



Environment & Society



White Horse Press

Full citation:

Szerszynski, Bronislaw, "Risk and Trust: The Performative Dimension."
Environmental Values 8, no. 2, (1999): 239-252.
<http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/5774>

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Risk and Trust: The Performative Dimension¹

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ABSTRACT: This paper will explore some of the implications of attending to the performative aspects of language for the sociological understanding of issues of risk and trust among lay communities. Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens have alerted us to the way that in late or reflexive modernity trust in authority cannot be taken for granted, but increasingly has to be actively earned and actively invested. For his part, Brian Wynne has pointed out that lay judgements are relational and hermeneutic, including as they do judgements about the behaviour of relevant expert institutions, and about the risk to one's self-identity incurred by being caught up in relationships of dependency. Wynne has also argued that public avowals of trust can often mask deep private distrust, and thus be expressions more of fatalistic acceptance than of genuine trust. However, all of these analyses work from a basic model of 'trust' as being the result of a cognitive process – as a judgement as to the trustworthiness of others. Yet trust is frequently 'active' in an even stronger sense than this. To take a posture of trust towards another can often be best understood not just as a cognitive judgement but as an attempt to bind the 'trusted' into a relationship and attitude of responsibility – and thus perhaps to alter their behaviour – through the taking up of a position in a social ritual. Speech act theory can help us be sensitive to this sort of use of the language of 'trust', by reminding us that language can perform a number of different functions – not just that of describing the world, or of acting out ascribed roles and identities, but also that of trying to change the world. The analysis of public discourse about risk, trust and mistrust must thus be sensitive to the range of things that people might be attempting to do when they are saying things if it is to avoid drawing misleading conclusions about public attitudes to risk.

KEYWORDS: Risk, trust, lay knowledge, performativity, speech acts

What does a member of the public mean when they say, as they are sometimes recorded as doing in risk research, that they 'trust' those running a potentially dangerous installation in their locality, such as a chemical plant or a nuclear

facility? Is this a manifestation of unreflexive deference towards technical expertise? Or the result of a well considered judgement about the ability, in this particular case, of expert systems and their representatives to control the technologies in their charge? Should it be read as a fatalistic acceptance of an inescapable situation of dependency? Or as an active attempt to make those in power to fulfil their obligations to behave responsibly?

In this paper I want to suggest that the idea of 'speech acts' can make an important contribution to the interpretation of these avowals of trust, and thus to our understanding of the cultural dimensions of the public perception of environmental risk. But first I want to consider how the above questions have been explored and answered within two theoretical approaches – reflexive modernisation, and the sociology of the public understanding of science. While our understanding of issues of risk and trust has, been greatly advanced by theorists working within these two frameworks, I will argue that a deeper consideration of the different things that people do with language can shed further light not only on how people respond to living in risky places, but also about the wider dynamics of trust in modern society.

REFLEXIVE MODERNISATION

In a number of important and challenging recent works, Ulrich Beck has developed an influential theoretical account of the distinctive dynamics of risk and trust operating in contemporary society (Beck 1992; 1995; 1997). Beck has argued that we have entered a new era, one that he calls 'risk society', as distinct from classical industrial society as this was from pre-modern society. Risk society, Beck argues, has been brought into being by the internal contradictions of classical industrial society, which Beck describes as 'simple modernity'. Firstly, the risks produced by modern technologies – especially those of ionising radiation and toxic pollutants – exceed society's capacity to predict, control, geographically locate, causally attribute and financially compensate for anthropogenic risks (Beck 1996). Because of their relatively inaccessibility to the senses, late modern risks are also highly mediated risks, extremely open to social definition and interpretation. This generates a politics of knowledge in which different social groups continually compete over risk definition (1992: 26-8).

Secondly, Beck insists that simple modernity was never completely modern. Industrial society was always a transitional but ultimately unstable hybrid between traditional and modern social forms – part feudal, part industrial. The liberating effects of the labour market of industrial modernity always operated in tension with the solidity of traditional gender roles and class cultures, and the development of cognitive reflexivity was held in check by the concentration of epistemic authority in expert institutions. The feudal aspects of industrial society were thus not a survival from pre-modern times, but a product of and precondi-

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tion for industrial society itself. However, the working through of these contradictions, not least through the continuing pressures of the labour market, are progressively eroding the last vestiges of traditionality in modern society (1992: 89).

These contradictions in industrial modernity thus drive a second narrative within Beck's account of contemporary society. Alongside the 'risk narrative', grounded in the idea that modern technological risks are intrinsically different from earlier risks in a way that has far-reaching environmental and social consequences, runs a conceptually distinct 'individualisation narrative'. Beck suggests that we are witnessing little less than a new Reformation, as individuals are increasingly 'set free from the certainties and modes of living of the industrial epoch – just as they were 'freed' from the arms of the Church into society in the age of the Reformation' (1992: 14). Thus, although the increasing clamour of critical voices and alternative risk definitions is partly due to the uncontrollable and highly knowledge-mediated nature of modern risks, it is also due to the potentially quite independent process of individualisation. More and more areas of people's lives – gender roles, occupational choice, geographical residence, and so on – have been set free from their perception of being natural and inevitable and have become understood as subject to choice and calculation (Szerszynski et al. 1996: 12). Furthermore, unthinking trust of and deference towards expertise is being increasingly undermined by individualisation, so that scientific claims are not simply accepted due to their originating from experts, but are subjected to stringent social critique and contestation.

Whereas 'risk' has been the central organising concept in Beck's work, it is 'trust' that has been given more theoretical attention in the broadly compatible account developed by Anthony Giddens (1990; 1991; 1994a). For Giddens, the emergence of modern society is characterised by a shift in the principle mode of organising social relations from an unexamined and habitual *confidence* to a more actively bestowed *trust* (cf. Luhmann 1988). However, rather like Beck, Giddens distinguishes between 'simple modernity', in which science retained an aura of formulaic truth and trust in experts had more of the character of pre-modern 'confidence' (Giddens 1994b: 94), and 'late modernity', which Giddens characterises in terms of an 'active trust' which 'has to be won', and which is actively invested in others and in expert systems by autonomous, reflexive individuals (Giddens 1994a: 14).

Although Giddens perhaps is more insistent than Beck that, in relation to assessments of risk, the lay public can do little more than to choose which expert to trust – and that even in this choice they are dependent on systems of expertise (Giddens 1994b: 89-90) – the answers that both of them seem to offer to the questions with which I opened this essay would appear to be largely the same. The contested nature of expert opinion in all areas means that there is no relief from the necessity that the individual actively choose whom to trust. Under modern social conditions, trust which is not earned by the trusted and actively

invested by the truster is mere compulsiveness. Following this kind of analysis, whenever people express trust in those responsible for the operation of risky technologies, we seem to be faced with two possible interpretations – either they are being reflexive, or they are being unreflexive. In each case of expressed trust, then, either such expressions are the result of the critical, reflective weighing up of evidence and counter-evidence, of argument and counter-argument, or they are simply survivals of the unexamined habits of deference towards authority characteristic of earlier eras.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

But are there not other possible interpretations of trust in expertise, interpretations that might avoid both the starkness of this opposition, and also the implication that the only rationally defensible response to risk available to the lay public is one of assent to one expert or another? One such interpretation has been advanced in an important critique of Giddens' and Beck's work by Brian Wynne (1996). A consistent theme in Wynne's earlier work has been the attempt to counter the denigration and subsequent dismissal of lay assessments of risk as 'ignorant' or 'irrational' by expert bodies, by restoring some degree of equivalence in how expert and lay responses to risk are characterised. In turning his attention to Giddens and Beck, he argues that they too underestimate the extent to which (a) scientific knowledge is itself formulaic and contextual, and (b) lay assessment of risk has its own rationality (and not just one borrowed, as it is for Giddens, from expert systems).

Wynne argues that the distinctive rationality operating within lay publics is one that is predominantly 'relational' in character, and in at least two ways. Firstly, in lay risk assessments, judgements about technical safety are subordinated to judgements about the risks involved in the dependency on certain institutions that might follow from the introduction of a technology – such as a dependency on those who own the patents involved in the genetic modification of food (cf. Grove-White et al. 1997). Secondly, for lay communities 'risks are defined primarily according to their perceived threat to familiar social relationships' such as those of established local communities and economies, rather than by 'numerical magnitudes of physical harm' (Wynne 1989: 15). Wynne offers this interpretation of lay responses to risk and expertise, framed in terms of the maintenance of meaningful identities and relationships, as a counter to Giddens' and Beck's more instrumental-calculative understanding of how people perceive and respond to risks, in whom they invest trust, and why they invest it. For Giddens, as for Beck (1992: 34, 135) the 'reflexivity of the self' rarely seems to mean much more than an actuarial planning for the future on the basis of probabilistic calculations of advantage and risk-avoidance (Lash and Urry 1994: 39).²

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However, Wynne further argues that lay assessments of risk and investments of trust are characteristically ambivalent in nature. Deference to epistemic authority, he suggests, is often an 'as-if' trust which is as much about dependency as it is an active bestowal of trust. For the relatively powerless – such as those living in a community dependent on risky industrial plants – there is no choice *but* to trust. For example, in their study of public perceptions of the nuclear industry in West Cumbria, Wynne, Waterton and Grove-White found that '[t]rust, such as it was in the nuclear industry and the government, came across more as a necessary *condition* for satisfactory existence in the area, than as something authentically felt. As one focus group participant expressed it, "we have to believe them"' (Wynne et al. 1993: 31).

But this public but shallow display of confidence in institutions coexists in the same individual with private, active *mistrust* (Wynne 1992: 300; 1996: 48, 50; Wynne et al. 1993: 26). This represents a helpful refinement of Giddens' distinction between the unreflexive 'confidence' characteristic of pre-modernity and simple modernity, and the 'active trust' constitutive of reflexive or late modernity. In his analysis, a stance of unexamined 'confidence' in others or in social systems was appropriate within traditional society, but in late modernity any commitment that was insulated from critical examination using the resources of abstract systems would simply be unreflexive (Giddens 1994b: 90-91). Wynne's treatment of dependency and ambivalence has added a third possible interpretation of avowals of trust in expert institutions, by showing how 'empty', unwarranted trusting can itself be a rational, and indeed reflexive, response to a lack of agency.

However, I want to argue that, despite writing elsewhere with perceptiveness about the deeply hermeneutic nature of human identity, Wynne frequently writes about trust and relationality in a way that echoes the very rational-calculative models of the self that he criticises in Beck and Giddens. It is useful here to separate his treatment of (a) public expressions of trust and (b) the simultaneous private feelings of mistrustfulness. In regard to the former, Wynne does treat apparent deference to expert judgements about risk hermeneutically – as the performance of identities which can make individual's lives meaningful and bearable in situations of constrained choices.³ But when he turns to the private expressions of distrust these are treated simply as rational-calculative assessments of trustworthiness. In order to elevate the status of lay expressions of anxiety and trust, Wynne is drawn to treat them as basically the same as expert assessments – as rational judgements made on the basis of evidence. The only difference between the two is that, for Wynne, lay assessments operate with an expanded and more comprehensive notion of *what counts as relevant evidence*.

Thus, although Wynne presents his model of the self as 'more thoroughly hermeneutical ... than the rational-calculative model of Giddens' (Wynne 1996: 50), this is only partly true. In his analysis of the private mistrust of institutions Wynne treats relationality not as a constitutive characteristic of human identity

itself, but simply as a feature of the subject's social environment, an assessment of which has to inform the cognitive judgements that the self has to make:

... public risk perceptions rationally involve some element of judgement both of the quality of relevant social institutions, and of their relevance, in other words of the roles of different social agents including one's own relationship to them. ... Included in the latter is a judgement of the extent and implications of dependency upon those institutions, for safety or for the protection of other valued aspects of life, including valued social relationships (Wynne 1996: 58).

Lay risk assessments thus incorporate an awareness of the importance of relational dimensions – dependency, trustworthiness, and so on – and risks to valued relationships, as factors which rightly shape the judgements made, often privately, about risk and trust (cf. Wynne et al. 1993: 26). But this is simply a model of active mistrust entirely consistent with Giddens' conception of active trust – as reflexively granted or withheld on the basis of individuals' own rational judgements. In trying to defend the cognitive status of lay assessments, Wynne is invoking a model of the human self which, though more complex in its reasoning, is perhaps no more intrinsically relational or hermeneutic than that offered by Giddens or by Beck. I want to suggest that a more thoroughly hermeneutic approach would provide us with yet another way of understanding avowals of trust.

BRINGING IN THE PERFORMATIVE: CONFUCIUS AND AUSTIN

We can find such a picture of the human person and of social relations in the analysis offered by Herbert Fingarette of the *Analects*, the collected sayings of the 6th century BC Chinese philosopher Confucius (1972). Fingarette insists that the dominant reading of Confucius as a secular rationalist concerned to expel superstition crucially neglect passages in the *Analects* which indicate the centrality of a belief in magical powers. However, Fingarette is *also* concerned to interpret these passages in the light of contemporary philosophy, particularly the speech act theory developed by J.L. Austin. For Fingarette, Confucius' belief in 'the power of a specific person to accomplish his will directly and effortlessly through ritual, gesture and incantation' (1972: 3) represents a recognition of the irreducibly hermeneutic character of human life – that the locus of our humanness is to be found in ceremonially defined relationships with others (*li*). The image of human existence as 'holy ritual' or 'sacred ceremony' thus represents his own way of capturing the hermeneutic and relational nature of human identity, the explicitly sacred rite being simply 'an emphatic, intensified and sharply elaborated extension of everyday *civilised* intercourse' (1972: 11). The ceremony is 'the primary, irreducible event', so that 'word and motion are only abstractions from the concrete ceremonial act' (1972: 14).

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This view of the human is performative in two senses. Firstly, it emphasises that humanness is not a characteristic we possess, due to our biology, but is a performance, a taking up of a role in a social drama, a role whose efficacy not simply measured in terms of effects but in terms of how closely it realises quasi-aesthetic notions of appropriateness, skill and authenticity. Secondly, it is performative in the sense, elaborated below, that through language and gesture we are performing certain acts which can, in the right circumstances, bring about social effects hermeneutically, through changing the definition of a situation, and of its constituent social relations.

However, it might be objected that this degree of relationality – where social identities are embedded in relationships with others and in the performance of conventionalised social ceremonies – is inapplicable to modern society. Giddens, for example, gives us a powerful account of the character of modern society in terms of the disembedding of social relations from local contexts, and by the former's reflexive ordering and reordering through the application of expert knowledge (Giddens 1990: 17). According to this account, the ascribed social roles and customary forms of interaction with which Confucius was so familiar have largely been swept away by the forces of modernisation. It is no longer sufficient for the Emperor to simply sit facing South for the affairs of his reign to proceed without flaw (Fingarette 1972: 4), since in late modernity action increasingly has to be justified by non-traditional means. People may once have been 'radically relational' in the way that Confucius/Fingarette describes, but not today. After the 'second Reformation' of reflexive modernisation, people have been set free from conventionalised forms of life. Roles, relationships and practices no longer constitute the self as once they might; they are confronted by the self as something *external* to it, as options to be chosen, rejected or adapted. From such a point of view Wynne would be right to treat relationality as something external to the self – as simply part of the environment against which the self makes its judgements about degrees of risk and whether to trust. But I want to argue that this account seriously overestimates the extent to which the modern self has been disembedded from ceremonially defined relationships.

PERFORMING TRUST

One way to approach this is through speech act theory (Austin 1975; Searle 1969). This was developed by the Oxford philosopher J.L. Austin largely as a reaction against logical positivists such as A.J. Ayer, who insisted that for an utterance to be meaningful it must be capable of verification (Ayer 1936). Austin pointed out that many sentences, which he called performatives – such as 'I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*', or 'I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow' – are not used in order to make statements which might be true or false, but actually to *do* things – naming, betting and so on. Such speech acts might have certain

'felicity conditions', without which the procedure cannot be said to have really taken place – such as the existence of such a conventional procedure, its correct execution in appropriate circumstances, and in some cases the having of appropriate feelings, intentions, and follow-up behaviour – but they cannot really be said to be true or false in the way that statements can (Austin 1975: 14–15).

Austin later abandoned his initial distinction between statements and performatives in a more general theory of illocutionary force, in which statements themselves are seen as a particular kind of performative. He did this by distinguishing (i) the *locutionary* act of uttering a given sentence; (ii) the *illocutionary* act that the speaker is performing in using that locution – for example, describing, offering, promising, naming; and finally (iii) the *perlocutionary* act that may be being attempted of bringing about effects in the addressed party – persuading, alarming, and so on (1975: 98–102).⁴

How can this be applied to our question about the interpretation of the language of 'trust' in relation to technological risks? Let us return to Wynne's interpretation of people's frequent ambivalence in whether experts and institutions can be trusted. Applying the language of speech acts, one could see him as treating *both* sides of this ambivalence – public behaviour and utterances which seem to imply high levels of trust, and privately admitted low levels of trust – in terms of the narrow class of speech acts that can be judged to be true or false – as 'constatives' or 'assertives'.⁵ In the case of public acts of trusting, Wynne would presumably say that these are 'misinvoked' assertives, assertives which fail the appropriate felicity conditions – not just because the institutions cannot, in fact, be trusted, but also because the utterer will privately admit that they do not, in fact, trust. They are the performance of ascribed roles, thrust upon dependent publics due to their lack of control over their lives. In the case of expressions of private mistrust, Wynne again seems to treat them as assertions, but this time as *well-formed* assertives, in resistance to the more usual treatment of lay judgements as simply 'expressive', as having little cognitive content. But in doing so he neglects, no less than Beck and Giddens, the other kinds of things we do with words. When we interpret lay speech we have to attend to the fact that people use speech to do many more things than simply represent the world, even the world as they see it. I want to argue that this is often the case when they use the language of 'trust'.

A reflection on how trust actually seems to operate, even in modern societies, quickly raises the suspicion that to understand trust simply as the product of rational judgement do not seem to capture its cultural logic. To ask here whether the trust that a given individual might have in others is well-founded or not often misses the point. Generalised trust of others, just like generalised distrust, can be self-fulfilling. For example, if everyone behaves *as if* others are generally untrustworthy, then people will actually be so. What matters most at the level of society as a whole is less whether people can make well-founded judgements

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about others, and more whether people are of such a character as to be inclined towards trust and co-operation. From this perspective, trust is less a matter of individual discernment and cognition and more like a kind of social glue that binds people into generalised relations of mutuality.

A useful illustration of this is provided by Robert Putnam's book, *Making Democracy Work* (1993). Putnam argues that the differing fortunes of the North and South of Italy, in respect of the effectiveness of their regional governments, their economic performance and the happiness of their citizens, is best explained not by levels of industrialisation and economic modernisation, but by the deeply rooted traditions of civic association in the North. The more culturally modern Northern Italy, he suggests, has long been characterised by 'an active, public spirited citizenry, by egalitarian political relations, by a social fabric of trust and co-operation', while the more traditional South is 'cursed with vertically structured politics, a social life of fragmentation and isolation, and a culture of distrust'. It is this deep-rooted cultural difference, itself perpetuated by starkly different levels of associational activity – of what Putnam calls 'social capital' – that is at the root of the different performance of the Northern and Southern regions. Associational activity helps to generate and sustain dense horizontal bonds of trust and co-operation, and thus creates a generalised climate of trust where people are less likely to think simply of their own, narrowly-conceived interests.

Putnam also used his Italian data to argue that horizontal trust, that between citizen and citizen, also facilitated what might be called vertical trust, between citizen and authority. In the un-civic regions any ties that there were between the citizenry and those in authority were not the generalised bonds that exists between those engaged in a shared pursuit of the common good, but a bond that was personalised and instrumental in nature – one based on what each side could get out of the relationship. Although they are mistrustful of those in authority, people in un-civic areas had little sense that they should or can do anything about it; it was not just the holders of office but also the office itself which was regarded with disdain. Interestingly, it was from the regions of the South, where trust in one's neighbour was lacking, and where everyone expected everyone else – including those in authority – to be corrupt, that the call for strong government was heard most frequently. In the North, the greater degree of trust in others and internalised norms of co-operation meant that government was able to go with the grain of culture, and thus operate effectively with a lighter touch.

How can we use speech act theory to make sense of this complex, self-sustaining dance of trust? Performing trust, and performing illocutionary acts of 'entrusting' on others, are vital to the sustaining not just of 'traditional' cultures, but modern, associationally structured ones too. Expressions of trust may sometimes take the pure form of what Searle (1979) calls an 'assertive', reporting a state of affairs (in this case, the trustworthiness of some individual or institution). But at other times the dominant intention behind their use may be

closer to that of a 'declarative', an illocutionary act which by its very performance maintains, restores or transforms social identities and relationships (Butler 1997). This kind of expression of trust would be an active trust, not in the sense provided by Giddens, that of being the product of an active cognitive process, but in the sense that the speaker would be actively trying to bind the 'entrusted' into a relationship of responsibility.

Let me summarise where we now stand in relation to the questions with which I started this paper, about how to interpret public expressions of trust in institutions charged with the operation of potentially risky technology. Two kinds of interpretation were offered by Beck and Giddens. The first was that such an expression might be a manifestation of unreflexive deference to expertise – a quasi-feudal survival from simple modernity. The second was to say that it might be a genuinely active (and therefore, presumably, warranted) bestowal of trust by a reflexive individual, armed with the knowledge provided by expert systems. Wynne, for his part, offered us a third interpretation – that it might be an expression of fatalistic dependency on institutions, of a lack of choice *but* to trust. This would be a performance of trust – but an empty performance, ascribed and not chosen, a performance which is not accompanied by the feelings appropriate to 'trust'. Such simulacra of trust can easily be mistaken for the real thing, particularly by social research techniques which are less sensitive to the nuances of ambivalence (Waterton and Wynne 1999).

I have here offered a fourth interpretation – that such expressions can sometimes be best interpreted as attempts – however futile – to make the institution fulfil its obligations to the speaker or to the wider community. Take the example of a resident approaching the operators of a local chemical plant for information about, say, the safety procedures in the case of an accidental leak. In terms of the distinctions of speech-act theory, such an act could be interpreted as an assertive ('you are trustworthy') or an expressive ('I experience feelings of trust in relation to you'). But it could also be done in the spirit of a declarative ('I declare my dependency on you') – acting out the dependency of the local community on the operators of the plant, and through such heightened reminders seeking to bring about the perlocutionary effect of the company living up to its responsibilities.

To be precise, I am suggesting that some uses of 'trust' language can be seen as hybrid speech acts, 'directive declarations', which are declarations which also have the quality possessed by directives of trying to get a party to do something they otherwise would not (Tilley 1991: 13-14). Indeed, as Wynne himself notes (1996: 51), sometimes members of the public will *themselves* offer this kind of interpretation for their apparent trusting of institutions and experts. For example, Jupp's study of populations around major hazard chemical plants in the UK found that the companies themselves were ranked top as an information source that the public would approach – a seemingly clear (if sometimes unwarranted) performance of trust. However, on further prompting Jupp found that the reason

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for this performance was in order to send a clear message to industry that it should fulfil its responsibility to provide clear and accurate information to the public (1989). As Irwin et al. note, much apparent ‘information-seeking’ behaviour by individuals on health and environmental risks does turn out, on further prompting, to be motivated by a desire to prompt institutions into action (Irwin et al. 1996: 58).

However, a number of objections might be raised to the wider interpretation of much ‘trust’ behaviour as being kinds of declaration. One would be to point out that, as speech acts, declarations usually take place within specified institutional contexts, and are made by someone with institutionally defined status (Searle and Vanderveken 1985). Only a priest can baptise; only a judge can declare the accused guilty; only a referee can declare the ball offside. Through the possession of what status can stigmatised lay communities claim the power to ‘declare’ an institution into a relationship of responsibility? However, there are examples of declaratives that are not institutionally bound, such as the confession – the assertive declaration that ‘I am who I am’. The public declaration that ‘I am an alcoholic’ is necessary – not just causally but definitionally – for one to become a recovering alcoholic (Tilley 1991: 73). Similarly, the powerless status of communities in positions of dependency on risky institutions grants their acts a specific paradoxical ‘power of the powerless’, in as far as their status as suffering ‘other’ can grant them an ethical priority (Levinas 1969). As Fingarette writes, ‘Confucius truly tells us that the man [sic] who uses the power of *li* can influence those above him – but not the man who has only physical force at his command’ (1972: 12)

Another objection of my interpretation would be to point out that such speech acts can hardly be expected to have the perlocutionary effects that I am claiming are being attempted if the actor to be affected does not even know these have taken place. Austin himself pointed out that attempted speech acts could go wrong in various ways, by not meeting the various felicity conditions appropriate for each kind of speech act. In particular, ‘misinvocations’ can occur where a valid procedure, such as asking or betting, ‘cannot be made to apply in the way attempted’ (1975: 17). It might be contended that, even if I am right that much of the ‘trust’ behaviour and language *in the field* towards risk-producing and risk-regulating institutions is more declarative than assertive, that encountered in *research settings* can only be mis-declarations, since the party who is supposed to be being entrusted is not even present to hear the declaration.

There are a number of possible replies to this. Firstly, declarations of trust in the absence of the ‘entrusted’ may have the logic of an oath sworn by an atheist; when someone has stopped listening sometimes we still keep talking – indeed, sometimes the very pointlessness of communicative acts can be the clearest bearer of their meaning. But secondly one has also to attend to the unintended effects that the presence of the researcher might have on the definition of the speech situation. Local communities can often perceive sociological researchers

as surrogates and intermediates for a generalised 'authority', and at times may address grievances and petitions to that authority through the person of the researcher. Even close attention to focus group transcripts may not be able to determine when a 'virtual addressee' may have been invoked in the research setting, through the moderator being constituted as a communicative channel between local populations and those who might be held responsible for their fate, but such an effect is familiar to researchers. It may well be that the risk researcher is being 'speech-acted' into a moral responsibility to act as such an intermediary, even if they would not have freely chosen such a role.

CONCLUSION

I have argued in this paper that, although relationality and trust are clearly crucial elements in any analysis of responses to technological risks within lay populations, it is important that our understanding of these two issues is not clouded by a simplified picture of the late modern subject as radically individualised, and as legislating to itself through a disembedded reflexivity. Expressions and performances of trust can be attempts, in un-civic situations where the dialectic of trusting and trustworthiness has faltered or not yet started, to restart it through illocutionary acts of entrusting. Expressions of trust in institutions can be at once performances of a 'trusting' role that are thrust onto dependent communities, and also directive declarations whose intention it is to remind institutions of their obligations to live up to that trust – to fill an empty trust, belatedly, with its justification. This is a performance of trust which is 'active' in a way quite different to that meant by Giddens – a risking of trust in a situation where to do otherwise is to run the risk of no trust at all.

NOTES

¹ I would like to thank Kerstin Dressel, Michael Hammond, Greg Myers, Peter Simmons, Claire Waterton, Brian Wynne, Alan Irwin, Barbara Adam and Chris Kaighin for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper, a version of which was presented at the workshop *Risk in the Modern Age: Contributions from the Social Sciences*, held at OCEES, Mansfield College, Oxford, 29th June-1st July 1997.

² This contrasts sharply with the role self-narrative plays in the work of Charles Taylor, where the emphasis is on the hermeneutic creation and maintenance of a meaningful biography in relation to a framework of value (cf. Taylor 1989).

³ Although at times Wynne is drawn to represent even this as the outcome of a rational-calculative decision-making process.

⁴ Theorists of language are quick to point out that, in practice, it is often difficult to assign a given utterance such as 'I trust you' to a particular class of speech acts, since meanings

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can vary so greatly depending on who says it and in what context (e.g. Brown and Yule 1983: 233; Levinson 1983: 278-83; Potter and Wetherell 1987: 29-30). Nevertheless, the distinctions made by Austin, Searle and others can be extremely useful in unpacking the different things that people can be doing when they use language.

⁵ I refer to four classes of illocutionary or speech acts in this paper. *Assertives* are statements of fact, attempts to communicate that such-and-such is the case. *Directives* (requesting, ordering, and so on) are attempts to change the behaviour of the recipient. *Declaratives* (promising, naming, awarding) change, maintain or restore identities and relationships. Finally, *expressives* convey subjective experience and emotions. For each of these kinds of speech act there are quite specific 'felicity conditions', as Austin calls them, which have to be met in order for them to be judged as well-formed and valid – and thus effective and legitimate in bringing about their intended effect.

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