

Please do not quote or cite without permission of authors.

Collective Action and the Problem of Strategic Action Fields\*

Neil Fligstein  
Department of Sociology  
University of California

And

Doug McAdam  
Department of Sociology  
Stanford University

November 2007

\*This paper was prepared for a conference on "The Emergence of Social Order" at the GSB-University of Chicago, Nov. 8-9, 2007.

## Collective Action and the Problem of Strategic Action Fields

We hold the view that strategic action fields (hereafter, SAFs) are the fundamental units of collective action in society. All collective actors (for example, organizations, extended families, clans, supply chains, intergovernmental organizations, and federal systems) are themselves SAFs. When they interact in a larger political, social, or economic field, that field also becomes an SAF. In this way, SAFs can look a lot like Russian dolls: open up an SAF and it contains a number of other SAF. SAFS are best thought of as organized social spaces. For a social space to be organized there must exist a social arena where actors share a common understanding of the purpose of the space and the nature and meaning of the relationships in the space. We call this understanding a conception of control. These relationships imply a system of power that can be based on coercion, cooperation, or competition.

Our argument is quite fundamental. We believe that human beings have a natural capacity to create social spaces through social interaction and language. They engage in collective action in order to survive, to gain resources, to gain advantages over others, to get social status, and in doing so to produce meaning for themselves and others. Individuals interact in and around SAFs. Mobilizing resources for "your people" and against "others" is part of what happens in SAFs. Gaining cooperation from your group may be a conflictual process. The ability to connect to other people and to get others to cooperate is the fundamental social skill that makes collective strategic action possible. For most of human existence, the SAFs humans created were geographically

limited, and in this way, geographic and social space coincided. As a result, SAFs were often also limited to people with whom one had immediate contact. But human beings have invented new kinds of SAFS, ones that allowed them to extend their control across time and place. We conceive of the substantive forms of SAFs as cultural products that can be characterized as organizing technologies. Formal organizations, political parties, markets, and social movements are particular generic templates for the organization of social space. These templates have created a whole set of occupations in modern societies for people who engage in SAF building activities. Consultants, accountants, lawyers, and academics offer groups advice of how to organize their SAF. Existing SAFs are cultural in the sense that they are social constructions that are based on both general (to the society) and local meanings. By general, we mean they are organizing technologies because their abstract forms can be used by other actors to engage in collective action. So, for example, the template SAF that can be called "formal organization" is available to mobilize people under certain conditions. The template becomes "local" when it is adapted to the purposes of actors to help organize a particular social space. The exact social relationships that are constructed, their meaning, and the dynamics of particular SAFS imply local meanings and require what Geertz has called the production of "local knowledge" (1976).

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the various ways to characterize SAFs both conceptually and historically. We begin by considering SAFs in a very abstract way and move towards trying to classify the types of possible dimensions upon which SAFs can be distinguished. Considering SAFs as organized social space raises the question of where unorganized social space comes from and how it becomes organized. It also raises the question of how to understand the underlying dimensions of social space and the possible kinds of organizing technologies that have come into existence to create SAFS.

Core to our understanding of SAFS is making sense of the various roles of coercion, cooperation, and competition in social life. SAFs are about both power and meaning. At one extreme, we know that sometimes one group can dominate another in an SAF because of a coercive threat. The group being threatened, however, must perceive that threat and figure out how to respond. So, even in extreme cases, meaning plays a role. At the other, social life can also be about finding identities and meanings that bring people to cooperate. We intend to explore how the form of the underlying structure of the SAF has implications for the ways in which SAFs can be structured.

Many studies of SAFs are of their founding or transformation (see for example Armstrong, 2002; McAdam, 1980; Fligstein, 1990; Davis and Stout, 1994). This means that we must specify how we can tell if an SAF is indeed a stable order, how can we tell if SAFs are stable or in crisis or when they are more or less vulnerable to invasion. This also causes us to think about the relations between SAFs. If we are right and SAFs are like Russian dolls, then the same type of relationships that help produce local order within a particular SAF, structure the borders of SAFs. SAFs are linked to other SAFS (where they are members) by relations of cooperation, coercion, and competition. These can have pivotal effects on the internal organization of a particular SAF and greatly affect its ability to survive. In terms of the problem of the emergence or transformation of a given SAF, we consider how groups in one social space seek out to colonize nearby organized or unorganized social space. Finally, we begin a discussion about how the political, economic, and social orders reflect agglomerations of particular kinds of SAFs.

After taking up these questions, we will then turn our attention to the relationship between the ideas that animate our view of SAFS and other theoretical constructs. The term, SAF, is intended to serve as the fundamental structural element in our model of political, social, and economic social

life. But theoretical sociology is littered with such concepts. The question is what is the relation between SAFs and these other concepts? Specifically, we will want to discuss: institutions, culture, formal organization, industry, law, network, and governance.

### What is organized and unorganized social space?

Social space exists whenever human beings create social relationships. This definition implies two things. First, the level of our analysis is collective human action. Individuals are important in social space to the degree that they help form a group, provide leadership, have relations to one another, and articulate means and ends. But, the focus of action for actors will be oriented towards others. We are interested in how groups like departments in universities or firms or a given set of social movement organizations form social spaces. It also means that SAFs (like a particular firm) are embedded in social relationships with other firms (i.e. other SAFs). This means the strategic actors (who can be individuals, but act for a group or fraction) in those SAFs will be orienting their action internally (to the other individuals, but also to the groups that exist) and externally to strategic actors in other groups.

Second, the focus of action within and across groups located in social space is social relationships. The nature of these relations is what is being contested in social space and when these relations become stable, it implies that the identities of actors in a particular SAF are more or less fixed (White, 1991). This is a strong claim: identities can be thought of as role structures where actors are involved in repeated interactions. Collective actors can make sense of moves other actors take because of these relationships and their ability to understand what others mean precisely because of who they are. When the participants and their relationships are fixed and there exists a

conception of control (a common understanding of these relationships and the overall meaning of the field), we call the situation a strategic action field. This acceptance does not mean that all actors accept their place in the SAF, but only that they share a view of what is going on in the field. They can identify the main actors, what their positions are, and what their actions mean.

Social space exists whenever social relations exist. Unorganized social space refers to the condition where the social relations have not yet crystallized and where two or more groups claim to occupy the same position in the social space. The basic problem of unorganized social space is that there is conflict over the basic relationships that structure the field. Conflict can result from two sources. Two groups can make claims over the same social relationship vis a vis the other group. For instance, different civil rights groups might vie to lead the civil rights movement. But the second source of conflict is over what the role structure and meaning will look like in the first place. This creates a conflict over means and ends. To follow the Civil rights example, different groups may recommend different courses of action, violent or non-violent, and different ends, integration or segregation. When the social space is not organized, it is not clear who holds what position and, in this case, the goals of the Civil Rights movement and the means to attain them are as up for grabs. The role structure of groups is unsettled as it is not clear who are incumbents and challengers.

The point of this notion of unorganized social space is that when actors take it upon themselves to define some new and distinctive sets of social relations, they create new social space. When two or more groups claim to occupy that space, we have unorganized social space. The contestation over all of the features governing rules of interaction in the social relationships is what defines the space as unorganized.

It is useful to consider why human groups invent new social relationships to one another. Groups are motivated to create new social spaces in order to gain either psychic or material benefits.

Weber (1978: 40-1) viewed social relationships as about either communal or associative ties.

Communal ties were "based on the subjective feelings of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belonged together" (1978:40). Associative ties are formed where actors reached "rationally motivated adjustments of interests" (1978:41). New social spaces can result from the creation of new meanings and identities. But, new social spaces can also be formed around self interest. In practice, the reasons for engaging in social relationships are often mixed and complex. Political coalitions reflect the mutual interests of actors towards organizing so that all may benefit. But, they also can reflect the identities that actors want to have. They are rarely just about either self interest or identity. Put another way, collective strategic action concerns securing or creating group advantages or minimizing disadvantages. These can be engaged in because of a collective identity based on affective or traditional ties or a sense of self interest.

Unorganized social space requires two sorts of preconditions to come into existence.

Unorganized social space is usually created as an offshoot of existing social space. Groups that are already organized as SAFs will work to preserve their internal functioning by finding, creating or modifying other social spaces. They will be motivated to enter another social space or help found a new one if their current arrangements start to fail. This can be opportunistic in the sense that organized SAFs might seek out new opportunities to take over or exploit other SAFs. But, it might also be precipitated by a crisis either internal to a particular social space, or more likely, caused by other SAFs upon which a particular social space is dependent. The creation of new social space requires groups to create or borrow a template that will help them organize a new social space and create a conception of control to govern that space. This is where cultural creativity comes from.

Collective strategic actors have to use cultural tools to organize a space and confront their principal competitors, create new forms of competition and cooperation. They do so by borrowing

tools that already exists. In the modern world, for instance, the template "formal organization" has really only emerged in the past 150 years. But now that form can be expropriated by many groups as a legitimate frame for action in many social spaces. While the notion of "closeness" and "template" are somewhat difficult to operationalize, one can certainly see that the spread of "successful" devices (ie. templates) occurs and that once set in motion, one can make predictions about their spread to nearby unorganized social space.

### The definition of strategic action fields

In order to make sense of the SAF concept, one needs to specify more clearly what is at stake in organizing social space. Creating SAFS depends on producing a role structure based on a system of social power and creating a set of meanings that define those positions and provide actors with frameworks to engage in making sense of the moves of other actors. As human beings, the possibility for meaningful communication always exists (by this, we mean one actor grasping the intent of another's verbal or actual behavior). For those who speak the same language, and are located in similar parts of social space, the possibility for meaningful communication rises substantially. The sharing of meanings implies coming to a common understanding of a situation. The problem of social space is often the problem of two or more social actors coming to an understanding of where they agree and disagree on what their social relations are. This is not just a linguistic problem, but one of consensual agreement over the boundaries of behavior. Sharing meanings implies that actors understand what is occurring in a similar way even if their views are colored by their position in the SAF. One dimension by which SAFs can be organized implies a common view of the meaning of behavior, although there can remain contestation about the

distribution of valued ends.

We do not intend to confound norms and culture here. Instead, we assert that the sharing of meanings implies a consensus over what is occurring and what actors role in that situation are. We do not think that the concepts of norms or values are useful in understanding behavior in SAFs. We prefer to assert only that actors share meanings and that these shared meanings have real consequences in the behavior of actors vis a vis one another. This dimension can be construed as a variable and the greater it exists, the more organized social space is. What is shared, in this case, is the definition of the situation; i.e. what is valuable, what are the appropriate means to attain ends. The degree of compliance, which is what normative accounts stress, seems to us to be too vague a notion for SAFs to rest on. When pressed, normative theorists generally turn norms into shared meanings or latent power. We think it makes more sense conceptually to reduce compliance to being affected in an SAF by some combination of shared meanings and power.

We define power here in Weberian terms: the ability to make others' do what you want them to do independent of their wills. The basis of power is the ability to marshal resources to enforce one's view of the situation. Resources are broadly defined to include control over capital, vital substances, information, and important relations to other SAFs (including the fields of the state) which provide access to legitimacy or other resources. Resources provide social power for groups in two ways. First, the other groups tend to recognize the social power and are thereby inclined to try and find an accommodation with those who have power. Second, if that fails, then groups will fight it out and those with the most resources will generally win. Powerful groups can organize social space in two ways: either by producing an order and daring others to transgress it or directly enforcing an order by confrontation. For many purposes in social life, power can be indexed by the size of group.

One problem with this view is that almost anything can be a resource. Indeed, one could argue that the existence of shared meanings is a resource for those for whom an SAF benefits the most. Following Bourdieu, who used the term capital to describe resources, we distinguish resources from shared meanings by asserting that resources have external value, external to a given SAF. Hence legitimacy is a resource only if that legitimacy can be carried over into other field contexts. Resources can therefore be more broadly construed as forms of capital that must have usefulness elsewhere. Therefore, shared meanings refer to the structure of the SAF, while resources are valued not just inside but outside of the SAF.

By separating meanings from social power, we hope to avoid the ambiguity of many social theories which rely either on power or shared meanings to generate social life. Since both aspects of social life come into play in the definition of social space and its organization (and in different amounts), it seems analytically useful to separate them and realize that SAFs can be organized by either or both. To specify the level of organization of a specific SAF, it is necessary to analyze that field along both dimensions.

### The organization of SAFs

It is necessary to specify what kinds of problems need to be solved in order for a stable social space, an SAF to come into existence. In unorganized social space, everything is up for grabs: what the goals of action are, what the means are to attain those, what the relations between groups will be, who can be an actor in the field, and what are the bases by which actors can make claims and make them stick. We have discussed the preconditions for that stability: shared meanings that define a conception of control, stable social relationships, and a system of power that defines the nature of

those relationships. As suggested earlier, the basic problem of any SAF is to solve the conflict over who gains, who loses, and who has what social position in the field. This suggests that action in SAFs is inherently about solving the underlying conflictual nature of social space.

A stable SAF contains groups who have stable social relations with each other. These relations govern interaction and the division of opportunities and rewards in the SAF. They are based on resources and collectively shared meanings. SAFs also have implicit rules of membership. New entrants to the SAF have to negotiate their identity with existing members. If they upset the existing social relations, they can expect retaliation from groups in the field. Similarly, groups in stable social relations with each other may find themselves in conflict whereby one group tries to change the "rules". This too will be met by resistance by the groups who are likely to be disadvantaged by a change in the situation.

There are two main tactics of solving the general conflict in SAFs: the imposition of some kind of hierarchical power relationship between actors or the creation of some kind of political coalition based on cooperation. At the core of the problem is whether or not the SAF will be built on coercion, competition, or cooperation. (In practice, it should be noted that fields contain elements of all three but it is useful to consider these as ideal types.) Coercion implies the threat or actual use of physical force or the withholding of valued resources (which may come down to the same thing as a physical threat). Competition occurs when different groups vie for dominance over opportunities or advantages without resorting to violence. Their competition to control opportunities or advantages will be based on resources that they have. The eventual winners have resources and use them to command subsequent resource flows and the opportunities to exploit them. The losers may get less, but may manage to remain in the field.

Cooperation involves building a political coalition to keep a group together. The purpose of

a given cooperative project is to provide resources to members. The basis of these resources can be material, but it can also be meaning or identity based. People join groups and cooperate for the rewards that occur, but also for the feeling of being a member of a group. In practice, a stable SAF can be built on any of these three bases or some combination of them.

Hierarchy implies a pecking order of groups that can be distinguished as incumbents and challengers. The incumbents are generally the largest groups that predominantly define the situation and get most of the valued objects in the SAF. The challengers are the smaller groups who may not totally accept their place in the SAF, but are unable to contest it. The hierarchy of incumbents and challengers is held in place by coercion or competitive threat. If incumbents have overwhelming resources, including the threat of force, they can coerce challengers and keep them in line by using material and psychic threats. If there is more than one incumbent, competition between incumbents can force them to create an uneasy truce whereby they agree to a division of the field. In an SAF, incumbents will constantly be testing the limits of each other's power.

Competition between incumbents and challengers is an ongoing process as well. A stable SAF is a role structure. But it is also a game being played by groups who occupy particular roles under a certain set of rules. Incumbent groups work to use their advantages to reproduce their position. Challengers will nibble around the edges. But, here, challengers have to be careful not to bring down the full force of the resources available to incumbents that might threaten their existence. Over time, we expect that both challenger and incumbent groups will learn more about defending their positions. There can also be some alteration in their relationships of one incumbent group manages to get the upper hand on another or alternatively, if a challenger group manages to gain more resources and become an incumbent. The jockeying for position in stable SAFS is a core feature of organized social life.

The structure of incumbents and challengers depends on the nature of the SAF. So, for example, the number of incumbent groups can reflect the relative power of those groups and the underlying basis of that power. Incumbent groups may compromise with each other and therefore share the field. This can cause them to form niches within the social space such that these groups can cooperate without stepping on one another's toes. They may ritualize their competition and constantly work to nibble at each other's resources. Challenger groups can use their resource dependence within a SAF to advantage. If groups are dependent upon other groups, this can create a stable situation, where "contracts" are made. There will always be tension in these kinds of relations because they define the roles of unequal partners.

A political coalition reflects an alliance between two or more groups in response to other groups. Our ideal typical view of political coalitions is that they are based on cooperation. This cooperation can be based on common interests or common identity. Forging political coalitions is a tricky task that requires social skill. Actors have to convince other groups that if they join together, their collective interests will in fact be served. If groups are of different size and purpose, then the larger groups obviously have advantages. Strategic actors use coalitions and hierarchies as alternative means to organize fields. They can form coalitions with some groups in an SAF to build a larger group and then use that larger group to coerce or compete with other groups. Of course, political coalitions can be SAFs in and of themselves. So, for example March has argued that firms can be thought of as a political coalition (1961). A political coalition that organizes an SAF contains explicit agreements between groups on the nature of the SAF and how the gains and losses will be distributed between groups. Often, groups in a political coalition will come to share a common identity. The identity is usually oppositional; i.e. it defines who is a member of the coalition and who is not.

In our ideal types, we have associated hierarchies with coercion and competition and political coalitions with cooperation. In reality, hierarchies are not just held in place by coercive or competitive advantage, and political coalitions do not rely entirely on cooperation.

Hierarchies often depend on the tacit consent of challengers and can even provide some rewards for compliance with a hierarchical order. So, incumbents will keep the lion's share of resources to themselves, but will allow challengers to survive. In return, challengers will keep their opposition to incumbents in check. Political coalitions continue to experience conflict and competition on an ongoing basis. Groups in the coalition will believe that they are not getting their fair share of rewards. They may also believe that their vision of the coalition is not being honored. They can try to remake the coalition by getting a different configuration of groups and goals recognized. Obviously, the size of groups and their resources can affect the ongoing politics of coalitions.

Strategic actors have two sorts of problems to solve in the various SAFs in which they are members. First, they have to keep their group together. This requires solving the internal political problems of who is a member and who gets what in the group. They can solve their problems by creating a political coalition around a certain identity based on communal ties or associative ties. They can also solve these problems using threat and coercion by favoring certain members of the group and threatening others. Strategic action is about figuring out which tactics to pursue with which groups. The second problem strategic actors have to solve, concerns how they will relate to groups who are outside of their boundaries. If those groups are hostile, then coercive social relations might set in. If the struggle over scarce resources in the field is carried out peacefully, then the struggle turns to who is an incumbent and who will be a challenger (i.e. who will be able to put together the most resources to win in the field). Finally, it is possible that

the larger field, itself, will become some form of political coalition. Skilled strategic actors thus have a number of tools with which they can try and solve their problems of getting action. Their actions will depend on what resources they have to work with and the various possibilities of political alliances.

(Figure 1 about here)

Figure 1 presents a set of diagrams illustrating the possible relations that can emerge in fields around political coalitions and hierarchies that have just been discussed. Where there are few political coalitions, and no hierarchy defining incumbents and challengers, there is unorganized social space. In an SAF where a single dominant coalition has emerged, we have defined who is a member, what meanings and identities they share, and how valued resources are to be distributed in the SAF. The struggle on a period to period basis is over holding the coalition together by making sure that people's positions are sufficiently "honored". This can mean affective or material rewards. In the pure case where hierarchy organizes the field and political coalitions are non-existent, we have the incumbent/challenger structure described earlier where either competition or coercion operate to enforce those relationships.

Finally, in a SAF where both coalitions and an incumbent/challenger structure exist, we have a hybrid structure to the SAF. It is useful to discuss this case because it characterizes many SAFs. There are two main dimensions upon which one can get more hybrid fields. First, within political coalitions, there can be hierarchies and within hierarchical SAFs, there can be political coalitions. So, for example, even in hierarchical fields, political coalitions can form between incumbents and challengers. During the Cold War, the U.S. and the Soviet Union generally

formed incumbents who organized world politics in a hierarchical fashion held in place by competition and coercion. Yet, eventually they agreed on having nuclear nonproliferation and even in the reduction of certain kinds of strategic arms. So, while they were busy imposing hierarchy on their client states and fomenting rebellion in states that could eventually become clients, they found themselves in a political coalition on matters of some mutual interest.

A political coalition may not just be about cooperation, but contain elements of competition and coercion. Incumbents may be able to force challengers in political coalitions to do things they might not otherwise want to do. In the Cold War example, the U.S. government dominated the NATO military coalition. They were able to use that coalition historically to forward their political ends, even if some of the member governments opposed. Because of their domination in the coalition, it was sometimes necessary for others to go along.

The second way in which we get hybrids is when groups in particular SAFS find themselves operating in other SAFs under different social relationships. So, SAFS with antagonistic groups in one field are members of political coalitions in other fields. So, firms may compete in a particular market. So while firms will work hard to hold market share, they will both go to Washington to lobby to keep foreign goods out of their market. Finally, SAFS whose members make up particular political coalitions can come to participate in other SAFs where they are competitive or coercive. Democratic governments are built on political coalitions between groups within a particular society. Within these political coalitions, there can exist a spirit of cooperation based upon shared affect or interest. But, these political coalitions will find themselves as competitors in a particular political field. The Democratic Party is made up of representative of various kinds of groups, such as the labor movement, civil rights groups, and various other interest groups (including to some degree environmental groups). In the early 1990s,

President Clinton decided to support the North American Free Trade Agreement, an agreement that was vehemently opposed by labor unions. So in the policy domain of trade politics, the head of the Democratic Party found himself in bitter conflict with one of the coalition's staunchest allies. In spite of this conflict, the unions decided to stay in the Democratic Party, mostly because they lacked any other option.

In the pure forms, SAFS are hierarchies or political coalitions. But because of the complex nature of SAFs, it is possible that analyzing a particular SAF will force us to consider how the SAF contains both elements of hierarchy and political coalition. This is often because of the nature of the internal structure of the relationships of the SAF. But, it is also a problem given that actors in a particular SAF can participate in more than one other SAF.

Emergence, stability, and crisis in SAFs:

How can we tell if SAFs are stable or in crisis?

The discussion so far has focused on the underlying structure of SAFs. We have argued that SAFs are about groups claiming to organize social space and enforcing that claim by using coercion, competition, and cooperation. Successful strategic action projects build either hierarchical structures in fields or political coalitions that dominate the field. The stability of SAFs relies on the ability of skilled strategic actors to enforce their order on a period to period basis. On the basis of this topology, one can gain some understanding of the conditions which are minimally required for the emergence of an SAF. SAFs can come into existence either through coercion/competition or cooperation. A sufficient condition for the emergence of an SAF is either hierarchy or political coalition where the parties and their relationships are defined, the nature of the field can be known,

and actors share a common conception of what is going on. It is useful to consider whether we get any leverage on the conditions under which groups are more likely to pursue one set of tactics over the other.

Proposition 1: Initial resource allocations effect whether or not SAFs become organized hierarchically or cooperatively. The greater the inequality of initial resource distribution, the more like the field will be hierarchical.

One would predict that the initial allocation of resources between groups will have a big effect on the likely organization of the SAF. A situation where a few or even one group has the lion's share of resources is likely to result in a more hierarchical structure to a particular field. After all, if a group can dictate the terms of the field, it can control the benefits that are likely to accrue to it more effectively. Where multiple groups can make claims on resources and no single group can find itself able to dictate the terms of the SAF, we are more likely to see the building of political coalitions. Skilled strategic actors will recognize their leverage in situations and will act to give their group the best chance at survival or success.

A historical example of this proposition that illustrates both parts of this hypothesis is presented in Spryt (1998). The Hanseatic League was formed by a group of city states in what is now northern Germany. These states banded together to create a common system of defense. This political coalition was not dominated by any single state precisely because the city states were roughly of the same size. The alternative model was to create a larger and larger kingdom. In France, for example, the largest kingdoms competed militarily. As they grew larger, they were able to absorb smaller political units into a hierarchical structure.

Stable SAFs imply there exists a conception of control. Social power and shared meanings have lined up to create a potent social order. In such SAFs, means and ends are widely shared and action is oriented towards preserving each group's privilege in that context. As long as ends are delivered and means hold up, then their will be stable reproduction. The postwar division of east and west provided a great deal of stability for the world in the sense that as long as conflicts were fought through client states, nuclear war was avoided. While the third and fourth world did not benefit materially, they played their parts in the SAF because certain of their ends were met (or more precisely, of fragments of their elites).

Proposition 2: SAFs are stable when they have role structures and conceptions of control that are based on either incumbent/challenger structures or political coalitions. Unorganized social space, on the contrary, is characterized by the frequent entry and exit of organizations, no stable social relationships, and no agreement on means and ends. This kind of drift or conflict can go on for long periods of time.

There can be two sources of instability in SAFs: that generated by a lack of a conception of control, or external shocks that undermine a previously stable conception of control. We consider internal sources of instability first. Unorganized social space can drift along in a conflictual state without having a solid role structure and a conception of control emerge. This constant conflict will result in the identities of the groups changing over time, new groups will enter the SAF and existing groups will exit. There will be no agreement about the status hierarchy of the field and little about what are the means and ends of the field. There certainly will not be recognizable political coalitions. The field will be conflictual and the sides will agree about little.

Proposition 3: SAFs will most frequently be destabilized by changes in their relations with other SAFs. Changes in external political coalitions or changes in external hierarchies can destabilize the basis of an SAF.

Connections to other SAFs can take an SAF with a conception of control and destabilize it, thereby producing a crisis whereby one or the other dimension of organization breaks down. This can work in a number of ways. The means and ends of a SAF may be threatened by external political coalitions dissolving or hierarchical relations that provide resources coming apart. It can also be threatened by the invasion of groups from other SAFs or the attempts of nearby SAFs to take over a given SAF. These actions undermine the power of incumbents and that threatens the existing conception of control. If an SAF is already only defined by shared meanings or social power, then external shocks can really destabilize the situation. If groups with high social power lose that power, then the SAF may verge on dissolving into unorganized social space. Similarly, if an external shock disrupts shared meanings in an SAF, then that might threaten to turn into unorganized social space. Shocks could be indirect, such as the state deciding that the shared social meanings were illegal or direct, such as the invasion of the SAF by other groups.

### The "Russian Doll" character of SAFs

SAFs do not exist in a vacuum. They have relations to other SAFs and these relations are pivotal for their survival. It is useful to consider how these larger relations effect the stability and instability of SAFs. By definition, SAFs are embedded in one another. One of the big insights of our

theory is that the embedding of SAFs in other SAFs can be understood entirely in similar ways. The relations between SAFs are three-fold: unconnected, hierarchical, or cooperative (the same dimensions by which SAFs form in general). This follows from one of our central theoretical assertions: SAFs are embedded in other SAFs. It is the case that these relations can exist between a member of one SAF and members of another, or between members of one SAF and a whole other SAF. It is also sensible that the type of relations that exist within fields should exist across fields because of the nature of the whole problem of embeddedness. Social life is, thus, like a Russian doll: open up one SAF and you will find another. The connections between SAFs stem from a number of factors: resource dependence, mutual beneficial interactions, information flows, and legitimacy. Where no obvious links exist among fields along one of these dimensions, we can say that fields are unconnected. Hence, in the 1960s, the steel industry and the Civil Rights' Movement would appear to be social fields that are only remotely connected. The form of the connection specifies the nature of the relation.

Given these many possible relations, it is important to define more closely how one can say if two SAFs are closer together or farther apart. At this point in history, it is probably the case that all organized social space on this planet can be reached by traveling through other social space. This was not always the case. Indeed, one definition of modernity is what Giddens' has called the shift in time-space distancing (1981). Our modern conceptions of time and space have been greatly altered by improvements in technology, communications, and transportation which have increased our ability to control distant events. A similar point can be made about social space. If we consider something like the spread of AIDS in the world, one can see the literal connections between social space of a particular variety. Yet it is clear that some places are closer together than others and that some social spaces that contain SAFs are closer. While in the past, this has very much been limited

by geography, and geography continues to play a role in social space, it can clearly be seen that geography is really a stand-in for propinquity in social space.

In the modern world, however, it is possible for fields which are not directly connected in geographic space to be relatively coherent. So, for instance, scholars in one academic department who are active in their disciplines are likely to have more information about what is occurring in other departments around the country than they are in departments across the street. Nearness in social space, is therefore, the crucial and hidden variable.

Two SAFs can be defined to be near to one another on the basis of the directness of links of their social relations. Similarly, two SAFs can be judged to be near to each other on the basis of their direct ties between groups and the number of relations between SAFs. A direct relation is one where members of groups or SAFs have actual social relations with one another. Indirect ties occur when two groups or SAFs share a relation with other SAFs or groups. These relations can be the same relation or else different. When these indirect relations are hierarchical or dependency, then the indirect ties can have strong effects even though no face-to-face interaction occurs. When two groups have the same relation to a third group, then their relations will be dependent upon the nature of the shared relation. Closeness can be defined in terms of the number of relations, both direct and indirect. The more that exist, the closer the SAFs are.

As suggested earlier, SAFs require a conception of control. The links to other SAFs will be part of the conception of control and therefore, the degree to which these links are stable will greatly affect the stability of an SAF. If there are few links and dependency is great, then if the links become unstable, the SAF becomes unstable. If there are many links, even with a great deal of dependency, the instability of links will not matter much. This implies the following propositions.

Proposition 3. The more connected an SAF is to other SAFs, the more stable that SAF is likely to be. Similarly, new SAFs or those with few connections will be unstable.

Proposition 4. The more dependent an SAF is on others for resources, or the lower it is in the hierarchy of SAFs, the less stable it is.

Proposition 3 is somewhat counterintuitive. One might expect that the more closely tied SAFS are, the more likely they are to be buffeted by crises in nearby SAFs. Crises in nearby social space, particularly one for which an SAF is dependent, can become local because of the connections and dependencies. What allows a particular SAF to be buffered from such a crisis is its links to other SAFs. The more connected to other SAFs, the more likely that a given SAF will have alternative means to weather a particular crisis. It will be able to expand those connections or perhaps search for new SAFs to enter to stabilize itself. The situation where a densely connected SAF is more likely to be buffeted is when its linkages place it in a more dependent position.

Revisiting the problem of the colonization of nearby SAFs and unorganized space

One could argue that groups in a SAF develop relations to other groups and SAFs. One interesting question is under what conditions would they be likely to colonize existing SAFs or enter unorganized social space as opposed to developing relations that preserve the boundaries of SAFs. Put differently, if one SAF is organized, how would groups in it decide to expand: by increasing the number of groups inside, by entering unorganized social space, or by preying on nearby, but dependent SAFs?

The colonization of nearby SAFs and unorganized SAFs may be motivated by a number of factors. First, there must be a template that suggests how nearby social space can be colonized or organized. Second, there needs to be a crisis in an existing SAF (either in legitimacy or resources) such that in order to survive, groups need to migrate or merge with a nearby SAF. Finally, a political opportunity to gain resources or legitimacy by aligning oneself with groups in another SAF must exist.

More formally, unorganized social space will only be colonized under the conditions where two factors exist: a template for action (a conception of control waiting to be actualized) and groups with resources. If groups exist without a template, there will be no colonization. Further, groups are unlikely to colonize SAFs where they already have some established relation, such as cooperation or hierarchy. The reason is that in order to disrupt a stable relation, one would need a new template that would make such an action make sense.

Colonization will not be random. Some motions will make more sense than others. For instance, oil companies decided to enter the chemical business when they realized that a large portion of their product was being consumed by that industry (Hidy and Hidy, 1978). They realized that chemical firms were securing large profits by converting oil into various kinds of petrochemicals. They invaded the field mainly by buying up existing chemical companies. They did not decide to enter the furniture or electronics business. This is a quite sensible approach to understanding invasion. On an a priori basis, if one understands the templates or conception of control that guides the action of various groups, one ought to be able to predict both the direction and nondirection (in a social sense) of colonization. If the existing template is to prove useful, the social space to be colonized must be nearby in a social sense. Similarly, the types of resources available to the group will be more useful in a nearby social space.

## Forms of Organizing Technologies

Our discussion of SAFs and their dynamics has been carried out so far at a very abstract level. This was necessary in order to gain insight into the core problem of understanding what unorganized and organized social space is and how the underlying basis of an SAF (cooperation, competition, and coercion) structure the types of social relationships that are possible (i.e. hierarchy and political coalitions). It is useful to extend this discussion to more recognizable kinds of generic organizing technologies. Human beings have proliferated forms of hierarchy and political coalitions in order to engage in collective strategic action that is oriented towards material and psychic gains for their group.

(Figure 2 about here)

We begin our discussion by distinguishing organizing technologies along several dimensions. We have already suggested that fields contain mixes of hierarchy and political coalitions. Fields can be distinguished along three other dimensions: the type and breadth of issues that are available for groups in the field to control, the degree to which groups in the field are tightly or loosely coupled and how boundaries are maintained as a result, and the ways in which the rules of the field are enforced and the reliability of that enforcement. Figure 2 presents examples of organizing technologies that reflect these principles.

SAFs are places where groups gather to gain psychic or material benefits. How they do this and towards what end can be narrowly or broadly construed. For example, a supply chain for a

personal computer manufacturer has relatively narrow goals. The political coalition that is reflected in such a chain is based on material benefits accruing along the chain to each firm. But, the commitment of each firm is somewhat restricted. Extended kin networks, on the other hand, can serve many purposes. They provide people with families and identity, they provide support for families and the elderly, they help people find jobs and spouses, and of course, they can constrain people by forcing them to make sacrifices for the group.

The looseness or tightness of relations between groups is an issue that is somewhat orthogonal to issues of membership and the ease of exit and entry in an SAF. SAFS can have loose structures akin to rapidly changing networks. Alliances and joint ventures between firms may shift rapidly over time as projects end and new opportunities arise. The boundaries of those alliances can be clear and even enforced by legal contracts. So who is a member and who is not and what their duties and responsibility is can be clearly defined. Some SAFs have a loose structure of groups that change rapidly. So, for example, a friendship network may be altered continuously. Who is a member of the "group" and who is either coming in or going out may be a matter of some dispute.

Close relations between groups often cause them to form closed relations. The most prominent example of this is the formal organization. The formal organization has boundaries, clear rules of membership, and certain kinds of costs for entry and exit. A government bureaucracy has extensive rules about who works there, what they are paid, and extensive work rules, and rules of advancement. This kind of SAF makes it hard for people to join the organization and costly to leave it. But some groups, like political parties are more fluid. While political parties may have some formal organization, they depend on other groups to help form a coalition to support candidates. Identifying with a party is a kind of membership. But, exit and entry into parties is relatively easy.

Proposition 5: A breach of an SAF's conception of control will be met by a response from other groups that is proportional to the threat.

Rule enforcement depends very much on the nature of the SAF. SAFs based more on coercion or competition are likely to have direct rule enforcement by the incumbent groups. Since the reproduction of an incumbent/challenger structure is dependent on incumbents reinforcing their rule, they will retaliate against groups that attempt to challenge their supremacy. However, the strength of their response will be proportional to the threat. If an invader or other incumbent threatens their core activities, they will react strongly. If the threat is less, then transgressions will be met with less force. The U.S. is currently the military hegemon in the world. As the incumbent, they will act if their hegemony is deeply questioned. So, the takeover in Afghanistan by the Taliban (a radical Islamic regime who professed enmity towards the U.S.) did not provoke military action. But an attack by a group allied with that government directly on the U.S. brought the full force of the military hegemon to bear.

Political coalitions deal with rule infringement in a different way. Members of the coalition are constantly in discussion about the means and ends and their relationships to each other. If a group feels that it is not getting what it is due, then it will press its claims on the other groups. Since everyone in the coalition will try and keep it together, conflict will be resolved through negotiation. Rule transgressions will often be ignored. The more that the transgression undermines the overall purposes of the group, the more likely that the coalition will have to act. Failing that, it might break down. Of course, groups who remove themselves from a particular coalition have to find another situation that might reward them psychically or materially. In lieu of that, they are likely to stick it out. So, for example, the European monetary system has a rule that member states cannot run budget

deficits greater than 3% of GDP. The penalty is supposed to be a huge fine. In 2001-2003, the German and French governments both ran deficits larger than 3%. No penalties have been levied against them, although warnings have been issued. In this case, the size and importance of the two large countries means that other members of the political coalition that underlies the European Monetary System are unable to sanction them.

Rule enforcement from within an SAF is one way in which groups can maintain (or negotiate) their position in the SAF. There is another possibility: third party enforcement of agreements. The idea is that disputes can be resolved by "neutral" parties either inside of or outside of the SAF. So, for example, corporations who do business in China and the rest of the Third World do not trust local governments, firms, or local courts to honor contracts. In order to deal with this, they have constructed a set of private courts that operate to mediate contract disputes (Garth and Dezalay, 1998). These courts are specified usually in contracts as the agent of dispute resolution. The most common form of dispute resolution in modern society is the use of courts or regulatory agencies. Even disputes in SAFs based on competition or coercion are used to adjudicate disagreements sometimes. Firms may be sued by other firms for unfair trade practices. Governments may be taken to task in the World Court at the Hague.

The various substantive organizing technologies that have been invented can be characterized along the dimensions of breadth of issues they cover, how tight or loose groups are and how rules of membership are created, and how formal rules are and how they are enforced. It is useful to consider some of the most important kinds of organizing technologies that have evolved. Organizing technologies break down along the lines of either being forms of political coalitions, or hierarchies, or some hybrid of both. The creation of organizing technologies is a creative cultural act. Strategic actors find themselves trying to organize some SAF. In doing so, they confront many

problems. They can borrow existing organizing technologies, or they can fabricate entirely new ones from the necessity of the moment. One reason that hybrid technologies evolve is that people are trying to resolve complex political problems where one side or another has more social power, but neither side has sufficient to force their will. This brings them to create hybrids.

It is useful to start by discussing some of the pure forms. Good examples of SAFs that are hierarchically organized are markets, military conflicts, and dictatorships. Fligstein (1996, 2001) has argued that markets contain incumbent/challenger structures. The purpose of these structures is to provide a framework whereby competition is controlled in the SAF. A stable market is a role structure where incumbents use certain tactics on a period to period basis to reproduce their position in that structure. The American soft drink market contains two large companies, Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola. These two companies are market incumbents who control a large part of the market. This means that they are constantly engaging in competition over market share. Their main strategy is to compete through marketing efforts. They most frequently do this by taking turns discounting their products. So, one week, Pepsi Cola products will be cheap and the next week, Coca Cola products will go on sale. If new soft drinks rise to threaten their oligopoly, they frequently compete with them by buying them out.

Military conflicts are a clear case of a coercive SAF. Armies threaten one another and to the degree that one is larger than the other, the smaller challenger army will avoid direct confrontation. Building a bigger army is, thus always a tactic to gain advantage in warfare. Dictatorships also use coercion to get challenger political groups to remain quiet. If groups try and infringe on the dictator's political prerogatives, they will quickly find themselves dead.

Good examples of purely cooperative SAFs are strategic alliances and friendship networks. Strategic alliances can occur in politics, the economy, or in the greater society. Partners negotiate

their rights and responsibilities ahead of time. Usually there is some division of the gains in the SAF that reflects their relative contributions. Particular forms of strategic alliances in the economy include joint ventures and supply chains. Joint ventures preserve the identity of firms but produce a cooperative structure for a particular project. Supply chains commit firms to a contract whereby goods or services are bought upstream from certain suppliers and delivered routinely downstream to a set group of firms. Friendship networks form around issues of mutual interest and attraction. Member of such networks presumably generally have an equal distribution of positive psychic rewards. If they don't, presumably friendships end.

The most common forms of SAF technologies are hybrids where political coalitions and hierarchies are both in action. The most important modern SAF is the formal organization. These organizations contain strict definitions of membership, reward their members by paying them, and provide members with identities. But, they also frequently contain within them political coalitions. March (1961) has gone so far as to describe the firm as a political coalition (and this idea has been expanded by Hinings, et. al., 1974; Pfeffer, 1980; and Fligstein, 1990). The basic idea is that the subunits of the firm must come to some accommodation with one another in order to carry out the activities of the firm. Fligstein (1985) has shown how the subunits of the largest corporations in the U.S. that have controlled the corporations have changed over the past 100 years. This implies that there are winners and losers in the firm who get to control the allocation of resources in the firm and the strategic control over the SAFs in which the firm participates. Fligstein (1990) has shown the subunit which is a first mover effects the corporation's strategy and its tactics to make money. When those tactics are successful, other firms emulate a winning set of tactics. These changes are often implemented by the subunit in ascendance and part of their rhetoric is that this is the path to make profits. Kin networks that are organized as patriarchies or matriarchies also combine

cooperative and coercive elements. These are amongst the most longstanding and durable of SAF organizing technology. Indeed, Weber identifies patriarchies of various kinds as the organizational basis for traditional societies (1978: ). By having a single person or some form of rule by elders, kin networks are implicitly hierarchical. But, they are also cooperative as individuals are able to get meaning, care, and access to opportunities from the network.

Not surprisingly, modern democratic states have created a large number of organizing technologies. Modern states are a kind of SAF in their own right. They are political fields where actors claim to create and enforce the rules for all other fields. The construction of such an organizing technology is a topic that we will spend some time on in a later chapter. Modern formal organizations first emerged in state bureaucracies (Rosenberg, 1965). Democratic states contain political coalitions which have hierarchical structures within them and in SAFs in which they are involved. Indeed, the state consists of a large number of SAFs. Suffice it to say, that the process of building state capacity is identical to the problem of building new SAFs within the state. States create policy domains where representatives of state bureaucracies, legislatures, and interest groups cooperate to produce legislation. These domains are a form of organizing political life in democracies. States also enter into relationships with other states that form unique SAFs.

There is a continuum of such technologies that are more and more constraining on a particular state. The most cooperative form of SAF is an intergovernmental organization where states gather to work on an issue of common interest. Decision-making is done usually by unanimous voting rules in such organizations. States can also enter into confederal or federal arrangements with each other. Confederal arrangements usually bind states more strongly to collective decision-making procedures. Once decisions have been made, states are forced to comply. Federal arrangements involve a strong transfer of collective power of individual states to a central

authority. Such an authority binds states even more closely. All three organizing technologies have varying mix of cooperative and coercive elements. Federal arrangements are the most coercive while intergovernmental organizations are the least binding.

While we have not exhausted all of the kinds of SAFS, we have identified many of the most important varieties. Strategic actors who are creating an SAF will prefer SAF organizing technologies that benefit their group. But, they will often have to compromise with others because of threats of coercive or cooperation or the inability to create or enforce an order because of other SAFs. So for example, while firms may prefer not to have unions, they may have to accept them if governments make them legal. They will often be made legal depending on the relative power of unions to mobilize political opinion in their favor. Once unions exist, firms will engage in coercive, competitive, and cooperative tactics depending on the relative power of unions.

### Social, Political, and Economic Fields

Weber (1978: 926) identifies the legal, political, economic, and social orders. He sometimes seems to argue that there is also a religious order. Parsons (1937) took the idea of order and created a four fold schema that posited the necessity of similar orders for the functioning of society. Parsons argued that societies needed to solve the problem of orders in these spheres in order to survive. Lenski (1966) has argued that in principle there are a large number of bases for stratification in society that are expressed in social divisions. For Lenski, there may be as many as 9 important orders. Mann (1990?) has returned to the Weberian ideal types and argues that society's can be characterized as being dominated by political, social, religious, or economic orders. He then proceeds to read the history of modern society as the rise and fall of these various orders. Bourdieu,

using the idea of fields argues that there is a social, economic, political, literary or artistic, and educational orders (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1994).

In this section, we would like to link the idea of SAFs up to the idea of larger orders in society. We are less interested in the question of the dominance of orders (at least in this chapter) in particular societies and more interested in characterizing the linkages between orders and how SAFs are implicated in all of it. We begin with the idea that groups seek to organize SAFs for their material or psychic benefit. The question is, what kinds of rewards do actors seek? We want to argue that there are three main types of rewards: social, political, and economic. These types of rewards are what help explain the underlying basis of the orders. Figure 3 summarizes some of the key organizing principles of each order and some of the linking SAFs.

(Figure 3 about here)

For Weber, the social order is inherently about social status. Groups claim in the social order to have a certain social honor or privilege based on some common trait. This trait entitles them to a particular style of life, one that is consistent with their identity. If we think of the social order as a set of SAFs, then there can be one homogenous social field (as perhaps there were in smaller and less differentiated societies, like medieval societies in Europe) or a multiplicity of social orders. The social order contains, as subfields, the religious order, the gender order, the race/ethnicity order, and the educational order. In these SAFs, there is a claim on the part of one group to dominate other groups. These orders can be divided in many ways. They are held in place by groups seeking social closure for their members (Tilly, 1990; Weber, 1978: 926-40).

The economic order is dominated by groups seeking material rewards. Economies can be

organized according to a great many principles. Market societies create many SAFs that organize products, supply chains, and ultimately, sell to consumers. Market economies consist of labor markets, product markets, and capital markets. They operate according to the general logic of SAFs (Fligstein, 2001). All employ principles of hierarchy because they are based on competition. Successful market organizing projects will create incumbent/challenger structures that use various mechanisms of closure to maintain privilege. In the case of labor markets, those principles include credentialing, unions, and various forms of state certification (Fligstein and Fernandez, 1988). Where successful, groups create SAFs where they can control who has access to training and jobs. We have already described how to think about product markets in a similar way. Here, incumbents are able to construct and control competitive social relations by using a conception of control and enforcing it on a period to period basis. Podolny (1994) has argued that capital markets also produce "status hierarchies" that are exactly what we mean by SAFs.

What are at stake in the SAFs of the state are the rules that allow SAFs in the social and economic spheres to function. Capturing these decision-making processes goes a long way towards guaranteeing the reproduction of social or economic privilege in the rest of society. The state is unique because it provides legitimacy to all other SAFs. This legitimacy means that every SAF is connected to the state in some fashion. We will take up the issue of the state as a set of SAFs in a latter chapter. Here, we only assert that the difference between the state and other SAFs is that the state claims to decide what is legitimate and illegitimate action in the entire field of the SAFs (what others would call society). This claim means that every SAF either must accept that claim and use the legitimacy for its ends or be prepared to fight the state over that claim.

It also means that every SAF in a given field of SAFs is connected to the state precisely because its legitimacy depends on the state. We do not mean to suggest a Hegelian view of the state

as an overmaster of society. Instead, we want to demystify the state by viewing it as a set of SAFs that make a peculiar claim: the claim over control of the means of violence in a territory and the further claim to define the rules that all SAFs must conform to certain standards. Because of these claims and the more or less ability to enforce them, the state touches all other SAFs.

Obviously, the state itself has a history and the modern state has built an impressive template that has been freely borrowed by other states over the world. Indeed, states now defend the rights of other states precisely because undermining that right would potentially damage the claim of all other states to exist and define legitimacy in their societies (Meyer, et. al., 2000). No state can remove the legitimacy of another. Only people within a given state can legitimately change it. This very powerful template is one of the most important features of the modern world.

We include in the state the formal government bureaucracies, the legal system, the party system (in the case of a democracy), the military, and social movements that orient action towards the state. The growth of the state can be revolutionary or incremental. The main way that states add fields is through successful mobilization projects. Social movement groups work outside of normal political channels to try and change the way that existing SAFs work and to provide for new SAFs. Existing political parties that come to power may also alter existing SAFS. Generally, existing political parties engage in incremental change, although occasionally they can create an entirely new set of fields. So, for example, during the 1960s, the U.S. government dominated by the Democratic Party created equal opportunity laws for schooling and employment. They also greatly expanded social security, welfare, and medical benefits for the poor and elderly. Social movement organizations seek to create new SAFs. Thus, if successful, they often re-make society in relatively broad ways.

There are several kinds of dynamics that we will consider in our chapter on the emergence

and transformation of SAFs. The first concerns within SAF dynamics and their links to nearby SAFs, often within the same order. But, it will be important to theorize the links between orders and some general principles by which we might expect a given SAF to appeal to SAFs in other orders. It is also the case that a given order can come to dominate a society. We consider how our general view of SAFs can be used to think about the balance of power between larger orders. These ideal typical relationships can be used to understand the historical domination of particular orders over time.

Here, we are interested in describing the links between SAFs in the various orders and the main types of SAFs that operate to link orders. The simplest links to describe are the ones between the social order and the economy. Households and families act as consumers and suppliers of labor. They are often responsible for part of the training of labor market participants. They participate in various labor market activities such as professional associations and can be craftsmen and join unions. They also operate as consumers.

For our purposes the links between the social order and the economic order and the political order are more interesting. Weber thought that the key political dynamic of modern society was the claims that class and status groups (ie. representatives of economic and social interest groups) brought to the state. There is a Durkheimian point to be made here as well. Durkheim argued that as there was a proliferation of interactions in the economy and in the social sphere, actors would eventually need help in solving their problems. They would get help by taking their grievances to the state. This would cause the state to grow in importance and to also change its function. Law and courts would come to adjudicate the relationships between groups. Politics would expand to incorporate groups into political processes. If one combines Weber's and Durkheim's view, one understands that groups will bring pressure to bear on states to help them out. But, because groups

have different resources, they will differentially be able to effect change in their direction. So, Durkheim's account suggests that the state should expand its role in society while Weber's implies that it will not always do it for the "common good" but instead to serve the interests of the most organized.

The links between the economy and the state will produce lobbying groups, political parties, and the use of law and lawyers. Organized economic actors will take their grievances directly to the state. Grievances generated from the social order will tend to produce social movements that will push for the expansion of government policies to include both advantaged and disadvantaged groups.

Proposition 6: Professionals, lawyers, and educated people play a special role in the propagation of fields. They often have knowledge of SAF organizing technology. They act as consultants to help actors in the social, economic, and political spheres to produce arguments about how they should organize a particular SAF.

Bourdieu (1990) described the leading part of the intellectual sector as the "state nobility". In modern society, one of the things that professionals and educated people possess is an expertise in organizing SAFs. Reich calls such people "symbolic analysts" (1994). They can be enlisted to advise businesses to organize, political parties to produce tactics, and social groups to mobilize.

The link between our constructs and more familiar ones

Our comparison has two parts. First, an assertion about the nature of the constructs we

suggest. Then, an attempt to compare them to the ways that others use the more familiar terms of institutions, culture, formal organization, industry, law, networks, and governance. There are two important features of all of the constructs used here. At root, they require meanings to become collectively recognized across actors constituting fields. These meanings become embedded in social relations to create shared rules about what exists. These meanings can have a taken for granted status, once in place and will only become contested under conditions of SAF instability. We describe the meaning system and the social relations that underlie it, a conception of control.

SAFs rely on fundamentally political processes for their constitution and reproduction. Politics defines in the first place the means and ends by which actors constitute SAFs. Actors struggle over what the benefits of courses of action are (i.e. these are emergent in action), what courses of action should be in the first place, and who gets what and why. Once SAFs come into existence, they are political systems that operate to benefit those who constructed them according to their rules. Thus, politics is an ongoing part of the reproduction of SAFs and the legitimacy of the SAF is constantly being guarded by the incumbents. Since the state is implicated in the constitution of all fields, politics enters into the process in more traditional ways as well. The state as a field operates both politically and culturally as we have suggested.

Unfortunately, the terms we wish to compare to have a number of referents. It is not our intention to discuss all definitions of these terms. Instead, we focus on authors who use these terms in ways that are compatible with our uses of the terms. Generally, institutions refer to patterned sets of interactions that actors recognize, that have come to take on a taken for granted status (Scott, 1998). A set of social relations is institutionalized when actors accept the social relations as natural and uncontested (Jepperson, 1991). We accept this definition, but we think institutionalization is a meso-level phenomena. This means that the mechanisms of institutionalization take place in SAFs,

not at some more macro level. One of the key problems of Parson's theory of institutions (1951) is that it is conceived at too high a level of abstraction (i.e. too macro) and the mechanisms by which institutions form require too strong a belief in abstract system functionalism (see Giddens, 1978 for a similar critique).

We feel more comfortable with the recent use of institutions in the organizations literature, although we think that there are problems with the use of the term here as well. Institutional theory in organizational theory focuses on the taken for granted meanings that actors come to associate with given arrangements (Meyer and Rowan, 1978; Zucker, 1981; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). These arrangements produce stability precisely because actors do not question the assumptions of the institutions, but accept their "facticity".

On the surface, institutional theory appears to be compatible with a number of the features of SAFs that we discuss. Action is oriented towards fields; i.e. to the social space between organizations. The state can be an agent of institutional stability and change. However, there are several important differences in the theories. There is not a strong theory of institutional change in institutional theory. Once institutions are perceived as successful, they diffuse. But there is no notion of crisis in SAFs or any understanding of the possibility for change. There is little theorizing about the relations between SAF or the emergence of SAFs in the first place. In our account the mechanisms for SAF stability are interests and meanings. In institutional theory, it is taken for grantedness. Politics are under theorized and the state is an exogenous force, but politics internal to fields are not seriously theorized. The only form of strategic action that is available is mimetic in institutional theory. New SAFs and conceptions of control are not theorized.

The use of culture that we feel most akin to comes from Swidler (1996) and Snow and Benford(1991). Swidler (1996) argues that strategic action can be best viewed as a cultural problem

that requires actors to conceptualize action; i.e. make sense of their worlds and interests and figure out how to act. This creates culture. Snow and Benford argue that action in social movements is guided by master frames. These frames, once formed, give action meaning. We think that our notions are quite compatible with these ideas.

We add, however, the following ideas about the role of culture. The formation of frames or templates in the first place is quite problematic. Strategic actors will generally use what they already have or borrow notions from others. This problem of constructing a frame is akin to constructing a conception of control. We view this process as close to what Levi-Strauss called bricolage. Levi-Strauss (1969), however, argued that bricolage was what so-called primitive cultures engaged in, in order to make sense of their worlds. We argue that this process is more general.

The idea of a conception of control implies that the frame or culture in action has come to actually organize social space. This means that it has moved from the possession of a single group to a SAF. This dimension, i.e. the conception of control is missing from both Swidler's and Snow's accounts of the rise and spread of cultures (or frames).

Again, the role of politics is under theorized in these other views. The construction of a conception of control requires not just the template, but the resources to back it up. Political action requires not just disembodied frames or vague notions of "success" or efficiency, but the ability to organize an SAF. Once conceptions of control exist, they are very stable both because of the interests they embed and the taken for grantedness they hold. Neither of these theories of culture explores the problem of cultural change in the context of strategic action and the difficulty of altering conceptions of control.

Since Weber, there has been a tendency to reify formal organization. We take issue with this by viewing organizations as a type of SAF. Organizations are SAFs usually built on a combination

of coercion and cooperation. They are dominated by political coalitions who fight about which group is most prepared to deal with the problems created by links to other SAFs.

Many organizational theories view the environment as neutral and objective (a niche). This notion of a solid environment perpetuates the view that the organization is a solid entity as well. We are somewhat skeptical of the claim that these relations are hard and fast as some versions of population ecology or resource dependence theory suggest. Instead, we view the links between a particular organization (i.e. its SAF) and other SAFs as constructed and negotiated. Depending on the nature of its linkages, a given organization may be more or less susceptible to other SAFs. We treat the environment as contestable and a social construction. Since the organization and the environment are both constructed and contestable, then this raises the kind of problems of interest here, which many organization theories find unproblematic. Decisive resources may also be constructed and appeals to powerful outside actors contested. In organizational theory, the state is very exogenous. In our view the state is part of how the environment is constructed. Further, if everything is a social construction, then politics have to be part of which social construction wins out.

New institutional theory in formal organization is much closer to our view. Organizational theories that focus on the problem of action internally and externally (i.e. Simon, 1957; March and Simon, 1961) are much closer to our view than those which objectify the organization. They view the organization as a set of routines that embody logic of action. The organization is a control structure with such logic which minimizes problems of bounded rationality and information impactedness. These kinds of theories are more akin to the problem of conceptions of control, although they do not view those problems as externally induced.

Economists use the term industry to describe the nature of groups of related product producing

technologies (Caves, 1977). The problem of industries is that they are somewhat vague in definition. Industries can be broadly defined (metal making) or narrowly defined (copper). Industries are not to be confused with product lines: products are goods that are substitutable with one another. Hence, glass jars and tin cans may be products in competition with one another, but they are produced by quite different industries.

We think that our model can be applied to the problem of industries. But instead of focusing on products or technologies, our view would be that industries are made up of firms who take one another into account either implicitly or explicitly in their actions. This social definition means that industries form SAFs. This view is similar to what White (2001) calls a production market.

Our view differs from standard economic views because we assume actors have an awareness of one another. They define their actions on the basis of that awareness. They understand the conception of control that dominates the industry (to the degree that one actually exists and dominates). Markets are a kind of SAF where the population of competitors whose basic motives are that they are trying to find a stable, i.e. noncompetitive social world (Fligstein, 1996).

Law is another one of those difficult terms. Law is generally viewed as rules that are enforced by some organization. What separates them from norms is that the enforcement mechanism is formal and that sanctions, once applied are sure and swift. Note that law does not have to be written down or passed by legislative bodies (i.e. the common law). The organization meting out sanctions is generally seen as legitimate by those enforcing and being the victims of the sanctions. Generally, states enforce laws, but churches and other formal organizations have tried to do so as well. Of course, the existence of a law has nothing to do with whether or not people obey it or whether or not they actually get punished for failing to do so.

In our theory, law plays an important role. Laws generally define what types of behaviors

are permissible in SAFS. As new types of SAFs form, the limits of law can be reached and new laws can come into play. Hence, the legitimacy of tactics of actors in SAFS will be determined to a great degree by the law as it exists and as it is modified. So, for instance, the corporation as a legal form, changed over time depending on the demands that actors placed on the legal system.

Network analysis has made great progress in modeling social relationships. We think that there is a great deal to be gained by conceiving of fields in network terms (see DiMaggio, 1988 for an elaborated example). But, there are problems as well. Network analysis lacks a concept like SAF. This means that the nature of relationships is not embedded in a deeper understanding of the purposes of actors in the field. In essence, the field idea assumes that meso level social orders work coherently as cultural structures that guide group's action. Network analysis has no obvious way to make sense of these cultural relations and understandings. It also lacks a theory of the underlying power base of social relationships in fields. So, network analysis can prove useful if one already knows something about the field but does not stand as a theory of fields.

Network analysis leads to one important problem. Since network ties can be broken over time, it means that the underlying structure of the field "changes" every time a new group emerges or an old group departs. Moreover, small changes in fields will be "read" a total transformation of the field. We think that it is important to have a sense of the field as a social whole independent of the groups that occupy the role structure. Adjustments in that role structure can and should be studied. But the analyst wants to have a sense about the magnitude of those changes. This implies that analysts will also want to construct the meanings actors attach to changes in order to evaluate their significance. We will take up some of these issues in our methods chapter.

Finally, we consider the issue of governance (North, 1990; Williamson, 1985). Governance has come to mean broadly the way in which relations with particular arenas are set up. For

economists, governance should produce the efficient allocation of resources in a particular market (Williamson, 1985). We are comfortable with seeing our view of SAFs as a theory of governance of meso-level social orders. We are interested in the conditions under which various forms of governance emerge in political, social, and economic fields. We take issue with economic theory on the issue of efficiency. We hold that the purpose of setting up a system of governance in an SAF is to create an order that benefits groups in the SAF. Such an order will promote the survival of those groups. In organizational theory, this idea is known as "effectiveness" (Thompson, 1967). The behavior of groups in SAFs may be oriented towards allocating scarce resources towards the best ends, but it is not necessarily the case that this will always be true.

So, for example, Jensen and Meckling (1976) (and subsequently Jensen and Fama, 1981 a;b; Fama, 1979; Jensen 1988) argue that the system of corporate governance that exists in the U.S. causes the efficient allocation of resources. Their argument is that the separation of owners from managers works because shareholders can easily sell their stock. They believe that there are two forces which push managers to maximize profits: tying their salaries to the share price by using stock options and bonuses and boards of directors which monitor their performance. If both of these forces fail, then the stock price will slide. This will cause someone to engage in a hostile takeover of the firm. This model of governance (what could be called the "shareholder value" conception of control) took over U.S. firms during the 1980s (Fligstein, 2001; Davis and Stout, 1994). In the late 1990s, this model appears to have run its course. One of the main problems is that it encouraged managers to engage in ploys to change the financial picture of the firm. These ploys finally stopped working and a number of large corporations went bankrupt as a result. It is hard to argue that these arrangements were efficient. Instead, they provided leverage for certain managers to take control of firms and form a political alliance with large shareholders and financial analysts. We would argue

that this conception of control benefited certain people within the firm and certain firms as well.

## Conclusion

While we have borrowed from other theories and see quite a few compatibilities between our theories and others, we think our theory contains unique elements that cover gaps the other theories leave. In general, we have a meso-level theory of the emergence and stability of social orders and institutions. We explicitly conceptualize the political nature of social life and its ongoing consequences. We show how culture can help us understand the construction and reproduction of these middle range orders. We avoid reification of social organizational features or misplaced abstractness with regard to mechanisms of social change.

However, in this account, we have left out two crucial elements. First, it is necessary to consider more explicitly the mechanisms of change and stability in SAFs. This will cause us to be more theoretical about how new SAFs look like social movements. It will also bring us to consider the links between SAFs in the social, political, and economic orders. We have so far provided a mainly descriptive set of categories that provide a basis for thinking about SAFs. It is important to try and make these statements more causal by considering the conditions under which we will get changes in SAFs. Finally, we have not yet consider a key part of our theory" what strategic actors do under varying conditions of social space. In our theory, it is pivotally important to understand actors, their social skill, and their ability to construct SAFs and conceptions of control. Actors have to survey the SAF, understand what their resources are in the SAF, figure out what organizing technologies might work in the SAF, and work to gain cooperation from the members of their group

and decide how they will interact with those outside their group. It is to these discussions that we now turn.

Figure 1: Hierarchy and political coalitions as the basis of SAFs

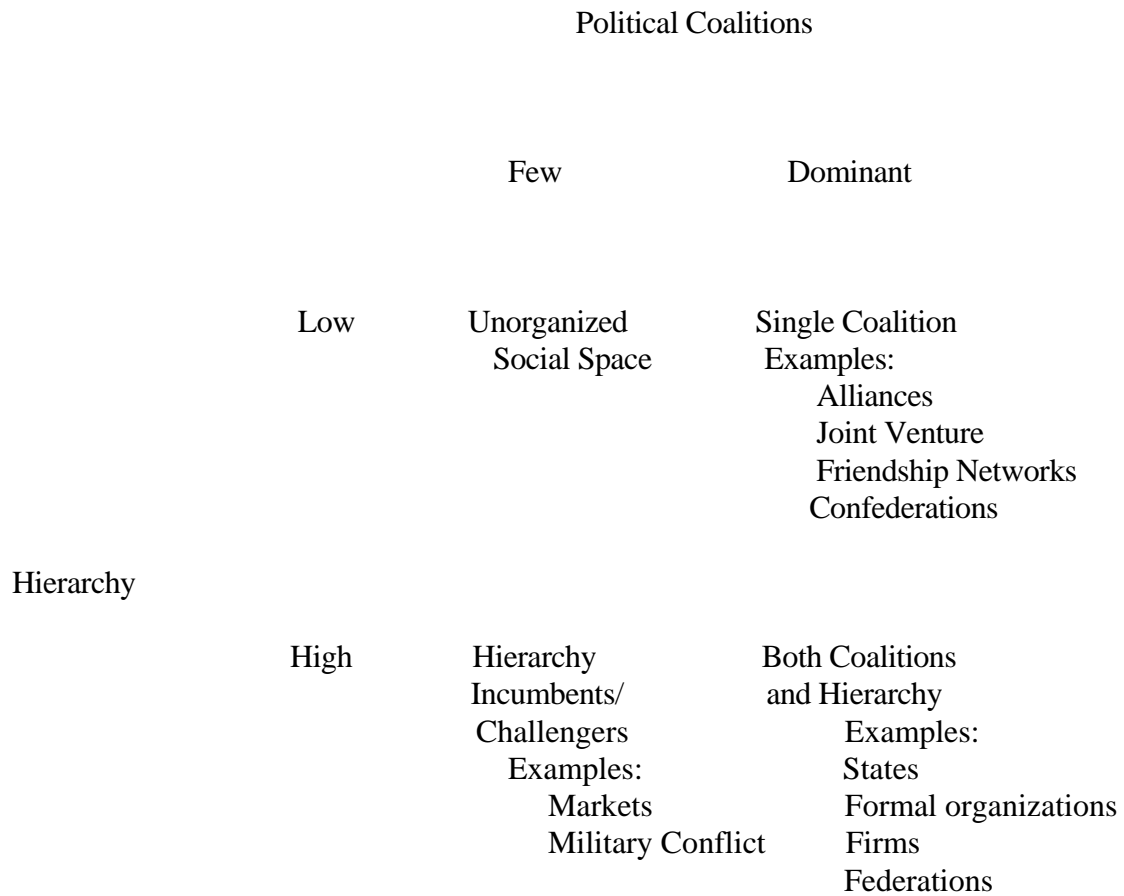


Figure 2: Ideal typical SAF Forms of Collective Action (Organizing technologies) and their underlying dimensions

	Loose	Moderate	Tight Organization
	Alliances Joint Ventures Friendship Networks	Markets Patriarchies Extended Kin Networks Social Movements Political Coalitions	Formal Organization Federations Confederations
		Narrow Issues	Broad Issues
	Alliances Joint ventures Markets Social Movements Formal Organizations		Friendship Networks Patriarchies Extended Kin Networks Federations Confederation Political Coalitions
Rule Enforcement:			
	Coercive	Mixed	Negotiated
	Formal Organizations Federations Markets	Patriarchies Extended Kin Networks Confederations	Friendship Networks Alliances Joint Ventures Political Coalitions



Figure 3: Social, Political, and Economic Orders: Strategic Action Fields

Social

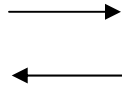
Examples of subfields:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Education
- Religion



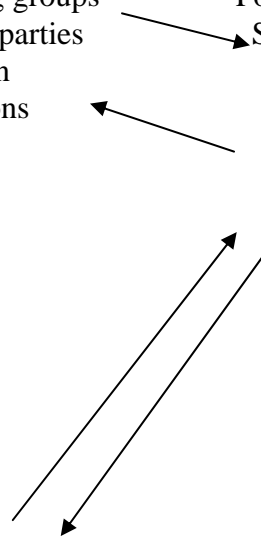
Links between Social and Political

- Social Movements
- Lawyers/Law
- Lobbying groups
- Political parties
- Education
- Professions



Political Subfields:

- Bureaucracies
- Legal System
- Political Domains
- Social Movements
- Parties
- Military



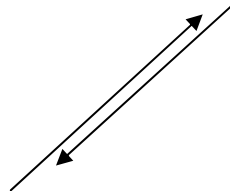
Links between Social and Economic

- Families and households
- Education
- Consultants/professionals



Links btn. Political and Economic

- Lobbying groups
- Law/Lawyers
- Political Parties



Economic

Examples of subfields:

- Firms
- Markets
- Joint ventures
- Supply chains
- Consumers