A LOSS BUT NOT A DEFEAT

DAVID STARK

David Stark is Arthur Lehman Professor of Sociology at Columbia University and Professor of Social Science at the University of Warwick. His book, *The Sense of Dissonance: Accounts of Worth in Economic Life*, studies how organizations and their members search for what's valuable. A former Guggenheim Fellow, he has been a fellow at Cornell's Society for the Humanities, the Collegium Budapest/Institute for Advanced Study, the Santa Fe Institute, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, the Russell Sage Foundation, the Netherlands Institute of Advanced Study, and the Zhejiang Institute for Advanced Study (Hangzhou). Stark has been Principal Investigator for eleven major research projects funded by the National Science Foundation, using various methods including comparative historical analysis, ethnography, network analysis, and laboratory experiments. His current research is supported by a five-year Advanced Career Award from the European Research Council for a project on "Diversity and Performance: Networks of Cognition in Markets and Teams." – Address: Department of Sociology, Columbia University, 606 W. 122nd Street, New York, NY 10027, USA E-mail: dcs36@columbia.edu.

We wuz robbed! The coronavirus robbed us of our Wiko Spring. We wuz robbed of concerts, exhibits, and restaurants. Robbed of lunches together, Tuesday seminars, and Thursday dinners. Of guest rooms for family, colleagues, and co-authors. Robbed of late night, upper deck, front row seats on the M19 returning on the Ku'damm after a Berlin evening.

The term, from American sports, is not about the agony of losing to an opponent, but about the game being "stolen" by a particularly egregious bad call by a referee. Not about defeat but about something unfair. Our Fellows were now our friends, we had learned our way around the city, and by March we were ready to enjoy friends and the city on a new level. But the virus interfered. Just not fair. So, of course, we took it personally.

Yet, also of course, in the great scheme of things, the personal disruption was of nothing in light of the sufferings and deaths of so many. Already at the time, our anxieties were mild in comparison with those of our friends and families in Northern Italy and New York City. With the lakes and forests nearby, Grunewald was among the safest and least unpleasant places to spend a lockdown in relatively relaxation compared with where we might have been. Still, to lose a Wiko Spring seemed unfair.

But although some things were lost, it was certainly not a defeat. Zooming through late March, April, and May, we continued the seminars and even started new ones – camaraderie robust and friendships deepened.

I especially appreciated the new colloquium on COVID and society, "Thinking the Virus," that Daniel Schönpflug organized, responding to the initiative of Giovanni Galizia and others. For me, like many of us, March was a struggle. How to concentrate to do research and writing when one's attention was on the news from our home countries and where they and Germany were located on the shape of the curve? The weekly meeting helped me realize that I could read the news *and* do my work by turning my work to the problem of the day: testing.

It was March 18; I remember it well (my 70th birthday it was). One week earlier, Angela Merkel had given her famous address to the German people about the predicted severity of the coronavirus. The *British Journal of Sociology (BJS)* was processing the manuscripts for a Special Issue that I had just edited with my friend and colleague, Noortje Marres. The theme of the special issue was "Put to the Test: The Sociology of Testing." But not only that. It was then, while I was looking over the page proofs, that I saw again the opening sentence of the introductory essay that I had written with Noortje back in December, well before the outbreak of the pandemic: "Have you been tested?"

I immediately called Nigel Dodd, editor of the *BJS*. He, in turn, immediately embraced my suggestion that we expedite the publication of the special issue and orchestrate a social media campaign calling attention to its relevance. My next call was to my program officer at the European Research Council (ERC), notifying him that I would be making some modifications in the program of my five-year advanced research grant, specifically to devote resources to conducting video interviews with the authors of the special issue (as well as other specialists on testing) to hear their insights about the pandemic testing crisis. My third call was to Daniel, to sign me up for a slot in the special colloquium series. I got the third, for April 1.

"Have You Been Tested?" was the title of my presentation. I had worked hard in the intervening weeks, reading all I could about the pandemic, about epidemiological models, about different national regimes of testing, and about how the crisis was putting individuals, organizations, and institutions to the test. The response from the Wiko Fellows after my colloquium was encouraging, and so I threw myself even more into the work, reading the press, digesting scientific papers and policy reports, and doing zoom interviews with specialists.

A month later, I had a manuscript that was then improved by the prodding of quick-turnaround but tough reviews for *Sociologica*, where the substantial piece, "Testing and Being Tested in Pandemic Times," was published later in May. As the title suggests, two types of testing are proliferating during the coronavirus pandemic. The first type is *testing* – medical tests to diagnose the virus as well as epidemiological models that project its course. In the second type, actors, organizations, and institutions are *being tested* in a moment of social and political crisis. This essay analyzed the similarities and differences between these two major types of tests in order to understand their entanglements in scientific and public discourse.

The paper has a strong architecture, based on the work that I had recently completed for the introductory essay for the *BJS*. However, I was not so much applying concepts from that essay as, by writing a new one, becoming aware of ideas that were not explicit in the earlier. So, the *Sociologica* paper is organized around *three aspects of testing*. First, tests are frequently proxies (or projections) that *stand for* something. Second, a test is a critical moment that *stands out* – whether because it is a moment deliberately separated out or because it is a puzzling or troublesome "situation" that disrupts the flow of social life. Third, when someone or something is put to the test, of interest is whether it *stands up* to the challenge. With those three aspects, I could examine three key issues – *representation, selection,* and *accountability* – related to testing and being tested in the pandemic crisis.

Guess what? There was a time before the coronavirus. It seems almost a different geological era. I was working then, too. During the fall of 2019, in addition to editing and writing for the *BJS* special issue, I also edited a book for Oxford University Press, *The Performance Complex: Competition and Competitions in Social Life* (just published in summer 2020). The underlying question of the book is: What happens when ever more activities in many domains of everyday life are evaluated and experienced in terms of performance metrics? The ratings and rankings of such systems do not have prices but are more like the prizes of competitions. Yet, unlike organized competitions, they are ceaseless and without formal entry. Instead of producing resolutions, their scorings create addictions. In the performance society's networks of observation, all are performing and all keeping score. I refer to this assemblage of metrics, networks, and their attendant emotional pathologies as the *performance complex*.

The book developed out of three workshops (in Copenhagen, Bologna, and London) where an extraordinary group of contributors met, presented, commented, and argued with and encouraged each other – while enjoying some extraordinary restaurants (Copenhagen! Bologna!!). The chapters in the book study discrete contests (architectural competitions, international music competitions, and world press photo competitions); show how the continuous updating of rankings (and other new forms of competition) is both a device for navigating the social world and an engine of anxiety; and examine the production of such anxiety in settings ranging from algorithmic reputation metrics to the Chinese Social Credit System and from the pedagogy of performance in business schools to struggling musicians coping with new performance metrics on online platforms.

By May 25, things at Wiko were beginning to return to normal, the restaurant was open and a week or so later we were again able to meet (partly) for the weekly seminar. But things in the United States were not normal, because the empty streets of the virus days had become the sites of mass protests all across the county in the wake of the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25. Moreover, the movement of protest against police violence became something broader, as it provoked renewed attention to the problems of racism not only in police departments, but also in organizations and institutions of all sorts. Some of the research that I had been doing since arriving at Wiko with my geographically dispersed research team bore on this problem.

During my last month in Berlin, I completed a paper, "Who's Paying Attention? Racial Bias Blocks Learning," for which we had been conducting experiments and analyzing data throughout my time at Wiko. I'm particularly fond of this paper, and I hope it finds an appropriate outlet (it's currently under review). The opening paragraph does as good a job as I could do in summarizing the argument, and so I'll include it here:

> Who's paying attention? The question is posed in the context of sorrow and rage in the wake of recent police killings that has brought renewed attention to racism in the core institutions of American society. Science is no exception. We must pay attention. Scientists must be attentive to the experiences of minority colleagues, researchers, and students – as expressed in personal accounts and surveys – that their contributions are not receiving

the recognition they deserve. As part of this critical reflection, our research specifies the question "Who's paying attention?" quite literally. We provide experimental evidence of a racial disparity in attention: White Americans are more likely to ignore (and hence less likely to learn from) the choices of Black peers than those of White ones, resulting in missed opportunities and lower performance. We further show that this peculiar form of racial attention deficit disorder can be remedied by practices that deliberately recognize the prior accomplishments and ongoing contributions of underrepresented minorities. Our research findings suggest that measures to establish a climate of inclusive recognition hold promise for marshaling the benefits of racial diversity in scientific activity.

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