectives we subsume, for instance, Foucault's (1980) remarks on the relation between power and knowledge that allows us to better understand the usefulness of micro-political struggles in the course of strategizing at various organizational levels and Giddens' (1979; 1984) theory of structuration that puts much emphasize on the reconstitution of rules and resources in practices.

Deconstruction means to rethink our basic assumptions about what strategy might be, to uncover the paradoxes inherent in our thinking, and to affirm what is 'to come' (i.e. the constant deference of meaning). After all, we should be aware that our theoretical lens determines what counts as a 'scientific fact' (Astley 1985, 498) – it could also be otherwise possible; the most important lesson we can learn from contingency. It is our contention that a theory of the strategy process, insightful in its own right, needs to encompass different views of which a deconstructive perspective is just one part. Our plea is for *unlocking* strategy process theory, not only the relationship of strategic decisions and actions, but of research itself.

Überblick: Der vorliegende Beitrag beschäftigt sich mit dem gegenwärtigen Stand der Strategieprozessforschung. Obwohl die verschiedenen derzeit vorhandenen Strategieprozesskonzeptionen wichtige Einsichten bzgl. der Beschaffenheit von Strategieprozessen liefern, lassen sie doch eine Reihe von Fragen unbeantwortet. Ein Grund für dieses theoretische Defizit kann in der vorherrschenden entweder-oder Logik gesehen werden, auf die sich die Prozessforschung stützt. Im Rahmen dieser Logik werden die Prozesselemente – Entscheidungen und Handlungen – voneinander losgelöst betrachtet. Eine Vernachlässigung der Wechselbeziehung zwischen Entscheidungen und Handlungen führt zu einer unrealistischen Konzeptionalisierung des Strategieprozesses, da bestimmte Phänomene, wie die doppelte Kontingenz von strategischen Entscheidungen, nicht berücksichtigt werden können.

Im Rahmen dieses Beitrags wird die Strategieprozessforschung dekonstruiert, um auf das rekursive Verhältnis zwischen Entscheidungen und Handlungen aufmerksam zu machen. Die Dekonstruktion des Strategieprozesses deckt ein Entscheidungsparadox auf, welches durch die vorherrschende entweder-oder Logik wegdefiniert wurde. Entscheidungen sind deshalb nicht unmöglich – aber nach Derrida ‚gefangen' im Geist der Unentscheidbarkeit. Das Paradox weist auf die Notwendigkeit hin, Strategie als ein ‚Denken im Handeln' zu konzeptionalisieren, da Entscheidungskriterien nie a priori begründet werden können.

Um dieser Notwendigkeit zu begegnen, wird der performative Charakter von Sprechakten herausgearbeitet. Performative Sprechakte erzeugen wovon sie sprechen, indem sie es aussprechen. Äußerungen dieser Art ‚tun' etwas, da sie ausführenden Charakter haben. Wir zeigen anschließend wie und warum der Strategieprozess eine performative Form annimmt. Abschließend diskutieren wird die Möglichkeit diskutiert, eine sprechaktbasierte Auffassung von Strategie weiter zu denken, indem Sprechakte als soziale Praktiken interpretiert werden. Dies eröffnet die Chance Anschluss an die derzeit geführten Debatten im Rahmen der soziologischen Praxisforschung zu finden. Der Beitrag schließt mit einem Hinweis auf weiterführende Fragestellungen und zukünftiges Forschungspotential.

Schlüsselworte: *Strategieprozess, Paradoxien, Denken, Handeln, Dekonstruktion, Strategie als Praktik, Sprechakte*

Endnotes

[1] Hereafter referred to as the thinking/action, decision/action, or formulation/implementation opposition/dichotomy/dualism.

[2] An *infinite regress* represents the causal or logical relationship of terms in a series that logically has no first or initiating term. Such a regress arises in a series of propositions if the truth of proposition P1 requires the support of proposition P2, and for any proposition in the series Pn, the truth of Pn requires the support of the truth of Pn+1. A sufficient support for P1 becomes out of reach since the infinite series needed to give such support could not be completed. A *circulus vitiosus*, or vicious circle, characterizes situations in which one trouble leads to another that aggravates the first. The conclusion of one argument is appealed to as one of the truths upon which the argument rests itself. *Dogmatic interruptions* simply terminate the justification process at an arbitrary point to evade an infinite regress. The offered justification is then simply regarded as reasonable.

[3] Khanna et al. (2000, 783), for instance argue that their notion of strategy process rests on logically deduced economic principles of rational behavior. In a similar way, the model of Farjoun (2002), although emphasizing the need to consider emergent components of strategy, basically relies on a linear process logic.

[4] Of course, this definition of strategy created much tension in the scientific community as the 'Mintzberg-Ansoff-controversy', held in the *Strategic Management Journal* between 1990 and 1991, shows (Mintzberg 1990; Ansoff 1991; Mintzberg 1991).

[5] In a recent article Mintzberg/Westley (2001) discuss both primacies as 'thinking first' and 'doing first'. This highlights once again, Mintzberg's obsession with hierarchically structured oppositions without acknowledging the ontological status of decision-making as such.

[6] To be fair, we need to note that Mintzberg/Waters (1985; 1990) think of strategies as a mixture of deliberate and emergent elements with 'pure' emergence being only an extreme – but possible – situation. Nevertheless, this does not change the underlying definition of strategy – a pattern in stream of actions.

[7] In sociological terms: "There is a double contingency inherent in interaction. On the one hand, ego's gratifications are contingent on his selection among available alternatives. But in turn, alter's reaction will be contingent on ego's selection and will result from a complementary selection on alter's part." (Parsons et al. 1951, 16, quoted in Vanderstraeten 2002, 80)

[8] Vanderstraeten (2002) discusses the concept of double contingency with regard to Parsons and Luhmann in-depth and also provides a comparison of their thinking with regard to this theorem.

[9] Strictly speaking we can even differentiate between two text-layers. The first layer consists of the written texts provided by strategy scholars in which we can identify the thinking/action opposition in various disguises. The second layer consists of the strategy-making activities within organizations. If we speak about deconstructing the thinking/action opposition, we refer to both layers.

[10] Of course, one could argue that since Derrida thinks of the world as a text that is shaped by language, he reduces the 'real mundane objects' in the world to language. Does Derrida collapse the distinction between words and things by indicating that things are words? Schalkwyk (1997, 388) notes that this is not the case, because Derrida only points to the fact that our grasp of things *shares the structure* of our grasp of language. Things are not reduced to be mere words, they continue to exist as things, but are textualized. Things are not 'things' but

just another text. A 'real' cat, for instance, is not in itself 'outside the text' as we can attribute values and meanings to it that are open to interpretation. Any reference to the cat would still be another reference. Of course, the cat is also 'real' in a sense, but its 'reality' is as Lucy (2004, 144) remarks, "not [...] something that could exist outside of claims to know that it exists." Following this position it is impossible to find an extra-textual position from where to find meaning. In this sense, things are part of the text just as language is part of it, but that does not mean that both are the same. Text is an interweaving of the woof of language with what we call 'the world' (Schalkwyk 1997, 388). This imbrication of language and the world is the foundation for world-disclosure.

[11] Strictly speaking we face a threefold paradox of decision-making because (1) as discussed, only those questions that we cannot decide are in fact decisions, (2) decisions are supposed to fulfill social expectations of the future but are always reached retrospectively, and (3) what a decision is, is in itself a decision. See also the discussions by Akerstrom Andersen (2001) and Moran (2002).

[12] This ‚ghost' has been seen by a variety of authors besides Derrida. Luhmann (2000, 131), for example, reminds us that undecidability is the very condition to make any decision at all. In a similar way, Loasby (1976, 5) stresses that "if choice is real, the future cannot be certain; if the future is certain, there can be no choice." (quoted in Pettigrew 1992, 11) These issues are discussed in more depth by Ortmann (2003, 138-145; 2003, 122-127.)

[13] See also the remarks of Ortmann/Salzman (2002, 221-222) who claim that the process of implementation is in fact part of the process of formulation (*et vice versa*), if we consider Derrida's logic of supplementarity as a point of departure for conceptualizing the strategy process.

[14] With regard to organizations, Cooper (1986, 316) calls this state 'the zero degree of organization' that pervades all social structuring. We can equate this state with Derrida's notion of undecidability because in a state of true undecidability we give full reference to the contingent nature of reality.

[15] Another alternative to think about the becoming nature of decisions has been shown by Chia (1994, 801) who argues that decision-making is the activity of linguistic structuring consisting of *micro-incisional acts.* These acts punctuate phenomena and thus set boundaries that create our reality which we then attach labels to (e.g., 'the decision situation').

"Decision-making is the ontological act of cutting and partitioning off a version of reality from what was hitherto been indistinguishable and then subsequently presenting the former as representative of the latter. It is the creating of a primary distinction, a cleavage in an empty space, and an active insertion of a bounding frame." (Chia 1994, 800) Note, however, that micro-incisional acts do not dismantle the opposition decision (thinking)/action but the opposition *decision situation/decision*. Decisions give rise to incisions which construct reality (the decision situation); the notion of action remains underexplored in this conceptualization.

[16] When referring to Chia's (1994) remarks we may claim that by means of speech acts we establish the micro-incisional distinctions that cut off a version of reality which is thereafter conceived as 'real'.

[17] The practice view on strategy has attracted a variety of contributions during the last couple of years. An outline of the general relevance of a practice based view and a discussion of the research agenda is provided by Johnson et al. (2003), Chia (2004), and Whittington (2002). There are already a variety of conceptual contributions as the ones by Hendry/Seidl (2003), de la Ville/Mounoud (2003), Hendry (2000).

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