March 4, 1997

Invitation to Founding Workshop of "States and Market Formation" Program at Santa Fe Institute

The Santa Fe Institute invites you to attend the founding workshop for its new "State and Market Formation" program, under the current direction of John Padgett. Along with its already innovative Economics program, this new initiative represents the decision of SFI to expand beyond its strong physics and biology core into the social sciences—in particular into sociology and political science. The goal of the founding workshop is to help to define an agenda to guide SFI in developing its own distinctive contribution to social science concerns.

In the past, the physics and biology core of SFI has concentrated on the "dynamics of highly interactive systems"—usually large-n, often with a self-organizing evolutionary twist. Therefore, upon considering a new research field to support, it seemed natural for SFI to gravitate towards large-scale social transformations, on historical time frames. Much obviously has already been written on such topics. However, past research typically has "explained" macro-organization (e.g., state, market, class) through positing the historical outcome at the analytic outset, and then through "telling history backwards" via one type or other of modernization teleology. [Reacting against this, many historians have given up on theorizing historical process at all.] Not only does this reification suppress the heterogeneity, contradiction, and openness of actual human history, but also it elides the central theoretical task—deriving from interactive process those units (macro and micro) which become coherent enough to "act". Such a derivation, on empirical as well as modeling fronts, is the central theoretical mission of the "State and Market Formation" program.

The ambiguous phrase "interactive process", however, can be interpreted in many scientific ways, which this founding workshop will attempt to identify and compare. Evolutionary reproduction, learning (either of behavioral repertoires or of cognitive frames), conversation, exchange, and "chains of opportunity" are just some of the candidates. The current director has found social network analysis to be one useful theoretical tool for focusing on the structure of interaction per se, while remaining sensitive to the complexities of actual human history. Micro processes of local learning and of channeled opportunities fit naturally into this framework, and provide one processual bridge for "actors" and "organization"
to emerge from interaction. [Work on network macro-dynamics (cascades, tipping points, etc.) for the most part remains to be finished, but the techniques pioneered at SFI should prove of assistance in this obvious next step.]

For any successful discussion of states and markets, however, there is an obvious need to embed social networks in particular, or "interactive processes" more generally, both up and down. Up into institutions, which establish the ecology or governance framework within which social interaction evolves. And down into behavioral and cognitive processes, which generate the action that interaction concatenates. At the level of system, such embedding seems the key to the analysis of interesting dynamics (rather than just the comparative statics of equilibria). And at the level of cognition/behavior, such embedding seems the key to understanding "cognition in the wild" (rather than the self-enclosed mentalism typical of much contemporary psychology and economics).

Thus the charge to the founding workshop is actually two fold:

(1) The primary objective is to identify alternative "interactive processes" capable of inducing coherent "actors"/organization--both macro (states, markets) and micro (cognition, identities, repertoires).

(2) The secondary objective is to explore, within each of the "interactive processes" so identified, how institutions, social networks, and behavior/cognition can be linked.

Such general issues cannot be resolved in a few days. But the goal is to generate enough common interest to structure and sustain future research. The Santa Fe Institute sponsors sequences of related research projects and workshops, on a common theme, not unlike the Social Science Research Council or the Russell Sage Foundation (two models more familiar to American social scientists).

While the objectives of the founding workshop are primarily theoretical, the intent is not to discuss such matters merely in the abstract. Participants have been selected with an eye to their grounding in some empirical (often historical) expertise. Since substantive application ultimately is to the topics of state and market formation, the second day of the workshop will be devoted entirely to macro-oriented subjects and scientists of this genre. But since the theoretical thrust of the program is to ground our understanding of states and markets in non-reified interactional dynamics, the first day will be devoted to micro-oriented scientists of learning, cognition, and social networks. Conversation between these (hopefully compatible) sides will occur throughout, but will be the special charge of
commentators on the third half-day.

We hope that you will be able to participate. The time will be a weekend in the fall, the exact date of which will be chosen to maximize availability of invited participants. Possible options are 9/19–9/21, 9/26–9/28, 10/24–10/26, any weekend in November, and 12/12–12/14. Please tell John Padgett (padgett@datacomm.iue.it) if you can come, and if you can come, your dates of availability. Expenses of course will be paid.

Invited Participants to Founding Workshop of SFI Program on "State and Market Formation"

I. Alternate Micro Foundations (Fri. morn.)
   Walter Fontana, Theoretical Chemistry, Univ. Vienna
   John Holland, Psychology and Computer Science, Univ. Michigan
   Edwin Hutchins, Cognitive Science, Univ. Calif. San Diego
   Aaron Cicourel, Sociology, Univ. Calif. San Diego
   (moderator: John Padgett, Political Science, Univ. Chicago)

II. Organizational Fields (Fri. aft.)
   Miller McPherson, Sociology, Arizona Univ.
   John Padgett, Political Science, Univ. Chicago
   Andy Abbott, Sociology, Univ. of Chicago
   Paul DiMaggio, Sociology, Princeton Univ.
   (moderator: Michael Cohen, Political Science, Univ. Michigan)

III. Markets (Sat. morn.)
   Mark Granovetter, Sociology, Stanford Univ.
   Charles Sabel, Law and Political Science, Columbia Univ.
   David Stark, Sociology, Cornell Univ.
   Peter Evans, Sociology, Univ. Calif. Berkeley
   (moderator: David Lane, Statistics, Univ. Modena)

IV. States and Social Movements (Sat. aft.)
   Charles Tilly, Sociology and History, Columbia Univ.
   Sidney Tarrow, Government, Cornell Univ.
   Chris Ansell, Political Science, Univ. Calif. Berkeley
   David Laitin, Political Science, Univ. Chicago
   (moderator: Peter Bearman, Sociology, Univ. North Carolina)

V. General Commentary and Discussion (Sun. morn.)
   Jim March, Business School, Stanford Univ.
VI. Other invited SFI participants

Brian Arthur, Economics, SFI
Larry Blume, Economics, Cornell Univ. & SFI
Steven Durlauf, Economics, Univ. Wisc. & SFI
Bob Axelrod, Political Science, Univ. of Michigan & SFI
Stuart Kaufman, Biology, SFI
Murray Gell-Mann, Physics, SFI
George Gumerman, Anthropology, Univ. Illinois & SFI
Erica Jen, Vice President, SFI
Ellen Goldberg, President, SFI
interested business participants