

In Commons We Trust
The Gift of Being Given to the Other

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Abstract

Trust is at the heart of many debates on topics such as democracy, well-being, and civil society. It is also central to the topic of the commons, which has received increasing attention since the Nobel Prize to Elinor Ostrom in 2009. In the mainstream theory of commons, trust is a basic foundation of collective or cooperative actions. However, the work of trust building and sustaining is rarely problematized or theorized. We challenge the existing understandings of trust based on reciprocity (i.e. entitlements, ‘tit for tat’, rights or expectations from others based on common rules) in order to invite a broadening of imagination that discusses trust as an ethical and political dimension of human relations: we argue for an honest talk about trust beyond fixed expectations about selves in the context of our inevitable constant exposure and hence vulnerability to the other’s difference/foreignness/ambiguity. Starting from a non-foundational vision on political power, we critically assess trust as reciprocity and bounded rationality to introduce ideas about trust as gift and bounded selves.

Keywords: *power, vulnerability, (post)-foundational politics, identity, solidarities, trust, common(ing)*

Introduction: Conditional Trust in Commons

Trust is one of the most important synthetic forces within society.¹

Social science could be said to be in a love affair with trust. From different specialized and fragmented academic disciplines there has been a large number of writings on the topic since the 1990s. Moreover, trust is related to many other central social science concepts, like “life satisfaction and happiness, optimism, well-being, health, economic prosperity, education, welfare, participation, community, civil society, and democracy” (Delhey and Newton, 2003, 94). The increasing concern for trust is also associated to the resurgent topic of the commons both from the mainstream literature of the commons who could be said to attempt to ‘save capitalism from itself’, as well as from the critical writers proposing commons as an alternative to capitalism (Caffentzis, 2010).² Our interest in this paper is opening up a necessary discussion of trust that we believe should be complementary to analyses or calls for commons as a project of anti-capitalist solidarity.

¹ Simmel, Georg (1950) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, translated and edited by Kurt Wolff, Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press.

² Caffentzis, G. *The future of commons*

Elinor Ostrom's work has been central to this renewed interest in both trust and the commons. Her work challenged the traditional simplistic model of a "rational egoist" in economics, in which individuals were not expected to cooperate when facing a common problem (a so-called "social dilemma"). She argued that individuals can adopt norms of behavior which favor 'trust and reciprocity' (cooperating with others who cooperate with you), "in domains where individuals interact repeatedly with others and/or gain information about their past behavior." (Ostrom, 2009, 10) Explaining cooperation in social dilemmas, Ostrom argues, requires recognizing a broader model of humans and their behavior. Her vision on trust inspired her work on the commons as self-managed communities. We will detail this vision below as a starting point of our discussion on trust.

We use this widespread vision as a relevant starting point for both a discussion about trust and eventually about solidarities and commons: we find that this rationalist-functional view of trust, even when it could be empirically adequate to represent the behavior of the majority of people in certain circumstances, is incomplete to explain the process of building and sustaining trust, especially for the normative project of expanding trust and collective action in commons as a basis for social transformations.

First of all, in other disciplines there have been an abundance of texts that argue contrary to the "cognitive" or evidentialist model of trust as based on empirical/factual observations of others. Many other scholars have theorized trust differently, as either faith (Simmel 1900), commitment or will beyond evidence (Baker 1987), "noncognitive security about motives" (Becker 1996), or "affective attitude of optimism" (Jones 1996). In all of these models, what is constant is the recognition of an additional non-rational, non-cognitive, emotional, moral or spiritual dimension of trust in interpersonal relations. For example for Simmel trust is given among people as a *sine qua non* in any society that results precisely from our limits of what we can know about each other (2004/1900; Barbour 2012).

Thus, trust is, in Barbour's (2012, 219-220) words, "a belief in others that exceeds all proof or observation", close to an experience of faith/belief which "is part of what it means to be human, or to live in a community of human beings". Contrary to Marxist or Durkheimian sociological models that place faith as an external projection of a social fact, Simmel emphasizes the inherent human condition of incomplete knowing, in which we are all subject to the other's betrayal, opacity/blindness, deception, and self-deception. More than seeing these possibilities with optimism or pessimism, which already imply a judgement or expectation about what the other will do (McLeod 2006), it is precisely the unknown future of our relationship that requires trust which is not simply opposite to suspicion/distrust. As others have argued, trust is not a measure of someone else's reliability (Baier 1996), it is "not an attitude that we can adopt toward machinery" (Jones 1996, 14).

very few relationships are based entirely upon what is known with certainty about another person, and very few relationships would endure if trust were not as strong as, or stronger than, rational proof or personal observation (Simmel, 2004 [1900]: 178-9)

Second, this paper wishes to embed the discussion on trust to the vision on political power: more than a choice between cognitive or emotional, trust is a problematized as a power relationship. Following ideas from Foucault and Butler, we argue that societal models of belief, faith, rationality or trust are primarily decisions about power and vulnerability among humans. Before talking about the marginalized vulnerable who require societal support, one has to problematize the precise production of such social category of the vulnerable. Second, whether we are interested to ‘save the vulnerable’ or to promote the rational competitive agents, a first gesture of transformation is moving beyond dualist fixed deadlocks about ‘who has the power’. When, as Ostromian model assumes, the rational, calculative individual is the “natural” condition, vulnerability will be seen as a negative condition to be reduced. Like in the mainstream realpolitik, in this perception of reality as “nasty, brutish and short” (Hobbes), cooperation becomes a strategic necessity to achieve individual goals, including survival. But in doing so they forget that social contexts and the human subject are mutually constitutive; the “rational individual” as an identitarian or behavioural essence is in fact discursively produced. Rational individualism is therefore not just a response to “repressive” mechanisms based on impositions of rules or punishments; it is also a product of self-disciplinary techniques of conduct that reproduce/reiterate modes of behavior or habits and that are based in unequal power relations (Foucault 1991, Butler, 1999). If we recognize that our socialization processes are behind this predominance of the rational-calculative reciprocal conduct, we are inviting a theorization of trust outside such strategic/defensive behavior.

Our focus therefore does not wish to emphasize a sovereign self: on the contrary, it continues a tradition of questioning modern human exceptionalism as being primarily based on ‘otherness’ (Derrida 1995) as a violent producing of difference as dangerous (Said , exploitable, less than human or subaltern (Spivak 1988). Contrary to focusing on groups/collectivities as main unit of analysis (Fraser, 1997, Young, 2000), we focus here on (self)-reproduction of subjectivities (discursively, culturally and in economic terms) given the complexity of the formation or sustainment of a social group even when homogeneity is high (Gramsci 1997, Hall 1988, Swanson 2005).

Given these perspectives, our assumption is that any reform or emancipatory transformation requires not simply a change of institutions or their rules (who holds power and how authority is administered) or even of the ideological positions of commoners, but a transformation of how, a sufficient number of people, relate to each other and to other beings. Our perspective can enrich recent thinking on commons as building radical non-market relations (De Angelis, 2013, Caffentzis, 2010, Gibson-Graham, 1996). From our view, it is not enough to say that commons can be alternatives to capitalism as non-market alternatives which seem to automatically arise from embracing a teleological non-capitalist form of solidarity (Caffentzis, 2010); or that different (re)distribution of resources will bring a more just society (Fraser). In fact, this approach of positing some anti-capitalist relations in commons as the opposite of the capitalist relations is just the mirror image and

reproduces the same dualist (good/bad, etc.) modernist logic of human behavior. The complex nature of human political relations (which is already a large topic theorized in other fields), requires more than resistance to a specific form of power hegemony (be it state or the market). As Deleuze was arguing, “the alternative is not between the market and economic planning, since planning is necessarily introduced in the capitalist State, and the market subsists in the socialist State, if only as a monopolistic market of the State itself. And in effect, how does one define the true alternative without assuming all these problems resolved beforehand?”³

Our central argument is that the expansion of commons requires a different view of social (and power) relations than one based simply on assumptions about a human behavioral or ideological essence as either strategic economic cooperators, or solidary anti-capitalists. Rather, it demands a more profound rethinking of human relations that goes beyond some common identity or goals, and which is focused on our embeddedness in power relations, the opacity of the self (and consequently of others), and the common vulnerability to each other. This view sees trust not as an expected reciprocity or solidarity, but as an unconditional “being given to the other” (Butler), a gift of ‘justice of love’ (Adorno) from a position of freedom (non-entitlement) in our common “worldiness”.

Starting from a non-foundational vision on political power, we critically assess trust as reciprocity and bounded rationality to introduce ideas about trust as gift and bounded selves, moving from the predominance of the exchange mindset to a mindset based on care/love and sharing. To build this argument, first we introduce the capillary perception on power (or governmentality), in order to understand our embeddedness within power relation in multiple social sites. Power is at play in any relation: what matters is how we use it, to abuse/take/extract or to love/give. We wish to re-read Ostrom’s vision of power/trust in more Foucaultian terms so that then we could proceed with introducing the idea of an ethics of trust based on what Butler calls the opacity/boundedness of (our)selves and human primordial state of ‘being given to the other’.

In the second section, we critically assess the prevailing view of trust as calculative reciprocal exchanges for the purpose of ‘improved utility’ (individual and collective) and ‘competition’. We posit that in this model, cooperation is reduced to a strategic *exchange* between predominantly egoist individuals, much like in the market. Scholars who posit the rational egoist model are arguing that the ego is an adaptive mechanism of survival of humans. Following our ego can also lead to personal and collective destruction. We propose consequently the idea of bounded selves’ as opposed to ‘bounded rationality’, a situation of profound ambiguity-opacity about the ego in its constant exposure/vulnerability to others, a primordial condition since infancy, which would requires less calculation and prediction and more acceptance and empathy as. A non-foundationalist understanding of

³ Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), pp, p. 256.

power implies also not being blindly attached to a foundation (identity, ego, value, worldview) which demands and consumes us, instead of giving.

Finally, we develop the idea of a relational ethics of trust as gift: being ‘blindly given to the other’ our unbearable vulnerability and exposure to the others does not preclude the possibility for social responsibility or solidarity: on the contrary, such collective work must start precisely in the face of our inevitable failures and limitations.

Calculating Trust, (Ex)Changing Relations

For Hardin, all herders were trapped in a tragedy from which they could not escape, some ‘natural’ egoism that prevents collective engagements and therefore, commons tend towards degradation. The herders were helpless, as the unavoidably violent ungoverned citizens of Hobbes. Ostrom’s research was coming to the observations that such a paradigm is obviously limited by the limited measuring of ‘selves’ as players cast in the rationality model. Nowadays we can better observe the consequences of such a defensive/offensive behavior promoted as realistic: the apocalypse is here already (visible in the socio-environmental crisis) despite the temporary cocoons of privilege still assuring shelter from destruction⁴). Despite the debunking of Hardin long ago, his ideas still persist. It is easy to see why: like many other *realpolitik* truths, it is a convenient truth for global markets where actors do not have to see each other, relations are reduced to numbers, and decisions are reduced to rational calculations by interest groups. The production of these truths in capitalism is as important, and in fact supports, the production of profit that keeps the capitalist engines going.⁵

Ostrom saw that Hardin’s idea was not a general truth but rather that it illustrated cases when people did not organize collectively. For her, people did not cooperate not because of an egoistic nature, but because they could not communicate with each other (Ostrom 2005, 2010). People are still pursuing self-interest, but they are “boundedly rational” (i.e. rational but with limited knowledge), and self-interest is more broadly defined: it can incorporate concerns for ‘others’ as well as for established ‘norms’ and ‘rules’. Thus, self-interest could still lead to cooperation because once people started talking they would realize their self-interest could be better achieved by cooperating. Moreover, they would develop trust in each other, because face-to-face communication allows people to ‘judge’ others’ “trustworthiness”, and make predictions about their behavior, and then decide if they will cooperate. Trust is therefore a strategic calculation of costs and benefits of trusting and cooperating to address a joint problem (a ‘social dilemma’). The cost-benefit analysis is based on the idea that trusting others has some costs to individuals (including the risk or fear of being cheated), but that they also provide benefits (‘pleasure’) to individuals who value following norms as well as punishing those who don’t follow them:

⁴ Erik

⁵ Foucault *Society must be defended. Gramsci Prison Notebooks*

If individuals do not believe that the others with whom they are relating are trustworthy, then the best they can do is to act in a manner consistent with accepted theory of self-regarding preferences. On the other hand, if individuals trust that at least some others will reciprocate cooperation with cooperation, then it may pay—especially in settings where the costs are not too high initially—to explore this possibility by trying cooperative actions and seeing what happens. If others do not reciprocate, one immediately returns to noncooperation and tries to exit and find other situations that are more productive (Ostrom, 2009, 12).

Ostrom argued that while there is a minority of individuals who do not trust at all (i.e. egoists) and another minority who trust *unconditionally* (i.e. altruists), the vast majority of individuals are “conditionally trusting” (Ostrom and Walker, 1994)⁶ This is also a *conditional expectation* of others behaving in a trustworthy manner. Reciprocity is to be used strategically: as a ‘carrot’ for the other’s good behavior, or a stick (in ‘negative reciprocity’, i.e. punishment) for bad behavior. Reputation of trustworthiness in this theory is directly related to people’s behavior, but also to their recognized identity. Commons theory naturalizes the observation that people with common identity trust each other more (reference). Finally, in Ostrom’s model individual norms of reciprocity are not enough to sustain cooperation, because a breaking of trust can easily lead to a circle of negative reciprocity. Thus, formalized institutions (‘rules of the game’) are essential to establish the agreements as well as the sanctions to those who do not comply with an agreed-upon action (i.e. those who behave contrary to the group’s majority decision).

...graduated sanctions are a way of informing those, who have made an error or faced some emergency temptation, that others are watching and, if someone else were to break a rule, they would likely be observed (Ostrom, 2009, 25)

In this sense, Ostrom’s view are inspired by that of Habermasian understanding of democracy based on rational dialog, trying to also find the conditions people have to approximate in order to be able to exchange their arguments and produce/validate norms.⁷ There are two main problems with such a process of communication that we will now introduce and further elaborate in the coming sections. First, as other institutional scholars pointed out in their criticism of Ostrom, these ideal situations of face-to-face rational

⁶ Ostrom, E. and Walker, J. (1994) *Trust and Reciprocity, Interdisciplinary Lessons from Experimental Research*.

⁷ In the structure of the discourse ethics developed by Habermas, the presuppositions about people’s possibilities for communication are related to rational argumentation (equally respected rights to participate in this process). However, perhaps Ostrom’s insistence on avoiding generalized universal truths and designs brings her closer to a Foucaultian notion of criticism or genealogy as “historical investigation of the events that led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying....Archeological – and not transcendental, in that it will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or all possible moral action”

communication are not enough, because they are not devoid of unequal power relations.⁸ Second, the situation of inequality or injustice of power relations is first and foremost a matter of socialized invisibility -- who sets the terms of the conversation (who sets the agenda)⁹ and who is silenced.¹⁰ This invisibility may not simply be something that can be granted in a participatory process of recognition, consultation or communication: that is, the injury exercised upon such people is not simply an identitarian injury that can be solved with coalition building alone.¹¹

Hence, the reputation for ‘trustworthiness’ in Ostrom’s becomes quite problematic. For instance, the “Investment game”, also called the “Game of trust”, developed by Berg and colleagues (1995), highlights how the economic “game theory” behind Ostrom’s model views trust as a market good to be invested in (and, as in markets today, speculated with). In this game, a person (investor) has an initial fund that, if they share with a second person (broker), is tripled by the experiment’s controller. The dilemma is that in order to give the funds to the broker, the investor has to either trust that the broker will give back some of the surplus from the funds, or has to be somewhat altruistic and positively value the broker’s financial well-being. Traditional game theory would predict that the investor would not send any funds to the broker. The findings by Berg et al. (1995) show that even without knowing each other, many of the people playing the investor chose to trust the broker and transfer some funds. However, the level of investment made by the ‘investor’ influences his/her ‘reputation’ of trustworthiness (Ebenhöh and Pahl-Wostl, 2008); and this level of reputation, when known in advance, in turn influences how much the investor will give, and also how much the broker will return to the investor (Boero et al., 2008).

Reciprocity in game theoretic approaches, therefore, works as a tit for tat: what I give back depends on what you gave. This has troubling implications for a broader conception of trust. The conception of “fairness” applied seems to be one based on “equal amounts of contributions” (criticize this?). In addition, trust appears as a thing to be ‘bought’ with enough investment. Moreover, this approach can be taken to imply that socio-economic status is inherently tied to perceived trustworthiness, leading easily to marginalization of the already marginalized, the invisible. The more one has, the more one can give, the better reputation one will have, and the more people will give back. For all we know, the investor could be a white-collar criminal, and as long as he has sufficient money and decides to share it (or more accurately, to buy others’ trust), he can gain a reputation for being trustworthy. As Putnam (2000) stated: “in virtually all societies, ‘have-nots’ are less trusting than ‘haves’, probably because haves are treated by others with more honesty and respect.”¹² Moreover, “The poor cannot afford to lose even a little of what they have if

⁸ Jack Knight.

⁹ Barach and Baratz

¹⁰ Ranciere

¹¹ Velicu and Kaika

¹² Putnam, Robert (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster, p. 138.

their trust is betrayed; the rich stand to lose comparatively less, and they may gain comparatively more from trusting behaviour”¹³. This is, after all, an accurate picture of today’s society which praises ‘achievers’ as people to be emulated and trusted; (**find a nice citation about this from popular press**).

However, as shown by critical scholars of commons, many community institutions that may appear as emerging from self-governing autonomous processes, are actually reproducing and naturalizing unequal power relations in various forms, from paternalism and sexism to abusive or tyrannical.¹⁴ Therefore, repetitive reciprocal exchanges in this individualistic frame, even when perceived as a self-governing process, could often be the repetitive habits we have been governmentalized into. As Nandy argued for the context of post-colonial India, ‘we can only talk to the state like the state’¹⁵. The ‘intimate enemy’ is already within us, in our perceptions about ourselves and our self-worth, in the discursive and cultural exchanges we have from this self-positioning.¹⁶

In the next section, we will expand on how the paradigm we are governmentalized in – self-centric or individualistic – may not be a problem in itself: the problem is that our socialization process hegemonizes this as natural and the only realistic position we could have. We handicap ourselves by limiting our own possibilities of relating. Reciprocity, we argue, operates as violence when one does not meet the expectations, with punishment producing a cycle of violence and retaliation for the failure of someone to meet the expectations. People therefore, are commonly invisibilised by the exact institutions they are supposed to belong to; or they are simply not belonging, for instance, in the cases of different classes Adivasi, ethnicities, migrant communities or women.¹⁷ Perhaps the space for ethics could more honestly and imaginatively be created from the fragile textures of our knowledge and failures rather than from obsessive search for successful compliances. Perhaps this is precisely why we should look for other sources of trust, to go beyond the cycle of reciprocity or retaliation. This is a crucial point for trust as an ethical and political relation, for, how can you have trust and communicate when you don’t see the other in his/her valid reality, suffering, desires or interests?

Our Common Embeddedness in Power Relations

¹³ Delhey and Newton, 2003, p. 95-96. See also Patterson, who analyses the relation of trust with race and class in the USA. Patterson, Orlando (1999) ‘Liberty against the democratic state: on the historical and contemporary sources of American distrust’, in Mark E. Warren (ed.) *Democracy and Trust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁴ Gustavo uses example as power elite persistence in Mexican community. Tania Muray Wilshusen
¹⁵ reference

¹⁶ Nandy and Said..... therefore, colonialism in India continued after the British left Can people who have been told that their self-worth is depended on the Authority, give themselves to others in different ways?

¹⁷ Women in the indigenous communities of Mexico women are usually a very small minority of those formally recognized as community members.

*Recent liberation movements suffer from the fact that they cannot find any principle on which to base the elaboration of a new ethics.*¹⁸

*The individual is the product of power.*¹⁹

To talk about human relations, including trust and reciprocity, inevitably requires one to engage with the issue of power. The mainstream commons literature, however, has not addressed power systematically. To the extent that it has, power has been understood as a resource each individual has in different degrees and which can be used to achieve certain individual or collective goals or to constrain others' actions (Theesfeld, Kaswhan). Inequalities of power were unproblematic as long as everyone gains from trust and cooperation. Ostrom herself gave little visibility to the issue of power and its connection to trust. However, despite her conventional individualist take on power as a resource to be managed, Ostrom's view already opens a window towards challenging the idea that power is only located in the institutions of the state or the market. Put it differently, she prepares us for a shift from the questions of 'who' (has the power) to the questions of 'how' power circulates among people in relations of trust, reciprocity and collective actions.

While one may read Ostrom in a top-down approach to power, we could also read her with Foucaultian lenses: power is productive and capillary in the sense of diffusion through micro-practices of everyday life, in the bodily/ discursively produced relations among people (). For Ostrom, people do not just demand power from a higher authority, they have the power to produce authorities in their own backyard at various levels (from small groups like family and neighbourhoods to villages/cities, from schools to factories or corporations). But we should be adding that even when people are producing these new authority relations, they are often also reproducing more general patterns of power relations: the marginalized of the world are themselves embedded in relations of power in the way they reproduce and internalize these relations as ways of engaging with each other and ways of identifying themselves. As Butler argued, „we are always already within power”²⁰ that sphere which we may conform to (reproduce/fight for) or even reject (rebel against). This controversial Foucaultian perspective that power is everywhere may sound like it renders us impotent in terms of transformation. However, in Butler's reading of Foucault, what matters is that he, as many other critical thinkers, insists on seeing power as an **intimate process of relational transformation** rather than a closed dualistic process of 'us vs. they'. Here is where our concern for trust and self-transformation comes to the fore: once we rethink power as productive and capillary, the relational factor escapes dualist deadlocks of power relations. Changing the unequal structural conditions of power has to start with an intimate transformation of self-identification and inter-relations beyond

¹⁸ “On Genealogy of Ethics” , p. 343 in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader* (NY: Random House, 1984),

¹⁹ Foucault's preface to Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia* (NY: Viking Press, 1977).

²⁰ pg

egoistic self-interest, abuse or domination. Power is not merely capturing more assets or having more rights but instituting ourselves as equally political.²¹

Coproduction or self-governance can be seen as happening wherever governmentality happens: power (one may also say economic system/regimes, structures, culture, discourses or mainstream paradigms) produces (our)selves and our relations within its own (epistemological/ontological) limits and naturalizes these to the point that we may not distinguish between 'us' and the power that circulates within/through us, our embodiment of structural power relations. Power co-produces us, and we co-produce power. It is not about institutions (party/government etc.) as some rigid machines that produce individuals. It is not enough to say that schools, for instance, mold us into becoming disciplined subjects: we have to remember that we have internalized these norms and normalized them, or sometimes reproduce them 'unconsciously' in many other forms and venues (despite or even because of hating them). Even when we reject these norms, we are already produced through and within them: we are implicated in these even in the exact process when we produce our rebellious subjectivities. One cannot think of oneself outside the system/regime as some 'better' ego. As Foucault was explaining, 'strategists' (rulers) themselves who may appear to lead the game had to go through a process of self-formation to develop such domination- approach to power. The bourgeoisie formed itself as a dominant class through strategies of self-moralization and self-discipline etc.²² By accepting such a perspective, we already see the actual potential for transformation: we are already engaged in a process of self-governance. The contingency and instability of any point of domination in power relations makes Foucault prefer an approach to power through the analysis of micro-practices and political technologies rather than through theoretical deductions.²³ In other words, since hegemony is never complete, any form of political subjectivation remains open to transformation. Despite often being read as almost a fatalist in terms of resistance, Foucault wrote:

It is through revolt that subjectivity (not that of great men but that of whomever) introduces itself into history and gives it the breath of life. (...) One does not have to be in solidarity with them. One does not have to maintain that these confused voices sound better than the others and express the ultimate truth.²⁴

His ideas are moved forward by Butler's development of performativity. She writes that any foundational identity or category (such as women, workers, etc.) is discursively produced by the very structures it is supposed to criticize in order to emancipate, liberate or

²¹ My paper with Kaika

²² 1st vol of History of Sexuality

²³ Dreyfus, Hubert L. *Michel Foucault, beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982)

²⁴ Michel Foucault, "Is it useless to revolt?" 1979 in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy Carrette (NY: Routledge, 1999), p. 133-134 emphasized added.

represent itself.²⁵ The problem lies not in having or not having different or common identities or foundations per se, but in the refusal to see that these, despite being discursive contextual and contingent formations, are often (ontologically and epistemologically) portrayed as ‘natural’, static and unquestionable, as more just or better than others. The issue is not how to liberate the self but how to imagine new types of relations to selves as aware of our own historicity and the always/already-ness within power relations.

Since there is nothing essentially good or bad about power, imagining and practicing a relational ethics based on trust seems to be a crucial step in contemporary movements for commoning. Recognizing this omnipresence of power in every relation has a component of *violence* (of being hurt, of *suffering*). In order to build another form of trust not based on expectations (rule/norm of reciprocity) which avoids vicious cycles of retaliation (if you break trust, you are ‘punished’), we need to accept this possibility of being hurt (of the other failing). In the next section, we discuss Ostrom’s proposal for face to face rational communication as the basis for trust and the limits of such a vision. Then, we develop the idea of trust as a problem of human relations (to themselves and to others) – and consequently an ethical and political issue.

No Common(s) Grounds, No Ethics?

“the most optimistic ethics have all begun by emphasizing the element of failure involved in the condition of man; without failure, no ethics”

Simone de Beauvoir

As introduced in the previous sections, the vision of conditional trust developed by Ostrom implies that people with bounded or limited knowledge of each other and their conditions base their trust on the observation of other’s behavior and their social reputation. Therefore, the bounded rationality of individuals presupposes the desirability of having more information in order to reduce uncertainty and therefore vulnerability and be able to ‘succeed’ / be more effective/efficient. Moreover, people’s nature as fallible can be further corrected by the development of collective institutions that regularize interactions and especially that monitor/punish the wrong-doers (who break the trust). She adds however, that these institutions are never enough because “the temptation to cheat always exists. No amount of monitoring and sanctioning reduces the temptation to zero” and insists on “ensuring that trust and reciprocity are supported rather than undermined”

In complex settings, no one is able to do a complete analysis before actions are taken, but individuals learn from mistakes and are able to craft tools, including rules, to improve the structure of the repetitive situations they face.

²⁵ Butler

In this section, we further problematize trust as calculus of expectations (or knowledge accumulation) meant to build institutions of consensus/sameness be them cooperatives or social movements. We argue that from a non-foundational vision of power, such impulse for coalition building still conditions trust on factors that make it a ‘deal’: we emphasize the violence of ethics based on homogeneity or common foundations (e.g. ‘common identity’, common norms). The question is: can we have an ethics that does not presuppose a common ground *ex ante*? We make such observations in order to prepare the ground for talking about boundedness of selves as opposed to bounded rationality.

A common identity has often been viewed as a necessary precondition for trust and collective engagements in both social movement and commons scholarship; however, this ignores that identitarian categories are not fixed or natural but socially produced and reproduced through existing power relations. The point we wish to emphasize is that the focus on common identity originates in an epistemological practice of ‘knowing’ and ‘researching’ the ‘other’, and therefore fixing the other in the mirror of our own projections. Rational-choice theories are based on such projections and they are a result of a Hegelian understanding of the other as yourself in the mirror.²⁶ It is often the case that commonness is preferred to otherness since the latter presupposes a possible different ontological field that we have to see or even create/prepare (Butler). Fixing the others into familiar categories (producing compulsory norms of behaviour/institutions etc.) can reduce the ‘uncertainty’ and vulnerability when relating to them. As other theorists have argued, identity and representational politics is about dealing mainly with ‘legible’ people (Scott, Li) or ready-made political subjects (Butler).

Like identity, trustworthiness is also a social construct: it is easy to trust those with similar beliefs/norms/identities and who we know can be ‘trusted’ (in fact research shows this is the case).²⁷ This understanding is itself related to hegemonic views about individuals and groups, and is often associated to particular identities/values (e.g. class, ethnicity, gender). Since the epistemological/ontological foundation that prevails is egocentrism, the emphasize on commonalities simply reproduces such view with all its narcissistic or nationalistic overtones. The civic and the ecological commons (Reid and Taylor) cannot flourish in this manner. For instance, the classic comment of ‘don’t trust strangers’ has historically been racialized amongst whites as ‘don’t trust blacks’. The Mexicans, in their exterminatory war, would similarly say of the Yaquis that they are not to be trusted, that they don’t have ‘morals’.²⁸ Sayings about ‘men’ as not worthy of trust are also popular in Western culture. But one of the main challenges of building trust within societies is how to trust those who are seen as different, the societal ‘otherness’ and its unknown. Therefore, moving beyond this ‘bounded rationality’ requires more than knowledge or sameness as foundational truths. By making the statement “this person/community/state is trustworthy’

²⁶ Butler

²⁷ Some illustrations

²⁸ Taibo II, P.I. *Yaquis*

we are already assuming a foundational truth about it, which means we are enclosing the others in the prison of our own expectations.

Violence is further reproduced through the flipside of reciprocity, which is punishment. A “coherent self” or a homogenous community may cease to be so at any point in time, behaving contrary to the expectations imposed upon by others (institutionalized through community rules and norms);²⁹. This is the same logic behind the disputed but widely held ‘broken windows’ theory of law enforcement, which posits that enforcing laws against petty crime will reduce crime. This view ignores not only the social conditionings that lead people into committing a ‘crime’, but also that the norms that establish a certain act as ‘crime’ can be questioned. Simply punishing the free-riders may produce more prisons, as shown by the failure of policies for criminality in the US. After all, law already incorporates the hegemonic social constructs about trustworthiness and thus, can also be seen as a way to ‘administer illegalities’ (Foucault). This view also makes the ‘criminal’ more invisible than he/she already is. Recognizing this invisibility problem as a power issue foresees that these ‘illegal’ actions are often a way for the invisible to violently (not necessarily in physical sense) become *visible* –as in fact has been the case with civil disobedients from India’s independence movement, the civil rights struggle, the gay/lesbian movement or the anti-military movements across the world. These people “come out” to be more *authentic* with themselves, even risking their lives to do so. These kinds of acts, however, have little space in the view of trust as reciprocity, because they are not acts of doing something expecting the other to do in return – they are acts out of courage and love and the need to *be something different* than expected.

By limiting our perspectives on our-selves and others, we are already constraining our vision on the commons, we enclose the ‘commons’ within ourselves, for what/who is not recognized as familiar is also often invisible as a political subject. No matter how much we try to define what a human should be, history showed us that such humanistic endeavors are also often moralistic or patronizing. The more we try to invest the human with values we accept as essential, no matter how altruistic and beneficial, such investments could certainly function as pressures (norms/oppression) for those who do not feel represented by them. This is a form of violence that we are reproducing among ourselves. Therefore, by contrast with the institutionalist-foundationalist view, the acceptance of uncertainty in a non-foundational sense is an indication of the fact that politics is not only about having foundations (world-views, values, identities) in common, but about *embracing the different worlds of others*.

The points Butler is making are crucial to understand the fallacy of basing a societal ethics on essences or commonalities of human nature. She critically analyzes Arendt’s idea of simply ‘belonging to’ the Jewish by making the point that we should be concerned about our *„capacity to live with others precisely when there is no obvious mode of belonging.”*³⁰

²⁹ Ostrom article on the origins of trust

³⁰ Butler’s article

This is not just relevant for small communities from families and neighbourhoods but to larger groups (nations/regions) which have historically been formed around commonalities and therefore, the differences have had to be ‚dealt’ with often violently, while even toleration of such differences eludes the shift in optic from commonalities to differences and ambiguities as the basis of people coming together. More simply put, it is not (universal) sameness or heterogeneity that should be looked for when thinking ethically³¹:

the question of ethics emerges precisely at the limits of our schemes of intelligibility, the site where we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in a dialogue where no common ground can be assumed.

When we see it is so hard to keep people accountable for being only good, only altruistic, only sincere, precisely when we see that no universalizing of such humanistic features we can perhaps relate more authentically to each other, we can proceed with trusting and building together from a position of ambiguity/uncertainty of what a human is and could become. Here we read Butler’s exigency in terms of rule-making: the transformation or perhaps the production of norms as open ontologically and epistemologically to what is foreign/unknown/uncertain/unborn yet. If we follow the bounded rationality and rule-making only we can approximate norms that already exist. How can we approximate norms that we do not recognize as ours?

It is one thing to say that a subject must be able to appropriate norms, but another to say that there must be norms that prepare a place within the ontological field for a subject.

The idea of limits/boundedness to our rationality (not being able to do a “complete analysis”) necessarily implies that we should not start with a foundational assumption about ‘reality’ (both around and inside us) and the ‘proper’ way to engage in commoning. Ostrom suggested we should be humble about our capabilities and engage in a continuous process of deliberation learning. Ostrom believed that trust can only be practiced in the experimentation of collective deliberations within (self-governing) institutions. Perhaps Ostrom’s cautiousness is similar to what Butler called the promising ambivalence of norms. Talking about this requires first a discussion about the boundedness of ourselves.

Suspending the demand for self-identity or, more particularly, for complete coherence seems to me to counter a certain ethical violence, which demands that we manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require that others do the same.

³¹ Foundations are fragile, solidarities do not necessarily need foundations, so how do you create trust without foundations? Explain foundations. And then, can we build a different post-foundational foundation that is not destructive to trust? A common purpose is more important than shared set of values? Non-foundational is not about not having in common, but about embracing difference, fragility, and the ‘doing other worlds in common’.

Bounded Selves and the Necessary Mourning for the Ego

The opacity of the subject may be a consequence of its being conceived as a relational being, one whose early and primary relations are not always available to conscious knowledge. Butler

There is a sense of optimism in the celebration of our potential benevolence in counter-reaction to the prevailing ego-selfish-advertisement that capitalism has been encouraging (Hart and Negri Klein, . This is a welcoming trust as celebration of how much better we and the world could be (another world is possible type of slogans). However, there is less talk about ‘another self is possible’ outside the already emerging movements. As we have discussed previously, any foundation is socially produced and when historicized, it becomes fragile. Recent literature and practices of social movements confirm us that people can perform multiple, fluid, or hybrid identities³² in their collective engagements. This shows us that humans are never fixed in their interests or identities, they themselves are in the making.³³ One reason why these movements have a difficult time in sustaining their networks is perhaps related to the complex conditions of our beings, which Butler calls the “opacity of the self”. If it is often the case that we may not even be aware of our own various identities, contradictions and hybridities, how can we really know and accept/trust the (identities of) others? In fact, perhaps solidarity work should actually start when we failed at being solidary. Butler paraphrases Foucault saying that we cannot know „up to what point we can know” about (our)selves and hence the Others. How to handle or even honor with trust our inevitable constant exposure and hence vulnerability to the other’s difference/foreignness/ambiguity?

Some of the answers that Butler, among others, proposes are pointing to accepting the opacity/indeterminacy of the subject. Who is the ‘I’ in relation to norms? How can I tell the ‘truth’ about who I am (selfish/altruistic/good/bad etc.) when I see the operation of norms in the very constitution of myself as a subject? Any relation to a regime of truth is also a relation to myself, it is about how I am making myself in a certain mode of subjectivation. The very making of the self is a process of relations to others and to the norms that create the scene for our mutual recognition. These norms by which I recognize another or indeed myself are not mine alone and are often not even chosen by me.

The “I” has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation – or set of relations – to a set of norms. (...) always to some extent dispossessed by the social conditions of its emergence. This dispossession does not mean we have lost the subjective ground for ethics. On the contrary, it may well be the condition for moral inquiry (...). If the ‘I’ is not at one with moral norms, this means only that the subject must deliberate upon these norms.

³² Also indigenous politics such as Borderlines Homi Bhaba

³³ Even Ostrom said that. And counteract with the book *The Will to Improve*

There are three implications of this view: first, we are never fully ‘true’ as in non-socially constructed and that we are never fully complete since, even as a ‘will to improve’ we are constantly incited to change or inspired to transform. Moreover, the constitution and re-constitution of our selves within the limits (norms) that are often unchosen also relate to the insupportable unintelligibility of our unconscious. Who “I” am, is ‘relations’: as an ego, socially constructed to survive and grow in a particular environment, I am truly ‘enigmatic’ to myself and I could never ‘find/know’ myself outside social relations. My ego is not some substance I came with in this world but an ‘array of relations and processes, implicated in the world of primary caregivers’³⁴The psychoanalytical scene puts us back into our inaugural moment with the purpose of moving beyond the narrative of myself: it helps the ego see the intersubjective conditions of its own emergence, individuation, survival, subjectivation and perhaps subjectification. Some of my egos would unreflectively scream here: this sounds vague and incoherent! Perhaps, as Butler suggests, psychoanalysis overrates the coherence of the ego’s narrative in its ethical mission of mental health. Perhaps, the fantasies we could unveil within our egos are merely indicative of our own indeterminacy.

To understand the unconscious, however, is to understand what *cannot* belong, properly speaking, to me, precisely because it defies the rhetoric of belonging, is a way of being dispossessed through the address of the other from the start³⁵.

Second, is that I cannot trust another if I do not accept myself with my own incomplete/ambiguous identities and vice versa since I am constituted through my relations to the others. As Ostrom also argues, people are making and re-making the norms in any community faced with the need to self-organize for the preservation of commons. This is a process of first recognizing the “inter-dependency” (citation from Ostrom) of oneself to others, and second, of deliberation and self-making. Moreover, we could add that this situation is not about a given set of participants in a certain context; as Butler would say, it is all past and present relations we have been embedded in. From our families and small groups, to the nation, our allegiances and forms of belonging give us a sense of identitarian security without which we would perhaps not be able to navigate the world. However, we are never just our egos: we are never just peasant, worker, woman, mother, etc. and we do not really know what we could (have) become given different conditions and choices. The egos are artificially constructed in our social history and within the limits of the structures of power that made us possible in the first place. Therefore, as Butler invites us to think, ethics could be looked upon outside the morality of egos or after the death of the ego.

Out of a fear of “death, the death of a subject who cannot, who can never, fully recuperate the conditions of its own emergence. But this death, if it is a death, is only the death of a

³⁴ 59

³⁵ P. 54

certain kind of subject, one that was never possible to begin with, the death of a fantasy of impossible mastery, (...) a necessary grief.

Saying that the subject is ambiguous (ambivalent) or mobile in its forms of subjectivation, both produced and reproducing itself is not a novel idea. Accepting the complicity of the subject to its own conditions of production is also a liberating responsibility. Marx also assumed human freedom as the basis of agency, a view which is hard to reconcile with his overall material determinism. If we are, at least partially, free from the constraints of the external world, we might act without justification according to our whims. As Simone de Beauvoir criticizes the Christian logic of Marxism “To admit the ontological possibility of a choice is already to betray the Cause.”³⁶ Or, as Foucault also argued that “there cannot be relations of power unless subjects are free”. In other words, one cannot be trusted to fulfill one’s promises without the fear of punishment and because failure is an unacceptable possibility. Such an ethical violence is mostly visible in totalitarian regimes of power precisely because in such regimes, opacity, indeterminacy, mobility of the fellow-participant is unacceptable. However, such mobility has allowed people to survive beyond conventional and arbitrary definitions of right or wrong.

The third implication our (primary) opacity or incoherence is that it does not exclude human agency and ethics. On the contrary, as we will detail below, it is perhaps a base of agency, which is relational and collective. Working out trembling from (and within) fragile/ambiguous materials such as the humans has the advantage of avoiding the violent gesture that comes with ethical closure (norms as deadlocks) irrespective of how much such closure has been rationally deliberated in a specific time and space and by a specific community. There is a foundational ‘truth’ that even post-foundational thinking encourages and that is, human freedom to give itself foundations/identities and to create own realities, sometimes precisely in the contradictory scenarios that he/she embodies: juggling the opacity of who we are and the openness that comes with that. In other more simple words, the ability to self-organize.

When we claim to know and to present ourselves, we will fail in some ways that are nevertheless essential to who we are. We cannot reasonably expect anything different from other in return. (...) it is to experience the limits of knowing. This can, by the way, constitute a disposition of humility and generosity alike. I will need to be forgiven for what I cannot have fully known and I will be under a similar obligation to offer forgiveness to others who are also constituted in partial opacity to themselves. (...)

Vulnerable as in ‘Given to the Other’ or Trust as a Gift

The infant enters the world given over from the start to a language and a series of signs, (...). From this primary experience of *having been given over from the start*, an ‘I’

³⁶ Simone, ethics of ambiguity

subsequently emerges. (...) This is a scandal, of course, since it shows us that love, from the outset, is without judgement, and that, to a certain extent, it remains without judgment”

The emphasis on ‘rationality’ and in particular ‘calculative rationality’ means the role of emotions in collective action in the mainstream theory of the commons has been largely ignored. In Ostrom’s bounded rationality model of trust, there is a clear absence of reference to anything that resembles emotions as drivers of individual actions, including the decision to trust someone. But people’s fears about the unknown or the different are often central barriers to trust. This leads us back to what we have discussed earlier as the role of power-laden social constructs of human categories. Even from within the rational-choice school, we encounter scholars like Farrell who notes that in situations of power inequalities, a more powerful person who has more opportunities for developing social relations may value them less and may take advantage/abuse trust more easily. He concludes that if relationships “involve *genuine emotional attachments* they are less likely to be highly asymmetrical in this sense; both parties may have sunk considerable resources into the relationship, and will be unwilling to abandon it lightly.”³⁷

We are not just trying to advance emotions as opposite/prior to reason: we want to emphasize this aspect as additional to any strategic calculative dimensions of human behavior. Talking about emotions is just another way of addressing the issue of vulnerability in human relations; Ostrom also recognized the material basis of vulnerability which she called interdependence. She argued that without collective action in the commons, we could not achieve our own objectives nor the sustainability of the common resources: water in the irrigation system cannot be managed individually; our streets and our parks, our air and our silence, our schools and our playgrounds and all the relations we are building together in given spaces. But a failure of management in conditions of interdependency is not simply a technical problem to be solved but also a relational ethical issue of trust beyond the obsession with knowledge accumulation and risk reduction. Thus, the focus we want to discuss here is not on reducing vulnerability through institution-building or rule-making but rather in accepting vulnerability as an inherent state of our relating: we are vulnerable to the others in ways that often escape our control and this can also be traumatic. Perhaps self-preservation and survival (in the rational-competitive sense) is not to be ranked the highest aspiration of humans but rather, as a defense mechanism against what we could accept as our unbearable exposure to others, “a common vulnerability, a common physicality and risk”³⁸ Therefore, we might need to challenge the

grandiose notion of the transparent “I” that is presupposed as the ethical ideal. That is hardly a belief in which self-acceptance (a humility about one’s constitutive limitations) or generosity (a disposition towards the limits of others) might find room to flourish.

³⁷ Farrell, H. 2009. Trust, Distrust, and Power. In R. Hardin, ed. *Distrust*, Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 85-105.

³⁸ 100

Ostrom's invitation to trust may be characterized as a teleological and even (ego)centric: more and more people will choose to trust and cooperate over time simply because they will realize they are better off in such a scheme. Butler problematizes such teleological position in order to show the indeterminacy of any model based on presuppositions/expectations about ends and essences of human nature. In other words, we choose to trust and love not because we know it will be better off but even if we do not know how things will turn out. This chosen attitude is not to be confused with cautiousness; rather, it comes from the acceptance of our common (epistemological and ontological) limits. We simply do not really know who we are becoming: honestly, how often do we surprise/dissappoint ourselves even in the very attempt to be your best ego? More so, we simply do not really know what we want: how many times reaching our objective placed us back into another search? Butler invites us to trust by welcoming/allowing the foreignness/opacity of our(selves) or "the foreignness at the heart of my desire" and thus, of others.

"ethics requires us **to risk ourselves** precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human."

Fearing that the world of others will harm/traumatize us, we often defend ourselves by commonly learning to relate in a reciprocal way. In this absurd and often futile attempt to avoid suffering, as many other authors have argued, we are attempting to be less human or inhuman (un-vulnerable) (Adorno, Butler).

"if one were successful at walling oneself off from injury, one would become inhuman. (...) One of the problems with insisting on self-preservation as the basis of ethics is that it becomes a pure ethics of the self, if not a form of moral narcissism. Persisting in the vacillation between wanting to claim a right against such injury and resisting that claim, one becomes human (...) a double movement, one in which we assert moral norms at the same time as we question the authority by which we make that assertion"³⁹

Such a perspective on vulnerability leads us to reconsider the desirability of reciprocity/punishment models of trust. As Butler notes, given the historical recurrence of atrocity-making in the name of (moral) retaliation against norm violation, humanity has been haunted by a spectrum of suffering through exclusion, separation and oppression which "knows no end and can have no end"⁴⁰ The 'I' is ontologically produced even at the moment of its own persecution, through taking on (even prolonging) the suffering. Debating ideas from Hegel and Nietzsche to Laplanche and Levinas, Butler argues that

³⁹ 103

⁴⁰ 101

vulnerability is more than a state of inter-dependency or attachment. It is about ‘being given to the other’. Butler invites us to trust by communicate/act with others as if ‘we are in love’, always anguished and blind. How could such trust from blindness help us think ethically? We can only know the ‘others’ as ‘us’, in the limits we allow ourselves in, through the love/hate we give to ourselves and which creates our common world in this togetherness.

This vision on trust based on the acceptance of vulnerability and exposure to the others or being given to the others is to be handled, according to Butler, as a gift. The reciprocal model of trust is based on entitledness, on an expectation that you have the right to be reciprocated: by contrast, a model of trust that incorporates the reality of ‘blind/unconditional love’ does not expect anything in return, does not claim or demand any right/entitlement to received back that trust. It is a trust from the human state of freedom to give, it is a gift. As Adorno writes that “The secret of justice in love is the annulment of all rights, to which love mutely points” It is perhaps this free space of love to be given unconditionally which could nurture trust as a gift from such love, a space that is created and offered rather than demanded.

We could wish ourselves to be wholly perspicacious being. But that would be to disavow infancy, dependency, relationality, primary impressionability; it would be to eradicate all the active and structuring traces of our psychological formations and to dwell in the pretense of being fully knowing, self-possessed adults. Indeed, we would be the kind of beings who, by definition, could not be in love, blind and blinded, vulnerable to devastation, subject to enthrallment. If we were to respond to injury by claiming we had a ‘right’ not to be so treated, we would be treating the other’s love as an entitlement rather than a gift.⁴¹

What is a deeper emotional bond than love? Love can be conceived of as “feeling cared for” by others (not to be confused with being served by others), which is the same as saying love is about *caring for/taking care of* each other . Feeling care for/caring for also has an ecological dimension, since our lives are intimately bound with ecology. Therefore, love/caring is an act of *commoning* –of building our social and ecological commons.⁴² Despite love being naturalized as a selfish-romantic relation with superficial connotations, solidarity and trust could be built on unconditional love outside narcissism as many philosophies, religions and forms of activism have taught us. Ghandi and Martin Luther King told us to start with our(selves). People who have really tried to practice love unconditionally, can make a distinction between selfish love and ‘justice in love’ to understand the importance of building cooperation beyond the purpose of activism and also in the process of forming an extended family through caring and sharing. As we will detail

⁴¹ P. 102

⁴² Cite Reid and Taylor

below, a commoning society needs the courage to trust out of non-egotistic love, a shift from fear to love. Perhaps such ethics is about trusting that humanity will go through the hell of its 'inhumanity' in order to trust and love itself. After all, one needs to be almost inhuman if the accepted humanity cannot think of itself outside the paradigm of competitiveness and egocentrism. Perhaps the only thing we have to trust is trust itself.

A Relational Ethics of Trust in Commoning

“It will be necessary to reconsider **the relationship of ethics to social critique**, since part of what I find so hard to narrate are the norms – social in character – that bring me into being.”

As we have discussed in the previous section, our culture is placing a lot of emphasis on avoiding/reducing vulnerabilities and weaknesses. There is an entire scientific field working on this issue. Ostrom talked about our limits of knowing but believed you could always obtain more information to reduce uncertainty/vulnerability by observing the others and by developing institutions to provide information through monitoring and stability through enforcement. Perhaps what became almost an obsession with institutional rules and discipline is also a desire to be always persecuting the free-rider, an easier method of controlling rather than transforming our relations based on trust from an acceptance of our common limits and fears. Institutions are the easy way out through as we can see in the proliferation of “law and enforcement” or “security”⁴³; institutionalized relations, not only of the state, but also those of the commons, always tend to promote a ‘stalker’ kind of love – they vigilate, discipline and punish. Perhaps we do not need to know everything about the other and certainly we do not need to calculate her/his percentage of trustworthiness based on statistics of how many times they complied with a given rule/promise⁴⁴. Racism in America is the best illustration that trust and love could not be sanctioned by institutions of equal rights, ‘justice’, surveillance and control.⁴⁵ In this prevailing belief, conventional morality is serving the sustaining of an order (which could be an order of inequalities/injustices) with the purpose of sustaining a society/community/state.

⁴³ Shapiro / Every move we make;

⁴⁴ From the jargon of the theory commons Let’s calculate again how many times some people failed to follow the rules to see how STRONG/vulnerability THE COMMUNITY IS

⁴⁵ Gus article on Viaques. Working with the enemy, people who are from politically opposite views

As we have argued previously, accepting vulnerability could also be seen as a way to overcome the fear of the unknown and the potential violence that this fear generates. Such a vision requires accepting vulnerabilities as part of us being primarily a relational being, which means that exposure to the other could always imply suffering, and still, choose not to reciprocate/retaliate. This is perhaps the reason why trusting or loving someone implies an irrationality that mostly poets and other artists, rather than scientists, have recognized.⁴⁶ Trusting is about risking ourselves precisely in the face of possible failure, suffering and limited knowledge or predictability, a “tragic identity of knowing and not knowing”⁴⁷. More than about the lack of truth or validity in irrationality such often painful realities are expressed artistically in many operas for which words and calculations are not enough. In this sense Ranciere talks about, for instance, the different ways of putting into stage of the drama of Oedipus and more generally about art as being freed from the ‘catastrophe of *unsustainable* knowing’⁴⁸

Such vision on vulnerability as the uncertainty/opacity of selves and the state of ‘being given to the other’ does not preclude human agency and responsibility. Continuing controversial philosophical debates, Butler reminds us of the fact that the one who is suffering can even move to a responsibility for one’s own persecutor which, opens a discussion on a larger social ethical scene: vulnerability and grief are not problems to be fixed through the mechanisms of ego/superego such as revenge, violence or guilt. What would mean for our society to be practicing non-violence in an emphatically non-reciprocal response? What would mean to base humanity’s bonds of trust on the refusal to retaliate to violence?

none of us is fully bounded, utterly separate, but rather we are in our skins, given over, in each other’s hands, at each other’s mercy. This is a situation we do not choose. It forms the horizon of choice, and it grounds our responsibility.

Butler talks about an ethics of trust as being based on the realization of our own (epistemological and ontological) limits which reside in our primary relational becoming into a being, a being that cannot, thus, claim any (ethical) essences. On the one hand, acting from ego (which is a constructed essence of human fixed identities), be it selfish or altruistic, is still a process in which we are producing an artificial form of trust. Such trust is based on calculations of costs and benefits of a particular cause/goal which one wants to pursue: in other words, it may still be viewed as interested/egotistic since it comes from serving a specific cause proposed as good/moral. Such trust would not, therefore, be about serving others in a disinterested non-utilitarian manner. What we proposed in this paper is to broaden this social imaginary of trust by seeing this as a *poiesis*, a space and time (a

⁴⁶ There are scholars who are using poiesis and poetry as a critical thinking approach, For instance, aesthetics politics. This is why Rancire calls the aesthetic “The end of an ordered set of relations between what can be seen and what can be said, knowledge and action, activity and passivity” and we can add cooperation or conflict. We develop this aesthetic perspective in another paper....

⁴⁷ P. 19

⁴⁸ The way one is vulnerable to another is different in all relations and our vulnerabilities are like our.

‘world’), a new reality we choose to make and re-make with others and ourselves in expanding the universe of the commons (within ourselves). This required two steps.

First, as many critical thinkers argued, the search for ethical principles is by definition a critical inquiry into the societal conditions of our-selves, their limits that founded us as humans (Foucault, Adorno, Levinas, Butler). Therefore, ethics is first of all necessarily a social critique. Even if we would be able to predict human behavior, it is not enough to know: what we know and how we behave is already constrained by a regime of truth in which we live and our positionality in this regime is to be realized as constitutive to ourselves and our relational terms. Being addressed as a fixed subject, being demanded a particular behavior, and being expected to perform in a particular way, is not merely to be recognized as part of a dialogic society but also, to be subjected by the power-relations regime which produces the terms of recognition in the first place.⁴⁹ Such terms are not simply ‘who we are’ as some pure essence.

Second, to make a world together, we would need to accept the encounter with the other as foreign and unfamiliar, vulnerable and blind to each other. This is not a matter of self-assertion as more knowledgeable person in a self-inflated narcissistic manner. It is about “seeing the other”⁵⁰, a recognition and acceptance of the other as equal in our interconnectedness, a visibility that cannot be given by any institution. *Sewa buna* (in South Africa ‘good day’/) literary means ‘I see you’, I am here, I am present. A similar idea comes from Buddhism: Namaste, or “I see the light inside you”. As the thinking of Ubuntu already teaches us, we are “human only through the humanity of others” and that requires gratitude for the connection we have with ourselves and the others, their gift of love and trust freed of expectations. Then, we can say that “if we are to accomplish anything in this world it will in equal measure be due to the work and achievements of others.” (Mandela). A relational ethics of trust could be based less on knowing and more on witnessing the other.⁵¹

More broadly, a rethinking of relations among humans comes together with a process of challenging dualisms (such as human and non-human nature) which underpin modernity. In that sense, to oppose trust with calculus/control or rule imposing as a reaction to failure (to respect the rule) could also be seen as a dualist deadlock: trust is not opposite to failure just as human is not opposite to non-human or, in other words, “no madness, no reason’ (Foucault, Latimer 2013). Deleuze for instance challenged the dualism between human and non-human and argued for the idea of ‘becoming animal’ as a form of resistance or ‘line of flight’: ‘A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 264).

Other authors have recently theorized different forms of relating which seem to imply a different basis for trust starting from the premise that who we are as persons is

⁴⁹ Foucault The Use of pleasure

⁵⁰ Like the indigenous tribe says. Other scholars in Ubuntu That is why the problem of cast in India cannot be solved by some institutions or laws

⁵¹ See writings of Nelson

made up from our complex relations, a result of our “becoming with” in this world (Haraway, 2007: 17). What we talked about as trust ‘being given to the other’ could also be theorized as a new form of political imagination towards relational openness (Latimer and Skeggs, 2011) or a form of relational extension (Latimer, 2009, drawing on Strathern, 1991) or being inhabited by the other, recognizing (feeling, admitting) the presence of the other in your everydayness mornings of waking up in this world: Latimer’s account (2013) talks about ‘being alongside’ the others (including non-humans), which, more than being-with in the sense given by Haraway (2007), breaks the dualism of human/non-human to a form of dwelling in togetherness of beings through taking care and giving of concern to each other. Developing the concept ‘ecologies of concern’, Bell also refers to the necessary sustaining of each other as ecology: “creative movement of concerns between elements in relation with one another” (2012, p. 112) where the only possible consensus among elements/ subjects that constitute each other could be a symbiosis as a new ‘immanent mode of existence” the purpose of which is the success/survival of each (Stengers 2010, 35).

Solidarity work as building trust relationships starts precisely when we failed at it: in other words, our social responsibility of wanting to live together requires us to find an ethical perspective of becoming (human) together. Trust is a working process that would require constant effort in accepting the others’ realities, i.e. their “worldiness”. Let’s co-inspire and not conspire for we may not even see that there is a whole universe of invisible being(s) in the space between earth and the infinite sky. The least we could do within the limits of our humanism is to create openness to a multitude of relational practices that could be transformed and transformative over time as new ritualized habits.

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