

## Curating Coherence: Towards a Political/Poetical Theory of Expertise

David M. McCourt, UC-Davis

Daniel J. Levine, University of Alabama

Since Eyal and Bucholtz (2010), a growing body of sociological literature studies expertise in terms of liminality. On this account, expert fields mediate those “fuzzy zones of contact and overlap” that form between scientific knowledge (however conceived) and political power (however institutionalized or enacted). Drawing on Latour – whose own work focuses on generating cohesive publics around ‘matters of concern’ – expert authority comes not from mastery of a body of recondite and/or technical knowledge, nor by command of particular discourses; rather it is *performed*, “by assembling the necessary material and cognitive and social equipment, as so many prostheses, into a coherent form of agency.”

It is this notion of ‘coherence’ that forms our point of departure. Of what does it consist, and what narrative emplotments or ‘story arcs’ are available to the expert? How do we account for the felt sense of ‘concern’ which such successful performances engender in their audiences? Are there relations between ‘genres’ of expert performances and those genres, categories and forms of narration familiar to aesthetic and/or literary theory? If so, what connections can be drawn between the appeal of those genres and the ideological and/or political sensitivities to which they appeal to and serve to galvanize? What ontologies, historiographies/historiosophies, or theodicies can be discerned within their folds? Put differently, is there a ‘politics’ to the poetics of expert performances; and if so, how can we trace its broad ideological outlines, and its limitations?