Trust, cosmetics or suspicion?

A multi-sited ethnography of the relationships between users and institutions in six Spanish expert systems

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The problem: after the iron cage

It is not uncommon to find ethnographies that still present social identity as a matter of belonging to a specified territory, a local community or a personal network of relatives and neighbors, without articulating such domestic, regional and ethnic identities with the simultaneous - and modern - condition of citizen, client, patient, passenger, taxpayer, insured, expert, and the like. The question to be analyzed is whether the basis for such anthropological lack of sensitivity towards the constitutive role of modern institutions for contemporary cultures may not be rooted in one of our founding dichotomies, *Gemeinschaft* versus *Gesellschaft*, which tends to split two ideal typical social linkages apart (Abélès 1990).

On the *Gesellschaft* side would be found the Weberian regime of institutions, regulated by the conventional stipulations of contract, a pattern of legal-rational domination and the process of bureaucratic rationalization that have shaped both the modern state and the agencies of capitalist expansion (Weber 1944). The resulting image is that of the iron cage, with its Kafkaesque connotations of depersonalization and dissolution of identity. According to this, at the onset of modernity, answers to the necessities of real human beings were transformed into abstract algorithms suited to processing numbers, bodies, and files (Hacking 1985). In order to fulfill the general goal of efficiency, it is argued, the institution becomes a calculating device, a cold set of rules and practices obeying a purely instrumental rationality: thus, the disenchantment of the world.

Whether this Weberian diagnosis was accurate or not, obvious changes in the cultural regime of advanced modernity oblige us to restate the terms of the problem. Institutions have undergone important transformations. Although they sometimes still show their Kafkaesque side, generally speaking, institutions in late modernity are 'smiling entities'. They cultivate a particular type of image, take care of good manners and incorporate concepts of 'quality', 'client-orientation', 'proximity to the citizen', and 'nice treatment'. In other words, the bulk of the institutional work is done today in dialogue with the disparate logics of users in their diverse local contexts, for the world of late modernity can hardly recognize itself in the disenchanted depiction of the 'iron cage', but rather in what Gellner ironically called the 'rubber cage' (Gellner 1989).

Social sciences are thus paying attention to this increasingly hybrid relationship between the process of universalistic rationalization and particular cultures. One can then observe

an authentic return of the subject to social theory, parallel to the interest shown by organizations themselves in reworking their bonds with their addressees. It is worth noting that this subject who returns to theory is no longer the whole person in the Maussian sense, but a decentered, diversified, plural, changing and diffuse subject, who appears occasionally as an 'agency' or a contingent 'action group'.

The need to rethink the Weberian categories has to do with the slippery problem of grasping these new social subjects and their relationships to current institutional rationality. In our view, the *Gemeinschaft / Gesellschaft* opposition has not gone out of fashion because the modern bureaucratic organization has had to become 'better in quality', 'nearer to the client or the citizen' or 'more human'. What does happen is that the institution has become reflexive: aware of its deficit in relating to subjects, sensitive to making up such a link and to justifying it. It has also become reflexive in Beck´s sense of a self-applying device: the decisions it takes transform its initial conditions of existence (Beck 1997). Institutions in late modernity have developed rationalized instruments against the faults of excessive rationalization. Bureaucracies have had to reform themselves bureaucratically, and specially those of the so-called welfare state. So, what we find here is not the end of the regime of rationalization described by Max Weber, but rather its radicalization in an advanced phase. A substantial change seems to be affecting the social contract: its customary interpretation as the foundation of *Gesellschaft* must now coexist with a new conception aiming at the rebuilding of the bond between institutions and subjects.

A multi-sited ethnography in six institutional contexts

In order to explore the relationships institutions maintain with their users we undertook a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) in six

institutional contexts, mostly located in the Comunidad de Madrid, Spain. We intended to document the multiple meanings and problems inherent in the concept of trust as embodied in the experience of experts and lay persons when they meet at access points to the expert system. As people's social identity increasingly depends on a number of institutionally provided services[2], our basic assumption has been that the category of 'trust' could offer insights for understanding the patterns linking different institutions and the world external to them.

We follow Anthony Giddens in using 'expert system' to refer to an abstract and disembodied system of knowledge, which is spatio-temporally free from local conditions of face-to-face interaction. This organization of knowledge correlates with the modern organization of work, and becomes accessible to the public only at well-bounded and defined places, that is, at 'access points' (Giddens 1994): office windows, clinics and other kind of counters.[3] The 'access point' metaphor delineates a closed system endowed with its own criteria for verification and efficiency, which is, to a great extent, opaque and inaccessible from the outside. Since the system is invisible as a whole, the process of building trust on the two sides of this divide becomes a central aspect of the institutional work, especially because expert systems, as mechanisms of problem resolution, are a systematic source of both control and uncertainty. From this point of view, risk is the implicit counterpart of trust.[4]

For the sake of comparison, we carried out fieldwork in a) a municipal bureau of public information, b) several urban civic councils, c) a village council d) a branch of a bank, e) several services of air transport, and f) a neo-natal intensive care unit in a big hospital.[5]

Our main argument is that a double linking code is at work when subjects meet institutional agents. On the one hand, the contractual foundation of the link sets clear limits to the construction of extended bonds. The aim here is to maximize the efficient provision of ser-

CONTEXT	LOCALE	MAIN TYPE OF BOND
Regional Administration	Central office of public information (Madrid)	Citizen-Regional Administration
Local administration (urban)	Several civic participation councils in two districts (Madrid)	Neighbor-City Council
Local administration (rural)	Village council (North Sierra of Madrid)	Neighbor-Village Council
Bank services	Bank branch (Seville)	Client-Bank
Health services	Intensive care unit for neonates (Madrid)	Patient-Doctor-Relatives
Air transport services	Barajas airport (Madrid) Air carriers Bureau for civil aviation	Passenger-Carrier

vices to an anonymous, impersonal public, considered as a singularized and passive object of technical intervention. In this vein, an official may respond to an upset citizen by suggesting that a given problem 'is not within his competence', or that he or she must 'follow the regulations and procedures', or that the client should go to another window. Likewise, a doctor may sacrifice aspects of his/her patient's quality of life so as to ensure the efficiency of the treatment, or might adopt diagnostic techniques that save some patients to the detriment to others. A bank agency will reject giving credit to a client if he or she is included in a given risk profile. The same bank can adopt a policy of rotating personnel in order to prevent an undesired linkage with clients.

Air-transport companies calculate beforehand, leaving some passengers on the ground through overbooking in order to warrant a minimum of clients. Besides, these companies sometimes find it more profitable to pay compensation than to modify well-known deficiencies. All these examples illustrate institutional work that clearly fits into the principles of instrumental rationality described in the Weberian tradition: particular cases are sacrificed for the sake of a general sense of systemic efficiency.

On the other hand, our ethnography also shows how contemporary institutions tend to repersonalize their bonds with subjects: bureaus of public information serving citizens, travelers or neighbors are opened, spaces for participation, animation and claims are created, and institutional strategies of image, quality, and satisfaction are elaborated. All these devices operate to recompose and renew the bond between the two worlds, and to transform the initial passive object of intervention into an active participant. The city council educates its employees to smile when facing the public, and expects the latter to be actively involved in advisory organisms. The bank eliminates the classical barriers expressing an inside/outside relationship, and transforms the typical window space into a welcoming atmosphere of intimacy. Doctors in the intensive care unit test unobtrusive, more ecological, therapies. The regional administration proclaims 'transparency' to be its essential value.

From site to site, all seem committed to the task of 'becoming closer'.

What an ethnography of access points reveals is a two-sided reality. The instrumental logic of the system builds on an inescapable border on which different devices of reembodiment and repersonalization work tirelessly and with unequal success. The institutions strategically plan part of such devices, another part derives from the local tactics that both users and experts develop so as to endow their interactions with order and sense. The bonds of trust generated between these two types of actors can be considered along a range of patterns of mutual expectation that include: a) mere familiarity, thus the natural attitude in coping with the everyday world; b) interpersonal deep trust, anchored in face-to-face and normally long-term relationships; c) certainty, reliability, or system trust, the unquestioned faith in the good operation of the system; d) what we have called figured or rhetorical trust, the outcome of programmatic processes of institutional repersonalization; and e) cooperative suspicion, a vigilant expectation regarding the foregone shortcomings in all contractual deals. The resultant plot is a complex one where these various patterns of linkage alternately, ambiguously or contradictorily overlap.

Deep trust, figured trust and cooperative suspicion

The concepts of 'trust' and 'risk' are as recurrent in contemporary life as they are vague and polysemic. Of trust speak lovers and friends, relatives and partners, as well as political leaders, real-estate agencies, bank agencies, churches and trade unions, European institutions as well as municipal, national and global ones. Naturally, 'trust' has entered into the vocabulary of sociologists, anthropologists and experts in communication. 'Risk' has undergone a similar process of expansion: we use it to speak of leisure, sexual practices, and the feeding of our children, but also of air accidents, financial investments, natural catastrophes, and surgical operations.

Because of its vagueness, the concept of 'trust' as used in common sense has been traditionally mistrusted by the sociological tradition. But in the last few years this concept has stirred up a growing theoretical interest (Mutti 1987, Luhmann 1979, Giddens 1994, Misztal 1996, Fukuyama 1995). In common sense, informants use it across a diversity of situations in order to produce insights about them: 'I trust that doctor', 'People put their trust in this bank', or, as the head of the Bureau of information said, speaking of the general functions of the service: "It works in two directions: inwards, to improve the administration, and outwards, to generate trust". In particular, one might wonder how to understand the expression 'trust in institutions'. What does 'trust' mean in this context? To what extent does it carry the same meaning as in the field of personal relationships, familiar bonds or elective affinity?

Authors like Luhmann, Gambetta, and Mutti define trust as a behavior expectation - the expectation an actor has regarding the behavior of another, in such a situation that the former may benefit or be harmed. This notion of trust implies several conditions: a) a possibility of election must exist, b) the one who trusts does not know entirely the outcome of the action, and c) this outcome must be important for him/her and dependent on the behavior of the other. Up to this point, trust implies the creation of a social bond. The trustee is obliged to fulfill the trust invested in him. Besides, trust is prospective: it is based on past relationships, but oriented towards the future. We thus differentiate between trust situations and non-elective situations such as those guided by routine or familiarity. On the other hand, we also distinguish between trust and mere calculation, by means of which the subject decides according to a probabilistic and rational reflection about costs and benefits. According to Mutti, trust takes place in between

'hope' (as faith without evidence) and 'certainty' (as evidence that does not require faith).

Simmel established a classic differentiation between 'interpersonal trust', which is based on the interaction among subjects in one another's presence, and 'system trust', the modern abstract belief that specialized systems of knowledge will produce a reliable output. More recently, others have introduced further distinctions (Luhmann 1988, Giddens 1994, Gambetta 1988a). According to Luhmann, 'familiarity' is a stage previous to trust. Familiarity implies that the world of daily existence, the life-world, is structured by tradition or routine in such a way that the subject simply lives it, without being forced to take decisions. At the opposite extreme, the Simmelian 'faith in the system' also excludes decision, because it is experienced as a consummate calculation or as a need without alternatives. It goes without saying how difficult it may be to place oneself voluntarily 'out of the system', giving up the use of money, the educational and health services or the political system. This situation has been diversely labeled as 'certainty', 'confidence' (Luhmann), or 'reliability' (Giddens). In fact, trust is located in a no man's land between familiarity and certainty, as a pattern of relation among subjects who are forced to opt by circumstances, thus, to take decisions that imply a deposit of faith in others.

To these diverse patterns of expectation Gambetta opposes the more restricted and conditional concept of 'cooperation' (in our elaboration, 'cooperative suspicion'). Here the subjects are willing to link each other by virtue of complementary interests in a well-bounded field of action. This pattern of relationship is essentially contractual, and bears the expectation of mutual surveillance and control regarding the results of the exchange. The subjects commit themselves to each other to carry out a mutually beneficial action, and in doing so they rely on their own capacity for assessing the fulfillment of their interests, and eventually, for breaking the contract. In this sense, cooperation is always a form of suspicion.

To report on our data we must introduce a new category: the figured or rhetorical trust. We refer here to strategies of repersonalization developed by the expert system. These are discursive and expressive forms by means of which a personal engagement is predicated where, in fact, the relationship is abstract and disembodied. The institution (and eventually the user) invokes personal bonds, but the linkage is actually of a different nature.

When analyzing the local senses of 'trust in institutions', we can find all these different patterns of relationship. What is more important, this bundle of meanings is in permanent traffic and semantic interaction. They contaminate, substitute and alternate with each other. Often they stand in open contradiction. In other words, they generate a variety of rhetorics of trust at the disposal of every agent in the course of the relation. We also find such rhetorics in the diverse analytic approaches of the social sciences. Depending on the dominant meaning chosen for 'trust in institutions' we will get divergent views - more or less benign or Machiavellian - of the linkage.

Speaking of trust evokes par excellence deep trust, that is trust as a result of interpersonal, face-to-face relationships, derived from the human capacity - so well studied by Schutz, Goffman and other microsociologists - to generate consensus, role expectations, and shared conventions out of interaction routines in repeated encounters.[6] Here, the locus of the trust relationship is personal, obtaining between subjects who become acquainted with each other through practical and immediate experience over a long period of time.

There is evidence that this is the dominant model in understanding trust for the majority of both users and experts. The common clients of the bank, for example, tend to invest their faith in one particular branch, and express a particular attachment to concrete employees as a form of 'putting a face into the money'. This works as though a personal commitment

rooted in a lengthy treatment and in the confidence of everyday problems could neutralize the abstract, anonymous and implacable flows of the financial mechanism. So you will find, at every local branch, a category of clients - the regular ones, and mainly retired persons - who visit it almost everyday for minor account movements, or even for no other reason but a little chat.

Patients at the hospital underline the communicative competence and personal mood of the doctors as signs of dependability. An explicit question about trusting doctors in general seems nonsensical, because for the patient normally there is no choice: 'You are in their hands'. What becomes relevant is whether or not a given doctor merits credibility in a given situation, and this rests very much on the explanations and self-presentation he/she is able to provide (young women are still less credited in the eyes of some patients). Doctors and nurses are blamed or praised - trusted or distrusted - in terms of an inner locus of attribution: 'depends on the person', 'depends on the interest they have', 'you want to be attended to, to be convinced'. Their technical expertise is customarily taken for granted. Quite routinely, medical staff of the hospital attends off-the-record a net of relatives and friends, regardless of bureaucratic procedures.

This model of personal commitment works even in contexts where encounters are limited to a single occasion. For example, in the bureau of public information at the community of Madrid, an official justified the fact that the service provides information beyond prescribed limits saying: "We are persons. If we can give it, we do". And in the aircraft, the passengers always enjoy the personal voice of a captain whom they do not know at all.

In a reversed image of the same model, stewardesses, nurses, and direct contact officials learn, among other tricks of the trade, how to play with (and against) the public in the short distances of the interaction. They learn to present the anonymous as personal, and the other way round. This implies an exercise of balance in the encounter with the personal sphere of the users: far enough so as to avoid involvement, and near enough to keep influence on somebody else. For example, a flight attendant may calm down a terrified passenger by saying: "When you see fear in my face, only then can you start trembling". She may, conversely, demand respect for her person when another passenger becomes offensive because of delay. Stewardesses speak of *torear* (fighting bulls) with problematic clients, that are those who protest and make claims without reason. This is an art that consists of a quick answer and a steady sense of humor, because flying means an unavoidable proximity to users. "I don't like your eyes. You know, we cannot choose the passengers". And if this is a typical face-to-face situation, what about nurses who must manage empathy as an essential element of caring. In the neonatal unit, this ability is made with affectionate caresses, massages, kisses, baby talk and so on; in the emergency room, it is the neutral look with which the nurse undresses new patients; in the intensive care unit we hear the serene speech of a nurse explaining to a patient leaving a coma who he is, what his name is, where he is and where his family is, why he is suffering so much and who won the last football championship.

Therefore, however abstract these modern systems may be, they don't remove all traces of personal commitment. The system works on them and tries to subject them to non-local logics. To this extent, institutional agents can easily feel themselves to be prisoners of the situation, when this becomes awkward and there is no way out between the personal and the abstract, between the ceremonial and the substantive. This is the ground of ambivalence in the experts' discourse - the public is, at the same time, sovereign and despicable -, a discourse that leads to plenty of misanthropic platitudes about aggressive clients, users who steal, patients who deceive, neighbors who do not understand and citizens who go be-

yond norms. This expert discourse returns repeatedly to the anecdotes of difficult situations, when the institutional order was overflowing and the public appeared to be a source of danger: a surgeon troubled about the health of a patient who was the kin of some manager of the hospital, passengers that mutinied in the airport, municipal technicians intimidated by the massive vote against neighbors, a flight attendant who discovered monkey meat smuggling into the cabin.

In certain cases the negative view of the user crystallizes in stereotypes circulating as part of the expert's oral tradition, as in the case of a hospital where a humorous leaflet with the title *manual del cartillero* (user's guide) parodied the quotidian violations of regulations by the patients, depicting them as a kind of demanding, uncivilized and illiterate mass. On the other hand, in the life stories of some experts a chapter about the personal wounds and regrets of an excessive - or deficient - engagement with the Other may sometimes be found: the young nurse that, at the beginning of her career, made the mistake of allowing a patient (a teenager with malignant cancer) to fall in love with her; or the pediatrist unable to remember the many faces of the patients he attends to all through the day. But normally what we have is merely a routine attitude, the one that renders the required empathy possible without becoming trapped in the user's web: 'You become callous', they say.

The paradigmatic case in our sample reflecting a conflict of loyalties is that of the rural officials behaving like moral hostages of a local network. Representatives of the state, but also neighbors, relatives, and friends - members of a plot of dense bonds of kinship, reciprocity and identity -, these subjects must harmonize their double condition, in a system where access points tend to be dissolved in the bosom of community. This dissolution even had, in the case of our rural council, a spatial expression. Villagers belonging to long-established families went to solve their problems directly to the bar owned by the mayor,

an independent politician who ruled the village due to his extended network of reciprocal ties. Other categories of residents, not belonging to the traditional core, had to manage their business with the administration through a more routinized and lengthy path - going to the official building of the council, recently rebuilt as a rather empty façade of local institutionalism.

Nevertheless, the understanding of the link with institutions in terms of interpersonal trust may be deceiving, because we are no longer speaking of personal bonds developing in the context of an enclosed community. Rather, these relationships grow within systems that are fundamentally anonymous and disembodied - and therefore able to radically redefine the reach of such bonds. A strategy of analysis stressing this kind of commitment runs the risk of transferring the rules generated in the local context to the expert system as a whole. But those rules, if not annulled, do undergo significant rearticulation. This is usually the case when political institutions are analyzed in terms of patronage, as a mere pattern of continuity between traditional networks and modern organizations.

On the other hand, a consideration of modern patterns of trust in purely interpersonal terms results in mistakenly literal interpretation of the formalities of social treatment - a promise questioned even by the very actors in the situation. In expert systems, where a radical cut separates the front-stage from the backstage, nothing is as it seems. When smiling, the stewardess doesn't mean that the aircraft is going to be on time. In Goffman's words, the ceremonial and the substantive sides are not coextensive (Goffman 1970).

Figured trust

The interpersonal notion of trust is a dominant one, to the extent of becoming a metaphor, a model and source of meaning for any kind of bond. According to informants, trust refers to the primordial scenario of family loy-

alties or to the intimate sphere of elective affinities. It is, therefore, trust in somebody more than trust in something. In consequence, it is not strange that institutions also want to present themselves through personalization: a bank that is 'your friend', a ministry of 'everybody', an airline where 'you feel at home'. These disembodied entities need the attachment of a genuine, recognizable face, in order to seem worthy of trust.

Since they are rhetorical strategies, we call them figured trust. This is expressed through explicit metaphors, and through a calculated *mise en scène* programmed into the communication departments of corporations: design of spaces including decoration, illumination and furniture; logotypes and posters; personnel policies, wardrobe and tidiness; services of attention and information; protocol and directives for treatment. For instance, the department training new stewardesses in an airline company gives them directives such as: "A warm and polite welcome", "A positive and sincere greeting", "Visual contact and friendly smile", "Effective help", "Impeccable look", "Recognizing and anticipating the client's individual needs", "Speaking whatever language if possible", "Making them feel important", "Personalized treatment", "Giving opportunities to communicate", "Avoiding routine attitudes", "A nice and clean cabin", "Efficient and professional delivery of food and drinks", "Quick answer to calls", "Attending requests as soon as possible", "Calm and discrete treatment during eventual conflicts", "A proper body language", "Always visible in cabin", "Giving clear messages", and "Correct spelling and tone of voice".

It is important to stress that being rhetorical is not a reason for being less real or powerful. To a great extent, the institutional rhetoric gives form to the daily realities we live in. What is implied in rhetoric is that the predicates may be susceptible of objection or contestation from other rhetorics, in the encounter with the users. For these users are able to assess the extent to which these expressions are no more

than ways of speaking realities built into language but not into practice. To refute the institutional rhetoric, the users often disclose it as a mere 'façade', a 'make-up', an 'image operation'. As a matter of fact, all these expressions are commonplace in conventional speech about the administration, public companies and financial institutions. "In the private clinics, the nurses wear miniskirts but skint on the medicines", "Maybe you pay a million for flying first class, but you will arrive at your destination as late as everybody else", and "That young lady at the counter was very kind, but she didn't solve my problem". Occasionally the inversion of the expected roles can be observed: the institution can hardly offer more than good manners while users demand 'facts', 'efficiency', and 'courts' - that is, less smiling and more contract.

Institutional agents themselves turn out to be, off the record, skeptical or disenchanted with such rhetoric, even if at other times they support it with enthusiastic faith. For example, they can communicate confidential information to put the image politics of the company in an embarrassing light, or, more frequently, to force a decision in case of labor conflict. Besides, workers in these organizations may consider information and claim services as a mere strategy to 'wash the face' of the institution. For instance, in one department attending to patients experts admitted that their main function has not so much to do with the problems of the actual customers as with supplying the chief manager of the hospital with first hand information. And officials of civil aviation in charge of compensation for baggage loss take them to be a simple economic restitution, not at all a corrective mechanism or a moral reparation. To this extent, the inner look on institutional rhetoric does not seem to be more enthusiastic than the external one.

A case illustrating this point is the chain of positions relating to information in the Comunidad de Madrid. Those who have the practical information that must be taken into account first (for example information about budget-

ary issues) are located at the centers of the management structure. Officials in peripheral positions attending to the citizen are then perfectly conscious of the limits of transparency, as they themselves can experience the difficulties of open access.

Does this mean that policies of communication are merely cynical, a smoke screen for institutional failures? An understanding of the link with institutions reduced to figured trust would suggest this. From such a critical point of view, based on notions as 'simulacrum', 'alienation' or 'false experience', the personalizing and smiling presentation of institutions hides the institutional despoiling of the life world. The massive intervention of the old political, economic and techno-scientific bureaucracies over the local forms of culture would be ensured more than ever in this mystifying way, through this new look and kind face.

Certainly, we do not lack evidence to support such a pessimistic interpretation. An instance is the twofold evolution of the credit system. On the one hand, the idiom of thick trust (mutuality, reciprocity and intimacy) increasingly pervades all the bank's self-presentation - its stationery, space design and corporate image. At the same time, old procedures for credit assignment, based on the autonomous and weighted criteria of branch managers, with all its local knowledge of customers and their personal circumstances, have been swept away in favor of a mere calculus based on statistical risk profiles controlled by a central department far from any local influence. Banks move easily from the discourse of pure trust to the practice of pure calculation.

But the notion of repersonalization that we are introducing here suggests a less uni-dimensional interpretation of figured trust. From our point of view, such operations are the result of an overlapping of codes in a structure of double legitimacy: a contractual code working in the ultimate direction of the expert system, and a consensual one, which works at establishing a reciprocal legitimacy among social subjects. Therefore, a significant rela-

tion is to be analyzed between figured trust and the subjects involved. We also argue that such expressive codes bring about expectations rooted in the symbolic components of treatment, and, to this extent, tend to become substantive. It generates rights and right-expectations, especially in public and administrative institutions where right, law, and justice are key outcomes. But the same could be said of services like health or transport, with their important commercial facets. The theatre of trust bears the seed for its own transformation because it raises expectations of dependability and commits the institutional agents to their promises.

Cooperative suspicion.

Both thick and figured trust are very demanding, for both grow upon the image of holistic relationships between whole subjects. In contrast, the idea of cooperation seems to suit the fragmented, conditional, bounded, and pragmatic link between users and expert systems much better. Even under conditions of optimal satisfaction with the institutional output, the cooperative attitude entails a permanent surveillance and a sort of pessimistic native hypothesis: in dealing with institutions any caution is too little.

So, users, neighbors, and citizens of our ethnography can be seen as moving alternatively from acquiescence to apprehension, from good faith to pitiless scrutiny. Neighbors in participation councils try to hold tight control over the technicians and politicians of the city and village administrations. Air passengers have become masters in reading between the lines of the (normally unprovided) reasons for changes in flight schedules, as well as in detecting the minor danger alerts during the flight. Patients at the hospital demand explanations and even 'proofs' and 'evidence' supporting medical decisions.

In particular, the discourse of claims dominates the users' speech about institutions. No matter how much this kind of service has im-

proved in Spain in recent decades, the general tone is one of complaint. We find a narrative of disenchantment and surveillance, punctuated with anecdotes of defenseless users suffering the system's inefficiency and arbitrariness.

Together with this kind of speech, we find a positive self-assertion in action. For instance, it is well known that in Madrid airport taxi drivers refuse to bring clients to places nearby. As a consequence, the wary client has learnt to lie about his destination until he is already en route. In our ethnography we found many other extreme instances of 'user's cunning', like the daughter who rescued her dying father from the hospital during the night - literally kidnapping him in a van -, or the woman who confronted her midwife during labor with: "I do know how to give birth. Listen, I have already done it before".

This line of interpretation is reinforced when looking at what happens secretly at the other side of the divide - in counters, cabins and bureaus. For instance, the number of medical mistakes registered during a single day in an intensive care unit can be amazing (sources of potential or actual error ranging from miscalculation of drugs, over-diagnosis, or unclear writing, to failures in the information chain). Of course, the business-as-usual attitude of experts renders this reality invisible to the user's eye and neutralizes its disturbing effects.

This rather Machiavellian view is reflected in the feeling of social pressure and public misunderstanding expressed by experts - their 'bad image', usually attributed to the mischievousness of the media. Such a feeling is particularly acute among doctors and pilots, once considered glamorous and highly respected figures, but today in crisis because of the universalization of services. It is expressed as well in the misogynistic deprecation of the image of nurses and stewardesses - roughly downgraded today from 'angels' to 'aids' and 'waitresses'. Paradoxically, the recent visibility of women's work of care has had the consequence of commodifying it, hence depreciating it in the public's eye.

But the logic of suspicion is not a privilege of the users: it is used just as much by the experts themselves in assessment of other colleagues and of the system as a whole. Some doctors confess to being deeply reluctant themselves to 'surrender' themselves (as patients) into the hospital's hands. And neonatologists use hard language on the professional bias and attitudes of other specialists. In particular they are very much concerned with the gynecological engagement in promoting artificial pregnancies, for the more successful they are at saving premature babies, the more such babies will be produced in future stages of the emergent reproductive market.

In summary, the analyst must consider the relationships between users and institutions as a field of interests brought into play (Elster 1997), or as a structure of 'cooperation without trust' (see Gambetta 1988a; Misztal 1996: 64). In our opinion, this analytic perspective identifies well the limits of the institution in late modernity, to the extent that organizations are caught between the urge to fulfill technical aims and the necessity to encourage the voluntary cooperation of users.

The double structure of legitimacy and its consequences

Why, then, continue to speak of trust? Does this concept represent more than a sociological fashion, or is it just a confusion of analytic and native categories?

In our opinion, the concept of trust does not need to be abandoned, but rather to be conceived of in a more complex way. In this discussion, we want to illustrate the inadequacy of the dualism between the image of the institution as an iron cage and the propagandistic image of a re-enchanted institution. Both descriptions are unable to account for what really happens in the field. In contrast to this dualism, we have suggested the double structure of legitimacy in late modernity. This structure bears a contradiction in the classic

Marxian sense of the term, namely, a clash between functional principles (see Offe 1990; Beck 1997). Anchored in a contractual logic and in instrumental rationality, institutions cannot avoid depersonalization; but as they become aware of the limits of this anchorage, they promote a growing recognition of the previously excluded cultural and individual diversity of subjects. The result is a blurred pattern of bonds, which seems to be a result of this double and simultaneous movement of exclusion/inclusion of the subject, this double and simultaneous movement of disregard/recognition of other cultural logics.

The first consequence of this conflict is the promotion and enacting of a code of repersonalization. This code is in fact a constant trait of our contexts, as pervasive as the drive towards depersonalization in the past epoch. By means of this code institutions try to recover the subject as part of the institutional process, to restore the gap between the organizational world and the life world and to overcome the legitimacy deficit of the organizational world by endowing it with a 'smiling face'. In short, they tend to re-enchant the framework of relationships between institutions and users. Such an expressive code, however, neither cancels nor substitutes the institutional regime of instrumental rationality, but overlaps with it. Not only does the code of repersonalization continue the instrumental device, it also raises contradictions and paradoxes within the system. To what extent can these contradictions affect the institutional goals and their functional operation is a question open to more empirical research.

In establishing the hypothesis of an overlap between repersonalization and the instrumental-contractual regime of institutions, we want to imply that it would be a mistake to conceptualize these transformations as a 'post'-era (in the sense of a break or radical discontinuity with the preceding regime). It is not actually a matter of overcoming an established institutional mode. Neither is it a mere simulacrum without any consequences for in-

stitutional processes, a mere smoke-screen hiding the 'hard', 'real', and strictly instrumental work of taking decisions. Being contractual systems, formal organizations become forced to keep in mind what happens in the world outside them, and to take care of consensual traits of legitimacy regarding their users (see Offe 1992).

A second consequence of this double pattern is the tension between the goals of the expert system and the meanings with which the concrete subjects try to fill it. 'Meaning' is here a concept related to those of 'semantic density' (Lash 1997), 'intimate sphere' (Giddens 1997) or 'linking energies' (Habermas 1998), and refers to the varied forms of symbolic production that emerge from everyday life. For human beings not only experience the need to fulfill objectives, but also the necessity to find an inter-subjective and shared meaning in them. Our expert systems guarantee an enormous efficiency, as well as diverse and constantly renewed practical possibilities - those associated with the spheres of consumption or communication, for example. They cannot, however, guarantee a high level of consensual value orientation among subjects that are constantly forced to choose (Beck 1992, Habermas 1986). This can be shown by analyzing the experts' attitudes with respect to the central dilemmas of their action: the problem of democratic participation for administrative officials, understanding the cure and the management of the consequences of illness - with death among them - for medical doctors, or the insecurities the public discussion of the expert's knowledge brings to whatever kind of expert.

Giving consensual meanings to instrumental goals triggers reflexivity, a growing recognition of tensions as they emerge from the experts' exercise of justification and from the users' cultural diversity. But reflexivity is not simply an individualistic operation; on the contrary it is relative to the position of the subjects in the institutional game. Thus we can conclude that the code of repersonaliza-

tions is played through different modes of reflexivity, depending on the ways the contractual and the consensual frame the different fields of institutional production. There seem to be three forms.

First, systems in the political, administrative and juridical fields. The main trait of these systems is the operation of what we call a programmatic reflexivity, based on the democratic principle of discourse. Programmatic reflexivity, focused on the system as a set of rules for living together, is usually matched with a dialogic reflexivity, focused on experts as a source for decisions and values. By this means, experts try to introduce into the institutional logic meanings coming from the life-world, which in principle do not derive from the instrumental rationality of the expert system. Programmatic reflexivity has two different sources: on the one hand, a juridical one in the principle of discourse and the concept of citizenship, on the other, a pragmatic one in the models of market and consumption, as these become more and more structured by principles of quality and satisfaction.

Second, systems in the instrumental technological field. In this field a dialogic reflexivity dominates. It does not derive from an abstract, democratic imperative, but rather from the practical relationships that the experts maintain with the different life worlds they have to cope with in their daily experience.

Third, systems in the financial and mercantile fields. In these fields, the goal of benefit maximization seems to be quite impermeable to the introduction of extra-institutional meanings. In other words, money is blind. The study of the access points to these systems shows a considerable dissociation between the goals of the financial system and the local meanings of agents. It is not surprising then that money has been considered since Simmel as a model of abstract, disembodied systems (Simmel 1977, Giddens 1994).

Besides programmatic reflexivity (focused on the system) and dialogic reflexivity (focused on the expert as practitioner) we have to add reflexivity on the margins, focused on the user. The first of these refers to modes of self-acknowledgement on the part of the expert system whereby a necessity of re-linking is stressed and elaborated. This is a centrally controlled process, guided by the organizational staff, strategically planned and silently carried out as lubrication for institutional changes and conflicts. The second refers to logics of re-embodiment that the practitioners introduce into the system through their own socio-cultural experience, because there are not only professionals, but also citizens, clients, patients and users. Finally, reflexivity on the margins rushes into the access point as a daily confrontation between the institution and the subjects' life worlds.

Organizations are more or less able to process and even forecast the drift of programmatic and dialogic reflexivity through their ordinary channels of communication. But in the case of reflexivity on the margins, they proceed more abruptly, reacting to the intricacies of claims as a counter-discourse, or directly confronting normative transgressions, flaws and collapses. Normally this kind of reflexivity is poured on metaphors of chaos and imaginary scenarios of vulnerability. It is here that the study of access points becomes especially relevant, since as places of traffic and accumulation of people they often work as authentic metaphors of social disorder (consider the cases of the airport and the hospital emergency room). Reflexivity on the margins is recognized by institutions quite thoughtlessly, as they are pushed by circumstances and forced to palliate or avoid the consequences of collapse and the horizon of catastrophe.

Conclusion

The ethnography of exchanges between experts and users at access points allows us to document a number of interesting problems concerning the nature of the bond between late modern institutions and their addressees

- problems that have to do with trust, risk, visibility, difference, knowledge, equality, and justice in the interplay among rationalizing forces and local life worlds. As we have argued, this relationship cannot be understood in terms of pure instrumental rationality. Instead, it is necessary to focus on the plurality of forms of reflexivity resulting from new processes of re-personalization aimed at recreating the link. These processes aim at bringing a 'smiling institution' closer to its constituents through the predication of trust in institutional discourse.

The code of re-personalization takes place primarily on a ceremonial and symbolic level, that of nice treatment as a deferential expression of the person's sacred dignity (see Goffman 1970, 1979). It is, thus, founded on a sharp dissociation between the expert's technical action and the expressive dimensions of personal treatment. From this point of view, repersonalization could be no more than an enormous rhetorical strategy, a programmatic *mise en scène*. To a certain extent this is the case, since institutional work is explicitly divided into two branches: technical decision taking and image-policy design. This opposition may be expressed in terms of more or less hard processes - more or less impermeability to the opinions and actions of the public.

Nevertheless, our ethnography also shows how this dissociation is questioned by both users and experts. We saw neighbors claiming direct participation in town planning, as well as patients' relatives refusing to accept medical decisions. In doing so, these users take the promises of collaboration that are implicit in the expert's rhetoric, by the letter. Besides, we found institutional agents who eventually assume attitudes of critical distance regarding the work of the institution they belong to, experts who identify themselves, to a certain degree, with the users' point of view, and even act as users under particular circumstances.

Thus, as experts' credibility is openly questioned, the ceremonial limits of repersonaliza- tion also impose new limits on the future expert's ability to act mono-logically. The consequences of repersonalization are then more than ceremonial, affecting substantial aspects of expert activity. In this process the former passive objects of intervention may become dialogic subjects in the view of the institution. This dynamic can no longer be controlled exclusively from inside the system, for cultural dialogues and quarrels overflow its inner instrumental rationality, expressing emergent agreements about the very goals of the system as such.

For that reason we have proposed here an interpretation of the repersonalization processes in terms of the work of a double code of bonding - contractual and consensual at the same time - to be conceived in terms of an overlapping between organizing principles. Perhaps modern institutions have not ceased to be the one-sided, instrumental machines for problem solving and people processing that they always were, but their rationale has somehow become entangled with that of the subjects they were supposed to act upon.

In our view, the traps, conflicts, and dysfunctions affecting the daily work of expert systems in the local field (continuously verbalized by informants as the 'bitter complaint', the unsatisfied claim, the 'muddle', the 'chaos', etc.) overshadow any naïve image that institutions in late modernity have been able to successfully break away from the coercions of techno-bureaucratic rationality in order to construct a totally integrated bond with their subjects. This fact lets the door open to consider the various contradictory forms that this bond is taking now and will take in the future.

Notes

risk in access points to experts systems. Towards an ethnography of complex connections in the city" (05C/003/1996 and 06/0102/1997). The multi-sited research was directed by Honorio Velasco (UNED). An ethnographic monograph is to be published soon: Velasco, H. et al., *La sonrisa de la institución. Confianza y riesgo en puntos de acceso a sistemas expertos*. (The institution's smile. Trust and risk in access points to expert systems). Madrid: Trotta. Another paper summarizing this ethnography is forthcoming in *American Ethnologist* (Díaz de Rada, A. et al., 'The meanings of the expression 'trust in institutions'").

2. Let us consider, for example, the current meaning of the expression 'to have an identity'. A number of concrete items can be taken into account: an identification card, a credit card, a bank account, a mortgage, an office, a car, a work position, a telephone number and other addresses, a medical company and so on. All these goods and services create a social existence in face of the institutions. To this extent, research on social identity can hardly neglect the institutional insertion of subjects.

3. It seems advisable to introduce a nuance between the notions of 'expert system' and 'institution'. Strictly speaking, the expert system is a system of knowledge, therefore necessarily abstract and disembodied. Institutions are concrete realizations of such systems, empirical social organizations.

4. For a relationship of trust to develop, a subject must expect a certain behavior from another, so that the former understands that the behavior of the latter will bring important consequences for him (see Luhmann 1988, Mutti 1987, Gambetta 1988a). Trust is, therefore, one of the possible answers to a situation of uncertainty. In general, we speak of 'risk' in a much more objectified way, to refer to the probability of undesirable consequences of a specific set of actions. Thus, 'trust' seems to be an act of faith predicated about the behavior of others, while the notion of 'risk' would entail the statistical calculation of impersonal events. The techno-scientific cutting of the concept is nevertheless deceiving, since it tends to hide away the social valuations implicit in it, for example, conventions about the acceptable levels of risk, the figures of potential victims of risk scenarios or the rationality in assuming or not the consequences of risky decisions (see Beck 1992, 1995, Douglas 1992, 1996, Lash & Wynne 1992).

5. The criteria for the selection of these fieldwork contexts were a) to be prominent for its users, b) to entail problems of trust and risk, c) to entail a sharp contrast between expert and lay knowledge, d) to involve diverse kinds of bond, in particular both political and technological, e) to vary in terms of class, age and gender. In accordance with this complex object, we applied a diversity of strategies of data production: a) in depth interviewing of experts, b) participant observation at access points, c) discussion groups with users (thirteen discussion groups about air transport, hospital services, bank services and points of information and claim).

6. A constellation of terms can be grouped together under this label: 'personal' or 'interpersonal trust' for Simmel, Luhmann, or Giddens; 'primary relationships' for Cooley. These categories may be susceptible of ulterior nuances. For example, Luhmann discriminates between 'familiarity' as a naïve attitude in coping with the life world without any kind of decision, and the properly interpersonal trust as a reduction of uncertainty in coping with behavior alternatives. For the Husserlian concept of 'life world' (*Lebenswelt*), see Schutz and Luckmann (1977).

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