Players and Arenas

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Introduction

Playing the Game

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The last several years have been exciting for those who study protest, with a wave of activity ranging from revolutions in the Arab-speaking world to tent cities in Israel, Europe, and the United States, followed by Turkey, Brazil, and elsewhere. There have been right-wingers like the Tea Party sympathizers who shouted down their elected representatives in town hall meetings in the United States, and left-leaning projects in favor of the “99 percent.” But even as we congratulate ourselves for living through an important moment in history, we should not forget that protest occurs every day, all around the world, and probably always has – whether or not it is dramatic and sustained enough to attract media coverage. Protest is a fundamental part of human existence.

Despite a plethora of exciting cases to study, theories of protest movements have reached an impasse. On the one hand, theories of great structural shifts – modernization, markets, nation-building, urbanization – no longer have much to say about the practice of protest, commenting instead on the conditions of possibility for collective action in the grand sweep of history. On the other hand, cultural theories which focus on the perspectives of protestors, including their emotions and grievances and choices, have had difficulty building beyond them and connecting with the arenas from which outcomes eventually emerge.

A strategic perspective may be able to bridge this gap by giving equal and symmetric weight to protestors and to the other players whom they engage, and by focusing equally on players and the arenas in which they interact (Jasper, 2004). Although beginning from the goals and means that each player controls, we can watch what happens when players interact creatively over short or long periods of time. 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. 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.

The big paradigms that linked social movements to History or to Society have fallen out of favor. If there has been a trend in recent theories of protest,
it has been toward the micro rather than the macro, and toward interpretive and cultural rather than materialist approaches (Jasper, 2010a; 2012a). Thus we see political-opportunity theorists renouncing their own structuralism in favor of local causal mechanisms (Kurzman, 2004; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001); Alain Touraine (1997) discussing individuals as subjects instead of the collective Subjects struggling to control the direction of History; rational choice theorists who are adding collective identities, frames, and even emotions to formal models formerly centered on material interests (Opp, 2009). How can we acknowledge the felt experience of participants without losing the insights of the structural school? How can we trace the effects of global capitalism or neoinperialist states at the level of individuals and their interactions?

Players

Players are those who engage in strategic action with some goal in mind. Simple players consist of individuals, compound players are teams of individuals. Compound players range from loose, informal groups to formal organizations all the way up to nations tentatively or seemingly united behind some purpose. Simple and compound players face many of the same challenges and dilemmas, but they differ in an important way: the individuals who comprise teams may depart, defect, partly defect, or pursue their own goals at the same time that they pursue the group goals. Compound players, even when they have names and bylaws and payrolls, are never completely unified. They are “necessary fictions” that attract and inspire supporters through their promise of unity (Gamson, 1995; McGarry and Jasper, 2015).

Every player has multiple goals, which range from its official mission to other stated objectives to secret aspirations to murky motivations that may be obscure even to the players themselves. These goals take them into different arenas: a police department engages protestors in public battles for control of the streets, but also lobbies legislatures for more funding; is a member of a propolicing interest group and engages in moral entrepreneurship in the media during a moral panic. It is difficult for a player to compare or rank-order its goals, in part because their salience shifts according to external circumstances and in part because there is always contention within a player over its priorities. The goals of compound players are especially unstable, because factions and individuals are forever competing to make their own goals into the official goals of the team. Goals
can be entirely altruistic as well as selfish, ideal interests as well as material interests. In addition, goals change: new ones surface, old ones disappear, new twists and interpretations emerge.

Players have a variety of capacities at their disposal in pursuing their goals. Adopting a general strategic language, we observe three basic families of strategic means: paying others to do what you want, persuading them to, and coercing them to. A fourth, derivative capacity is to hold positions (physical locations on a battlefield, bureaucratic posts in an organization) that help you pay, persuade, or coerce others. Money, reputation, technologies, even emotions of confidence are all helpful. Some capacities adhere to an organization, others are held primarily by individuals. By identifying capabilities like these, we hope to push beyond the vague and often circular language of “power” in order to specify more precisely how players try to attain their goals. Pierre Bourdieu similarly used various forms of capital to specify the mechanisms of power: cultural knowledge, social network ties, money, and reputation. I find the metaphor of capital – one makes an investment in order to reap a return – provocative, but it seems clearer and more concrete to speak about payments made, technologies of coercion, the media and messages of persuasion, and official positions governed by rules.

Players vary in how tight or porous their boundaries are. Some compound players are composed of paid staff positions; some have security guards at the door to keep outsiders away. Most organizations have rules about who can speak at meetings. At the other extreme, a group may be open to anyone who shows up at a meeting or a rally – raising problems of infiltrators whose intent is to discredit or disrupt the player’s projects, but also of well-intentioned participants with widely different goals or tastes in tactics.

Players overlap with each other. A protest group is part of a movement coalition. An MP is also a member of her party, occasionally pursuing its goals (fundraising, for instance) alongside legislative ones, and she may also be a member of a protest group seeking social change or justice. Individuals are especially clear cases of one player moving among and being a part of various other players. Thanks to the individuals who compose them, protest movements can permeate a number of other players, even on occasion their targets and opponents.

Compound players are always shifting: appearing, merging, splitting, going through dormant periods, disappearing altogether, growing, shrinking, changing names and purposes. Although our analytic approach begins with players, we do not want to reify them as necessarily preexisting and permanent. After all, players redefine each other through their interactions and conflicts, as Fetner (2008) describes in the case of pro- and anti-gay
rights activists. Players are not set in stone, but change constantly, especially expanding and contracting. Charles Tilly famously linked the emergence of new players to the opening of political opportunities: create or empower a parliament, and political factions and parties will appear to pursue the stakes available within it. This structural insight was very fruitful, but such an emphasis on access to arenas meant that players were often taken for granted (Jasper, 2012b; Krinsky and Mische, 2013). From the structural perspective, it is sometimes difficult to see how players move among arenas, trying to enter those where their capabilities will yield the greatest advantages, or to see how new goals emerge and inspire players to form around them (Armstrong and Bernstein, 2008).

Groups and organizations that operate as players in various external arenas can, from a different point of view, be seen as arenas themselves when we look at their internal procedures. The individuals who compose them never agree entirely on either goals or means, so that considerable time is devoted to arriving at decisions through formal and informal processes (Maeckelbergh, 2009). In fact a compound player almost always devotes more time to internal interactions – making decisions, performing rituals of solidarity, eating or occupying together – than to external engagements. These internal activities are strategic and influential, and they prepare players to confront others. A player that looks unified from the outside is still going to be an arena for contestation within. Even players that have strict hierarchies, intended to reduce internal conflicts, have many ways that individuals maneuver. Players are also arenas. Ann Mische (Chapter 2 of this volume) calls this a fractal process, in which each player can be broken into subplayers, each of those can in turn be further subdivided, all the way down to individuals (or beyond, according to postmodern theorists, who insist that individuals are not unified actors either, but rather sites for internal conversation and conflict) (Archer, 2003; Wiley, 1995). We need to do this kind of work if we wish to acknowledge the lived experience of human beings. For example, bureaucrats do not feel their way toward action as “the state,” but rather as accountants, department heads, litigators, and so on.

Its ability to incorporate individuals as players (and as symbols) seems an enormous advantage for a strategic perspective. Some decisions are made by a single individual, who either persuades others, disposes of financial or coercive resources, or has some positional authority provided by a set of rules. We 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 (Jasper, 1997: ch. 9). Even the most macro-level phenomena often reflect the influence of one or a few individuals. In
the chapters that follow, the reader will encounter a number of idiosyncratic, influential individuals. (I prefer to speak of individuals rather than of “leaders,” given the mystique that business and military observers have bestowed on “leadership,” and given that there can be influential individuals at any level of an organization, in any part of a network.)

Players are not always fully conscious of all their goals and projects, and they certainly do not always articulate them to others (whether to articulate them publicly is a dilemma [Jasper, 2006: 78]). Many of them are preconscious, part of what Anthony Giddens (1984) calls practical consciousness: we have not consciously thought about them but would probably recognize them if we were challenged or interrogated about them. In contrast I hesitate to include goals that are entirely unconscious to the player, on the Freudian model of repression, largely for methodological reasons. Evidence is necessarily weaker for unconscious motives, and the observer is given enormous freedom to speculate. Structural approaches allow similar license to the researcher to assume that she already knows the goals of players, because she can read their “objective interests” directly from their structural positions. Strategic theories have the advantage of encouraging (or forcing) the researcher to acknowledge a range of goals through empirical investigation rather than deductive theory.

Appreciation of the meanings and emotions of players is crucial to explaining their actions. Emotions in particular permeate both goals and means, as well as the very definition of the players. We hope to take account of both the affective solidarities that define players, the reflex emotions they have when engaging others, and the moods and moral emotions that energize participants. Like other components of culture, emotions are now being studied from many angles, but they have yet to be integrated completely into a strategic approach (Archer, 2001; Collins, 2004; Gould, 2009; Jasper, 2011).

To understand how protest arises, unfolds, and affects (or does not affect) the world around it, research needs to begin with catalogs of the players involved on all sides. These lists often need to be quite extensive, and include the multiple goals and many capabilities a player has at its disposal. The goals and the means, furthermore, change over time, as do the players themselves. Because today we tend to see culture as contested, constructed, and ever-shifting, rather than unitary and static, we must admit that players and arenas are always emerging, changing, and recombining. But by developing better theories about who these players are, what they want, and how they operate, we hope to aid future political researchers in creating their own catalogs.
Talking about players allows us to avoid the term “social movements,” which many scholars think is simply too vague (although it is perhaps another necessary fiction, useful as a popular label or collective identity). Researchers have also given too much attention to explaining the rise and fall of movements, as opposed to the many other dynamics inside and outside of them (McAdam et al., 2001; McAdam and Tarrow, 2010). Once we break both the movement and its environment down into their component players and arenas, we can judge when there is enough coherence to these players to warrant the term “social movement.”

We originally asked our contributors to keep in mind the following questions about the players in their cases. How do these players typically operate: what do they want, what means do they have at their disposal, what constraints do they face? What were the origins of this player? How well defined or permanent are its boundaries? How stable is it? What goals do its components widely share? What goals receive less consensus? What means does it have: what financial resources, legal standing, rhetoric for persuading others, coercive capacities? What is its internal structure, when viewed as an arena rather than as a player? How does it make formal and informal decisions? How vertically is it structured? What role do its leaders play?

Arenas

An arena is a bundle of rules and resources that allow or encourage certain kinds of interactions to proceed, with something at stake. Players within an arena monitor each others’ actions, although that capacity is not always equally distributed. Players can play different roles in the same arena (such as active players, reserve players, referees, assistants and managers, audiences, backstage managers), governed by different rules and norms. Some strategic moves are made clearly within the rules of the game, others are meant to change, ignore, or twist those rules. Bend the rules far enough, and the player has moved into a different arena, as when a sports team bribes referees (although it is the same conflict between teams). Some rules are formally written down, providing procedural ammunition for any player who has a stake in seeing that they are enforced. Other rules are moral norms, and the cost of breaking these is usually a tarnished reputation among those who hold to the norms, but here again opponents must work to tarnish that reputation. There are many combinations in-between. Arenas are where politics occur, at least in Sheldon Wolin’s (1960: 16) expansive
definition of politics as the place “where the plans, ambitions, and actions of individuals and groups incessantly jar against each other – colliding, blocking, coalescing, separating.”

Arenas vary along several dimensions. Like players, they vary in the degree to which they are institutionalized with bureaucratic rules and legal recognition as opposed to informal traditions and expectations; public opinion is an amorphous arena, whereas law courts have elaborate rules, including rules about who has standing in them. Second, they vary in the ratio of players to audience: some arenas are composed only of the players themselves, while at the other end of the spectrum a vast audience watches a tiny number of players. Third, different capacities are useful to different degrees and in different combinations in different arenas: in markets we expect money to matter most, but in politics and courts we expect persuasion to matter more than money – although corruption occurs all the time (Walzer, 1983).

Arenas have a variety of formal and informal relationships with each other. In more formal cases there may be hierarchies of arenas, as with appeals courts. Most arenas can be further broken down into subarenas. Thus policy-making can be seen as one arena, or as a number of distinct arenas, ranging from informal persuasion to registered lobbying to legislative chambers and votes (and even votes can be formal tallies of names or less formal voice votes). An outcome in one arena can be the opening move in another, like a new law that is challenged in court. Players can force each other into some arenas, but must entice them in other cases. (They face the Bystander dilemma: you may wish to get outsiders involved in your strategic engagement, but you cannot always control what they do once they are involved [Jasper, 2006: 123].) One arena may affect another merely by changing morale, as players carry a good or bad mood with them from one setting to another.

Arenas are similar to that favorite concept of sociologists, the institution. Taylor and Zald (2010: 305) define this as “a complex of roles, norms, and practices that form around some object, some realm of behavior in a society.” In line with this structural-functional concept, they claim that within the “common cultural understandings” that define the institution, there can be conflict over how to “enact” the values and roles (Taylor and Zald, 2010: 307), which is more or less the argument of Smelser (1962). Taylor and Zald go further down this strategic path, fortunately, saying that “institutions may actually be seen as made up of several institutional arenas.” The potential circularity of seeing institutions as institutional suggests that we might be better off simply observing the arenas rather than some mysterious entity behind them.
Because of these variations in both players and arenas, players can have a variety of relationships to arenas, and they usually have several kinds at the same time. They can play in an arena through formal standing, or through the standing of individual members. They can try to influence other players in an arena through personal networks, by persuading third parties such as the media, or by creating their own versions of other players (establishing their own media or fielding their own candidates for office, say). Some arenas are defined by the players in them, as in games or in legislatures (which could not exist without legislators). Some prove to be “false arenas”: as soon as a new player is admitted, the arena loses its influence (whether to enter such arenas, which are often intentional traps, is another dilemma [Jasper, 2006: 169]).

One kind of strategic project is to change arenas themselves. Some players may try to stabilize an arena to their advantage, or to change an existing one so that it favors them. Some arenas are changing constantly, without much stabilization; others are established for long periods, punctuated by sudden changes that can be dramatic and which are often unexpected. But all arenas can be changed or abandoned. When they are stable for long periods, it is not mere inertia, but the result of active support from interested players.

The positions they hold in arenas can help or hinder players, just as their resources and skills can. Like positions on a field of battle, positions in an arena such as a bureaucracy allow players to do certain things by providing them with a distinct bundle of rules and resources. They may still have to fight to enforce or bend those rules and to deploy those resources, despite the formalities of their positions. As Maarten Hajer (2009: 21) notes, highlighting the performance involved in politics, “In addition to this de jure authority, they have to create de facto authority by acting out their role in a sequence of concrete situations.” Some positions, like the high ground on a battlefield, are more advantageous than others, and a great deal of contestation centers around getting into good position. In some cases attaining standing in an arena is a key position, but then in addition there are different positions within that arena. Being elected to the US Congress is one thing, chairing an influential committee is another.

 Arenas capture most of what has gone under the banner of structure. There are several levels of structures buried in the idea of an arena: literal structures are physical places that offer spaces to stand or sit, doors through which to enter and exit, recording devices for the media, possibly artificial lighting for nighttime uses, and of course constraints on how many people can fit comfortably or uncomfortably in the arena. Beyond these physical
characteristics, structure becomes more metaphorical: there are formal rules that some subplayer may be charged with enforcing; informal norms and traditions that can be broken but only at some cost in reputation; and other expectations that have to do with how the meeting was called and organized. It is easier to break an informal expectation than to walk through a wall.

Arenas embody past decisions, invested resources, and cultural meanings. A society’s history as well as its patterns of inequality shape arenas, as well as shaping what happens in those arenas by affecting what players can bring to those arenas. These are indirect effects, compared to the direct effects of the interaction that unfolds in the arena itself. Randall Collins (2008: 20) contrasts background and situational factors in his micro-sociological account of violence. There are “factors outside the situation that lead up to and cause the observed violence. Some background conditions may be necessary or at least strongly predisposing, but they certainly are not sufficient; situational conditions are always necessary, and sometimes they are sufficient.” He finds it useful to push as far as possible with the situational approach, in contrast to most explanations that rely on background conditions. Although I am sympathetic to this approach, there is far more work that goes into preparing players and arenas in advance than there is for most interpersonal violence.

There are arenas that a researcher must infer, but inferred arenas come in two forms. In one, we simply lack access: political leaders, corporate executives, and military commanders – the power elites – prefer to meet behind closed doors (cf. Allison and Zelikow, 1999). But we also infer arenas by aggregating large numbers of separate arenas. The paradigm here is the market, which sets a price out of many small transactions. Economists have made a discipline from such aggregations, as well as from pointing out the unintended (and often irrational) aggregate consequences of many uncoordinated (and in the eyes of economists, rational) choices. But these arenas are more metaphorical, living in summations of data rather than the lived experience of human beings. And as E.P. Thompson points out, “the market” in the abstract derives from real, physical marketplaces, where buyers and sellers used to meet every week or every month.6

The concept of an arena is similar in some ways to Pierre Bourdieu’s popular idea of a field of conflict over clearly identifiable stakes. This was an advance over images of institutions as tightly integrated by norms and values, offering instead a strategic vision of them as sites for competition and conflict. Yet the idea of a field was never meant to do much institutional work; it is a “field of struggle” defined by the relations between players, some
dominant and others subordinate but all trying to improve their positions. It represents social structure, not institutional structure. Any formal rules are imposed by the “field of power,” namely the political system or the state, which structures the relations among arenas.\textsuperscript{7}

A field’s form of competition is usually taken for granted, as though there were no choice of arenas or of major strategies within a field. Agreement is assumed to govern some parts of the field (cognitive understandings, goals, norms of behavior), while conflict governs others (competition for the stakes of the field), with a clear (perhaps unrealistically clear) boundary between them. The boundaries of fields are restricted, with little ability for players to open up new arenas or to innovate in their struggles. Fields also tend to be zero-sum, consisting of competition more than cooperation, even though most strategic action includes both. Fields are also extremely metaphorical. Fields are constructed by social scientists; arenas are built by the strategic players themselves. You can’t see a field, only imagine or draw it from data you collect. But you can sit in most arenas and watch the interactions. Even aggregate arenas such as the media consist of the summing up of lots of concrete arenas such as TV shows or websites.\textsuperscript{8} Finally, fields homogenize players’ motives by building the stakes into the definition of the field: players cannot have multiple goals, only the goal offered by the field.

By distinguishing players, arenas, and players’ goals and capabilities (especially their resources and skills), we hope to better observe the interactions among them. Why do players choose the arenas they do, often switching from one to another? How do they adapt their capabilities to arenas, and choose arenas that best suit their capabilities? What positions do they hold in an arena, and what do these positions allow them to do? We can also observe when there are good matches and when there are mismatches between a player’s capacities and an arena. Players sometimes fail badly, or unexpectedly. By distinguishing arenas from players, we can also observe more dimensions of the arenas: formal rules versus informal traditions, status within the arena versus status outside it, soft and hard boundaries that define which players can participate. Players and arenas constantly adjust to each other, but they do not entirely define each other.

Conflicts among players often spill across arenas. They switch back and forth between battles over form and battles over content. They can even distort or change an arena. In what I call the Players or Prizes dilemma, for example, a player can pursue the standard stakes of an arena or instead devote its energy to defeating or harming its opponent (Jasper, 2006: 149). In bitter rivalries, there often end up being fewer rewards for everyone, as in nasty divorce proceedings from which only lawyers benefit (Jasper,
In civil wars, often, hatreds and vengeance threaten to crowd out all other goals.

The media are crucial players and arenas in politics. As players, reporters, editors, and others have their own perspectives on the issues, their own goals (usually audience size and profits), professional norms, and usual interventions. In arenas such as meetings, these insiders debate and decide what is news, what is the right tone for a fictional series, how to portray different characters. In doing their work they are influenced by the actions of external players. Political players fight hard to gain media coverage, even though they never entirely control that coverage, a dilemma that players always face when deciding whether to enter a new arena or not (Gitlin, 1980; Soberiaj, 2011). How they are portrayed in the media affects what they can do in other arenas. Because cultural understandings matter, Hajer (2009: 9) speaks of “the struggle to conduct politics at multiple sites, relating to a multiplicity of publics, and communicated through a multiplicity of media.”

We asked our contributors to consider the following questions about their players’ relationships to other players and to arenas. How does this player interact with protest groups: what conflicts, cooperations, tensions, dilemmas? Does it tend to follow one strategy or many? Does it have one arena to which it is restricted, or in which its capacities are especially useful? How and when does it choose to enter an arena or exit from one? What is at stake? How well are the player’s goals and means understood by outsiders, especially by protestors? What are protestors’ images and expectations about the other player? What expectations does it have about the protestors with which it interacts? What schemas, stories, and stereotypes does it deploy? What capacities does it have for bringing other players into the engagement? When does it try to do this? When does it succeed? What are its primary allies? What types of outcomes are there? Do they lead to new arenas or end here? How are new arenas created? Are there examples of “false arenas” that a player joins, only to find that the arena has been rendered ineffectual?

Dynamic Interactions

Although the term “strategy” is often used – in business and the military – to refer to a plan drawn up in advance of interaction or battle, we use the adjective “strategic” to refer to efforts to get others to do what you want them to. I have suggested (Jasper, 2006: 5) that strategic approaches include not only the goals and means of players, but some possibility of resistance,
a focus on interaction, and projects oriented toward the future (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). A strategic theory need not assume resistance: some of the best strategies involve persuasion and the avoidance of conflict. Cooperation is a more common form of strategic interaction than conflict. And considerable strategic activity is internal to a group or organization, such as grappling with radical flanks. 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.

Our strategic approach highlights the trade-offs, choice points, and dilemmas that players face as they negotiate arenas. I have already mentioned Players or Prizes, the Articulation, the Bystander, and the False Arena dilemmas, but there are many more. Several appear in the pages that follow. For instance the Powerful Allies dilemma, when protest groups make some kind of connection with another player but often find that the other player twists them to its own ends rather than helping the protestors attain their own, arises with the news media and with intellectuals (Nicholls and Uitermark label this version of it the “Power of Representation dilemma”).

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 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. Kathleen Blee (2012) has recently shown how protest groups establish decision-making routines in their first few months which they do not need to revisit. But all routines were originally choices, implicit or explicit. All changes to routines are also choices. And within certain routines, there are still choices to be made, especially in reaction to the actions of other players. The purpose of routines is to allow a group to focus its attention on new decisions. Decisions are still made, even when scholars avoid looking at them.

Some choices are tough ones, in which each option carries risks. For this reason, players often try hard to back their opponents into a position in which their options are limited and treacherous. Majken Sørenson and Brian Martin (2014) dub this “the dilemma action.” In many cases, they say, these actions force state agents to repress nonviolent protestors, leading to moral indignation in response. More generally, the point of these moves is to push an opponent to do something that conflicts with widely held or stated beliefs and values. In a way, protest itself is an effort to force authorities (or
other players) into actions they would prefer to avoid, whether concessions or repression or uncomfortable silence.

Scholars of protest and politics always think they are talking about strategy, but only game theorists are entirely explicit about what they mean. Social-movement scholars have begun to pay more explicit attention to strategy lately. Holly McCammon (2012), for instance, emphasizes activists’ agency in changing their strategies in response to emerging opportunities and contexts, although she still works with a linear model in which context and movement characteristics lead to strategic choices, which in turn lead to outcomes. The complex interactions between players are reduced to context: movements interact with contexts, rather than with other players. Two recent books examine the interplay between pairs of movements battling each other over time (Fetner, 2008; Bob, 2012), and an edited volume, based on a large 2007 conference, presents a dozen essays on various aspects of strategies of protest (Maney et al., 2012).

Sociology as a whole may be rediscovering strategy. In a powerful critique of neoinstitutionalists’ tendency to focus on the constraints imposed by institutions, Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam (2012: 10-12) have extended Bourdieu’s concept of fields, in which “[a]ctors make moves and other actors have to interpret them, consider their options, and act in response.” Even in apparently stable fields, there is always “a good deal of jockeying for advantage.” Strategic action fields are “socially constructed arenas within which actors with varying resource endowments vie for advantage.” They retain some of the problems of the field, especially the conflation of players and arenas and its zero-sum competition. They give the example of the 2,500 colleges and universities in the United States, which normally compete with each other, but would “probably unite and oppose” proposed legislation against their collective interests. But instead of recognizing this unity as forming a new player (as I would), perhaps intended to lobby collectively in policy arenas, they see it as a new field. Finally, Fligstein and McAdam observe that a modern society contains millions of fields, making the concept less useful as a way of grappling with institutional constraints.

The great theories of arenas, namely political-opportunity-structure approaches to protest, have also gestured toward a more strategic vision. In his last formulation of political-opportunity structures, Charles Tilly (2008) insisted that each protest campaign reshapes the political landscape, which in turn offers different opportunities to the next campaign, and so on. To make this approach more fully dynamic, we only need to add the many expectations, choices, and reactions made by players within each round of contestation, or to drop the image of rounds altogether and recognize that
some sort of strategic maneuvering is always present. Arenas do not simply sit there statically waiting for the next round of challenge. Players work constantly to strengthen their positions, as Gramsci famously suggested.

Hanspeter Kriesi and his collaborators traced the complexities of the interaction between social movements and the state in greater detail than Tilly. But their language remained that of structural availability rather than strategic choices: “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” (1995: 59). The risk seems objectively given, rather than something that government decision-makers might have to think about, might disagree about, and might try to manage in creative ways. The risks (known and unknown), the costs, and the benefits all add up to recurrent dilemmas. What is more, different segments of the state may face different dilemmas, or make different choices in the face of the same one. Kriesi and Donatella della Porta (1999) have described global protest as multilevel, international games. But all protest operates at different levels and across many arenas, whether those arenas are local, regional, national, global, or a combination of all of these. Arenas offer a kind of “mediation” between different players (Amenta, 2006).

When scholars reify arenas into static structures, they implicitly embrace a “lock and key” model of strategic engagement: protestors search for a weak spot that will allow them access to the polity. Their agency consists in trying a succession of keys. Cultural approaches sometimes fall into their own version of lock and key: activists try one frame after another until they hit upon one that resonates with audiences. 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.10

By looking at players in arenas, we highlight time, interaction, and process, all of which are obscured in more structural models. Pam Oliver (1989: 4) similarly talks about “these chains of action and reaction [that are] outside the control or direction of any person or organization.” According to two symbolic interactionists,

Process is not just a word. It’s shorthand for an insistence that social events don’t happen all at once, but rather happen in steps: first one thing, then another, with each succeeding step creating new conditions under which all the people and organizations involved must now negotiate the
next step. This is more than a theoretical nicety. It makes theoretical room for contingency. ... The interactionist emphasis on process stands ... as a corrective to any view that insists that culture or social structure determines what people do. (McCall and Becker, 1990: 6)

Tracing interactions over time will address the goals of the players, the rules of the arenas, the meanings players attach to those arenas, as well as the resources and skills that players bring with them or acquire in the arenas. We can also observe processes such as arena switching, alliance-building, and decision-making. We should also be able to see changes: the processes by which players emerge, change, and dissolve; the shifting boundaries and stakes of arenas. By analyzing interactions, and the choices various players make during them, we aim for a fully dynamic vision of how protest unfolds. Both structural and cultural approaches have rarely been able to move beyond static models, despite heroic efforts. Strategic models should do better.

What Follows

We have brought together experts on the interactions between political protestors and the many other players with whom they interact, including components of the state, such as courts, police, legislators, armies, and unelected rulers (these contributions appear in Duyvendak and Jasper [2015]); related players such as unions and professions; cultural institutions such as universities, artists, mass media, and religious organizations; as well as other players in the social movement sector such as potential allies or competitors, recruits, or funders.

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 (just as protestors are obsessed with media coverage, so scholars sometimes seem obsessed with studying it). 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.

Part 1 begins by taking the players usually known as social movements or movement organizations, and looking at them as arenas for internal conflict; it also looks at external players that are expected to be sympathetic and supportive to protestors. In Chapter 1, Francesca Polletta and Kelsy Kretschmer
address the scholarship that has tended to treat the causes of factionalism as internal to the organization, showing instead that groups’ interactions with other players – government actors, funders, groups within this movement and others, and so on – have had divisive effects. Yet factional battles do not necessarily sound the death knell for the organization or even foreclose the possibility of future collaboration between breakaway organizations and their parents. Polletta and Kretschmer show how a strategic perspective can illuminate causes and consequences of factionalism, while also showing the compatibility of that perspective with a more cultural-structuralist one.

Ann Mische’s Chapter 2 also looks inside movements, examining the communicative dilemmas generated by the fractal structuring of social movement arenas, in which major divisions among camps are mirrored in internal subdivisions at multiple levels, generating complex configurations of alliance and opposition. Mische shows how these internal subdivisions generate stylistic and strategic challenges for players, as they engage in symbolic and material battles over control of movement organizations and agendas. By analyzing the breakdown of a Brazilian student congress, she shows how commitments to styles of communication among movement leaders constrained them in dealing with moments of crisis, despite their own skilled efforts at mediation and alliance-building.

We then turn to external funders. Most research on the role of foundations in contentious claims-making has emphasized how patrons channel collective action in the direction of moderation and professionalization; this movement-centric view of foundations is illuminating in many ways but limiting in others. Ed Walker in Chapter 3 examines the factors that shape foundation giving in the health sector as well as how those funders provide resources to health advocacy organizations and social movement organizations (SMOs). Foundation giving is shaped more heavily by organizational and institutional pressures on foundations than by the mobilization of advocacy groups. In addition, foundations try to strategically align the interests of their donors with those of the advocacy groups they fund. The funding of SMOs serves as a covert marketing practice by the corporate parents of these foundations.

In Chapter 4 Christian Scholl looks at allies, in analyzing anti-summit protests as a chain of tactical interactions. Focusing on how different players create, shape, redefine, and reproduce political arenas, he examines five players, constituting, at the same time, arenas for dynamic interactions: counterglobalization movements, intergovernmental organizations, governments, police, and the media. Strategic interactions, especially through
tactical innovation and adaptation, neutralized the impact of anti-summit protests.

Part 2 turns to several types of formal organization that have strong identities and interests of their own, operating in markets: corporations, professions, and trade unions. These are sometimes allies of protestors, and sometimes – especially corporations – targets and opponents. Philip Balsiger’s Chapter 5 looks at the interactions between movements and corporations using the case of the anti-sweatshop movement. He discusses the “influence chains” that movement players create outside of and within corporations to make firms change, and how firms comply with, confront, or sidestep movement demands. The interaction between movements and corporations may lead to the creation of new markets (arenas) by taking up some of the demands made by movement players.

In Chapter 6, Frank Dobbin and Jiwook Jung examine the growing power of corporations, through their control of resources, influence over the life chances of individuals, and role in protecting everything from the environment to the safety of individuals. Protest movements are increasingly addressed not to nation-states, but to corporations. Moreover, professional groups have increasingly taken on the role of social movements, both inside and outside the corporation. Thus the civil rights movement was taken up by personnel professionals, who promoted equal opportunity from their professional perches within the firm; the shareholder value movement was led by professional institutional investors who directed their activism at publicly held corporations.

Ruth Milkman looks at labor unions in Chapter 7. Beginning with the disconnect between the sociological literature on the labor movement and the larger literature on social movements, she explores the potential of the players-and-arenas perspective for analysis of unions and the labor movement. Milkman argues that unions and labor movements are different from the other players considered in this volume, in that they are both part of the “establishment” and at the same time agents of social protest. The US labor movement in particular plays both an “inside” and an “outside” game, although as its power and legitimacy have declined in recent decades, the balance has increasingly tipped toward the latter.

Part 3 examines players that generate or frame ideas and facts for broader audiences, as well as the general public that is often the target of these claims. In Chapter 8 Walter Nicholls and Justus Uitermark investigate the role of intellectuals within social movements, particularly the contradiction that intellectuals can be a force for movements but may also exercise power over others within movements. The chapter explores the resulting
Power of Representation dilemma – intellectuals have superior skills of representation but if they use them for the movement, they marginalize others within the movement – through a historical overview of how some activist intellectuals in the past have addressed and sought to resolve the dilemma. The chapter also examines the roles of intellectuals in the immigrant and LGBT rights movements in the United States.

In Chapter 9, Alissa Cordner, Phil Brown, and Margaret Mulcahy look at the strategic role of scientists and public health officials. Through a case study of state-level regulation of flame-retardant chemicals, situated in the larger context of anti-toxic legislation and environmental health controversies, they examine how various players interact in regulatory arenas and justify their positions through the language of science. Players identifying as scientists or activists often operate in overlapping arenas, make similar claims to scientific knowledge, and challenge conventional ideas about the separation of science from policy arenas.

In Chapter 10 Edwin Amenta, Neal Caren, and Amber Celina Tierney play out the image of arena as sports venue, in showing that although news coverage is crucial to the goals of social movements, the news media do not treat protestors as players analogous to institutional political actors. The media serve as a kind of referee for institutional political contenders, who are treated like star players, but act like stadium security guards or owners for protestors, who are treated like unruly fans or wannabe players and are usually barred from the discursive contests of the news. That said, protestors do often gain coverage, and sometimes favorable coverage, as the authors show through a review of the literature and recent research from the Political Organizations in the News project, which encompasses all articles published mentioning SMOs in several major US newspapers in the 20th century.

Chapter 11, by Silke Heumann and Jan Willem Duyvendak, is about the interactions between religious organizations and protest movements. They ask when and why religious groups become political players, analyzing the involvement of Catholic and Evangelical churches in the Nicaraguan “pro-life” movement. These churches would seem to be a natural ally for the anti-abortion movement, but Heumann and Duyvendak demonstrate that alliances always require strategic work.

Hahrie Han and Dara Strolovitch, in Chapter 12, explore the relationships between bystander publics and social movements using the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street as case studies. Bystander publics that allied with the movement shaped each movement’s relationship to what scholars have come to call “intersectionally marginalized populations.” They also af-
fected how each movement chose its targets and characterized economic problems and their victims. Rather than standing passively on the sidelines, many members of “bystander publics” are actively engaged in processes and institutions that build their democratic capacities (such as civic skills, motivations, and networks).

Finally, Jan Willem Duyvendak and Olivier Fillieule join forces in the conclusion to draw broader theoretical implications of the players-and-arenas approach for the study of social movements, linking the theory more to interactionist traditions. They also raise a number of useful questions about the differences between arenas and fields.

In addition to the chapters in this volume, a second volume is in production, called *Breaking Down the State*, which contains chapters on the players formerly known as the state: bureaucrats, legislators and parties, police and armies, infiltrators, and more. They apply the same players-and-arenas framework as the contributors to this volume, examining how these state agents interact with protestors.

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**Notes**

1. I think that the players-and-arenas framework fits other relatively institutionalized strategic interactions as well, including markets, wars, diplomacy, electoral politics, sports, and more (Jasper, 2006).
2. Our ability to see a player as an arena and to see (some) arenas as players clarifies, I hope, a confusion in the concept of field: in some cases the field is defined more or less as a social movement, composed of individuals and organizations sharing goals, while in others it is broadened to include “the agencies, organizations, and countermovements that resist or aid the movement. ... In this usage, a field of contention is a structured arena of conflict
that includes all relevant actors to whom a social movement might be connected in pursuing its claims" (Taylor and Zald, 2010: 308).

3. In Freud's model of the Unconscious, materials are placed there because they are too dangerous to deal with consciously. In contemporary cognitive psychology, on the other hand, there are many processes with which we understand the world and use information that are unconscious only because they are so numerous that we can't be aware of them all. I call them "feeling-thinking processes." Some of them can be brought into awareness if we stop to think about them, others (such as biochemical signals) cannot be.

4. I see this effort to talk about players and arenas rather than social movements and environments as parallel to Bruno Latour's critique of "the social" as hopelessly vague and misleading, as when he says that "to explain is not a mysterious cognitive feat, but a very practical world-building enterprise that consists in connecting entities with other entities, that is, in tracing a network" (Latour, 2005: 103). For me, we explain politics when we assemble a long sequence of actions and reactions by players in arenas. (Although, unlike Latour, I prefer to restrict actors to humans, partly because emotions are central to action. Objects have causal impacts, but they do not have emotions.)

5. In a similar effort, Christoph Haug (2013:710) defines a "meeting arena" as "a socio-political setting which evokes expectations regarding appropriate conduct, the existence of certain roles, the definition of the situation and other aspects of the interaction order that potential participants can expect to find during a meeting event in a particular arena." Meeting arenas, he says, vary according to membership, rules, hierarchy, monitoring, and sanctions.

6. Thompson (1993: 273) asks, "Is market a market or is market a metaphor? Of course it can be both, but too often discourse about 'the market' conveys the sense of something definite – a space or institution of exchange (perhaps London's Corn Exchange at Mark Lane?) – when, in fact, sometimes unknown to the term's user, it is being employed as a metaphor of economic process, or an idealization or abstraction from that process." The same could be said of arenas, and we need to be clear about when we are speaking of a physical place and when we are speaking metaphorically.

7. In La Distinction (1979), Bourdieu mapped social classes along two dimensions, those with more or less capital and their proportion (at any given level) of economic and cultural capital; for maps of the bourgeoisie alone, seniority in the bourgeoisie replaced the amount of capital. Although he assumed that classes and class fragments compare and compete with one another, these fields were simply maps of different groups or subcultures, grouped by variables of interest to the sociologist. They were means of describing potential players, not the arenas in which they compete.

His fields of cultural production are similar (Bourdieu, 1993). French literary figures of the late 19th century are spread across a two-dimensional
grid: more or less established (old or young), and more or less successful in the marketplace. The field is actually structured by the outcomes of artistic production, as a way of describing the players, not how they compete with each other. Arena characteristics disappear into the relative success of the players (“bohemia” versus “academy,” for instance). Players, arenas, and outcomes are fused in the field, and “the space of available positions” in a field seems to be determined outside each field, by other competitive fields such as universities, and not by the rules of the field itself.

Fields work better than arenas for Bourdieu because of his reluctance to acknowledge that individuals make conscious strategic choices, rather than being driven by the early socialization of habitus (Jenkins, 1992: 87). On the model of an electro-magnetic field, individuals are influenced by unseen forces emanating from the field itself rather than by self-conscious strategies arising from interactions with other players (Martin, 2003). Husu (2013) observes that fields have similar strengths and weaknesses as political opportunity structures.

8. An arena, which in Roman times could be used for spectacles as well as competitions, is usually well structured, but most conflicts cut across arenas. Strategic engagements are somewhat like Howard Becker’s “worlds,” which “contain people, all sorts of people, who are in the middle of doing something that requires them to pay attention to each other, to consciously take account of the existence of others and to shape what they do in the light of what others do. In such a world, people do not respond automatically to mysterious external forces surrounding them. Instead, they develop their lines of activity gradually, seeing how others respond to what they do and adjusting what they do next in a way that meshes with what others have done and will probably do next.” These activities move in and out of arenas. See Becker and Poussin (2006: 277). Lemieux (2011) finds historical limits to the concept of field, suggesting that Bourdieu’s more strategic concept of “le jeu,” a game or stakes, is a more general theoretical advance.

9. McCarthy and Zald (1977: 1217) commented, perspicaciously, “The concern with interaction between movements and authorities is accepted, but it is also noted that social movement organizations have a number of strategic tasks. These include mobilizing supporters, neutralizing and/or transforming mass and elite publics into sympathizers, achieving change in targets. Dilemmas occur in the choice of tactics, since what may achieve one aim may conflict with behavior aimed at achieving another. Moreover, tactics are influenced by interorganizational competition and cooperation.” Their otherwise useful hypotheses did not really highlight these dilemmas.

10. Interactionists have their own version of this structural trap, when the game itself is the center of attention and is allowed to define the players. It is then much like a field. I prefer to give players some (relative) autonomy from the games they play, which among other advantages allows them backstage (internal) preparation for external engagements.
References

Duyvendak, Jan Willem, and James M. Jasper, eds. 2014. *Breaking Down the State*. Amsterd: Amsterdam University Press.
INTRODUCTION


