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Making strategy critical?

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Making Strategy Critical?

It is hard to argue against the claim that strategy is one of the most ubiquitous and consequential organizational practices of modern times. The language and practices of strategy emanating from the corporate boardroom, consultancy firms and business schools have permeated all facets of society. Schools, hospitals, charities, sports teams, political parties, social movement organizations and religious organizations all have opted for, or been coerced into, using the tools, techniques and logics of strategic management. To fail to be 'strategic' seems to be regarded as a modern-day sin: tantamount to being incompetent, unprofessional and anachronistic. Yet the importing of corporate strategy language and practice has also transformed the way in which these organizations operate. Activities, identities and values are no longer allowed if they do not speak to the pursuit of the holy grail of the strategic "vision" and "mission". The commercial logic of strategy, in many cases, trumps all others. It has the tendency of writing out other possibilities for organizations, such as the pursuit of broader community-based objectives.

The strategies pursued in the corporate sector have also transformed modern society and their effects have been felt by every citizen around the world. Strategies of globalisation have shifted the production of goods and services in ways that can make or break nation-states and the livelihoods of their citizens. Strategies of monopoly power pursued by big corporations have crushed smaller, local providers and transformed the economic landscape. Global corporations often have more power than nation-states and do not seem to be shy from flexing their muscles in their 'non-market' strategies of political influence. Strategies of neo-liberalism have transformed public services into markets to be exploited and have transformed citizens into consumers. Strategies of 'financial innovation' in the banking sector have left the world still reverberating from the aftermath of the global financial crisis. To say that strategy matters is clearly an understatement. All stakeholders live with the

consequences of strategies that have been implemented. With hindsight, some are visionary, while others are at best misadventures.

Yet the way that strategy is currently conceptualised, and taught in classrooms around the world, is a curious thing. As a subject, strategy is dominated by the field of industrial economics. Through this disciplinary window, strategies are devised and enacted through rational economic calculations: the scanning of market opportunities, calculations about the economic payoffs of different courses of action and judgements about the likely outcomes of competitive moves and counter-moves. Admittedly, it is something of a 'straw man' to invoke a caricature of contemporary strategic theory and economics as a discipline more broadly. Certainly, some attempts have been made to bring in the 'human' and 'political' dimension of strategic action: social networks, cognitive bias in top management teams, differences in logics generated by national business systems or institutional fields, and so on. But it is this starting point in economics that still seems to lead theorists to view the "stuff" of the social world as an aberration to the ideal-type model of rational calculations. The 'social' is conceptualised as either something to be eliminated (or at least contained) if it detracts from the process of rational calculation or something to be exploited in the case of reputation or social networks. In so doing, the field of strategy still seems to be missing an awful lot of "stuff" in its current state of the art. This missing "stuff" not only limits its development as a 'pure' science that can understand the phenomenon in question but also its development as an 'applied' and 'critical' science that can help those we teach to learn not only how to execute it on a *technical* level but also how to articulate ways of evaluating *how it is done*, and *how it could be done differently*, from the perspective of society as a whole not just the corporate elite.

What is this "stuff" of the social world? And why does it matter for the development of our understanding of strategy? This "stuff" refers to the things that serve both to 'bind together' groups of people and groups of organisations (the 'glue' if you like) and the things that can drive them apart (the 'wedge' to continue the metaphor). These social groups could be as small as a team of senior managers or as large as the groups of organizations that form networks and alliances or the groups of organizations that interact within an industry or nation-state. This social "stuff" includes all kinds of things that are constitutive of the social realm: social norms, rules, values, roles, identities, beliefs, discourses, symbols, meaning-systems, systems of domination, power relations and ideologies. Taking this social stuff seriously means moving away from understanding strategies as merely the outcome of sets of rational economic calculations. The way that strategies emerge and gain or lose their legitimacy are instead viewed as rooted in this social "stuff": shared understandings of what is normal and abnormal, what the 'rules of the game' are, what is right and wrong, who should 'properly' do what, understanding of who we are and what we can and cannot (or should and should not) do, beliefs about what exists and how the world works, ways of representing the world through language and other symbolic means, dominant systems of thought that structure how we come to see ourselves and the world around us, and the power relations and ideologies that generate and legitimate systems of advantage and disadvantage. It is this social "stuff" that is behind forms of coordination and cooperation as well as forms of division, conflict and inequality that arise from strategies pursued by organizations.

Importantly, this social "stuff" is also not politically neutral and inert, a purely "ideational" realm" that is divorced from the material world. This social "stuff" from which strategies emerge is constitutive of, and consequential for, the material world. A deregulated banking sector and the strategies of risk-taking and risk-distribution which emerged from it, grounded in the belief in the 'trickle down' benefits of free markets, resulted in a global financial crisis which was then responded to as merely an 'aberration' in the neo-liberal ideology that created it (Clegg et al, 2011; Cooper, 2015; Elliot and Atkinson, 2009). From within this discourse and ideology of neo-liberalism, the societal response was not to question the foundations of the neo-liberal economic system that created the crisis but instead a bail-out to be paid for with tax-payers money and followed by a period of austerity, affecting the lives of millions around the globe (Kelsey et al, 2017). The social "stuff" from which strategies emerge could not be more consequential for those involved in their creation and those still today feeling their impact. Strategy is therefore not just about scanning competitive environments and calculating payoffs from courses of action. It is a practice that is enmeshed in power and structured by forms of domination, inequality and exploitation. Thus, if we want to 'bring society back in' to the study of strategy, we will also need new ways of understanding this social "stuff" other than as an external 'stakeholder' to be factored in to the strategy calculation.

In this special issue, we propose that our understanding of strategy, in a field still dominated by the discipline of economics, is significantly limited by its lack of engagement with theory that can explain strategy *as a social and political practice*. We are mindful of the words of Sir Lawrence Freedman in his book, *Strategy: A History*, when he argues that strategy is "about getting more out of a situation than the starting balance of power would suggest. It is the art of creating power" (Freedman, 2013: xii). Strategy works on the promise that the future can not only be known, it can be also dominated and controlled. The strategic plan can be created and the competitive moves can be calculated, but the plans and moves can also be brought into being by bending the world to the will of those who created them. Our aim in this special issue is therefore to bring insights from sociology, philosophy, cultural theory and politics to illuminate one of the most important practices of modern times: the doing of strategy.

Strategic Thought: A Potted History

Given the range and prominence of strategy it should hardly come as a surprise that there are many approaches to studying it. Contributions from economics, history, military warfare, international relations, organization theory, public administration, social movement studies and strategy-as-practice make for a diverse archipelago of strategic thought. The different islands of the archipelago do not share a *lingua franca* and consequently view strategy in very different ways: from the rational actor of economic theory to the commander-general of military planning through to strategy-as-practice's focus on the somewhat more mundane and less exotic everyday management practices.

For close to three decades, scholarship on strategy in the Business School world divorced itself from broader developments in strategic thought. This was, in our view, a serious mistake. In

place of a multi-paradigmatic discussion on the nature of strategy, what emerged was a narrow window comprising of two panes: market-based Porterian approaches and the more organizationally grounded resource-based view (RBV). Using a metaphor from North American politics, the 'Overton Window' (Beck, 2010) refers to political debate taking place within a narrow window where discussion is confined to safe issues (cf. Bachrach and Baratz, 1962). Porterian and RBV perspectives retained an iron grip on strategy debates. As any MBA student will point out, you are either "with" Porter or the RBV. Both panes of the Overton Window claimed to be able to pin point the 'holy grail' of strategic thought: the source of sustainable competitive advantage. Occasionally, Henry Mintzberg – or another heterodox strategist - would score a direct hit with his catapult, cracking part of the window. This would be greeted as an opening up of strategy, only for *Academy of Management* and *Strategic Management Society* glaziers to swiftly reinforce the glass. During this period, aside from incursions by writers such as Mintzberg, strategy was implicitly or explicitly grounded in its origins in industrial economics.

There have, however, been some initially promising movements. In February 2001, a group of organization theorists and strategy scholars convened at an EIASM workshop in Brussels (Carter et al, 2008; Clegg et al., 2004). In broad terms, the meeting comprised of the old guard of processual strategists from Europe, some institutional scholars and a new generation of organization theorists. Out of this event, the nascent strategy-as-practice movement emerged. In the decade and a half that has followed, strategy-as-practice has institutionalised itself as a major position in strategy, especially in Europe. Arguably, this has been accomplished through the construction of a 'big tent', incorporating well-established processual scholars together with a newer generation of academics, perhaps best characterised as organization theorists who were interested in strategy processes. Big tents in academia, as in politics, tend to have a light ideological base to them, which can be a source of weakness as well as strength. The strategy pursued by the strategy-as-practice school itself is a fascinating story that is yet to be written. After a broadly incoherent start, the approach developed a momentum, constructed a very wide network and has generated substantial amounts of symbolic and cultural capital, in the form of elite chair positions and publications in high prestige journals.

Has strategy-as-practice shattered or extended the 'Overton window'? Has it in fact created its own window? Does it constitute a breakthrough in strategy thought? For all of strategy-as-practice's activity and scholarship, the ascendancy of industrial economics remains firmly in-tact. This speaks to the institutional power of institutional economics manifested in its control of the central apparatus of the discipline of strategic management. Equally, it is a result of the political quietism that undergirds the strategy-as-practice movement, which pursued a strategy of compromise and quiet diplomacy with the strategy mainstream. It was not unusual for strategy-as-practice writers to go as far as seeking to link strategy-as-practice with prevailing economics approaches (Jarbkowski, 2004; Johnson et al., 2003). Strategy-as-practice claimed it could provide a more realistic picture of the kinds of strategy work undertaken by corporate leaders and middle managers, revealing the mundane and messy realities of managerial practice that lay behind the neat and simplistic rationalities of the 2 x 2 matrix. In other words, strategy-as-practice did not seek to challenge directly the

underpinnings and assumptions of mainstream strategy theory. Whereas proponents of the RBV or of Porter busied themselves with abstractions of inimical resources or market structures, strategy-as-practistas headed to the board-room, meeting room or corporate away-day and watched and listened. The approach did not seek academic confrontations, such as the debates that took place between Keynesians and their neo-classical rivals, or the pugilistic arguments that took place between Foucaultians and their Marxist opponents in labour process conferences in the 1980s and 1990s. In other words, there was no scientific revolution, nor was there a dialectical process. While its impact on mainstream strategy is limited, it is beyond dispute that strategy-as-practice has carved out a space for itself within the academy field of strategy. This is most evident in its presence at the *Academy of Management*, with the *Strategic Management Society* and publications in high prestige journals. As a perspective, strategy-as-practice has gained acceptance from within the mainstream; as a community, it has continued to grow.

Returning to the archipelago metaphor, the strategy-as-practice island has been busy trading with other islands and in so doing gaining a reputation as a strategic entrepôt: building links with mainstream strategy (Regner, 2008), institutional theory (Suddaby et al, 2013), narratology (Brown and Thompson, 2013; Fenton and Langley, 2011), critical discourse analysis (Mantere & Vaara, 2008), routines (Hendry & Seidl, 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2004), information systems (Whittington, 2014), boundary objects (Spee and Jarzbkwoski, 2008), performativity (Kornberger and Clegg, 2011), socio-materiality (Balogun et al, 2012; Jarzbkowski et al., 2013) and accounting (Chapman et al, 2015 ; Boedker, 2010; Kornberger and Carter, 2010). The breadth of connections that strategy-as-practice has forged is quite staggering; importing and then blending these ideas into new conceptual ideas about strategy practice (Oswick et al., 2011). As with mainstream strategy, strategy-as-practice's limited engagement with practitioners is striking. This throws up a strategy-as-practice paradox: an approach that seeks to describe and analyse strategy practices struggles to communicate back to the practitioner community.

The connections made by strategy-as-practice have tended to be with debates going on elsewhere in organization and management theory. At the time of writing, the field has not yet engaged in these debates with international relations, war studies or social movement studies, for instance. Criticisms of strategy-as-practice have been voiced from its earliest days. The charge-sheet is that it promotes an overly managerialist agenda (Carter et al, 2008a; McCabe 2009); has paid insufficient attention to power and politics (Ezzamel and Willmott, 2004, 2008, 2010); ignores vocabularies of strategy beyond the firm (McKinlay and Pezet, 2017); makes spurious connections with mainstream strategic concepts (Carter et al, 2008b); lacks an epistemological understanding (Chia and MacKay, 2007); is ahistorical (Carter et al, 2010; McKinlay et al., 2010); and possesses an inadequate understanding of agency (Chia and Holt, 2006).

Few attending the workshop in Brussels in 2001 could have possibly imagined the impact that strategy-as-practice would achieve as a movement. Whereas a decade ago comparisons to 'pushy younger siblings' (Whittington, 2007) or 'punk rockers' (Carter et. al, 2008b) seemed apposite, strategy-as-practice is now an influential body of strategic thought. This achievement is as impressive as it is puzzling. It raises serious questions about the future of strategy-as-practice: What will strategy-as-practice look like in a decade's time? Will it continue to be in thrall to the mainstream establishment of the US-dominated Academy of Management? What does it aim to do: add an organizational side-show to the dominant economic paradigm or fundamentally rethink how strategy is conceptualised, practiced and taught? If the former is the aim, is this a useful endeavour? If it wants to do the latter, how can that be achieved? Will it engage with major societal issues or prefer to confine itself to relatively trivial issues? These questions are not lost on the leading lights of the strategy-as-practice community, who are quick to respond to critiques (Jarzbkowski and Whittington, 2008), challenges (Golsorkhi, et al, 2010), and in doing so have developed a much more definite view of practice (Jarzbkowski et al, 2016) than was present a decade ago (Carter et al, 2008b). Equally, scholars are aware of the need to think through the future of strategy-as-practice (Vaara and Whittington, 2012) and its intellectual foundations (Seidl and Whittington, 2014).

If we were to summarise the impact of the strategy-as-practice community to date, counting among its achievements are: (i) it has created a space for the sociological consideration of strategy; (ii) as a position, it has gained 'legitimacy' within mainstream management theory; (iii) it has linked to a wide variety of other social sciences literatures; (iv) it has reproduced itself successfully as a field. Applying a more sceptical perspective to strategy-as-practice, its limitations are: (i) the perspective is very broad, incorporating a wide of sometimes competing perspectives; (ii) while studying practice it rarely engages with practitioners, it is not clear on the practical implications it has so far for strategists ; (iii) despite this non-engagement with practitioners, it implicitly takes on a managerialist agenda – rather than viewing strategy from the point of view of employees, unions, consumers or NGOs; (iv) it lacks a political or ethical agenda; (v) the perspective is broadly ahistorical; (vi) the perspective lapses into tautology, trying to explain success or failure in relation to practices.

These strengths and weaknesses can perhaps be illustrated if we imagine studying the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) in 2004, a few years before its collapse. The story of the collapse is well-known (Martin, 2013). RBS had grown from being a comparatively small Scottish bank that was focused on its home market of Scotland. In the 1990s this began to change. A new breed of senior executives gained control of RBS. Kerr and Robinson have characterised the shift as being from Scottish blue-bloods, drawn from the Establishment, to self-made neo-liberal men and women. Dusty conservatism gave way to ambition and dynamism, under the leadership of its Chief Executive, Gordon Mathewson. This was signified by the Royal Bank of Scotland changing its name to signify a shift from Scottishness to its new role as a global player. This occurred at a time when the world economy was globalizing and the international money markets were awash with economic capital. In 1999-2000, RBS pulled off an audacious coup d'état by taking over the National Westminster Bank, its much larger competitor. The takeover was contested and involved competition between Edinburgh's two major banks –

RBS and Bank of Scotland. This involved both companies seeking to gain the support of major shareholders. Lauded by the financial markets, this takeover elevated the standing of RBS in the City of London. The deal made Fred Goodwin's reputation in the City of London, analysts were impressed by his grasp of detail and plans for growth as well as cost-cutting.   He succeeded Mathewson as Chief Executive in 2001. RBS now owned banks in North America, Ireland as well as the UK. Along with other UK banks, the early noughties were hugely profitable. For instance, in 2003, RBS posted pre-tax profits of £6.2 billion. As the *Harvard Business Review* said of the RBS executives, 'They had a shared aspiration to make RBS not just a leading bank, but also one of the most widely admired companies in the world'. Much of the narrative around RBS at that time centred – almost inevitably – on Fred Goodwin. His aggression and unwillingness 'to suffer fools gladly' combined with his attention to detail were seen as virtues. For a time in 2007, RBS became the largest bank in the world, in terms of market capitalisation. The transformation from small, regional player to global giant seemed complete. Of course, in 2008 RBS was saved from collapse only following a massive intervention by the British government. Ten years on the bank is still troubled, with a range of difficult legacy issues to deal with.

The question we would like to pose is: how would a strategy-as-practice study have handled RBS in its glory years? This is a counterfactual exercise, and could perhaps be dismissed as a rather meaningless parlour game. From our point of view, a strategy-as-practice study would have focussed on: Fred Goodwin and his managerial practices, such analysis might have approvingly picked up on his attention to detail; the strategy documents that were produced, many of which pointed to how well risk was being managed; the financial performance that pointed to remarkable success and was underpinned by financial innovation; and a culture oriented towards performance. Such a view would have been utterly credible. One can imagine an article on the 'Lessons from Scotland's Global Bank'. With what we know now, it would have been an entirely wrong-headed analysis. A superficial sociological analysis does little more than reproduce corporate fables. What is fairly clear from that period in RBS and the other banks that failed was that there was a *normalisation of deviance*, such that risky lending decisions that at one time would have been deeply problematic became '*normalised*'. This occurred in a climate where there was a lionisation of the executives of banks, to whom attributions of great powers and abilities were made. Embellishing these views, the media served up hagiographic accounts of banking executives, readily casting them as 'wonders of the age'. These accounts were little more than instances of *celebrity culture*, rather than serious analysis of a fast-changing sector. Along with central bankers – most notably Alan Greenspan - claims were made that the world economy had entered a new age, something that illustrated serious *governance* failures from regulators. In part, regulators bought into the creation of the mythology that bankers were re-inventing the 'laws of finance', which became a widely held view within the financial establishment. Risk, for instance, it was held had been so widely shared, to the extent that it had been more or less eliminated, ignoring the *performative* dimensions of financial models. Similarly, the *hubris* of senior executives perpetuated the mythology of the banks and bankers obscuring the possibility that the *unintended consequences* of their strategies would destroy capital on an unprecedented scale.   This process of destruction highlighted the wide-reaching effects of a strategy gone

wrong: it was the *State* that rescued private enterprise, demonstrating the power of nation states to act, in the face of forty years of neo-liberal writing that downplayed the role of state action. Yet this *re-embedding* of banks into their communities came at a terrible price to those communities, as austerity measures were implemented by many countries in order to pay for the banking crisis, which had led to bail outs and the collapse of their tax base. At this very point, the prime victims of the banking crash became the recipients of welfare, while governments, who had rescued the banks, now found themselves *scapegoated* for profligacy, as if they had caused the crash in the first place. It is difficult to see how strategy-as-practice could have provided an analysis that would step out of its latent conservativism – and attendant tendencies towards hagiography and tautology - to provide compelling signs that would have spoken to the dangers the banks posed both to themselves and society.

Strategy, Organizations and Society

In September 2014, a group of scholars convened at the Strategy, Organizations and Society group at Newcastle University for a '24 hours on Strategy' workshop. The event explored the social, cultural and political dimensions of strategy. The workshop involved presentations outlining insights from major social theorists, including Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault, Garfinkel, Goffman, Weick and Zizek. The workshop's objective was ambitious: it wanted to use insights from these theorists to ask new questions about strategy. If strategy had been a comparatively 'closed' discipline, largely disinterested in the broader currents running through social science, the workshop was an attempt to 'open up' strategy into a more interdisciplinary space. The presentations from the Newcastle workshop form the basis of this special issue. While some of these authors – such as Foucault (McKinlay and Pezet, 2018) and Weick (Brown, 2018) - are probably well known to writers on strategy, others – Deleuze and Guattari (Munro and Thanem, 2018), Garfinkel (Neyland and Whittle, 2018), Goffman (Mueller, 2018) and Zizek (Butler, 2018) – are likely to be less familiar figures to strategy scholars. The objectives of this special issue are threefold: first, we introduce the aforementioned thinkers and discuss their implications for strategy; second, we outline the possibilities their work offers for the future development of strategic thought; third, we offer some reflections for the challenges facing strategy. The theorists showcased in this issue fall into two broad categories, North American social constructionists and symbolic interactionists – Harold Garfinkel, Erving Goffman and Karl Weick – and continental philosophy - Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Michel Foucault and Slavoj Zizek. The sets of writers represent some of the most important thinkers of the last sixty years; the central premise of this issue is that their ideas have far reaching ramifications for the study of strategy, which are explored here.

Erving Goffman (1922-1982)

Erving Goffman was one of the most important North American sociologists of the twentieth century. Goffman was one of the first to take the world of ordinary social interaction seriously. Up to this point, the discipline of sociology had tended to view face-to-face encounters in social settings as far too messy, idiosyncratic and disorganized to warrant any serious

attention. Interaction was regarded as merely a surface 'babble' that detracted from the 'proper' focus of sociology on the so-called 'macro' social structures of the state, religion, education and the family. Goffman rejected this premise and showed that the world of social interaction was in fact highly structured and organized. A master of observation and categorisation, he was able to look closely at what happened when people interacted, or what he read in the newspaper, and see within the detail a pattern of expectations and understandings that constituted social reality. His most famous ethnographic studies include a study of a Shetland island community in Scotland and a study of a mental asylum. Goffman's influence has been vast and his conceptual vocabulary has become part of the essential tool-kit of social theorists today: the dramaturgical metaphor of social life as a 'stage' and the concepts of face, footing, role, rituals, stigma, and framing to name but a few.

Frank Mueller asks: what has Erving Goffman got to teach us about strategy? In a detailed exegesis of Goffman's work, Mueller points to the implications for how strategy performances are pulled off, particularly by executives and consultants. Mueller highlights that all strategies are created, and implemented, through *performances* of various kinds: interactions at board meetings and strategy away-days, interactions between CEOs and investors and analysts, speeches by strategy gurus, presentations by management consultants to corporate clients, and so on. This clearly has resonances with the Strategy- as-Practice field: Whittington (2007), for example, has pointed to the importance of studying the performance of strategy praxis (the actual activity involved in strategizing).

Mueller reprises many of the key constructs of Goffmanian thought: the interaction order, front-stage/back-stage, footing, keying, fabrications. In this regard, Mueller takes us far beyond standard renditions of Goffman often found in the organization studies literature, which tend to draw primarily on the stage and performance metaphors. The paper demonstrates how the making of a strategy performance as 'credible' and 'real' is what leads to its performative consequences. It is the strategy ideas of those who have given a convincing performance that get brought into being. This is a crucial point: for instance, certain consultants are credited with 'strategy expertise' by their clients. Similarly, certain gurus are credited with 'strategic ideas' by their audience. It follows that certain managers or employees are credited with 'strategic credibility' by the CEO. In turn, certain CEOs are credited with 'strategic competence' by investors and analysts. And crucially, others are not.

Politics does not enter the analysis through Goffman's contributions to theories of power. As Mueller notes, Goffman openly acknowledged that he was not a power theorist. Rather, politics enters a Goffmanian analysis by following the strategy performances through to examine the 'so what' question. 'So what' that strategists have to pull off a credible performance? The fact that these 'credible performers' tend to be drawn from particular class, gender and educational backgrounds – as Mueller's analysis of McKinsey suggests – serves to reproduce the organizational elites that dominate the strategy sphere. 'So what' that certain performers gain credence as strategists? The type of 'tough' and 'macho' performance of banking CEOs such as Fred Goodwin, or "Fred the Shred" as he was called, the now disgraced ex-CEO of Royal Bank of Scotland, was typical of the unquestioned high-risk strategies of so many failed banks. Boards, consultants, regulators and analysts all failed

to question the risks being taken by their trading strategies and many colluded with them. 'So what' that we trust appearances when strategy performances seem credible? For six years running, Enron was named "America's most innovative company" by Fortune magazine. We also trusted the auditors who signed off their books. Performances frame our sense of reality and provide us with unquestioning trust when they are 'pulled off' with credibility. 'So what' that strategy consultants peddle their wares in sometimes dubious ways? Assured by the rational calculations provided by their strategy consultant, organizations pursue their mergers and acquisitions, asset stripping, delayering and cost cutting strategies. Politics is right there at the heart of these performances. At stake is not only the bottom line but also impact on society as a whole.

Harold Garfinkel (1917-2011)

Harold Garfinkel was an American sociologist who followed Goffman's footsteps into the world of everyday interaction but whose target of attack was squarely centred on the mainstream of functionalist sociology, most notably the work of his own teacher Talcott Parsons. Functionalism was the dominant paradigm in sociology at the time and started with the assumption that social facts – things such as social norms, values and rules – served as a kind of 'glue' that held society together and staved off social atrophy and conflict. Garfinkel's challenge to functionalist sociology was to show how the social facts presumed to exist 'out there' in the social sphere were constituted by the common-sense social knowledge and reasoning of society's members. Members of society were no longer the 'cultural dopes' being pushed and pulled by norms, values and rules presumed to exist in the functionalist's version of society. Rather, ethnomethodology 're-specified' these social facts as endogenous accomplishments of members of society, who were now understood as knowledgeable, artful and resourceful agents whose 'methods' constituted the social world that functionalists took as their starting point. It is perhaps no surprise that ethnomethodology was received badly by many mainstream sociologists and remains to this day a somewhat marginalised approach within sociology and the broader social sciences. The approach has more recently been reinvigorated through the work of Harvey Sacks and the blossoming of the field known as Conversation Analysis, with some using the term EM/CA to highlight the links between the two (Llewellyn & Hindmarsh, 2010).

Daniel Neyland and Andrea Whittle take us through what an ethnomethodological approach, following Garfinkel, can illuminate in the study of strategy. Building on earlier ethnomethodological work by Samra-Fredericks in the Strategy as Practice field, they draw on a study of the development of a waste management strategy in a local authority to illustrate how attention to the ethno-methods of strategists helps us to understand how strategies are made – and with what consequences for society. Ethno-methods are the methods or procedures that people use to undertake common-sense reasoning and construct the 'facts' that strategists work with when they 'do strategy'. Apparently simple and mundane actions, such as trying to make sense of the contents of a recycling box as part of a survey that will inform the waste management strategy, rely on the production of social reality through ethno-methods involving reflexivity, indexicality and inconcludability: three important constructs in ethnomethodological thought.

Who are the 'strategists' and what are their practices? In this setting, the definition of the strategist is broad and includes anyone and everyone involved in the production of accounts that constitute the strategy: the Government officials involved in setting up carbon credit trading markets, the senior managers responsible for the strategic plan, and Dan, the researcher who was out at 5am in the freezing rain with the "bin men" (as they are known locally) surveying recycling boxes. It is these many and varied 'ethno-methods' that make up what strategists treat as the 'reality' of the strategy environment that then constitute the politics of strategizing. Should the authority invest in bigger recycling boxes and more regular collections? Or should they instead launch an educational campaign to make households recycle more and sort their waste better? Or should they scale back recycling facilities and just purchase carbon credits instead? The answers that the strategists come up with would have, and did have, material consequences for society and the natural environment. Ethnomethodology is not a 'grand' sociological theory, interested in explaining social order through reference to those who stand to gain the most from the prevailing order of things. Power is not the 'explanatory variable' in ethnomethodological analysis. Rather, through the detailed explication of how accounts are made and whose account comes to dominate in the strategy process, it can shed light on how forms of inequality, exclusion and domination come about from the 'common-sense' reasoning of those involved.

Karl Weick (1936- present)

Karl Weick is widely recognised as one of the most prominent writers on organizations (Brown et al, 2008, 2015; Colville et al, 2012; Sutcliffe et al, 2006). Most commonly associated with his theory of organizing (Weick 1979) and the concept of sensemaking (Weick, 1995), Weick's work has had a profound effect on the study of organizations. Weick's ideas have also been influential in the world of practice, most notably through his impact on Tom Peters and Robert Waterman (Freedman, 2013), the popular management writers associated with the best-selling *In Search of Excellence* (Peters and Waterman, 1982). Sensemaking is best characterised as a means of understanding the creation of the social world through the twin processes of interpretation and meaning production. The point is not that the world is 'out there' but rather that it is actively *enacted* by social actors when their beliefs about reality *produce* that reality. Weick's work has many connections with Garfinkel. Garfinkel's classic studies and his enquiries into the documentary method of interpretation, a concept first developed by Mannheim and Schutz, were both central to Weick's work on sensemaking (Weick, 1995: 51). However, Weick approaches the question of sensemaking from his own disciplinary base in social psychology rather than sociology.

In this special issue, Andrew Brown explores the implications of using Karl Weick's theory of sensemaking to further our understanding of strategy. Through his close reading of Mike Martin's (2014) book, *An Intimate War*, the author's analysis of the American and British military campaign in Afghanistan, Brown demonstrates how the failure of the military strategy was grounded in an underlying failure of sensemaking. Brown's analysis shows how the American and British military plan failed to make sense of the history, context and people of Afghanistan. The sensemaking failures were catastrophic for the people affected. In particular, a crucial error was made by the American and British military strategists who failed

to make sense of the nature and relevance of the established tribal groupings of the region. The corollary was an exacerbation of ethnic conflict. They failed to make sense of the economic importance of the opium trade for local farmers, pushing some into collusion with the Taliban for protection of the trade routes while pushing others into poverty. They failed to make sense of the inter-tribal divisions that undermined their attempts to install a democratic government. Bounty payments for those bringing in Taliban members led to innocent people being surrendered. Infrastructure investments were squandered and paid as bribes. In a bitter irony, those wrongly labelled as 'Taliban' often had little choice but to actually join the loose coalition so labelled by the West: left as they were with no aid money, terrorized by Government-backed 'militias' and with their poppy fields under threat.

The military campaign left countless civilians dead and a country still riven with conflict and an economy still dependent on the opium trade. The dominant narrative (erroneously) used to make sense of the war, that of an 'insurgency' of illegitimate terrorists acting against a legitimate Government, 'stuck' throughout the planning and the campaign itself. It was the 'stickiness' of the dominant narrative that led to a failure to make sense – and act – differently. Strong and unwavering commitment to a single master frame used in the West led to 'blind spots' in the military strategy pursued by the Americans and British. Failures were explained away as aberrations or side-effects rather than an opportunity to form a different 'pattern' – a concept underlying both Garfinkel's ethnomethodology and Weick's sensemaking theory – that would question the underlying assumptions of the strategy. The dominant narrative and master frame de-sensitized actorsfrom noticing cues that could have questioned what they took to be reality. Confirmation bias ruled. For example, tribal leaders trusted to provide information about the location of the Taliban were not subject to scrutiny. The idea that their 'intelligence information' was false, serving as a pretext for getting Western forces to back their tribal feud and regain territory or inflict revenge on rival clans, was never entertained. The links to Goffman's work on fabrications is also relevant here. So attached were they to their master narratives, the Western forces failed to find alternative frames that would take a more sceptical approach to the 'information' they were provided. The tactics used by Afghans to undermine and exploit the cultural ignorance of the Western forces could easily have made it as an entry into Goffman's (1969) book *Strategic Interaction*, based on his insights into the world of espionage, had Goffman been alive today.

What can this tell us about strategizing? To strategize *is* to make sense: to piece together all the cues into a coherent pattern or 'frame' that we use to construct plausible explanations of what is happening, where we should go and what we should do. As Brown puts it, strategy is the 'locally plausible sensemaking narrative' about the organization's future. That organization could be a firm, a hospital, a church, a political party or an 'organized instrument of violence' such as the military in this case. Failure in strategizing, then, can be directly linked to failure in sensemaking. The people the American and British military strategists should have been talking to and seeking to understand – the people of Afghanistan and their tribal leaders – were notably absent from the strategizing that took place in the military hierarchy. The 'pattern' or 'frame' associated with practices of war developed for other types of military campaign, with one coherent and collective 'enemy', were never questioned. And so the spiral of restricted sensemaking and the cycle of tribal conflict, poverty and violence

intensified – a process reminiscent of the escalation of commitment to an initial frame outlined by Cornelissen, Mantere, & Vaara (2014) but on a considerably more vast and bloody scale.

Michel Foucault – 1926-1984

Althusser, Baudrillard, Cixous, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard form a generation of French thinkers and philosophers who are celebrated and reviled in equal measure. Whatever one's view, the profound influence they have played in shaping contemporary social science is beyond doubt. Arguably, Michel Foucault stands at the fore of this group: his extraordinary body of work continues to have a far-reaching impact across the social sciences. Over thirty years since his death, Foucault remains as relevant and significant as when his lectures at the College de France first tantalised, beguiled and shaped a generation of researchers. Perhaps strangely, Foucault found a congenial home within European Business Schools (Carter, 2008). Most notably, his ideas have provided some of the major intellectual building blocks of both critical management studies (Knights and Morgan, 1991; Knights and Willmott 1989; McKinlay and Starkey, 1997) and interdisciplinary accounting (Kurunmaki and Miller, 2013; Mennicken and Miller, 2012; Miller and O'Leary, 1987). In recent years, articles adopting a broadly critical perspective on strategy have embraced Foucaultian thought (Carter and McKinlay, 2013; Dick and Collings, 2013; Ezzamel and Willmott, 2004; Hardy and Thomas, 2014; Kurunmaki and Miller, 2013; Macabe 2010, 2016; McKinlay et al. 2010, 2012; Munro, 2014).

In this Special Issue, Alan McKinlay and Eric Pezet further this conversation. They explore the implications for strategy of Foucault's work on governmentality. Their paper is enigmatic and challenging. This can be seen in the opening passages of their paper where McKinlay and Pezet note that while Foucault wrote little about strategy as we currently conceive it, strategy was in fact central to his conceptualisation of power. McKinlay and Pezet depart from the well-trodden strategic paths, journeying into unfamiliar territory. Their first destination is the conception of agency. Agency is a difficult terrain for strategy. While much of strategy writing – both critical as well as mainstream – is invested with heroic assumptions about human agency, in particular the fantasy of the all-powerful transformational CEO, economics-based treatments of strategy struggle with the concept. For instance, Michael Porter's conceptualisation of strategy affords prominence to industry attractiveness, rather than the skill of strategists. At best, the agency of the strategist is reduced to the ability to spot attractive industries and move into them before others do. Similarly, agency has been the source of a psychodrama for institutional theory as it slaloms between institutional entrepreneurship and embedded agency. While institutional theory generally demonstrates an adeptness at handling concepts, its struggle with agency is a serious limitation, one we speculate will ultimately undermine the viability of the approach. It is entirely possible and somewhat ironic that the neo-institutionalists will one day find their solutions in the works of Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu. It will be a case of trudging back 35 years to advance into the 2020s (Burrell and Reed, 2018). Strategy as practice is more up-front about the importance of the agency of the strategist. McKinlay and Pezet remind us that, at face value,

agency runs counter to a Foucaultian approach, which is broadly disinterested in agency. They go further by announcing the 'death of the strategist', a riff on the 'death of the author' thesis. The master strategist plays no part in a governmentality perspective.

What, then, does Foucault offer strategy? If questions of 'why' and 'by whom' fade into insignificance, McKinlay and Pezet suggest that a Foucaultian emphasis focuses on *how* strategy unfolds. This is borne from the central premise of governmentality, namely exploring *how* specific techniques function and the effects of these techniques therein (Miller & Rose, 2008). This changes the focus from 'who governs' – such as strategists or executives in an organization – to what "governmental rationalities" (Flyvberg, 1998: 273) are being used to govern? This distinction is crucial as it locates strategy at the level of vocabulary and rationality. As such, the key questions for the analysis of strategy becomes: 'what makes a particular strategy thinkable?; what are its key terms?; what is the specific set of relationships that are targeted; what are mechanisms that are necessary to its deployment?' (McKinlay and Pezet, 2018)In short, a Foucaultian approach to strategy places emphasis on how strategy is exercised. It is about how a technique such as a strategic planning cycle or a strategy workshop operates and what its effects are.

The central assumption underpinning a Foucaultian approach to strategy is that strategy is always local in form but draws from broader global logics, discourses and techniques. There are, therefore, broad discourses that get appropriated locally in different ways. The implication, for McKinlay and Pezet, is that strategy involves not so much an act of creativity or innovation so much as *curation*. This is a new figuration for the strategist – that of curator. To understand a specific strategy therefore involves much more than the consideration of the means-ends thinking of a particular elite, of whatever kind. A Foucaultian approach to strategy highlights how strategy has become ubiquitous. Through this omnipresence, it is now unremarkable. In other words, we *expect* organizations to have strategies and we are comfortable with groups of people – whether they are consultants, CEOs, spin-doctors, political advisors – doing strategy. In fact, we are surprised when we enter an organization that does *not* have strategists and does not engage in strategizing. While strategy dons the cloak of neutrality and objectivity, it is a technology that produces power effects. There are winners and losers. As Gendron (2018) aptly observes, 'the overarching "plan" is to make sure that our mentality is that of local strategists, who will play and find pleasure in playing by the market's rules. When this occurs, neoliberalism prevails. The "construction" of the strategizing individual, supported with a body of strategizing practices/knowledge, is a significant stake/step in the neoliberalization of the world'. The very commonplace nature of strategy has turned strategy on its head: while there is the death of the master strategist, in their place we are all strategists now. The 'rationality' of strategy and the techniques that accompany it – plans, forecasts, budgets, scenarios, and so on – are regarded as the 'natural' way to govern all aspects of our lives and our society.

Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Felix Guattari (1930-1992)

Iain Munro and Torkild Thanem draw inspiration from the work of Deleuze and Guattari to understand strategic practice under contemporary capitalism and, most importantly, to make strategy 'critical' by understanding the forces of resistance that may be mobilized to disrupt the power of capitalist strategists. The authors take three examples of contemporary forms of resistance to capitalist modes of appropriation - the media industry, the music industry, and the Occupy movement - to illustrate the power of the concepts of deterritorialization, nomadism and the creation of smooth spaces. The latter concept requires some explanation. Munro and Jordan (2013: 1501) alert us to how space is 'something that is fundamentally transformed by the way in which it is occupied'. Deleuze and Guattari draw a distinction between smooth space and striatic space. Striatic space is readily understandable about how modern societies deal with and engage with space. Space can be mapped, measured and quantified. Striatic space is manageable. In contrast, a smooth space is one which does not attempt to partition territory or prohibit free movement. In this way it is counter to how space has been treated since the advent of agriculture and, more recently, the creation of modern states. Smooth spaces 'tend to be difficult to map and to regulate, such as open spaces of the sea, the desert and the steppe' (Munro & Jordan, 2013: 1502). Such spaces are populated by figurations such as the nomad, the itinerant, the slum-dweller.

The deterritorialization (or 'movement away from a territory') of the traditional media is the first example. Internet and social media platforms have transformed journalistic practices in ways that escape the control of traditional news media firms. Citizen journalism through sites such as WikiLeaks act not only as whistleblowing platforms but also as sources of intelligence and activism for a range of social actors shut out or silenced by traditional media. WikiLeaks' strategy has been to create a 'smooth space' without attempts to divert or direct the flow of information exchange. WikiLeaks can be understood from this perspective as a 'nomadic war machine', creating its own deterritorialized smooth spaces which cut across the boundaries set by both nation-states and the international governance system as well as media corporations, generating news in ways that subvert the organization of production and distribution in traditional media corporations.   The role of social media has undoubtedly had far-reaching effects. Certainly, it has lessened the effects of traditional news organizations. For instance, in the 2017 British General Election, the right-wing press in the UK ran a strong campaign against Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the British Labour Party. In previous elections, labour leaders such as Michael Foot (1983), Neil Kinnock (1978 & 1992), Gordon Brown (2010) and Ed Miliband (2015) had been subject to similar campaigns. The difference in 2017 is that it had less of an effect (Iszatt White et al, 2018), largely because of the countervailing effect of social media. While progressives applaud the lessening of the grip of traditional media moguls, it opens up two questions: (i) while it is easy to get carried away with the progressive potential of new technology and social movements, are its effects overstated when it comes into conflict with prevailing power structures? (ii) to what extent can reactionary forces mobilise new technologies against progressive social movements?

The deterritorialization of the music industry provides the second example. With the rise of file sharing technology came a radical shift in the centralised control of music production and

consumption previously enjoyed by the industry. Since the launch of Napster and the many music sharing sites that have followed, these open platforms have deterritorialized music production and distribution, despite the attempts of media giants to reign in such 'information nomadism' (Munro, 2010). Porter's (2001) vision of strategy following the internet revolution, with its emphasis on the 'business as usual' of large corporations maintaining their strategic advantage by maintaining barriers to entry, could not have been more misguided it seems. Confined by his view of the 'rightful place' of corporations in producing commodities for us to consume, extracting their surplus in the process, Porter failed to appreciate the disruptive potential of actors not driven by capitalist logics (as the case in peer-to-peer sharing and open source programming) seeking to share information commodities that do not diminish when they are consumed. These new forms of production, distribution and consumption evade exploitation by traditional corporations, despite their attempts to curb them through legal action and copyright laws.

The third and final example is the Occupy movement. With no formal structures, no party machinery, no leaders and open communication flows, the Occupy movement is a combination of a physical smooth space in the encampments and a virtual smooth space on the Internet. The non-hierarchical and heterogeneous make-up of the Occupy movement deterritorializes conventional notions of political protest and resistance such as the Marxist notion of 'class struggle'. As Barthold et al. (2017:8) put it, 'OWS, and the wider Occupy movement which it sparked, can be considered as practising an itinerant politics. The movement, through its horizontality and its leaderless practice, refused hierarchies. Instead, power and leadership roles circulated'. But it is also more than a political protest. The Occupy movement creates economic and political value that exceeds and subverts both capitalist markets and the State-parliamentary regulation of political will. For Munro and Thanem, Deleuze and Guattari's conception of strategy *against* capitalism, rather than strategies pursued by firms, works through the concepts of nomadism, movement in smooth spaces, and the capacity to deterritorialize. Nomadism is the strategy of resistance aimed at an 'absolute deterritorialization' that cannot be exploited by capital or captured by the capitalist State. The 'nomadic war machine' described by Deleuze and Guattari refers to the subversive groups who turn 'striated' spaces of capital into smooth space, who deterritorialize desire and affect, and who challenge the powers of the capitalist State and the corporations it supports. Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy also brings a new range of people into the strategy scene: citizens who create their own news, peers who share their files through the internet, political activists who create their own community of resistance and protest without leaders or political parties. Of course, acts of deterritorialization and nomadism are always subject to countervailing strategies of territorialization and the strategies pursued against capitalism are met with forces to reassert its control. At the point of writing, large corporations seem to exercise a continued grip on the production of news and music and the Occupy movement is in danger of being forgotten. However, through Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, we are given new ways of understanding the politics of strategy: the practices of commodification and control exercised by corporations and the ways of escaping the exploitation of human desire by capital. Of course, such enthusiasm for the progressive possibilities of such movements are often short-lived. Matthews (2018: 140) highlights the

limitations of the Occupy movement in London, which was a high profile and fascinating social movement protesting against the excesses of the bankers, exposed by the banking crash: 'ultimately Occupy London stalled in that moment of home, and in the identity of the occupation camp, which represented a terminal moment. In this sense, Occupy London was an important but initial moment of critique, which was ultimately unable to extend itself into a more enduring threat'.

Slavoj Zizek (1949-present)

Slavoj Zizek is the self-styled rock star of European philosophy. Described as the Elvis of philosophy (Bainbridge, 2016), Zizek's work has electrified continental philosophy, although his influence within the Business School world remains somewhat more marginal. Zizek has maintained a high-profile media presence, including regular contributions to many English language periodicals, public lectures to packed audiences and the production of films, combined with prolific academic publishing covering a dazzling myriad of different subjects. Zizek is provocative and beguiling in equal measure; two properties that set him apart from the entirety of the canon of mainstream strategy but should commend him to critical scholars. It is in this spirit that critical management scholar Nick Butler (2018) interrogates the implications of Zizek's work for strategy.

Butler situates Zizek's work in two traditions: Hegelian-Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Butler highlights how these literatures are read in tension with one another by Zizek. Such intellectual currents are far removed from the prevailing trade-winds of strategy theorizing. Stylistically, Zizek has embraced a punk rock aesthetic that manifests itself in a propensity to make statements that are shocking, outrageous and counter intuitive. Yet behind the 'shock factor' lies the interrogation of a complex paradox, or a playful inversion of the taken for granted. Following an introduction of Zizek's oeuvre, Butler focuses on two concepts that have relevance for strategy: the '*point de capiton*' and *the 'object petit a'*[1].

The *point de capiton* is a term taken from Zizek's reading of Lacanian psychoanalysis. The term in French roughly translates as 'upholstery button', a metaphor for the points at which the signifier and signified are 'anchored' or 'knotted' together to fix and stabilise them, in the same way as the buttons on a quilt keep the otherwise shapeless stuffing from moving about. Turning to the world of strategy, then, if we seek to know what activities comprise strategy in the strategy as practice (SAP) literature, Butler points out it is underpinned by a strange tautology: 'strategy is strategy'. Rather than being a weakness or oversight on the part of SAP theorists, Butler argues, 'It alerts us to the fact that the term 'strategy' functions as a *point de capiton*'. What Butler is suggesting is that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is precarious: thus the relationship between the signifier (the word strategy) and the signified (what the word strategy is supposed to signify or refer to) is often arbitrary and

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[1] Zizek draws these concepts from Jacques Lacan. For the purposes of clarity, the *objet petit a* needs to be understood in terms of Lacan's theorisation of desire. Lacan argues that the 'object of desire' is perpetually deferred and asserts that we will never have what we desire. Lacan draws a distinction between 'needs' and 'desire', arguing that people can attain what they need but not what they desire.

unclear. In this schema, the *point de capiton* serves as a 'quilting' or 'anchoring' point, providing 'imaginary identification' between the signifier and the signified. Whatever they happen to be studying – managers talking in a corridor, consultants analyzing numbers in a spreadsheet, Powerpoint presentations in a corporate boardroom – SAP 'anchors' this activity to the signifier 'strategy'.

This 'anchoring' is not simply about meaning-making: a moment where the endless movement of signs in the systems of signification can be halted. It also has an ideological underpinning and import. For Zizek, the *point de capiton* also involves a process whereby individuals recognize themselves as certain types of subjects by this fixing and stabilizing of meaning around the signifier (e.g. the good citizen, the obedient child, the shrewd strategist, the creative thinker), an idea that connects back to Althusser's concept of interpellation as ideological identification. However, for Zizek, this identification is characterised not by its success and completeness but by its failure and the persistence of lack. This concept of pleasure, enjoyment and desire is important in the notion of *objet petit a*, a concept first developed by Lacan and then taken up by Zizek. *Objet petit a* roughly translates as the 'lost object'[2], very simply it refers an object of desire that can never be realised. The object of desire is something that people fantasize about, often unconsciously, but ultimately can never fully know, grasp or attain. It is this very unattainability, the thing that we are fundamentally *lacking*, that generates its appeal and sparks our desire. The *object petit a* is a 'cause of desire, is an expression of the lack inherent in human beings, whose incompleteness and early helplessness produce a quest for fulfillment beyond the satisfaction of physical needs' (Kirshner, 2004: 101). The *objet petit a* both expresses the lack or void at the same time as it masks it by filling it with something that can never be obtained and is ultimately illusory, which is why Lacan views the fantasy object as both the *cause* and *effect* of desire. It is also fundamentally ideological in nature because it serves the political function of creating 'sublime' objects (such as democracy, freedom, unity, etc.) that its subjects desire and that serve to justify all acts in its name (the creation of "The Jew" as an object of hatred and the fantasy of the 'pure and perfect' nation in Nazi ideology is one such example). If the entrepreneur is a sublime object in Jones and Spicer's (2005) analysis, then strategy is the sublime object not only for SAP but for all subjects caught up in the discourse of strategy.

Strategy, then, becomes a 'cause of desire' for managers, executives, business school students and so on. The fact that SAP produces tautological definitions of strategy ('strategy' is 'strategy') is therefore not evidence of conceptual sloppiness or a lack of precise instruments for measuring the 'properties' of strategy. Rather, it is evidence that strategy acts as a *point de capiton*, in the same way as Socialism operates in Zizek's analysis. The same holds true of the search for 'the strategist' within SAP. Rather than seek a tighter definition of who 'really is' a strategist or whose work 'really does' have strategic import, the point is to understand how potentially any subject (a manager, a salesperson, a supplier, a customer) is able to 'inhabit the empty place in the symbolic network to the extent that they are 'pinned' to the master-signifier' (Butler, 2018) that is 'strategy'. And crucially, those doing this 'pinning' include not only the people that we study but also the SAP scholars who are writing

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[2] Lacan was however against any attempts at translation and insisted on the original term being used.

about them. It is the SAP theorists, then, who are engaged in this 'constant effort to grasp something that remains – necessarily – forever beyond their grasp and which, for this very reason, exerts a powerful allure' (Butler, 2018), while at the same time obscuring the traces of their own 'fixing' of meaning.

Butler proceeds to argue that the other major implication of Zizek's arguments for strategic thought is to consider how an intervention can disrupt ideology and break with the existing symbolic order. In this reading of strategy, focus gets placed on an event that offers a challenge or break with an existing symbolic order. Butler reprises Zizek's discussion of the dispute between General Tito, president of the Yugoslav republic, and Joseph Stalin, head of the Soviet Union. Tito refused Stalin's demands, which led to a break between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Bloc. The central point is the 'arresting statement', when Tito exclaimed 'No!', which is a forceful gesture of refusal. This break short-circuited the social relations that defined them as communists. Strategy for Zizek would entail examining examples that lead to a break – however fleetingly - with an existing order. This would resonate with revolutionary strategy from below (Friedland, 2013), where the key is to understanding a revolutionary moment. Butler evinces that sudden ruptures challenge an organization's ability to function. These radical breaks are moments of freedom in which the routinized and habitual ideological functioning of organizations is disrupted.

Moving Forward

We started this essay by asserting the importance of strategy. Strategy is far from being a mere buzzword word that is little more than a delusional act to patch over managerial futility. Strategy matters. Strategy done well can improve the lot of an organization and society, conversely done badly it can have ruinous consequences. This insight applies to companies, professional service firms, NGOs, political parties and governments alike. Ten years on from the collapse of many of the world's financial institutions, the far-reaching effects of strategy done badly, or rather more precisely a 'bad' strategy from the perspective of society that was executed rather well from the perspective of the elites, is all too clear. If the broadly applied strategy of de-regulation ushered in the conditions of possibility for the great financial crash, it was the strategies pursued by many of the major banks that transmogrified this possibility into a reality. A heady mix of hubris, functional stupidity, automation of the assumptions built into algorithms, normalization of deviance and misunderstanding of risk saw the banks drown in an ocean of debt. Curiously it was government action that saved neo-liberalism from itself. A hastily arranged strategy of state intervention on a scale not seen in peacetime, saw the banks recapitalized and the financial system stabilised. Curiously, in spite of colossal strategic failure, bankers were reluctant to acknowledge their role in creating the crisis and instead were keen to return to business-as-usual as soon as possible. Many countries had now incurred large scale sovereign debts as a result of the rescue of the banks. This led to some governments then launch strategies of austerity to reduce the debts. Thus, those who had created the crash – the bankers and their auditors and advisors – had amassed considerable private wealth, while the victims became those reliant on state benefits and services, which

were cut dramatically. What we see are multiple strategies playing off each other with dramatic consequences.

Earlier in this paper, we talked about the dominant schools of thought in strategic management. MBAs are taught that they are either 'with' Porter or the Resource Based View. A new kid on the block, strategy as practice, has also laid claim to being the new school of thought. We hope that another school can also be considered, one that takes a critical view and understands strategy as a social and political practice. What we call for is a multi-paradigmatic and politically progressive conversation about how to work out a critical approach to strategy. In light of its importance, we argue that no singular perspective can hope to provide a comprehensive view of the importance of strategy. Reducing the world of strategy down to five strategic 'forces' or semi-mystical 'resources' is to the miss the point of strategy completely.

The world is changing. 2016 will almost certainly be counted as one of the most dramatic years in modern times, on a par with 1989 or 1968. The Brexit vote in the UK, the election of Donald Trump to the American presidency, and the on-going refugee crisis are symptoms of broader problems within society. Inequality breeds populism which can take societies to very dangerous places. Strategy scholarship must step up. The Overton window of strategy must be shattered: it is simply not enough to trot out clichés about market structures and dynamic capabilities. Nor is it enough to dwell on mundane practices that to non-academics might seem whimsical and self-indulgent, a little delight for some workshop or other aimed at publishing in some 'A' grade journal or other. If strategy scholarship is to count, it must engage with the rich resources of intellectual thought emanating from the social sciences over the past half century. These ideas have much to offer strategy.

Table 1 below offers a comparison of the perspectives covered in this issue, starting with the key concepts associated with the theorist and detailing the setting in which it is explored in each paper. The table then highlights "three P's" from each theorist: the *people* involved in making strategy, the types of *practices* each perspective associates with strategy, and finally how the perspective addresses questions of *politics*.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Table 1 illustrates the implications of each of the theorists profiled in this issue. The broader point is that each of the theorists has the potential to take us to a different place in our conceptualisation of strategy. If we return to the banking crash of 2007-2008 and think through what the implications of each of the theorists profiled in this issue for understanding the crisis. If we follow Goffman, for instance, we become intensely interested in the performance of strategy and, in particular, how some performances are deemed convincing and credible and thus 'strategic'. How was it that banks managed to convince regulators and auditors that their strategies of risk were sustainable? How was it that they were able to style themselves as 'Masters of the Universe' and producers of wealth in society? Most of us were

'duped' and few saw through their artful presentations. Strategy from a Garfinkel frame takes us to a place where we can ask how strategists use their common sense knowledge to produce accounts that constitute the 'facts' they work with in compiling their reports, presentations, forecasts and plans. How did the banks generate what seemed at the time as 'common sense' ways of maximizing returns by playing 'casino capitalism' with our money? Banks had, it seemed, created new products which re-wrote the 'laws of finance'. How was this so? Weick's master concept of sensemaking invites us to consider how strategists understand their world and crucially how they enact these assumptions through their strategizing. How did the banks take their master frame of 'too big to fail' and use it to enact such strategies of risk? How were the banks about to make sense of themselves as clever, smart and doing a good job for so long? For Foucault, strategy invites us to identify how strategy techniques work and how their power effects are felt in organizations and society. How did the techniques of governing ushered in with deregulation set up the conditions of possibility for the crash? Deleuze and Guattari lead us to try to understand strategies of resistance that involve deterritorialization and the creation of smooth spaces. Certainly, the banks were involved in processes of deterritorialization, with capital moving in new and unusual ways. A Deleuze and Guattari perspective would possibly be puzzled at how little resistance – outside of G8 protests and indignant cries from the far left of politics– occurred during the boom. Studying contemporary resistance would almost certainly involve highlighting the role of social media in the process of deterritorializing. The strategy of capital, with its colonization of territory necessary for exploitation, meets the nomad who rejects territorialization. Again, the rejection was marginal, only could perhaps be found in initiatives such as local currencies or local exchange trading systems. Of greatest note, is following the collapse of the banks, the nation state in numerous countries asserted itself by intervening in a crisis. This followed decades where the limits or decline of the nation state had been widely asserted. What we saw was state intervention on a colossal scale that shored up the economic system. Finally, Zizek invites us to consider strategy as an object of desire in organizations, where such desire is essential for the working of ideology. This tells us much about how executives within the banks 'object of desire' of being the biggest, richest and most powerful financial institutions also proved elusive. This prompted larger takeovers, more exotic financial instruments as the executives tried to live out their fantasies. No amount of profit was ever enough. Zizek can help us understand why such financial excesses were pursued.

Embracing these new perspectives entails not only providing different answers to existing questions being asked in the field of strategic management. It also involves asking different questions altogether: How do organizations come to conceive of their direction, purpose and goals through the frames and narratives they use to make sense? How do actors produce performances recognised as 'strategic'? How do strategic techniques and bodies of knowledge render the world calculable and governable? How do actors seek to resist the territorialisation of spaces by capital and reclaim spaces and flows of information? What are the ideological causes, and consequences, of the strategies that are pursued and the very signifier 'strategy' itself?

One of the central lessons of organization theory is that its strength comes from being multi-paradigmatic and polyphonic. Using different and sometimes complex ideas to understand a

phenomenon undoubtedly helps us to make sense of it in richer ways. This is not a one-way street of social scientific thought being imported into the strategic management community to help with working out functional problems of competitive advantage. If strategic thought is to matter within the social sciences then it also needs to be able to offer a compelling explanation of society's challenges and problems (Carter, 2013). Only by understanding the problem is it possible to conceive of solutions. This special issue maintains that using social theory can help understand strategy as a cultural, organizational and political phenomenon. Strategy is as much about 'strategy from below' – the activities of social movements and political parties – as it is about 'strategy from above' – the preserve of boardrooms, cabinet offices and the corridors of power. Strategy also suggests that we have agency in the world that we create: globalization was not an unstoppable juggernaut (Giddens, 1999), nor was the financial crisis, both were actively created and sustained by human agency. This special issue will have succeeded if it opens up a conversation about the future of studying and teaching strategy. It is a future that must be plural and progressive. It must also seek to overcome the dominance of those who are white and male, recognising that this special issue has reproduced this very issue, and strive to write gender, race and other forms of inequality and difference into the study of strategy.

We began this editorial by using the metaphor of an archipelago to describe the academic field of strategy. Business School strategy needs to build some bridges and become far more linked up to islands of critical thought. It is for this reason that we have published this collection of essays in *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*. The journal has shown a consistent commitment to publishing progressive and critical research[3]. Indeed, accounting is no stranger to strategy, with the Big Four accounting firms being providers of strategy consultancy. Stylized strategy tools such as the 'balance scorecard' have their origins within accounting. We assert that strategy is a topic that is of as much a concern for accounting scholars as risk management, valuation or integrated reporting. We end this Special Issue with an injunction: strategy is too important to be left to be studied by those who only seek functionalist answers to managerialist questions of competitive advantage. It must be part of a broader conversation that we hope many critical thinkers will want to join in.

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[3] Arguably there are two journals, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* and *Organization*, that have consistently published critical scholarship in the respective fields of accounting and organization theory.

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Table 1: Social Theory and Strategy

Paper	Social Theory	Key concepts	Strategy Setting	People	Practices	Politics
Mueller	Goffman	Performance, interaction ritual / interaction order, framing, front-stage/back-stage, footing, keying, fabrications	Strategy performances (e.g. Top Management Team meetings, strategy away-days, consultancy interactions, etc.)	Senior managers Strategy consultants Employees (as aspiring strategists) Investors	Interactions (e.g. conversations, speeches, presentations etc.)	Reproduction of organizational elites Image intensive presentations packaged as credible strategy Socio-economic outcomes of strategies pursued
Neyland & Whittle	Garfinkel (ethno-methodology)	Ethno-methods, stock of social knowledge, account-abilty, reflexivity, indexicality, inconcludability (etcetera clause)	Participant observation of development of waste management strategy in a local authority.	Managers Refuse collectors Households Government auditors / officials Researchers Strategic partners	Recycling survey Designing leaflets Writing of strategy documents Recycling league tables Trading of landfill credits	Provision of recycling facilities Moral evaluation of citizens Carbon credit trading (cheaper alternative to recycling)
Brown	Weick (sense-making)	Sensemaking, organizing, enactment, cue, frame, equivocality	Strategy of American and British military action in Afghanistan, as recounted in Martin (2014)	British/US strategists (military commanders, etc.) Tribal leaders Government officials Intelligent agents	Sensemaking about nature of 'enemy' Enforced changes in GIRoA Government Military attacks on terrorist units presumed to exist Bounty payments Infrastructure investment squandered	Intensification of ethnic violence Loss of civilian life Escalation of kidnapping, ransom, assassination, drugs trade

McKinlay & Pezet	Foucault	Governmentality, power/knowledge, subjectivity, discourse, genealogy, disciplinary power	Foucault's reading of Machiavelli on strategy The work and writings of management 'guru' Tom Peter	Any subjects who self-define and self-discipline according to the discourse of strategy	Techniques and technologies of governance Categorisation and measurement systems	Exercise of power in contemporary capitalism Techniques of control through 'empowerment'
Munro & Thanem	Deleuze	Nomadic strategy, deterritorialization, smooth space	Three cases: media, music industry and Occupy movement.	Citizens Peers Activists Corporations Nation-states	Citizen journalism (e.g. Wikileaks) Peer to peer sharing (e.g. Napster) Open source programming Political activism (e.g. Occupy Wall Street)	Resistance to capital by reclaiming flows, spaces and production
Butler	Zizek	Ideology, master-signifier, *objet petit a* (paradoxical cause and effect of desire), fantasy, enjoyment, lack, free floating signifier, master signifier	Strategy-as-practice literature	Speakers of the discourse of strategy Those 'pinned' to the master signifier 'strategist'	Practices of defining and enquiring about strategy	New forms of ideology in late capitalist society