

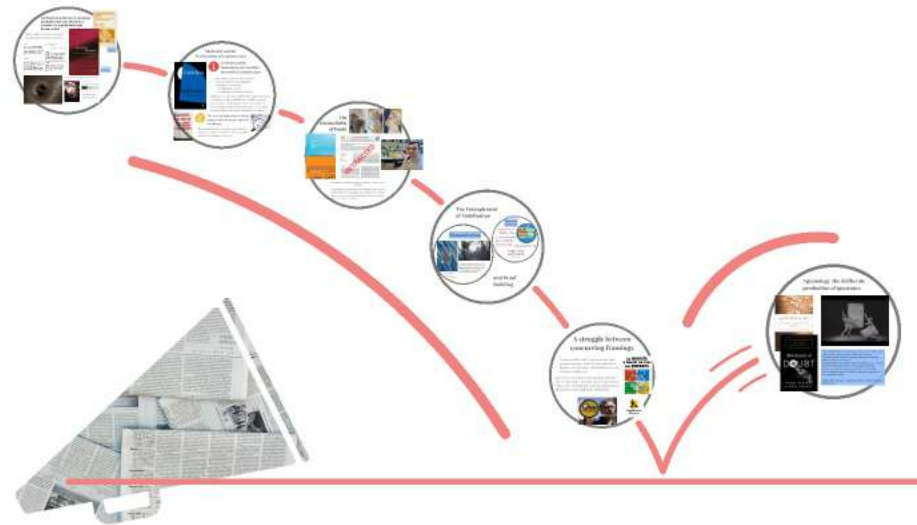
# Rethinking Expertise ( )

Thomas Tari

24 January, 2024

Sciences Po, Reims

## ... through Controversies (3.1)



### 3.2 Trust in Numbers

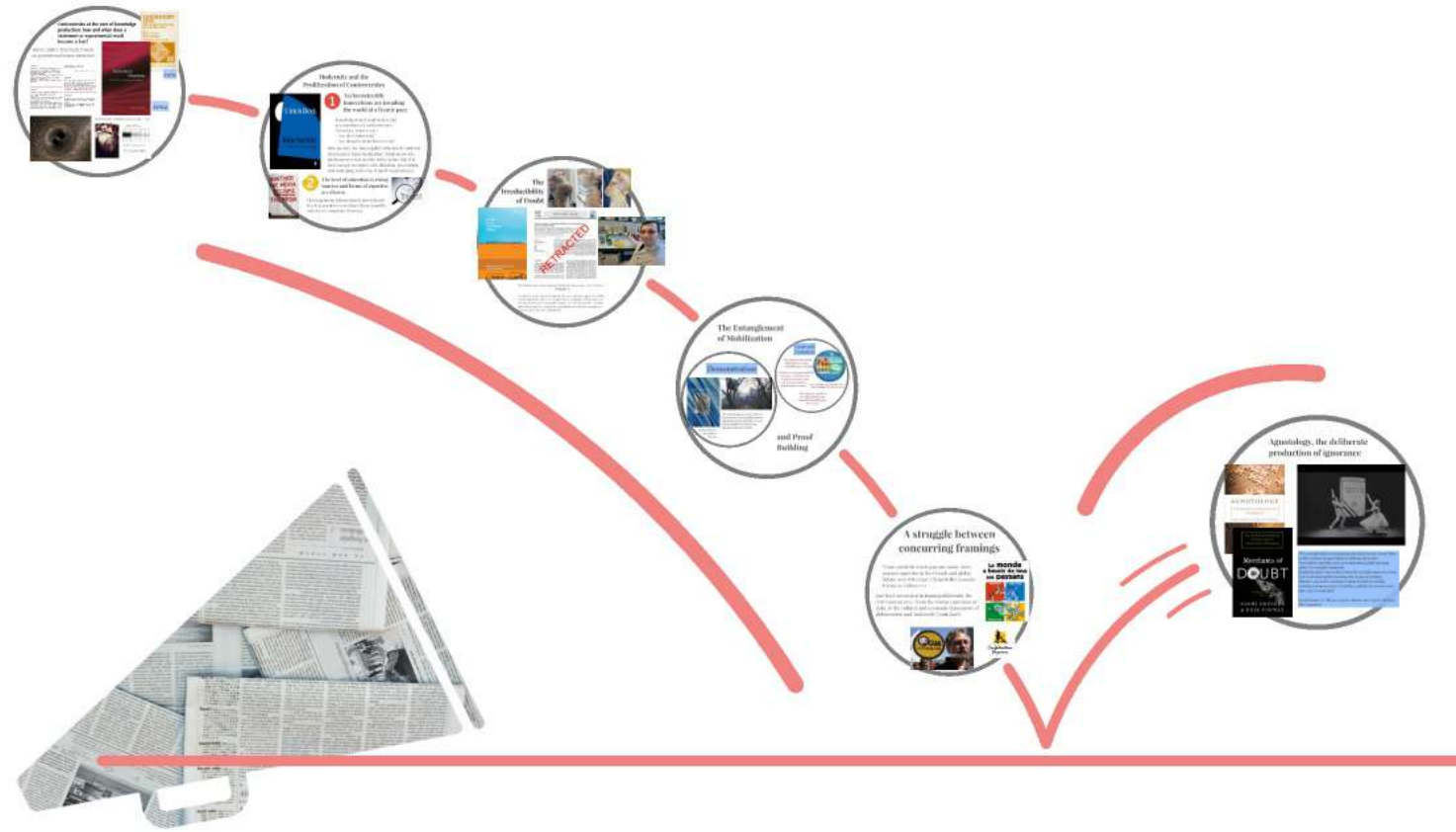


### 3.3 The Blurred Boundaries of Expertise



thomas.tari@sciencespo.fr

# ... through Controversies (3.1)



### 3.2 Trust in



### 3.3 The Blurred Boundaries of Expertise

thomas.t

# Controversies at the core of knowledge production: how and when does a statement or experimental result become a fact?

Harry Collins' 1972 to 2017-work on gravitational waves detection

## Experiment W

Scientist (a) - That's why the W thing though it's very complicated has certain attributes so that if they see something, it's a little more believable. They've really put some thought into it...  
Scientist (b) - They hope to get very high sensitivity but I don't believe them frankly. There are more subtle ways round it than brute force....  
Scientist (c) - I think that the group at W are just out of their minds.

## Experiment Y

Scientist (1) - Y's results do seem quite impressive. They are sort of very business-like and look quite authoritative...  
Scientist (2) - My best estimate of his sensitivity, and he and I are good friends is [low] and he has just got no chance [of detecting gravity waves].  
Scientist (3) - If you do as Y has done and you just give your figures to some girls and ask them to work that out, well, you don't know anything. You don't know whether those girls were talking to their boyfriends at the time.

Controversies constitute the core of scientific production

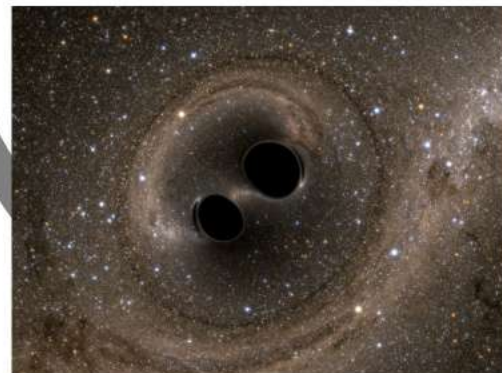
Which experts should one trust?

## Experiment X

Scientist (i) - he is at a very small place ; I have looked at his data, and he certainly has some interesting data.  
Scientist (ii) - I am not really impressed with his experimental capabilities so I would question anything he has done more than I would question other people's.  
Scientist (iii) - That experiment is a bunch of shit!

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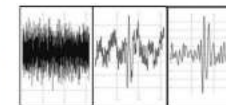
Scientist (1) - Z's experiment is quite interesting, and shouldn't be ruled out just because the . . group can't repeat it.  
Scientist (II) - I am very unimpressed with the Z affair.  
Scientist (III) - Then there's Z. Now the Z thing is an out and out fraud!



The 'first detection' of gravitational waves by Weber in 1969

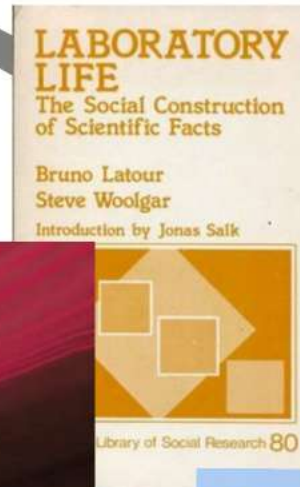


how the theory and the experiment are intertwined

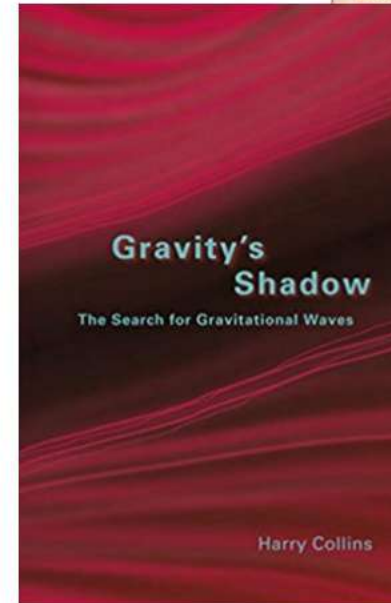


the notion of "experimental regression"

Garwin charismatic paper establishes a (social) consensus on the non-detection



1979



2004



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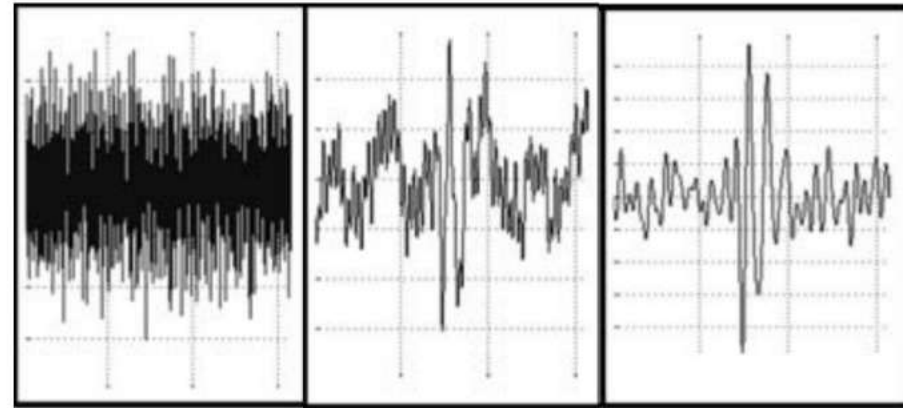
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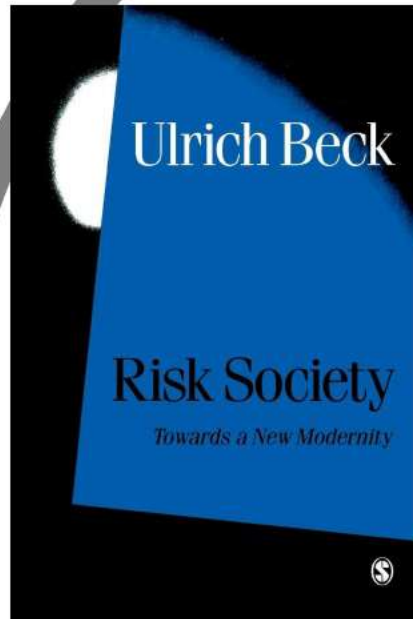


*the notion of "experimental regression"*

Garwin charismatic paper establishes a  
(social) consensus on the non detection



## Modernity and the Proliferation of Controversies



### 1 Technoscientific innovations are invading the world at a frantic pace

Knowledge is not produced as fast as innovation (cf. epidemiology)

Nowadays, experts say :

- "we don't know (yet)"
- "we disagree (even between us)"

Risk Society: an "inescapable structural condition of advanced industrialization". Modern society has become a risk society in the sense that it is increasingly occupied with debating, preventing and managing risks that it itself has produced.



### 2 The level of education is rising, sources and forms of expertise are diverse

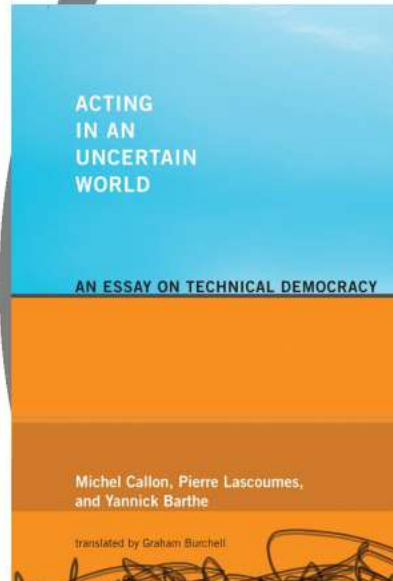
Heterogeneous information is now (almost) freely accessible everywhere (from scientific articles to conspiracy theories).



society  
that it is  
preventing  
itself from  
being  
ruined.



# The Irreducibility of Doubt



Rio Declaration on Environment and Development 1992, United Nations  
Principle 15

In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.

# The Entanglement of Mobilization

## Demonstration



Andrew Barry on  
A30 protests  
(Devon)



*"For by developing an inventive form of demonstration, it was possible, however imperfectly and momentarily, to reveal something which would have been otherwise unknown to others"*

## Cause and Causation

The symmetry between:  
- fighting for a cause  
- establishing a causality

Diversity of groups enrolled:  
- veterans of nuclear tests  
- victims of nuclear tests  
- anti-nuclear pacifists  
- anti-nuclear activists



*"Cause politique et politique des causes"*  
Yannick Barthe, Politix, 2010, vol3/91

The chain of causation  
is redefined through  
the (self)-identification  
of victims.

## and Proof Building



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# A struggle between concurring framings

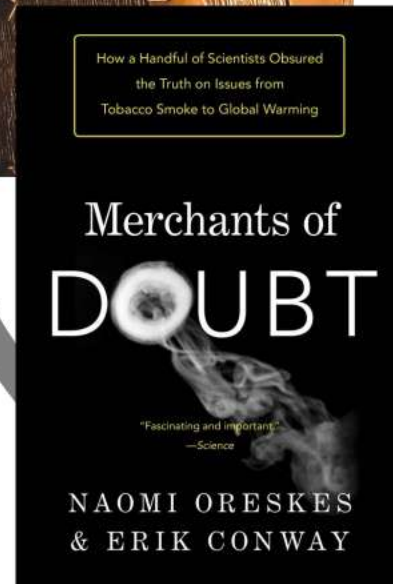
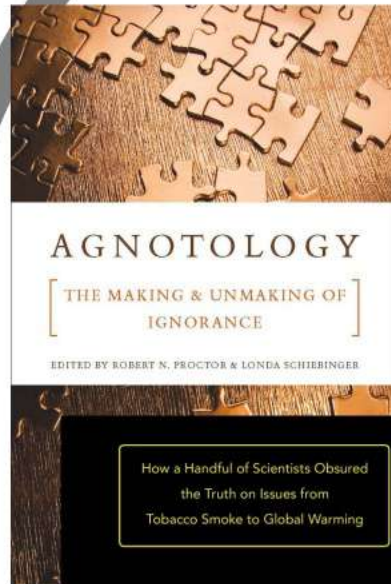
"From scientific risk to paysan savoir-faire: peasant expertise in the French and global debate over GM crops", Chaia Heller (2002) in *Science as Culture* 11.1

José Bové succeeded in framing differently the GMO controversy : from the sanitary question of risks, to the cultural and economic dimensions of globalization and "malbouffe" (junk food).





## Agnotology, the deliberate production of ignorance



*"The scientific debate is closing [against us] but not yet closed. There is still a window of opportunity to challenge the science... Voters believe that there is no consensus about global warming within the scientific community. Should the public come to believe that the scientific issues are settled, their views about global warming will change accordingly. Therefore, you need to continue to make the lack of scientific certainty a primary issue in the debate, and defer to scientists and other experts in the field."*

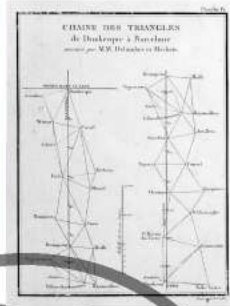
Frank Luntz, in "Memo exposes Bush's new green strategy"  
The Guardian

# 3.2 Trust in Numbers

## No double standards



Jean-Baptiste Delambre  
and Pierre Méchain



## Experimental history: the B.C. / A.D. timeline

*The Revolution, through the metric reform, has made the number six, always present in the numerologies of human civilizations, infinitely more visible than before. But for the century to spring up, it was necessary to have the happy coincidence of the End of the World and the End of a Century; and the deep conviction of living a unique regime in history, between two coherent and incompatible entities.*

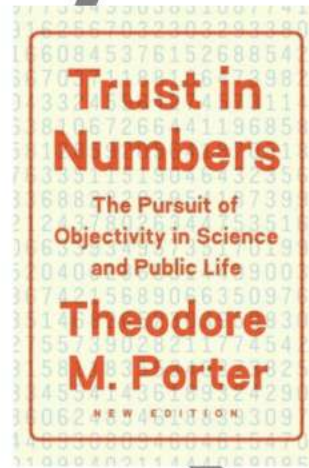


*This brings us back to one of the major characteristics of the century: its neutrality. The constitutive alteration of the century, namely its non-differentiability, thus becomes its main asset. Of all the systems of periodization, the secular system is the least marked – by reality, by historiography. It is, therefore, the most open to what has been little or not studied in history: economy, demography, mentalities.*

How old is the century?



## The overwhelming appeal of quantification



Porter shows that it is "exactly wrong" to interpret the drive for quantitative rigor as inherent somehow in the activity of science except where political and social pressures force compromise.

Instead, quantification grows from attempts to develop a strategy of impersonality in response to pressures from outside. Objectivity derives its impetus from cultural contexts, quantification becoming most important where elites are weak, where private negotiation is suspect, and where trust is in short supply.

## Legibility and simplification



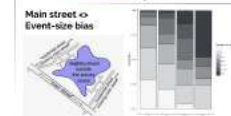
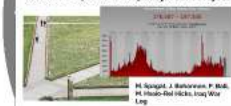
Illegible Natural vs. Legible "Scientific" Forests

A new form, Walden's forest dweller, entered the German vocabulary to describe the rural scene. He exceptionally complex process involving soil building, natural spirals, and symbiotic relation among forest insects, mammals, and flora – which were, and still are, not entirely understood – was apparently dissolved, with serious consequences, into a linear sequence of events in the radical simplicity of the scientific forest.

Society must be rebuilt before it can be the object of intervention. Categories of people and things must be defined, measures must be interchangeable, and communities must be constructed as represented by an individual in power, engaged in a process, rather than a collection of individuals in power, each with a part of the community.

## Counting the Dead

### A violent dispute w/ Iraq Body Count Project



### A major dichotomy

Category	Deaths
Direct deaths	100,000
Indirect deaths	1,000,000
Total	1,100,000

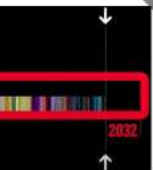
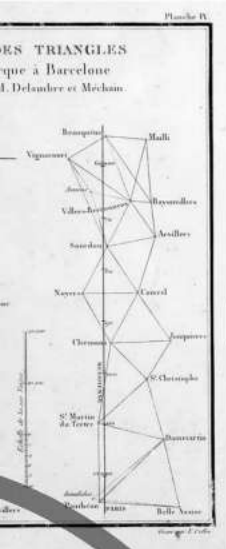
### Why does event size matter in Iraq?

Event size	Deaths
Small events	100,000
Large events	1,000,000
Total	1,100,000

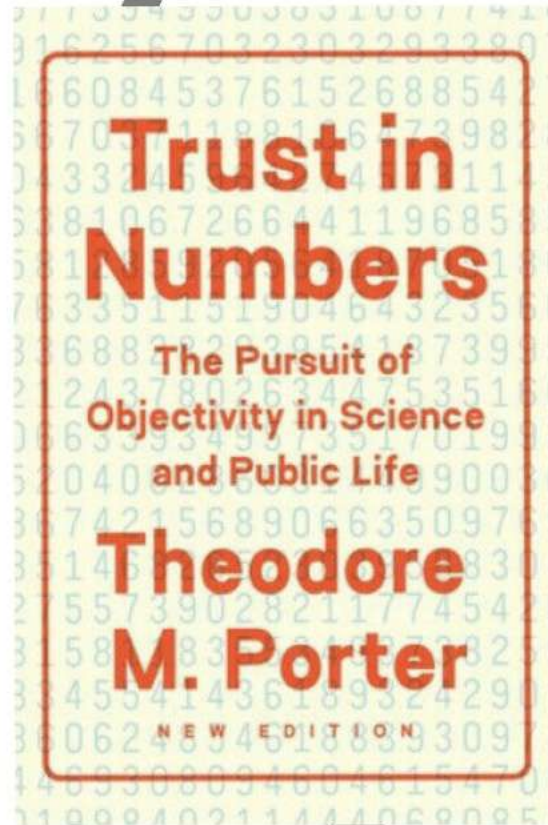


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ste Delambre  
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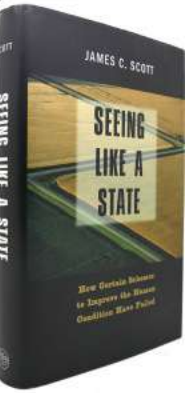


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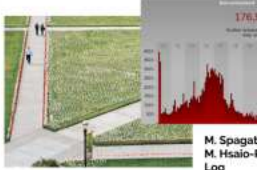
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Society  
quantity  
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Count  
the De

A violent dispute w/ Iraq Body

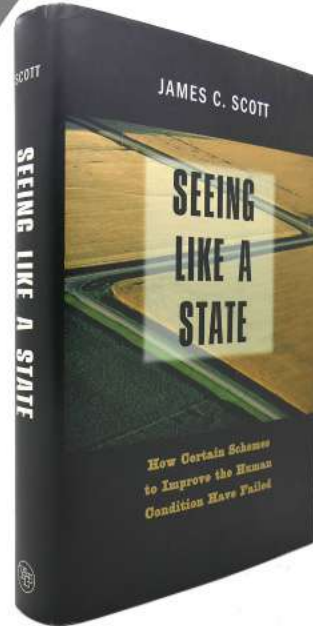


Main street <>  
Event-size bias





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Illegible Natural vs. Legible "Scientific" Forests

*A new term, Waldsterben (forest death), entered the German vocabulary to describe the worst cases. An exceptionally complex process involving soil building, nutrient uptake, and symbiotic relations among fungi, insects, mammals, and flora—which were, and still are, not entirely understood—was apparently disrupted, with serious consequences. Most of these consequences can be traced to the radical simplicity of the scientific forest.*

*'Society must be remade before it can be the object of quantification. Categories of people and things must be defined, measures must be interchangeable; land and commodities must be conceived as represented by an equivalent in money. There is much of what Weber called rationalization in this, and also a good deal of centralization.'*  
— Theodore M. Porter, "Objectivity as Standardization"

**AMATEURS, EXPERTS & LAY PEOPLE**

**The figure of the specialist**  
A study into a defence research institute in the French nuclear programme...  
0180

**Lay expertise**  
How do citizens become credible?...  
0180

**The Symmetry Principle**  
What is a...?...  
0180

**Knowledge Coproduction**  
A study into a defence research institute in the French nuclear programme...  
0180

**Is Physics for nukes?**  
A nuclear facility...  
0180

# Rethinking Expertise

Harry Collins  
Robert Evans

2008

*Expertise is not solely a social status, but a skill existing independently of public recognition.*



three kinds of expertise:

no expertise

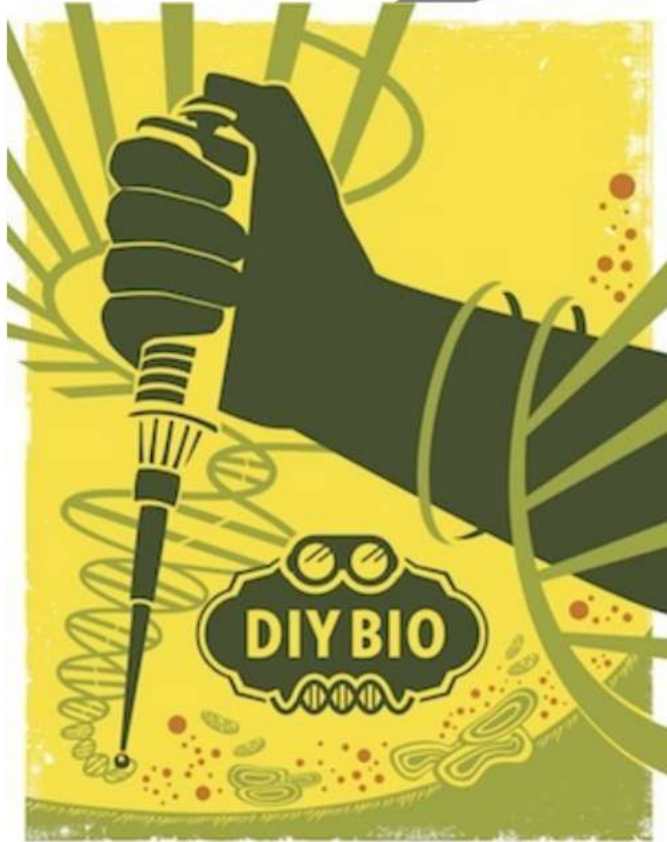
interactional expertise

contributory expertise



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S of





## The figure of the amateur

In field sciences (botany, ornithology, entomology...) amateurs watch, gather and sometimes structure local knowledge and their networks.

These contributions to science have been threatened by the professionalization of sciences in the 19th and 20th centuries, they still play an active role in knowledge production.

- the amateur as a sensible living being (tacit, practical, local knowledge)
- the amateur as a member of a community, a social club
- the amateur as an eco-citizen, (Peasant Seeds Networks etc.)

A movement that now claims the symbolic and material structure of the lab (makers, fablabs, biohackers, garage and DIY biology...)



# Lay expertise

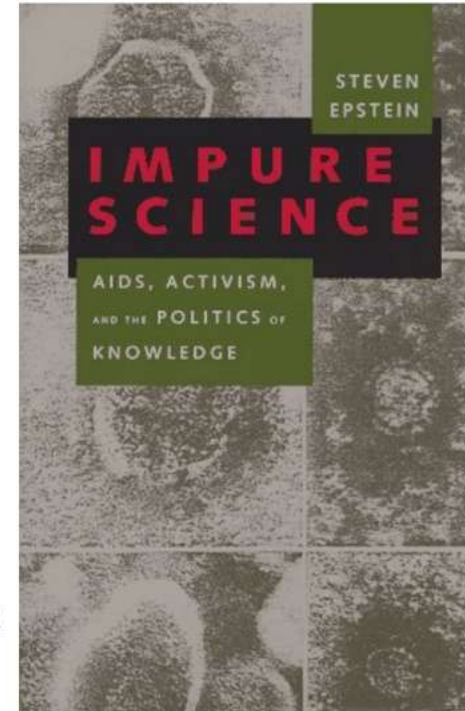
**How did activists become credible contributors in the process of knowledge production?**

A long process, that involved to learn how to speak the specific language (or pidgin) of medicine practice, to learn its codes.

**High stakes regarding the redefinition of clinical trials for AIDS victims, in a time of strong discrimination against the ill.**

A singular social group (young white males, gay, highly educated and wealthy, in California) becomes the spokesperson for the AIDS victims.

**A new boundary between lay experts and lay people within Act Up?**



**Steven Epstein,  
1993**



# Knowledge Coproduct

A study on a hybrid research group:  
the French Muscular Dystrophy  
Association (AFM-Téléthon)

The involvement of patients makes it  
possible to define research issues and  
priorities, to adapt clinical procedures,  
but also to collect a lot of field data for  
research.

The AFM and Genethon (with  
Telethon) also helps fund this  
research, and thus less depend  
on the power of pharmaceutical  
industries that do not invest in  
rare diseases.

a reflexive  
organization



V. Rabeharisoa and M. Callon



# The Symmetry Principle

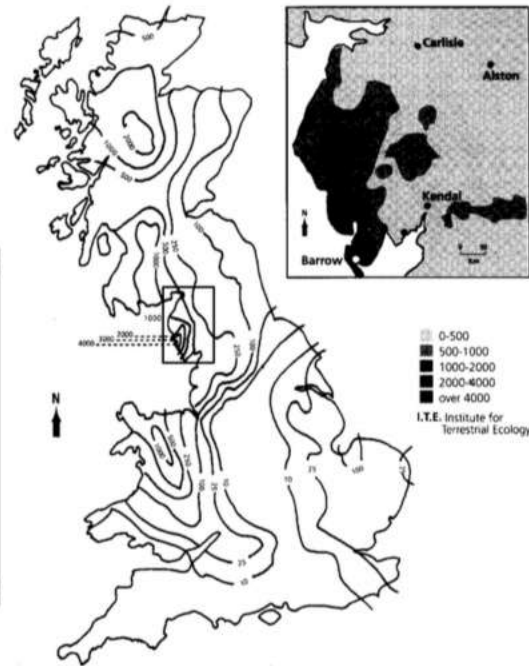


Figure 2. Contours of UK radioactive caesium contamination measured from vegetation, June-July 1986. The data are in units of  $\text{Bq m}^{-2}$ .

## Sellafield Nuclear Plant

It means being aware that the expert expertise is limited to his/her specific field, that tacit, local knowledge may also contribute to the definition, and sometimes resolution, of the problem. In the real world, the useful forms of knowledge to deal with a specific issue or controversy are diverse and not limited to "science".



Brian Wynne, "Misunderstood Misunderstanding"  
& "May the Sheep Safely Graze?" (1992; 1996)

To apply the symmetry principle (between losers and winners, the strong and the weak) is not being naive about power or nice to the marginalized or the excluded.