

# Conclusion

## Patterned Fluidity: An Interactionist Perspective as a Tool for Exploring Contentious Politics

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In this book, a strategic interaction perspective (SIP) has been applied by authors coming from various disciplinary backgrounds and theoretical traditions. In a way, by participating in this book, the authors are making a statement: we all agree that an approach focusing on the strategic interaction among players in arenas has much to offer the study of protest, particularly compared to the previously – and overly – dominant contentious politics model. Other attempts have been made recently in the same direction, mainly in critically referring to the theory of fields elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu (Mathieu, 2012; Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). While we largely share their ambition, we are convinced that an interactionist approach is better equipped to deal with the challenges raised here than the concept of field is. In this conclusion, we will defend this innovative approach, outlining the strong advantages of the notions of the “social world” and “arena” (as opposed to the concept of field) and the virtue of what we will call a “dispositionalist interactionism” in order to make sense of micro-mobilization processes and agency in interactions (as opposed to structuralist and rational choice theories). Thus, we honor James Jasper’s pioneering work, while at the same time engaging in discussions with him and other authors of this volume regarding various aspects that deserve further elaboration.

Jasper has developed a broad strategic interaction perspective, dealing with various players and arenas – and not merely players involved in protest. In particular, he developed this perspective in *Getting Your Way: Strategic Dilemmas in the Real World* (2006). In this conclusion, we will defend this innovative approach as indeed a major step forward in our understanding of both more and less ritualized forms of interaction, notably protest. We would claim, however, that even though the SIP can be applied to various forms of interaction, it contributes especially to our understanding of the least institutionalized, the least routinized forms of interactions, such as those between movements and their targets. Both players and arenas are very fluid in the context of protest and change, and it is precisely this fluidity which is a central tenet of the SIP. It should come as no surprise that it was as a scholar of protest that Jasper developed this dynamic perspective.

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At the same time, we will argue that there is a risk of overestimating the fluidity of players, even in the case of protestors, and that we should look for patterns in the fluidity. Players are not formed overnight, nor do they totally change in the interaction itself. Although we agree with Jasper that players constantly reinvent themselves, we should still pay attention to where they come from and how that informs the strategic choices they make in the *hic et nunc*. Socialization, norms, rules and cultural notions predating interactions do count, even for protestors who might feel cognitively and emotionally “liberated.”

### The Best of SIP

Let us start with what we consider the main contributions of the strategic interaction approach. In the first place, as this volume shows, the SIP centers our attention on the various players that protestors must contend with. These are more or less institutionalized players, more or less supportive of their causes, or more or less coercive. This opening up of the possible worlds of interaction stands in sharp contrast to much recent research on protest that has become very “movement centric.” In that sense we agree with McAdam and Boudet (2012): “The field of social movement studies has expanded dramatically through the past three decades. But as it has done so, its focus has become increasingly narrow and ‘movement centric.’” By this they mean: “The field’s preoccupation with movement groups and general neglect of other actors who also shape the broader ‘episodes of contention’ in which movements are typically embedded” (McAdam and Boudet, 2012: 2). This book – dealing with so many players (and subplayers) and arenas – can be read as an answer to their criticism that movement scholars have increasingly neglected the broader constellation of political and economic (f)actors:

In focusing primarily on movements, the emerging community of movement scholars began unwittingly to push to the margins the very actors – economic elites, state officials and political parties – that had been central to much of the pioneering work that shaped the field in the first place. Gradually, Ptolemy replaced Copernicus as the guiding spirit of the emerging field. Instead of situating movements in a fuller constellation of political and economic forces and actors, movements and movement groups increasingly came to be the central animating focus of the field. (McAdam and Boudet, 2012: 22)

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Paying attention to the broader context – as authors do in this book – doesn't mean, however, that one must prioritize macro-factors over meso- and micro-, or political and economic aspects over cultural and emotional ones. On the contrary, instead of a move back to Marxist, structuralist times favoring macro-factors, the SIP proposes to make, what we would call, a *lateral* move. In the words of Jasper: "The main constraints on what protestors can accomplish are not determined directly by economic and political structures so much as they are imposed by other players with different goals and interests" (Jasper, this volume). This book's lateral move implies that a SIP is about various players in the same social space; it is through and in strategic interaction with others in specific arenas that differences in economic resources, persuasion and positions become apparent. It is in the "horizontal" strategic interaction itself, and not in political forces from "above" or, for that matter, economic forces from "below," that these economic, political, and cultural differences materialize, that they are experienced.

The parts of the book dealing with market arenas and experts and with intellectuals and media clearly demonstrate the broad perspective that a SIP encourages. However, the first section on "supporters," including Chapter 1 on factions, and Chapter 2 on fractions, should not be misread as exclusively dealing with movement-internal affairs. Both convincingly show the impact of the "outside," indeed, they fundamentally question the very distinction between movement inside and outside, and posit the irreducible heterogeneity of players within movements.

Second, but related to the previous point, the SIP is not a deductive, "distanced" way of analyzing protest; it helps us to empirically understand the dynamics and outcomes. This stands in sharp contrast to approaches dominant in the US for decades, such as the "early" "political opportunity structure" approach, that relied (too) heavily on structural models. Movements were portrayed as facing contexts with structural characteristics, but rarely as autonomous players actively pursuing their goals. Recent propositions attacking this problem converge on more strategic and interactionist models. For instance, this is the case in France where the study of social movements, strongly influenced by Bourdieu's critical sociology, has long paid particular attention to interaction dynamics within different fields (Fillieule, 1997; Agrikoliansky, Fillieule, and Mayer, 2005; Sommier, Fillieule, and Agrikoliansky, 2008; Péchu, 2006; Mathieu, 2012). Strategic and field approaches have also developed in the American literature, particularly, but not exclusively, due to James Jasper's repeated calls for a perspective oriented toward the analysis of strategic interactions between players across

different arenas (Jasper, 2004; 2006), as well as Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) conceptualization of strategic action fields, which directly relies on Bourdieu's concept of fields as spaces of struggle opposing incumbent actors and their challengers.

In the introduction to this book, Jasper argues for a "doing justice to reality" approach. He stresses that the analytical use of "capacities" or "strategic means" is "more concrete" than Bourdieu's forms of capital, and far more inductive than very abstract analyses in terms of "power." Yet a SIP has a better understanding of not only the means of protest; the same is true – according to Jasper – for the goals: "Strategic theories have the advantage of encouraging (or forcing) the researcher to acknowledge a range of goals through empirical investigation rather than deductive theory". Moreover, he states that "we need to do this kind of work if we wish to acknowledge the lived experience of human beings". Even though this may sound quite ambitious to some, we agree with Jasper that a lot of the theorizing, and particularly the "modeling" in recent sociology has taken us far (too far) from those actual experiences (Bertossi and Duyvendak, 2012; Bertossi, Duyvendak, and Schain, 2012).

Structuralism was not only highly problematic because of its deductive way of analyzing protest behavior, but also because it needed stable, "superimposed" categories (and it never showed much interest in whether people "experienced" those categories, whether these made any "sense" to them). Thus, the first task for a SIP is to destabilize all a priori categories, to de-essentialize any particular characteristics of players and arenas, and to show that movements are indeed "on the move," difficult to grasp. Another way of saying this is that structuralist analyses have been particularly problematic for (the research on) social movements, since the latter are the least structural, the least routinized, the most challenging of everything fixed and stable. In situations of cognitive liberation (McAdam, 1999), "everything solid melts into air"; the impossible is perceived as possible because people have a new look at reality and a new "feeling" about what is possible. Old categories blur and therefore social movement scholars will always emphasize that the quintessence of protest behavior is the embattledness of the possible.

In that sense it comes as no surprise that Jasper in his introduction underlines the importance of agency and choice – the fact that protestors think they have options:

A great deal of sociology has been devoted to showing why people have fewer choices than they think. Social facts, structures, networks, institutional norms or logics all emphasize constraints. Various kinds of habits

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and routines are introduced to explain the stability of interactions, most recently in the guise of the *habitus*, an internalized set of dispositions for reacting in predictable ways even while improvising slightly within the set.

As a matter of fact, any scholar familiar with social movement research knows that the existing literature overwhelmingly relies on three different tools, all – at first sight – marginalizing the role of agency: structural conditions (political opportunity structures, the density of horizontal networks and links to the elite, suddenly imposed grievances, etc.), cultural idioms (cultural frames, *Weltanschauung*, traditions, etc.) and mobilization structures (leadership, material and organizational resources). As Rod Aya argues ironically, in this tripartite configuration, structures, culture and the availability of resources dictate the course of events; conversely, these events can also provoke changes in existing structures, cultures and resources. And yet, in this framework, “structure (with an assist from culture) constrains agency to make the events – by violence; and the events constrain agency to change the structure – again by violence. Agency is the Third Man between structure and event who does the killing and coercing. He makes the action happen” (Aya, 2001: 144). As a result, even in the most structuralist models, individuals are at one point or another called upon to explain “the transition from word to deed,” thus surreptitiously introducing a rational choice approach without admitting it. It is thus not surprising that, under such conditions, the existing literature ceaselessly swings between rather unconvincing binary oppositions: the spontaneity of the masses and emotional contagion, versus the calculated and manipulative actions of group leaders; and the reliance on established forms and cognitive shortcuts during routine situations and the prevalence of tactical choices and innovation – usually attributed only to leaders – in situations of structural uncertainty (Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule, 2012).

We desperately need a more balanced perspective on the role of agency. We are therefore sympathetic to Jasper’s call for renewed attention to the importance of choice (read: agency), although he may run the risk of overestimating what people in most situations experience as changeable since strategic interactions are always “situated,” that is, historically established: the social norms involved therein are and have been the object of gradual, multiple, and simultaneous developments. The fact that interactions have been changing over time doesn’t mean that the interaction pattern can easily be transformed at any point in the future. Jasper is certainly right that too many sociologists have been looking at rather stable series of interac-

tions – but that is not a reason to misrecognize the stability of many forms of interactions.

When and why people experience choice and have the option to dramatically change the interaction or, vice versa, when and why people do not experience these options, makes a huge difference. We should not too hastily generalize from the experiences of players in protest interaction – who might think about themselves as having multiple options and, hence, agency – to all forms of strategic interaction. We think that it is empirically useful to distinguish between various types of strategic interactions: between players who are part of the routinized organization of the social world and players involved in mobilization, when enormous shifts may occur: in meanings, in feelings and, consequently, in strategic interaction. This book clearly deals with the latter group of players and interactions.

In what follows, we start by critically discussing the notion of a field of contention (Bourdieu, 1984), which is gaining importance in social movements literature, before contrasting it with the concepts of the social world and arena (Strauss, 1978; Strauss, 1982; Strauss, 1984; Becker, 1982). In this discussion, we stress that the *fluidity* of protest interactions makes the concept of arena more apt than the concept of field. In the second part, we look for *patterns in fluidity*, going beyond SIP's fascination with the *hic et nunc*, the synchronic. We argue that one should take into account actors' socialization and dispositions, as well as their cultural and historical dimensions, when exploring the micro-foundations of interactions.

## The Misleading Metaphor of Fields of Contention

Social movements have a historically specific origin that parallels the development of modernity itself, starting at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Gusfield, 1978). The rise of state-building, capitalism, urbanization, and communications provided the impetus for the development of the division of labor, first labeled by Durkheim in 1893 as “social differentiation.” By this term, we mean a historic process that affects society and which suggests a greater complexity of social relationships. This evolution results from the repeated creation of previously nonexistent specialized structures. Many theories attempt to account for this structuring of the social world in more or less independent spaces. Depending on the scholar, there is talk of *fields* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), *organizational fields* (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), *sectors* (Scott and Meyer, 1983), *games* (Scharpf, 1997), *networks* (Powell

et al., 2005), or, in the case of the government, *policy domains* (Laumann and Knoke, 1987) and *polity systems/subsystems* (Sabatier, 2007), and *markets* in the economic realm (Fligstein, 1991; 2001). Social movement scholars have also tried to conceive of movements as specific social orders, starting with the seminal work of McCarthy and Zald (1973; 1977) who coined the concepts of *social movement organizations* (SMOs) and *social movement industries* (SMIs) or the closely related concept of *multi-organizational fields* (Curtis and Zurcher, 1973), referring to all organizations (including both opponents and supporters) with which a protest movement interacts. More recently, scholars have started to recognize that organizations are not the only mobilizing structures in social movements and that social movements do not have *members* but *participants* (e.g., Oliver, 1989; Diani, 1992). Among others, the concepts of *submerged networks* (Melucci, 1989), *ideologically structured action* (Zald, 2000), *social movement networks* (Diani and Bison, 2004) and *social movement communities* (Buechler, 1990; Taylor and Whittier, 1992; Lichterman, 1995) have helped to conceptualize the diffuse nature of protest activities and their moving structures.

Yet, paraphrasing Jasper, all those definitions treat protest groups and other players asymmetrically, reducing the latter to the “environment” of the former, “a structural trick that reduces the agency of all players except protestors. ... All players confront dilemmas, make choices, react to others and so on. We can only understand contention when we pay equal attention to all of them” (2004: 5; see also Walker, Martin, and McCarthy, 2008.) In recent years, the influence of Bourdieu’s theory of structuration on social movement scholars has brought to the forefront the powerful concept of field to describe the complex web of relationships and interactions among contentious movements. To our knowledge, Crossley (2003) was one of the first to use the notion of “fields of contention,” followed by Fligstein and McAdam (2012) who speak of “strategic action fields,” not to mention the numerous French scholars whose intellectual training drives them naturally to refer to Bourdieu’s concepts, which they adopt (on “activist fields,” see Péchu, 2006) or adapt to the empirical reality they are studying (on “spaces of contention,” see Mathieu, 2012).

Our interactionist perspective justifies speaking about “social worlds” and “arenas” as well as our choice of not using the Bourdieusian term “field,” when we try to make sense of social movement emergence and activities. Let us explain. Much of Bourdieu’s work is devoted to the exploration of these social worlds endowed with specific explicit and implicit operating principles, but this is especially true of two of his works, *The State Nobility* (1996a) and *The Rules of Art* (1996b). A field is defined as a *social subworld*, a

sphere of social life which, over time, has become increasingly autonomous and distinct from other fields, with its own specific social relations, issues and resources. We are not all driven by the same motivations or seek the same rewards in the religious field, the field of sports, and the political field.

As a result, two crucial elements appear in this theory, that of the boundaries of the field, and that of the relations that each field has with its environment. According to Bourdieu, the members of the field are constantly working to exclude those lacking the capital specific to the field. A major methodological consequence is that it is not up to sociologists to determine the boundaries of a field. Instead, their task is to study the battles of different agents to define the border, to try to invade the field, or to maintain their position in the field. This means that the fields are not totally set in stone but are instead subject to the influence of other fields while they, in turn, may influence other fields. Therefore, the fields are not absolutely but, more or less, autonomous. In other words, they are more or less endowed with their own law, which is still disputed within each field and which may be subject to external influence, as when the constraints of profitability in the economic field have an impact on artistic creation. This focus on variations in autonomy draws our attention to the fact that there is a history in each field leading to progressive autonomization, the field then acquiring its own rules of the game, from a specific ideology, and institutions responsible for playing the role of gatekeeper. It is in *The Rules of Art* that Bourdieu offered his best empirical demonstration of the validity of the concept of field, by studying the autonomization of the artistic field in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when artists managed to make a living from their art and to liberate themselves from patrons, at the same time that the ideology of “art for art’s sake” emerged.

The concept of the field is the most powerful concept we have today to examine the historical process of structuring our societies. Nonetheless, all the varieties of relations do not fall within fields, and their forms of structuration and modes of functioning fail to fully account for protest activities in particular and their interactions with other social actors.

First, the real world cannot be wholly confined to the fields. This does not exhaust the totality of differentiation phenomena. In fact, field theory is solely interested in relations between dominant forces and in describing the specialized worlds from which many are excluded. “The legitimism of field theory, which can be observed in the diminution of interest accorded to actors the more removed they are from the major agents in the field, is also not without problems in the study of all the dominated actors in the



field and of all the marginal forms of experience, weakly institutionalized” (Lahire, 2013: 164). This critique is particularly appropriate for social movements, which only rarely mobilize the most legitimate social groups with the most resources. An analysis in terms of fields would lead to an examination deliberately focused solely on the leaders and activists, ignoring the rank and file. Now, the force of any mobilization is also based on the power of numbers (DeNardo, 1985), the strength of those “external to the fields.” The notion of strategic action fields developed by Fligstein and McAdam is vulnerable to this critique as well, since they believe that, in using the metaphor of the Russian dolls, they have a universal concept applying to all social relations (including the relationship between two individuals). Now, as Lahire quite rightly observes: “In seeing ‘fields’ everywhere, ... we no longer see anything at all and the concept is no longer interesting” (Lahire, 2006: 44).

Secondly, the rules of field structuration do not take account of the functioning of social movements. If we postulate that any genuinely constituted field is the culmination of a progressive process leading to the acquisition of its own specific ideology, principles of hierarchization and structuration, and institutions empowered to pronounce and guarantee verdicts on the internal struggles for hierarchization and trace the boundaries of the field in excluding laymen, we can conclude that the world of social movements does not constitute a field. The sphere of social movement players does not seem sufficiently institutionalized, structured, and unified to correspond to Bourdieu’s definition (Mathieu, 2012). Here, three elements must be explained.

Not all individuals who devote themselves to protest activities are professional activists. Thus, it would be very reductionist to claim that the positions and practices of participants in protest activities could be explained by their position in the field. As Lemieux correctly observes: “The investment in the game, however wholeheartedly, cannot be absolutely continuous, other social games having inevitably to be played as well, if only those organized around *bios* and *oikos* (the management of the domestic space, sexuality, health, family relations, the raising of children ...)” (2011: 89; for a similar critique from a feminist standpoint, see McCall, 1992). The interactionist sociology of activism, in focusing on all spheres of individual life (family, professional, and so on) has demonstrated that life outside the field (prior to activism, as well as in other parallel activities) is important in understanding “activist careers” (Fillieule, 2001; 2010).

In addition, the notion of the field suggests fixed boundaries demarcating a finite list of competitors. Now, the particularity of protest struggles is that the spatial limits are both shifting over time and specific to the causes concerned. Thus, the anti-AIDS movement saw its borders redefined when the state established public policies to combat the epidemic (Epstein, 1998; Voegtli and Fillieule, 2012), and it does not involve the same actors as, for example, the battle against drinking and driving (Gusfield, 1981). Finally, the particularity of protest battles is not to be part of the domains controlled by gatekeepers tasked with ensuring that borders are respected. The special nature of political mobilization concerns the ad hoc bringing together and opposition of diverse groupings, whatever their legal status (associations, NGOs, loose networks, unions, parties and even specific sectors of the state). Moreover, one of the central issues of any protest struggle is to obtain from state authorities the recognition of their legitimate right to act (Mathieu, 2012). The notion of strategic action fields developed by Fligstein and McAdam suffers from the same flaw of assuming a priori boundaries based on established formal rules, when they make the existence of “formal governance units that are charged with overseeing compliance with field rules and, in general, facilitating the overall smooth functioning of the system” (2012: 14) a defining criterion.

Third, as Fligstein and McAdam (2012) do rightly stress, relations between social movements cannot be grasped only as relations of domination and competition, as is assumed in field theory. These relations may also reflect various forms of cooperation, indeed games of competitors-partners when the activities of opponents seem to constitute a vital driving force in the maintenance of mobilization and structures connected to the struggle. Overall, and to conclude with field theory (and its various proposed reformulations), it seems to us that it may accurately describe certain very hierarchical social subspheres, generally those where some players exercise power over some sector of the social realm. Yet, for all the reasons we have just presented, protest activities themselves are not part of a given and specific field. Contention is not limited to a circumscribed and relatively stable sphere of activity, more or less autonomous from other fields.<sup>1</sup> By nature, contentious activities develop at the margins or at the intersections of multiple fields, depending on the issues at stake, as well as on the individual or complex players they mobilize or target. This is why we prefer to draw upon the notion of the *arena* to designate the space delineated by anti-establishment mobilization, a space by definition specific to each cause and potentially shifting over time.

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## The Social World and the Arena Perspective in the Interactionist Tradition

The perspective developed in this book suggests turning to another conception of the structuration of society, expressed in terms of “social worlds” and “arenas.” The interactionist tradition in its symbolist version (H. Blumer, G. H. Mead, and A. Strauss), as well as its rhetorical and dramaturgical version (E. Goffman and J. Gusfield), has a dual advantage. First, it draws particular attention to the link between individual, meso-, and macro-social levels, as well as to strategic interactions, from a dynamic and processual perspective, which rejects all structuralism (Blumer, 1969: 50).

Interaction defines the social world deliberately vaguely, as a network of actors cooperating to accomplish specific activities. It is up to the sociologist to identify who is acting with whom, to produce what, with what degree of regularity and based on which conventions. Approached in this way, the activities of cooperation and competition may be distributed along an axis, from the most routine, formally organized, and strictly repeated activities, to the most unstable, rapidly changing ones. One consequence of this theoretical approach is to deny the operational value of descriptions which establish strict boundaries and watertight classifications. Any individual or complex player may at any moment be or get involved in a given world or subworld.

Therefore, the notion of a world has the advantage of being more inclusive than that of a field in not limiting the boundaries only to dominant actors. All those (individuals and organizations) are part of a given world who have a stake in the accomplishment of a task.

Our task becomes tracking groups of individuals who cooperate to produce things which belong to this world, at least in their eyes. A world is not strictly speaking a structure or an organization, but rather a network of individuals who cooperate so as to allow a given product to exist. Nonetheless, people caught in the same world may have divergent interests and, while the concepts of coordination and cooperation are central, they fall along a continuum, from entirely conflictual relationships to those of pure coordination.

The notion of a “world” is associated with that of an “arena.” In its dramaturgical and rhetorical version, the term “public arenas” appeared first in Gusfield’s *Symbolic Crusade* (1963) to designate the space of status struggles over the issues of the temperance movement, and then in *The Culture of Public Problems* (1981), where Gusfield studied the field of controversies around the public problem of drunk driving. For his part, Strauss used the

term “arenas” in *Psychiatric Ideologies and Institutions* (Strauss et al., 1964), to designate the idea of a “‘negotiated order,’ which emerges, takes shape and stabilizes within interactions, both within and between organizations” (Cefaï, 2007: 104). Strauss (1978: 124) explained the meaning:

Within each social world, various issues are debated, negotiated, fought out, forced and manipulated by representatives of implicated subworlds. Arenas involve political activity but not necessarily legislative bodies and courts of law. Issues are also fought out within subworlds by their members. Representatives of other subworlds (same and other worlds) may also enter into the fray. Some of these social world issues may make front page news, but others are known only to members or to other interested parties. Social world media are full of such partially invisible arenas. Wherever there is intersecting of worlds and subworlds, we can expect arenas to form along with their associated political processes.

On this basis, we define an arena as a space both concrete (that is, from a dramaturgical perspective, the place and time of the staging of interactions, for example, the street or a courtroom) and symbolic (that is from a rhetorical perspective, the site of the polemics or the controversy, of testimony, expertise, and deliberation) which brings together all the players, individual or complex, participating in the emergence, definition and resolution of a problem. The arenas do not exist at the time the problem appears. It is the emergence of a problem that generates its contours as a function of individuals and groups which intervene in the situation, and mobilize a specific part of the social world or field,<sup>2</sup> either openly or discreetly.<sup>3</sup> This has numerous consequences.

First, a theoretical and disciplinary consequence is that the sociology of social movements and the sociology of public problems are closely related, as Blumer (1969) emphasized when he observed that social problems are the products of collective action. This echoes the calls from some scholars, on one side, in the field of social problems, such as Spector and Kitsuse (1973; 1977) and, on the other side, from those involved in social movement studies (Benford and Hunt, 1992; Neveu, 1999; and Cefaï and Trom, 2001), since the two areas share “an interest in the ‘rhetoric of collective action’” defined as “the demands of members of public institutions, advocacy groups and social movement organisations” (Hunt, 1992, in Cefaï, 2007: 599).

The concept of *problematization* constitutes in some ways the point of connection between these two sociological traditions. This concept refers to

all social activity with the objective of entailing the emergence of a problem and rendering it a potential subject of public policy. Foucault defines it as

all the discursive or non-discursive practices that bring something into the game of true and false and constitute it as an object for thought (whether this be in the form of moral reflection, scientific analysis, or political analysis). ... Problematization does not mean representation of a pre-existing object, nor creation through discourse of an object which does not exist. (Foucault, 1994: 670)

Therefore, the success of mobilization around a problem results from the capacity of certain players to enlist other players, to have them in some way enter the game and, thus, to create a coalition which necessarily keeps the problem on the “agenda” of institutions and organizations which can provide a response, whether this be from a particular sector of the state, private operators acting in the market, or institutions such as churches. Other players oppose these groups for various reasons, and try hard to prevent this being placed on the agenda since they fear that it will lead to an action contrary to their interests, one which might be benefiting from the complicity of institutional agents and political managers reluctant to deal with a “hot” question that would disturb their routines and could ultimately lead to the challenging of positions they occupy in their respective fields or worlds.

In fact, the latter observation is crucial. The arenas at the heart of which activities of problematization develop can very well transform themselves over time into social subworlds, indeed even into new fields. There are very many examples of these trajectories of arenas ending with the perennial establishment of specialized subspheres, for example, in the sector of poverty management and solidarity where the churches lost their monopoly to various forms of public management during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Another example would be feminist movements, some fractions of which (“femocrats”) became institutionalized, leading to the creation of specific subfields of public action in favor of women’s rights, contributing, in turn, to a modification of the sphere of feminist struggles. In this book, particularly Chapters 5 and 6, dealing with corporations, provide examples of this tendency of institutionalization of interactions, transforming arenas into more established fields.

Yet, above all, the concept of arena has a major methodological consequence which brings us back to the heart of the SIP developed by Jasper. The identification of an arena as a site of interaction around a problem

can not be decided a priori and must be based on the concrete observation of interactions among a multiplicity of actors in a process. This requires starting with players and their strategies. It is only subsequently that the observation of their interaction can feed the knowledge of a level of social reality which is not that of the situation or of the interaction but that, more macro-sociologically, of the social world. It is to this question of the connection of different levels of social reality, at the basis of the link between structure and agency, that we devote the following section.

### Hodiecentrism?

A strategic approach runs the risk of exclusively focusing on the interaction itself: a kind of “hodiecentrism,” a fascination with the *hic et nunc*, the synchronic, whereas we think that a strategic perspective should take the historical dimension, the diachronic, into account as well. Players are more than “constituted” in a series of interactions – they have some stability; they embody a certain continuity. Hence, even though history indeed acquires meaning in the present, experiences and convictions predating the interaction play an important role when we want to understand interaction dynamics.

By emphasizing the “biographical” part of players, Jasper seems to agree that these diachronic aspects should be carefully taken into account: “One can only understand these decisions if we come to grips with the biography and psychology of that single person; such factors must find a place in social-science models” (1997: ch. 9). However, in her chapter, Polletta, in particular, seems to worry that in a SIP this “meaningful” past is not sufficiently taken into account:

It is not only that individuals’ and groups’ goals are often multiple and sometimes unacknowledged. It is also that the choices that are on the table in a dispute are viewed through the lens of preexisting frameworks of meaning. An option comes to be viewed as the “black” choice or the “strategic” option, not because of any logical connection to what is black or what is instrumental, but rather because of structures of symbolic associations that predate this particular battle.

Polletta seems especially worried that a strategic approach becomes too voluntaristic (our term) when it would suggest that in every interaction everything is open and possible – as if players are not burdened by all forms

of “cultural constraints” (Polletta’s term): “Their ideas about what counts as strategic are shaped by cultural associations that they sometimes challenge but more often do not.”

We agree with her on this latter point but we would also stress the fact that an interactionist perspective is not necessarily anti-diachronic, blind to the “forces of the past,” whether acting at the level of individuals, through their system of disposition or their habitus, or at the level of the memory of past battles and accepted forms of political conflict. We shall briefly explain these two elements.

An interactionist perspective is compatible with a firmly dispositionalist approach which endeavors to study observable practices in situ (and therefore players’ calculations) not only in the light of the contexts of action (the structure of observed interaction) but also in the light of the history of individuals, that is, to their socialization and their system of disposition. Consequently, the interactions observed always trigger incorporated dispositions, even if they also generate new dispositions. In other words, the players, individually or collectively, prepare to act on the basis of their understanding of the objects populating their world. Yet interpretations of their meaning are mediated by their system of dispositions, which orients their behavior and their decisions. This does not prevent interaction from *also* being the place and time of a *formative* process whereby individuals modify their lines of action, in light of the actions of others. From this perspective, players’ moves and countermoves are “neither the pure and simple replica of what has been internalized, nor the sudden and mysterious eruption, *ex nihilo*, of innovation” (Dobry 1986: 260).

Such a conception, which Lahire coins a “dispositionalist and contextualist sociology,” keeps us at an equal distance from both certain ethnographic studies satisfied with describing a situation or an action that is occurring, and from the authors of rational choice theory. The former tradition is particularly strong among French pragmatists who defend purely contextualist conceptions of action (Boltanski, 1990; Cefaï, 2007; Dodier, 1993). For example, Boltanski is solely interested in “constraints related to the arrangement of the situation in which people are placed” (Boltanski, 1990: 69). The skills attributed to the actors are assumed to be universally mastered by the individuals concerned and therefore Boltanski does not study them, which also means that he presupposes that mental dispositions as well as dispositions to act are transferable or transposable from one domain of social activity to another.

Rational choice scholars are certainly right that individual actions are the combined result of rational choice (which, nevertheless does not explain

what motivates such choices) and the hope of success (which does not presuppose the “reasonable” nature of said choices) but they are misleading when attempting to reconstruct how actors make calculations *in situ*. As Kurzman writes (2004), rational choice theory is primarily interested in predicting action, based on the identification of preexisting preferences. As a result, “we do not see players making decisions” (Jasper, 2004: 4; see also Jasper, 2006: ch. 3). In addition, the anthropological foundations of rational choice theory often circumscribe it within the confines of cognitivism, even when attempts are made to “contextualize” the explanatory models. We are, therefore, still very far from obtaining an adequate account of actors’ socio-cultural roots, whether concerning the nature and strength of preexisting ties, opportunities and obligations that the latter engender, or their spatial grounding in cost/benefit matrices (Gould, 1995). Finally, many historians have demonstrated how the momentum of protest activities also significantly contributes to redefining social ties and forms of interpersonal attachment, thus rendering futile the attempt to reconstruct cost/benefit structures by means of static, one-dimensional models. (Redy, 1977; Bouton, 1993: ch. 5)

### Patterns in Protest Players and Arenas

Dispositionalist interactionism suggests that the truth of the social world is not entirely confined to the order of the interaction. Here, the early studies by Goffman, *Face Work* (1955) and *Behavior in Public Places* (1963), prove extremely insightful in showing that interactions are framed like a ceremony. They follow the rules of intervention stemming from the law (Gusfield, 1981: ch. 2), from learned mechanisms defining conduct and organization (Wright, 1978; on crowds and riots, see McPhail, 1991; on demonstrations, see Fillieule and Tartakowsky, 2013), and from more implicit constraints, notably with respect to decorum and civility (on the public perception of protest, see Turner, 1969). From a Durkheimian perspective, we believe that strategic interactions are deployed in an “already existing” world and that

the individuals with whom I’m dealing are not inventing the world of the chess game each time they sit down to play; neither are they inventing the financial market when they buy stock, nor the pedestrian traffic system when they move on the street. Whatever the singularities of their motivations and their interpretations, they must, in order to participate, fit into a standard format of activity and reasoning which makes them act as they act. (Goffman, 1981: 307)



Beyond the more or less universally accepted and imposed rules of intervention in a given society (reflecting laws and mores), each field, each social world and subworld is characterized by its own rules, which Becker, in *Art Worlds*, calls “conventions.” This concept designates the fact that

people who cooperate to produce a work of art usually do not decide things afresh. Instead, they rely on earlier agreements now become customary, agreements that have become part of the conventional way of doing things in that art. ... Conventions thus make possible the easy and efficient coordination of activity among artists and support personnel. ... Though standardized, conventions are seldom rigid and unchanging. They do not specify an inviolate set of rules everyone must refer to in settling questions of what to do. Even where the directions seem quite specific, they leave much unsettled which gets resolved by reference to customary modes of interpretation on the one hand and by negotiation on the other. (Becker, 1974: 771)

As a logical consequence of the structured character of society, fields, and social worlds, the modalities by which arenas are constituted and function also correspond to conventions, explicit or implicit, rhetorical (in the notion of frame) and dramaturgical (in notion of tactical repertoires), even though in the case of arenas these modalities will be less stable and more fluid than in the case of fields and social worlds.

Action can only be grasped in concrete circumstances of a copresence, in fully considering the requirements stemming from mutual involvement in a social relation and the inherent uncertainty in the sequential unfolding of exchanges. Nonetheless, these circumstances – which Goffman terms *situations* – are preordained: while the course the action will take cannot be predicted, it always falls within a particular context which one can characterize as a collection of conventions, that is, significant elements of orientation which impose a certain regime of obligations on those who participate. The conventions which constrain the functioning of an arena are characterized by four traits.

First, an arena’s conventions stem from the conventions in the fields or subworlds, at the margins or intersection of which the arena emerges and develops. If they do not entirely overlap, they are partially linked to them.

Second, an arena’s conventions stem from the conventions internalized by individual or collective players who are involved in a specific arena, depending on their own history, memories and culture. Therefore, if they do not entirely overlap, they are partially linked to them.

Third, these conventions are not equivalent to the arithmetical sum of conventions characterizing the fields, worlds, and players involved. The very morphology of an arena (i.e., the form at its core made by the networks of alliance and conflict) and its dynamic (the entrance or departure of players, as well as the shifting of borders in the social space) determine a configuration that is always specific to relationships between players, so that the conventions are both a restrictive framework for action and a strategic issue in the struggle for actors. They promote the conventions to which they are most attached or which serve them best against those put forward by their adversaries, or even by their allies.

Fourth, and as a consequence, the conventions structuring an arena are inevitably idiosyncratic and patterned. From this perspective, studying a protest arena requires that we attempt to disentangle references to settled and mutually recognized conventions from those linked to innovation and invention (Mariot, 2011; Fillieule and Tartakowsky, 2013).

From what we have discussed, we must draw one central conclusion. Beyond the irreducible heterogeneity and diversity of protest arenas, some common patterns could be detected, as the work of Jasper and others show so well. One of the most interesting aspects of Jasper's work is how he effectively "dismantles" any fixed or central idea about players and arenas on the one hand, and yet he searches for recurring patterns and typical forms of strategic interaction involving certain players in specific arenas on the other hand. To quote his introduction once more: "Only in the strategic back-and-forth of engagement can we ever achieve a fully dynamic picture of politics, in the plans, initiatives, reactions, countermeasures, mobilizations, rhetorical efforts, arena switches, and other moves that players make." The fully dynamic picture doesn't imply, however, that we can't distinguish among types of arenas (with their specific conventions) and among players, with particular resources, experiences, ambitions, etc. In other words, Jasper proposes to go beyond the totally idiosyncratic. He doesn't want to claim any universal rules governing these interactions, but he makes the point that we can develop "catalogs" of interactions that "typically" happen between specific "types" of players and/or within certain arenas. "Although the strategic complexity of politics and protest is enormous, in this book we hope to make a beginning through a careful examination of players and arenas, accompanied by theorizing on the strategic interactions among them." Organized around different types of players and arenas, the book tries to empirically grasp the types of strategic interactions that can be considered "characteristic." In many cases, these patterns could be summarized as strategic dilemmas, typical of certain players in specific

arenas. As Polletta puts it in her contribution: “To gain analytic purchase on strategic choice in the swirl of multiple players, audiences, and arenas, complex goals, and ambivalent emotions, Jasper (2004) introduces the concept of strategic dilemmas, a concept that is developed in this volume.”

Our ambition here is not to summarize all these “typical” strategic interaction patterns and dilemmas so characteristic of a player and/or an arena, but we hope that anyone who has read this book agrees that this is indeed a very fruitful way to move forward. In every chapter, these “typical” aspects came to the fore, showing the enormous diversity of types of interactions protestors have to deal with, depending on the other players, and the arenas they are in. Although we have not yet been able to offer a catalog of typical strategic interactions, based on various arenas and players, we are getting close(r) to it, since every chapter is able to refer to typical forms of interaction, “bound” to the rules of that arena and the type of players involved.

This more systematic understanding of strategic interaction runs the risk of resulting in a rather “structuralist” approach, in which interaction is predictable, expected to follow a certain pattern. In his introduction, Jasper seems to be aware of this risk when he criticizes such a structuralist approach of Kriesi et al. (1995), who claim that – in the case they discuss – “social democrats usually do this and that.” “Overt facilitation of action campaigns of new social movements by a Social Democratic government is unlikely, because of the risk that such campaigns might get out of hand.” Jasper doesn’t agree that this risk is “objectively given,” and sees it rather as something that government decision-makers might have to think about case by case, might disagree about, and might try to manage in creative ways.

Beneath such visions, it seems as though costs, benefits, and risks are already given rather than emerging and shifting constantly during engagements, due to all the players’ actions. In contrast, an interactive approach would see various players adapting to each other, anticipating moves, and trying actively to block opponents. Both sides are constantly moving targets.

We partly agree with this criticism, but wonder if our definitions of arenas and of conventions do not offer a middle way between the type of claims made by Kriesi and his collaborators, and the typical forms of strategic interaction – summarized in “catalogs” – proposed by Jasper himself.

In other words, in our view, the book's case studies in fact show the "typical" forms of strategic interaction between protestors and other players in specific arenas in their situated and dispositionalist forms. Moreover, as Jasper himself writes in the introduction:

Each of the following chapters combines illustrative materials from case studies with theoretical formulations and hypotheses. More theoretical generalizations are possible for those players that have already been well studied, such as the media. ... In other cases, authors stick closer to their case materials to tease out observations about interactions. In all cases, our aim is to advance explanations of how protest unfolds through complex interactions with other players.

As the various chapters show, "theoretical generalizations" mean generalization in line with the case study, based on more (of the same) cases. In the end, a SIP is an inductive, robustly empirical approach that only allows for generalizations – theorizing – as long as the concrete case studies permit, given the dynamic, complex, and situated character of strategic interaction.

## Notes

1. For that reason, while we largely share Mathieu's (2012) critique of the notion of a field of contention, we think his concept of a "space of social movements" is wrong in considering that social movements constitute a specific universe, clearly distinct from other social fields. (Please also see Ancelovici 2009 for the same observation.)
2. Our conception of arenas is, therefore, very different from that used, for example, by Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) for whom there exist in the social world, in a permanent and structured manner, different public arenas, such as, for example, the media arena, the political arena, the legal arena, and, one might add, following Neveu, the "arena of social movements," defined as "an organized system of *institutions, processes* and *actors* that has the property of functioning as a space of appeal, in both the sense of a demand for a response to a problem and that of legal recourse" (Neveu, 2000: 17, emphasis added).
3. This point is crucial and explains why we speak of an "arena," following Strauss and not a "public arena," as does Gusfield. To avoid the lack of realism of the contentious politics approach which limits the definition of social movements to open and public actions, we defend a more inclusive definition which falls on a continuum of public and open actions, lobbying and pressure and hidden actions (Fillieule, 2009).

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