

THE PERFORMANCE COMPLEX: COMPETITIONS AND VALUATIONS IN SOCIAL LIFE

EDITED BY DAVID STARK

INTRODUCTION

1. The Performance Complex

David Stark

PART I. PERFORMANCE AS COMPETITION, COMPETITIONS AS PERFORMANCES

2. Pick the Winner, So You Can Then Choose the Reasons: Epistemic Dissonance in Architectural Competitions.

Kristian Kreiner

3. Competition and Consecration in the World Press Photo Awards

Marco Solaroli

4. Competitions as Complex Performances

Lisa McCormick

PART II. RATING PERFORMANCES: WHERE DO I STAND IN THE RANKINGS?

5. Evaluating Evaluations in Higher Education: How Rankings Can Change What Matters and Why

Wendy Espeland

6. What's Observed in a Rating?: Rankings as Orientation in the Face of Uncertainty

Elena Esposito and David Stark

7. Crowdsourcing Before the Smartphone: The Zagat Survey's Quantification of Everyday Life in 1980s New York

Will Payne

8. On Ranking and Rigging: Commodification and Portfolio Formation on Webcam Sex Platforms

Olav Velthuis and Niels van Doorn

PART III. PERFORMANCES OF VALUE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

9. Post-liberal Valuation?: Pragmatics of Gamification and Weaponisation

William Davies

10. What are Digital Reputation Measures Worth?

Dominique Cardon

11. Merit, Morality, and Market: The Chinese Social Credit Experiment

Jonathan Bach

12. Performing Numbers: Musicians and their Metrics

Robert Prey

13. Business Education and Anxiety in the Performance of Value

Fabian Muniesa

Jacket blurb

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What's valuable? Market competition provides one kind of answer. But competitions offer another. On one side, *competition* is an ongoing and seemingly endless process of pricings; on the other, *competitions* are discrete and bounded in time and location, with entry rules, judges, scores, and prizings. This book examines 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. To understand these developments, we study discrete contests (architectural competitions, international music competitions, and world press photo competitions); show how the continuous updating of rankings 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 the pedagogy of performance in business schools to struggling musicians coping with new performance metrics in online platforms. In the performance society, networks of observation – in which all are performing and all keeping score – are entangled with a system of emotionally charged preoccupations with one's positioning within the rankings. From the bedroom to the boardroom, pharmaceutical companies and management consultants promise enhanced performance. We refer to this assemblage of metrics, networks, and their attendant emotional pathologies as the *performance complex*.