INTRODUCTION

Vision, Decision, Revision: Finding Topics, Audiences, and Voices

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IN PREPARATION

Social scientists do research; we teach and mentor younger scholars; and we discuss theories and findings at workshops and conferences. About conducting research, we know a great deal. Professors expound at length in graduate seminars and dissertation defenses on the challenges of matching research methods to research problems; the literature on data collection, theory, and tools of analysis could fill entire libraries. Less has been written about the crafts of teaching and mentoring,[1] and still less about how to improve one's skills in presenting work to academic or public audiences.[2]

There are other activities—core to the social scientific profession—that are almost entirely in the shadows. You will not encounter them in books or articles and, regardless of how important for becoming a successful social scientist, they are seldom, if ever, addressed in the course of graduate training. I have in mind three such activities. In addition to conducting research, teaching, and presenting their work, a good social scientist must (1) come up with compelling research topics, not once but repeatedly; (2) develop a publication strategy; and (3) learn how to improve a manuscript while navigating the process of peer review.

Knowledge about such practices is not taboo, or secretive, but tacit. It is not explicit or codified, and as such is not taught in the classroom. This knowledge is acquired—sometimes painstakingly—over the course of a scholarly career.

But tacit knowledge is not precluded from being an object of conscious reflection. It might not be codified or reduced to formulas, steps, or recipes, yet it can be brought out of the shadows, illuminated, and demystified. Such reflection is exactly the task of this book.

About each of the three activities—discovering new topics, deciding where to publish, and improving manuscripts through revision—I asked ten or so prominent scholars to offer their reflections. The resulting thirty-three scholars I invited to contribute are all established figures in academia. Further still, it can be said without false modesty that they are among the most outstanding researchers and authors in their respective fields. Yet there is something that each of them shares with the PhD student looking for a dissertation topic or with the young scholar newly juggling the demands of researching, teaching, and publishing: each of them is a practicing sociologist. Like a surgeon or a sculptor, our contributors are highly skilled practitioners—in this case, of the sociological craft. Unlike dentists or attorneys, they do not have "a practice." But, like professional musicians or Olympic athletes, they practice every day.

Let me make four observations to prepare your reading. First, as you will see, none of these chapters offers recipes, formulas, or marching orders. These thirty-one chapters provide guidance for the practicing sociologist (whether the novice or the fully tenured). Yet this is not a "how-to" book. You will not be instructed, but there is much that you can learn. As you will see, moreover, the chapters are incredibly rich: they are packed with ideas, not simply about the task at hand but also with deep, sociologically theoretical insights. That is so even in the frequent cases when the author or authors seem to have adopted a casual, almost conversational tone.

Second, although the contributors were given the same question (distinctive for each activity), their answers vary widely. The great diversity of these chapters will strike you immediately. Along one axis of variation are enormous differences in style. As you will see (or perhaps I should say "hear"), one of the sources of pleasure in reading these strong writers is listening to distinctive writerly voices. Along another axis of variation is the content of their commentary. Indeed, one might think that such great variation provides no guidance at all: If the same question yields ten wildly different answers, is there really something that can be learned? In my view, the enormous differences in voice, in style, and in the intentions of the insights across the chapters are an asset, not a drawback. By confronting the reader with different—even directly contradictory—views and opinions, we affirm that on these matters of sociological practice, there is no one "best way."

Third, if there is not a clearly dominant pathway, it is also not the case that you must clear a passageway uniquely for and by yourself. You are not the first person who is navigating these multiple pathways, and you are certainly not alone. To demonstrate this, in this book you encounter scholars who are practicing sociology every day. Yes, practicing. About them we can also say that they are very practiced in their craft.[3] For the novice, these figures appear as giants. So, what do we do? Figuratively, our authors come down from their lecture hall pedestals, pull up a chair, sit down beside you, and talk, each with a distinctive voice. First one and then another, real personalities shine through, so alive. Here they are giving advice, as from one craftsperson speaking calmly to another member of the craft, not shouting it, not in a lecturing tone, being thoughtful, using humor, being caring. Frequently, they show their vulnerabilities: their manuscripts get rejected, they tear up drafts, they have doubts and worries, they curse at reviewers. But they persevere, and now, with some wonderful combination of confidence and humility, they share what they have learned. Because of this posture of talking rather than lecturing, the advice is so much more meaningful and activating. Do you see? You're not alone.

My fourth observation is how enjoyable it is to read these chapters. One of the major reasons for this is that the authors are having great fun in pulling together and putting out their thoughts. That's completely clear in the writing, and it was confirmed for me when the authors submitted their answers: almost all of them mentioned how much they had enjoyed thinking and writing about their topic. That's as it should be. There are aspects of our work life that are like a job. But being a sociologist (or a social scientist more generally) is not merely a job; it's a profession, a calling. As a vocation, it entails obligations. But obligations need not be burdens. Our work can be a joy. Perhaps the most important unstated lesson of these enjoyable chapters: throw yourself into your work and enjoy our wonderful profession.

A PRACTICING SOCIOLOGIST

Why do I refer to "practicing sociologists"? To elaborate that concept, I'll refer to the introductory remarks that I've made to the incoming PhD cohorts in the departments of sociology at Columbia (where I was twice chair) and at Cornell (where I was, for a good part of my time there, the director of graduate studies). Just as soon as everyone was settled around the table on the morning of that orientation, I'd say, "Hello, I'm David Stark and I want to welcome you to the Department of Sociology." The very next thing from me would be a pause (for dramatic effect, sure), and then I would say: "If you were in medical school, at exactly this point when you begin your training to become a physician, you would all stand up and take the Hippocratic Oath." Everyone is looking at me and at each other like, "What is this about? Why is he telling us this?" And I'd continue, "In med school, taking the Hippocratic Oath is a defining moment in which one grasps that something has changed in one's life. Sociology doesn't have a Hippocratic Oath, but I want you to understand that, from this moment on, you're not a student. You're a practicing sociologist."

Making the gesture of the basketball player shooting free throws, I'd go on to say, "I'm a practicing sociologist. I practice sociology every day." Then for the next fifteen minutes or so, I would elaborate on various ways in which the notion of practicing sociology could transform how they understood their role going forward. For example, whereas a student approaches coursework in a passive way, the practicing sociologist is more actively (critically and appreciatively) engaged. Active engagement doesn't begin and end with lobbing criticisms (the grad student equivalent of writing restaurant reviews), but with approaching every class, every seminar, every guest speaker as an encounter with a potential tool—whether a theoretical insight, a methodological innovation, or a trenchant research design—that could inform one's practice as a sociologist.

Moreover, an emphasis on "practice" means you can always improve. You must practice. Sometimes you miss, but the more you practice, the more skills you learn. It's a lifelong activity. It's for this reason that, although my undergraduates call me "Professor Stark," in interactions such as PhD seminars I am "David." Although we don't have the same status, we are all members of the same community of practicing sociologists. The same attitude applies in reverse. As I tell the participants at the beginning of the term of every PhD seminar: "I'm here to learn. The more you teach me and the more all of us can learn from each other, the better this course will be."

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

After this introduction, the major architecture of the book has three parts: (1) Encountering, (2) Publishing, and (3) Revising. For each segment, I had invited a set of sociologists to contribute to a special feature of the journal *Sociologica*.[4] So you can know the question or prompt that triggered each set of responses, I reproduce them here, as presented in my original invitation:

PART I. ENCOUNTERING: DISCOVERING A NEW RESEARCH PROJECT?

For the journal *Sociologica*, we are inviting a number of prominent sociologists to contribute to a special feature on "Heuristics of Discovery." In general terms, we're interested in how people come to work on the problems they do. We could use the word "choose," but perhaps some contributors will think that already has a decisionist bias. In an even broader sense, one could write about any aspect of work process—writing with a coauthor, matching method to research question, ways to think about data, the use of illustrations, or other topics.

PART II. PUBLISHING: WHAT IS YOUR PUBLICATION STRATEGY?

I write to ask you to reflect on your publication strategy. Some guiding questions: First, how do you know when a manuscript is ready to go? An obvious second question is about books versus articles or chapters in edited volumes. But also what about publishing in established outlets versus new journal ventures? Have you edited a volume or special issue of a journal? In general about publication strategy, what advice would you give to a young aspiring sociologist? Our telegraphic questions are merely illustrative. We cast a wide net, expecting high variance not only in your answers but also in the way you frame the question.

PART III. REVISING: HOW DO YOU IMPROVE A MANUSCRIPT FOR PUBLICATION?

We are interested in the process of improving a manuscript (article or book) for publication. We'll call the feature "Revising." Peer review is one aspect, but not necessarily. As with the previous special features, our query is open to interpretation.

Instead of summarizing the authors' contributions, in the remaining sections of this introduction, I've elected to offer some remarks of my own on the three topics, presented next as "Double Vision," "Decision," and "Revision." The temptation was strong to nominate themes prevalent across the various chapters. Perhaps even stronger was the urge to point you to lovely gems of wisdom, wit, or both. But these are too many, and they are so good. I would get lost yet one more time rereading the chapters; and in any case it would be too difficult to choose.

I know enough evolutionary theory to know that *selection* matters. Of course it does. But enough selection from me already. I've done the editorial work of selecting the topics and this cast of contributors. My guideline: read them all. Most likely, you will dip in and out. That's understandable—despite the casual tone, the chapters are dense, and, for some readers, the abrupt changes in style and tone from one author to another can be demanding. So, if you do put the book down, pick it up again, and then again.

DOUBLE VISION: ENCOUNTERING A NEW RESEARCH TOPIC

Think back to advice you received during your high school and college days. If you're like me, probably more than one person your senior said something like: "Get focused!" Perhaps more recently, a friend or an advisor, without actually employing the sports metaphor of "keeping your eye on the ball," used various expressions reminding you to keep an uncluttered, well-focused view on your path to the goal ahead.

On this matter, with his typical humor, the Yankee philosopher Yogi Berra offered: "If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up somewhere else." But Yogi's truism doesn't imply that getting and staying focused is the sole recipe for achieving goals. In fact, focus might be overrated. Of course, periods of intense focus are required lest you wander, aimlessly adrift. But unremitting focus on the given course could be just as detrimental. As we are biological organisms, it is our *peripheral* vision that is particularly sensitive to detecting movement. Without peripheral vision, our long-ago ancestors would have been devoured by large predators on the savannah; and it is precisely by *not* focusing that one can move quickly through a fast-moving crowd in the 42nd Street Times Square subway station.

For this reason, one of the epigraphs of my book *The Sense of Dissonance* was a passage from Dante's *Purgatorio*: "Fix not thy mind on one place only" (Stark, 2009). The object of study in that book was at the organizational level. In that context, Dante's injunction could be read as a warning to organizational decision makers of the dangers of locking in to prior successes. To thrive, even to survive, in rapidly changing environments requires something like an organizational peripheral vision.[5] The findings from my three ethnographic case studies suggested the positive effects of an organizational double vision: to the question "What's valuable?" answer by keeping multiple evaluative frameworks in play.

Applying this insight to our first practical challenge—encountering a new research problem—in place of the maxim "Stay focused," I'll substitute, "Pay attention." To make the case for this approach, let's start with a passage from "An Excess of Fact," an essay by Lee Friedlander, one of America's greatest photographers. Recalling an experience in adolescence in which he was "bitten by the mysteries of photography" and "learned its practical possibilities," Friedlander writes:

> The camera was a kind of net and what it caught had something to do with what was true, or truth in an excess of fact. The net is indiscriminate unless you point it and then are lucky. I might get what I hoped for and then some—lots of then some—more than I might have remembered was there. I only wanted Uncle Vern standing by his new

> car (a Hudson) on a clear day. I got him and the car. I also got a bit of Aunt Mary's laundry and Beau Jack, the dog, peeing on the fence, and a row of potted tuberous begonias on the porch and seventy-eight trees and a million pebbles in the driveway and more. It's a generous medium, photography (Friedlander, 1996:103).

To some, Lee Friedlander would be an odd choice if one is questioning the absolute value of focus: in the typical Friedlander photograph, *everything is in focus*. There's a lot going on in a Friedlander photograph, but not because it's frenetic or blurred. Instead, using reflection, shadow, and bold composition, Friedlander guides our attention. Look. You see here? Now look again; something else, and something different yet again. Pay attention. Windows are a recurring device. It is through car windshields that Friedlander (2010) sees America. Car windshields provide a framing, and then we notice the side-view mirror, a framing within a frame, and within it, an entirely different perspective on the setting. Shop windows can be mirrors reflecting what is behind the camera. But the same reflecting window can also be partially seen through—where there is a shadow, sometimes a shadow cast by the photographer. For Friedlander, the shadow reveals. By using it as something to be *seen through*, it is almost as if the shadow is illuminating a part of the scene that would otherwise be hidden.

So, I suggest reading the passage from Friedlander's essay again, this time replacing "the camera" and "photography" with "sociological research." Sociological research is a generous medium, casting a net that catches more than we see on first observation. If you are lucky and paying attention, your next research project will be one that was there in the shadows of one or another of your prior projects. It might be a minor finding that seemed odd at the time, or a line of investigation that you considered but put to the side, or an opening into a neighboring (or even distant) field to which you now turn your attention.

While you're attentive to materials and insights that are there in the shadows of your prior projects, don't forget the mirrors showing what's right behind you, just over your shoulder, so to speak. The cars from which Friedlander guided us to see America were not moving at the time he photographed from them. Like with the equally stationary shop windows, the cars' side-view and rear-view mirrors reflected not something from the past but something that was simply *behind* the photographer. Yet, in the remarkable visual vocabulary through which Friedlander's style had such a great and lasting impact on American photography, those reflected images were there, quite literally, right *in front of* the photographer.

Upon reflection, I recognized this process when I was close to completing a book on the political and economic transformations (some were saying "revolutions") in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. I was not yet on the lookout for a new topic. If I had not been paying attention, I might have locked in to my prior successes and continued, path dependently, to study Eastern Europe, or property transformation, or democratization. I didn't entirely stop doing any of those things, but I did encounter a new research problem—the so-called digital revolution that was happening right in front of my eyes, whether in Silicon Valley or Silicon Alley. My research in Eastern Europe had given me some preparation for studying the digital transformation in the United States. For one thing, I was somewhat immunized against the hype that surrounded the digital revolution. Moreover, I had some conceptual tools—notions about the "heterarchy" of value or the "network properties of property," for example—that gave me preparation to get started in the new field.[6] But it could not be just a matter of observing a new setting through exactly the same lenses: that starting point gave me some advantages but could also cloud my vision if I was not aware of its limitations.

Concepts and methods, like all the screens upon which we project our representations, conceal at the same time that they reveal

(Girard and Stark, 2007). Strictly speaking, one cannot pay attention to one's blind spot, but one should be attentive to the ways in which it allows *and* limits one's vision.[7]

Turning to peripheral vision, I find it helpful to read work that is not at the core of the field I'm researching. Of course, one must be familiar with the current debates. But that crowded, consecrated core is overshadowing other excellent work at the periphery of the field. That's where it can also pay to pay attention. Read work (and go to talks) by researchers who are reading (and thus being influenced by) different stuff than you. That way, you can be influenced by papers that you yourself have never directly encountered.

In my own case, the best way to promote peripheral or double vision is to work on more than one project at a time. As many of the chapters in the book indicate, that next project can appear by serendipity. In my experience, it doesn't matter how the second (in parallel, at the same time) project comes about. What matters is that it has to be different enough from the other. A recent paper of mine is exemplary in this respect. While working with one set of coauthors on an experimental study of how racial diversity affects performance (Levine, Reypens, and Stark, 2021), I was simultaneously working with a different coauthor on a network analytic paper on patterns of attention (Prato and Stark, 2022). Without the latter, I doubt that I would have come up with the core concept that was signaled in the title of the experimental paper: "Racial Attention Deficit."

That paper also shows a process that I'll call *being prepared to be surprised by your obsessions*. At first glance, this seems to be at odds with the line of argument I've been making, characterized as being alert to the dangers of becoming captivated and then captured by one's previous successes. Let's look closer. In the situation at hand, the topic was race, an area in which I was not an established researcher. The sense of novelty was amplified, moreover, by the fact that I was still new to experimental techniques. The novelty of methods, but even more the novelty of my engagement in a new field, was part of the attraction, multiplied by knowledge that the problem was important and a realistic anticipation that the research was likely to be consequential. And so, it was with a strong feeling of surprise that suddenly one day I discovered that I was now, in this research on race, once again grappling with a fundamental problem that had animated my theoretical interests and my empirical research already from the middle of the 1980s—the problem of worth. It was back then, in 1986, that I had written about how the tool makers in the Hungarian factory I was studying had used the opportunity of forming an intrapreneurial partnership in an attempt to gain recognition of their worth. Yes, the experimental research (like the network analytic research with Matteo Prato) was about who was paying attention to whom. But in a deeper sense, I recognized that it was about recognition.

The situation is familiar enough—one encounters something as a surprise and then, in the very next moment, it immediately seems completely obvious. Indeed, it was a surprise. I had not deliberately set out to create a research design to study the problem of worth in the context of race. When Sheen Levine and I started to work on the project, we had finished a study showing that ethnic diversity contributes to error detection by disrupting conformity. The new project, with a postdoc named Charlotte Reypens, would be something about race and observational learning. During the initial period of research design, and even during the early pilot studies, nothing in our conversations was about concepts of worth and recognition.

It was not the first time that I had been surprised to find that the problem of worth (or some similarly fundamental theoretical preoccupation) had been there in the shadows. Was I returning to an old problem? Yes, as in a musical composition, the theme was coming around again, returning. But, taking this new turn, it was not a simple repetition. Paying attention means being open to the world and to its new problems and challenges. Paying attention also means being prepared to accept your obsessions when they catch you by surprise.

DECISION: FINDING YOUR AUDIENCE

In his chapter here, Shamus Khan observes that in order to have publications, you must first have written something publishable; so his take on publication strategy is about his *writing* strategy. I'll take up a similar line of thinking: to have a publication strategy you must first know your audience. For writing at the beginning stages of one's academic career, I interpret this expression literally; rather than a general *idea* about your audience, it helps to write for people you actually know, or at least have particularly in mind.

Let's start with the dissertation. Of course, you will be writing for your advisor. That's already part of the problem. Writing for just one other person definitely won't do it, no matter how smart, thoughtful, and kind that person is. Widening the circle to the three or four other members of your dissertation committee is a step out, but not far enough. Your friends, your close pals in your graduate program, are good because that gets you started thinking about writing for your peers. I write my best when I'm writing for my peers. That's as it should be because science is very much peer-to-peer. So it follows that, as the audience for your dissertation and your first publishable papers, you should be *targeting other PhD students*.

Before elaborating on several reasons behind this targeting, a word about my own experience. I was not, nor should you be, thinking of an abstraction known as "other graduate students in sociology." No, I really do mean particular people. In the case of my first academic publication (Stark, 1980) and then my dissertation, at the center of my audience were Michael Burawoy, Magali Sarfatti-Larson, and Erik Olin Wright. "Yeah, right," you say, "two of the three became presidents of the American Sociological Association!" That's true, but not the point. At the time I was writing, they were just a few years my academic senior. As I recall, when I met each of them, they were writing their PhD dissertations.

Erik, Michael, and Magali were not students with whom I hung out in my department. We would later become friends, but at the time we were friendly acquaintances. I was reading their work, I had heard them speak on different occasions, and we had all participated at a wonderful conference on labor process theory where I was one of the presenters. Meeting, communicating, interacting—this is the key. Your target audience consists of other researchers in your field. You need to get out and meet them. Go to workshops and conferences (and not necessarily the biggest ones), introduce yourself, and offer to read and comment on their work. It's as part of a community of researchers that you will write for an audience that is interested in your work. Your faculty advisors want you to finish; but from the peers in your broader community, you get something more. From that community of peers you'll get criticism and encouragement, but even more important, a sense of urgency, even a kind of pressure: "Get that piece out, it's an important part of what we're doing, we need it, c'mon do it."

As your ideas develop, you will write for broader, anonymous audiences. The question is how to develop your ideas so you have something worth offering. In my case, it helped to have particular scholars in mind. Aim high. Think about the people who are having or will have an impact on the field, the ones whose ideas grab you. If you can meet them, do so. If not, still reach out. Write personally to scholars you admire.

Posting on social media might help you reach an audience, but it's not a substitute for making a connection to particular others. The way to raise the standards of your work is to have in mind and write for people with very high standards. As a young researcher, I wrote for Claus Offe, one of Europe's most outstanding sociologists. I had heard him speak several times while I was a graduate student fellow at Harvard's Center for European Studies. It was only later that I made his acquaintance. Even before then, I sent Claus my papers, frequently in manuscript. I wasn't terribly preoccupied with the number of people I was reaching. What mattered more was the quality of the people who knew and appreciated my research. It was my great fortune that Pierre Bourdieu and Janos Kornai also helped me in this way.

Over time, the audiences that I had in mind for any particular piece became less embodied. I say "audiences" because there was a long period in which many of the major pieces I was publishing were intended for two or more research communities, something about which I had not been explicitly aware until this writing. These include a book addressed to economic sociologists *and* political sociologists (Stark and Bruszt, 1998); a social sequence analysis of network positions targeting historical sociologists *and* network analysts (Stark and Vedres, 2006); several studies written for economic sociology *and* science and technology studies (Beunza and Stark, 2004, 2012); and a piece advocating cultural network analysis addressed to network analysts *and* cultural sociologists (De Vaan, Stark, and Vedres, 2015).

There have been other, more peculiar audiences. Writing about the economic and political transformations in Eastern Europe in the 1990s (Stark, 1996; Stark and Bruszt, 1998), I had in mind contemporary readers, of course. Yet, even more important, the real audience I was writing for was one that, I hoped, would read my work some twenty-five or more years in the future. Why? At the time, the prevailing view was that the countries of the former Soviet bloc were in transition, with the outcome known in advance: they would become liberal democratic societies with free elections and free markets. The only question was which country was wearing the yellow jersey leading the race to the promised land. For those who looked at the world through the distorting lens of the transitologists' crystal ball, the present wasn't interesting. For me, it was this messy present that was so fascinating. I proposed to analyze it as best I could without the optics of an imagined future, in hopes that some reader in the future would be interested in learning what was happening in the five or so years on either side of 1989.

Perhaps my most peculiar, certainly the most singular, audience was for an op-ed piece that my coauthor and I published in the *New York Times* in December 2015 (Levine and Stark, 2015). About a year earlier, Sheen Levine and I had published an article that used experimental methods to test the effect of ethnic diversity on market outcomes (Levine et al., 2014). We had found that markets of ethnically diverse traders outperformed those that were ethnically homogeneous. The message of the paper: racial/ethnic diversity deflates price bubbles and leads to less mispricing because it disrupts conformity. The paper received considerable attention in the press, especially in the financial pages of some major newspapers. The opportunity to write an op-ed piece appeared when we learned about a major affirmative action legal case that was being heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. Abigail Fisher, a white student, had sued the University of Texas on the grounds that she was denied admission to the law school because of racial discrimination. Her attorneys, we learned, were making the argument that there was no scientific evidence supporting the claim that racial diversity contributed to a better learning environment. Our experimental study was not in an educational context, but markets are a kind of learning environment, and the error detection that we documented in the diverse setups was a form of learning. So, drawing on the lessons of that study, we submitted 1,000 words to the *New York Times*.

The editorial board of the *Times* expressed interest in the piece, provided that it could be published on the morning of the day of the oral hearings for that Supreme Court case. That gave us about thirty-six hours to revise the paper, responding to the very demanding conditions of the *Times* fact-checkers and working closely with a member of the editorial board. In that back-and-forth, we were able to read between the lines to infer that the editorial board of the *New York Times* had a very clear and precise audience in mind: Justice Anthony Kennedy, the swing vote on the Court. Coming to this realization, we were better able to interpret subtle cues, for example, directing us to several important prior cases, including an important opinion written by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. We are under no illusions that our piece made a difference. But it was interesting to learn that the intended audience for that opinion piece was the justice who would go on to write the majority opinion in the case of *Fisher v. University of Texas*. The Court decision upheld the lower court decision (i.e., ruled against Fisher). Whether they are known to you personally or persons whom you will never encounter, knowing your audience is the first step in a publication strategy.

REVISION: GIVING VOICE TO YOUR IDEAS

Revision can begin from the first lines put to the page. Putting one's thoughts in writing with the foreknowledge that they will be revised can be a blessing or a burden (or both). On the one hand, it can be liberating to start writing without worries. Not carelessly, but *carefree*. On the other hand, knowing that revision is always possible, but then starting it too soon can be debilitating. Word processing provides both sides of these possibilities. It is for this reason that my son, a very gifted writer, sometimes elects to use a manual typewriter when writing a first draft. The backspace functionality of the electronic keyboard, making it easy to delete a word or catch a spelling error, he found, creates a subconscious inclination toward correction. The manual keyboard encourages a freer style. Who cares about typos when one isn't even concerned that everything comes in complete sentences? Just bang it out, hit the carriage return, and move on to get another phrase on the page.

With some material to work with, the more deliberate phase of writing/revising turns phrases into sentences. For me, those must always be grouped as paragraphs. For an academic paper, the paragraph is the basic unit of writing. Paragraphs have sentences, of course. And first and last sentences of paragraphs are privileged.

But it's with paragraphs that one makes an argument. It's for this reason that I would never write with double-spacing. I prefer to use single-spacing, with a hard carriage return at the end of a paragraph so that each thought unit stands out clearly.

But preferences and modes of writing differ. The point is to find what works for you. I sometimes wish I could write worse first drafts. In principle, I see the virtue of Samuel Beckett's edict: "Fail. Fail again. Fail better." In practice, at least when it comes to the mechanics of writing, I'm more in the continuously-revising-while-writing mode. Most important, if I'm now reconciled to the problem that my first drafts are in some ways too good, I know that they're not perfect—and might never be. "If the world were perfect," said Yogi Berra, "it wouldn't be."

At some point while writing, I will start to think about the title. The importance of a good title cannot be overstated—not just because it helps the reader, but because the process of thinking about it *helps the writing*. In not insignificant ways, the process of revising can be seen through the lens of working to find the right title.

The timing of the appearance of the good title can vary considerably. In my own experience, most good titles have come about only after the project was well on its way. If the typical project gets completed at, let's say, version 6.0, then the final title is there by version 3.0 or so. That would have been the case for some of my titles: "Recombinant Property in East European Capitalism" (1996), or "Tools of the Trade: The Socio-Technology of Arbitrage in a Wall Street Trading Room" (with Daniel Beunza, 2004), or the already mentioned "Racial Attention Deficit" (2022). Sometimes the work of getting the fitting title was painfully protracted right up to the joyful moment when it clicked, for example, *The Sense of Dissonance: Accounts of Worth in Economic Life* (2009). At one extreme, "Structural Folds: Generative Disruption in Overlapping Groups" (with Balazs Vedres, 2010) didn't show up until the paper was in the revise-and-resubmit phase at *AJS* in something like version 8.0, if not more. Less often, and at the other extreme, the final title happened during the very first session of writing, such as "Put to the Test: For a New Sociology of Testing" (with Noortje Marres, 2020). And in one entirely singular case, the title "Permanently Beta" came first and then Gina Neff and I (2004) decided to write the paper.

When the right title happens is much less significant than *how* it comes about. Or, more accurately, from the standpoint of making the argument, actually finding the right title is less important than *what results from the process of searching* for it. This should be understood within the broader context of writing and revising. While the process of writing involves understanding how a given phrase or sentence or paragraph or section fits in relation to what came before and what will come after, revision involves two quite different aspects.

The first (less related to title) is discovering what needs to be expanded and what needs to be trimmed (or deleted altogether). I think about this as fulfilling the criterion of *needs to know*. In intelligence services, "need to know" refers to who (which agents or agencies) needs to know and at what level of clearance and specificity. Analogously, while revising, ask: Does the reader need to know this? If the reader doesn't need to know it in order to be able to grasp and be convinced by the argument, cut it. In parallel, also ask whether there is something else that the reader needs to know. If so, it must be included, and perhaps expansively.

The second aspect of revision is compression. To find the appropriate title, one must grasp the key concepts of the project. At first, it might take you many pages to figure it out. That's an idea in long form, but the underlying concept should be compressed and expressed (i.e., better if it is compressed expressively). Here's the one-sentence summary of my 1996 *AJS* paper: capitalism in Eastern Europe is not being built *on* the ruins of communism, but *with* the ruins of communism. There are various ways to express that concept, pointing to how property change is not a transition but a transformative recombination. It's one thing to have a concept; another to be able to express it succinctly; and yet another to give it a name. A concept might take a sentence, or at least a phrase, to state. Naming it can be done well in three words or less. Robert Merton was particularly gifted at this, giving us, for example, "unintended consequences," "role strain," and "self-fulfilling prophecy."

I was fortunate to come up with "recombinant property." But as important as the naming was the process of repeatedly looking for ways to compress and express the key ideas. Generating titles is a simple heuristic for doing so. It can come with making diagrams and trying different metaphors. While revising, I'll often make lists of title candidates. Those that don't work as the overall title will sometimes make excellent subheadings. Fail. Fail again. Fail better.

The writing is finished; I've revised the project in response to comments from friends and colleagues in the field; it was sent off to a journal or publisher; and now I've received the "we-regret-that-we-cannot-accept-revise-and-resubmit-please-respond-to-the-reviewers" letter from the editor. Judging from a good number of the contributors to this volume, my initial reaction to the reviewers' comments is not idiosyncratic: "Where does this journal find such idiots?" would be the apt characterization. But, of course, they're not (all) idiots. And so, waiting at least some days to let my temper cool, my coauthors and I frequently adopt the following tactic: we read the reviewers' comments out loud. I'll read several, then each coauthor does, going slowly, taking turns, reading deliberately. Heard in one's own voice or that of a trusted other, the comments can now have a different effect. From item to item: "That's a valid point; we should incorporate it." "Here the reviewer doesn't grasp our argument, but that's our problem, we need to restate it more clearly." "OK, but we don't agree, we'll have to deal with that." And so on.

So voiced, the reviewers' comments help us gain distance from the text. We can now see its flaws—and not just those indicated by the reviewers. We can now map out a strategy for revision. We've made notes on how to respond to reviewers, but those comments recede in importance as we get involved in conducting new analysis, reworking the introduction, and sometimes making radical changes in the architecture of the paper. Now, we're excited about revising.

After being more or less satisfied that we have a version we really like, we turn again to the reviewers' comments for the purpose of preparing our explicit response. We go down the list of reviewers' criticisms and suggestions, checking off:

- Yes, that's been dealt with, and this one, too, and that one as well.
- Hmmm. Here, we disagree with reviewer A, but on this same or similar point, we agree with reviewer B. So, no problem—we say we agree with reviewer B.
- Oh, that's such a good phrase. There's a sentence in that middle section where we can make some adjustments to incorporate it. Thank reviewer A.
- Whoops, we forgot about that, but we can take care of in a footnote.
- On this point, we disagree with reviewer B. We need to say so and to be very explicit about why we have that disagreement.

Once, a few years ago, a close friend told me, "David, I've finally learned how to write for the reviewers." I was saddened, and I said so. My friend is a great writer with a wonderful voice. We don't write for reviewers, I told him; we write for audiences. If you really do revise your paper for three reviewers, you have almost guaranteed that the paper will find its intended audience—three readers, and only three.

Over the past few decades, the reviewing process has evolved so it is now widely accepted that the reviewer's role is almost exclusively to detect errors. Some reviewers will resist this confinement, but lest journal pages be filled with articles that are absolutely flawless yet entirely uninteresting, editors and editorial boards must be adamant that error detection is only one of the tasks of the editorial process. Editors are overwhelmed, so the responsibility to resist the preoccupation with error detection is up to authors and audiences. Do not let the editorial process repress your voice. To be good, sociology needs more voices. We need new voices, excellent voices. If the so-called major journals do not offer readers articles with strong authorial voices, then readers should find other journals that do. As a writer, use the revision process to identify your audience and better voice your ideas. Clearly expressed, your voice will find its audience.

I hope that you will be able to take several reading sessions listening to the wonderful set of sociological voices in the chapters that follow. They write from considerable experience as researchers and as authors. I speak for all of them: We hope that the knowledge you gain from this book will be matched by genuine enjoyment while reading it. It has been a pleasure sharing with you our reflections on the tribulations and joys of practicing the sociological craft.

NOTES

1. As an exception, see Becker (n.d.).
2. About presenting in public, also exceptionally, see Stein and Daniels (2017). About writing, there are some excellent guides, including Becker (2008) and Eco (2015).
3. Exceptionally, one of the authors, Eric I. Schwartz, is not a sociologist. But as the editorial director of a major university press that is a leading publisher of books in sociology, Schwartz is a prominent figure in sociology, understood as a *field* (see Fligstein and McAdam, 2012) in which some participants are not themselves sociologists.
4. I am coeditor-in-chief at *Sociologica*, where these essays were originally published in three special symposia: "Heuristics of Discovery" (vol. 12, no. 1, 2018); "What Is Your Publication Strategy?" (vol. 13, no. 1, 2019); and "Revising" (vol. 16, no. 1, 2022).
5. On the importance of organizational peripheral vision, see Prato and Stark's (2022) network analytic study of observational learning.
6. On heterarchy, see Stark (1999, 2001). On recombinant property, see Stark (1996).
7. In terms of the anatomy of human perception, one's blind spot (where the optic nerve meets the retina) is what allows one to see. But at that spot itself, one is blind. For insights building on that observation, see especially von Foerster (1984) and Esposito (2013).

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