



## **Faith, Trust, and Trustworthiness: A Preliminary Debate**

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## Introduction

The constellation of trust has been widely used as the cornerstone of the micro foundations of the New Economic Sociology (NES). Social capital, trust, confidence, reciprocity, warm glow and other related concepts enjoy a widespread acceptance inside the most relevant economic sociological networks. Trust was central to Granovetter's seminal paper and has been vital in many theoretical projects using the NSE framework. The economic transitions in Eastern Europe, the rediscovery of the informal nature of many economic transactions, the recognition of the tacit nature of contracts have also helped to revamp this theoretical approach. Public opinion and political leaders are currently seduced by this conceptual core (especially in the ways defined by Putnam), which seems to offer some hope to economic stagnation, social paralysis and moral apathy. At the same time, experimental economists and institutional economists, offering alternative views that demand strong response, have challenged the sociological concepts of trust. Laboratory experiments based on Dictator, Ultimatum and Trust games mark a radical departure from the standard economic model and constitute a strong incentive to the development of a new economic sociological approach to trust. However, and despite some important efforts stemming from different theoretical approaches (ranging from neo-functionalists experts to rational-choice pundits), the concept constellation remains fuzzy. In this paper, taking into account several (and sometimes contradictory) sociological contributions (namely Giddens, Gambetta, Barber, Luhmann, Sztompka or Misztal) we'll try to advance a theory of trust based on five important points.

1. Trust is a social relation established between two independent social agents that can exchange roles, pursuing different goals, but that submit each other to an interdependence frame that anchors the result of one to the actions of the second. The canonical form of trust can be represented as X trusts Y to do Z in the context K, under the conditions F1, F2, ..., Fn.
2. Trust is not a leap in the dark or a blind jump of faith. Trust defines limited responsibilities and mitigated actions, either by tacit agreements or by formal contracts.
3. Trust works like an "as if" social mechanism, simplifying the complex, reducing the uncertain, and mitigating risky situations.
4. There are no societies without trust. However trust can be converted in confidence or faith. Dissipation and conversion mechanisms are crucial to the understanding of the peculiar types of trust in every society across time and space.



5. Distrust is not the denial of trust but a civilizational mechanism central to the modernization process. Distrust has fostered the constitution of decontextualized social relations and enabled the build-up of guarantees that are central to the creation of cosmopolitan endeavors.

Any first approach to theorising on trust requires a dual consideration: conceptual clarification, stripping the concept of its equivocal associations and restricting its scope through reducing its utilisation to well defined circumstances. To this end, we begin by presenting a work in progress concept before moving onto detailing the key components of any definition of the trust phenomenon. Thus, and in an initial approach, we define trust as a reversible and conditional social relationship freely and independently established between the recipient and the trustee. These agree to establish a commitment around a specific and limited issue but which renders them interdependent in a context of risk or uncertainty in which information, knowledge and competences are partially clouded. Furthermore, although the scope of action is circumscribed, the opportunity of relational gains and losses outweigh the option of inaction. The canonical form of trust may be typified as: X trusts Y to do Z in context K, under conditions F1, F2, ..., Fn.

### The Primacy of Time: Questions of Decontextualisation

Despite all the variation in positions taken by researchers when studying trust, there is a broad consensus around the core importance of trust in developing decontextualised social relationships: interaction established in the absence of spatial contiguity and temporal concomitance. To this end, it may be concluded that one of the most important facets to studying social relations of trust involves the temporal dimension. Trust is produced and expanded by repetition of successful incidences of interaction or favourable memories of past events or the reliability of previous encounters or, additionally, by reputational triangulation that fosters favourable opinions where a relational track record does not exist. In any of such cases, the presence of trust is, in large part, the result of previous social encounters and the extension of effects resulting from such encounters. Even in cases of totally new interactions, there is rarely an informational vacuum as to the partner with whom a continued social relationship is being established.

Decontextualisation is clearly the basis for modern trust. Where co-presence and total visibility are the norm, there would be no problem with trust as social norms would be tied to total attitudinal and behavioural transparency. Thus, problems of trust derive from the opaque framework governing the course of action that the other may choose in addition to his/her partial inclusion in the relevant social circles. The other has to be potentially foreign, unknown or subject to erratic behaviour. This definitional dimension opens up an understanding that problems of trust are cousins to problems of conformity and dilemmas posed by collective action. Trust grows with predictable behaviour and the capacity to control results. The existence of alternatives and lower costs for anyone wishing to leave the group not only encourage free-riding but also poses problems with trust. Trust is open to doubt in situations of behavioural uncertainty and where the opportunity exists to escape from total visibility and absolute dependence. Dealing with others when not in possession of total information about them ensures contingent results and problematic relationships of trust. Such an obstacle to a strictly rational decision makes the act of trust even more important. In effect, partial opacity and the opportunity to exit does not ensure that the most obvious response be an absence of decisive action. The creation of opacity means trust, previously not considered as a problematic resource, becomes necessary. The extension of trust is a consequence of the overcoming of certainties and non-problematic expectations. The greater the threat, the more decisive does trust become.

The extension of fields of interaction with open-ended relational periods tends to produce trust or at the very least to mitigate a certain constitutional distrust that would otherwise prevail between actors that are partially unknown to each other. In all truth, trust is a social variable that particularly characterises social relationships defined by acquaintance and partial inclusion, that is, those relationships marked by doubt, uncertainty and ignorance as regards the interlocutor but where the promotion of features deriving from the place of meeting enable a social relationship to be established. If the situation is a total unknown and beyond prior experience, no social relationship will be resulting. Similarly, where there is total awareness and relational clarity, trust is not generated because there are certainties and transparency. Game theory enables us to understand that the non-specification of a purpose to the relationship tends to prolong co-operative efforts even between actors with antagonistic interests or who have established practically conflictual relationships. Trust emerges in such frameworks as a dialogic option that obeys the minimalist rule of “live and let live” expressed in the informal arrangements reached by German and British forces in the trenches of the Somme during World War One (cf. Axelrod, 1984).

Nevertheless, and considering just how far we can consider that co-operation and trust come from the same phenomenal stable, in truth there is no shared identity between the two concepts. There are multiple situations where trust is not present and yet co-operation is ongoing. Momentary acts of co-operation do not pre-suppose trust and may result from the mediation of third parties to guarantee actor co-operation. Should trust be understood as the willingness or the motivation to co-operation, this corresponds to the transformation of the trust problem into a dilemma of collective action falling within an analytical field that can be handled and formalised as in Game Theory. However, we need to move on from the pure and simple issue of motivation to the rationale strengths deployed by each social actor with good reasons not to keep their word or not to comply with established agreements. In such terms, we end up pushing a theory of trust into well known territory oscillating between solutions of generalised morality à la Parsons or solutions of sanctioning and social control à la Hechter or rational schemes of selective incentives à la Olson. These are, however, paths that should not be taken at the risk of creating total correspondence between two social phenomena that even while they may bear certain elective affinities are clearly distinct.

Clearly, trust is not necessarily co-operation. Should we abdicate rational or moral solutions for dilemmas pertaining to co-operation, we leap into a discussion of theories of contracts and formalised bonds, a field far closer to the world of trust. Indeed, authors such as Williams (1989), in defining co-operation, provide suggestions as to an understanding of trust, offering up the idea of trust as central to any undertaking in which two social actors are

involved and where the essential action to be taken by one party is beyond the complete and perfect scrutiny of the other. In fact, an act of confidence results either from specific ignorance or partial incapability or from constitutional doubt or any combination of these. The contingency dimension is central to the social act of trusting. An omniscient and omnipotent actor does not need to trust anybody. Trusting implies a heavy dose of perceived risk and a not avoidable percentage of anguish and other emotions linked to fear. Furthermore, trust and its related problems only emerge when the possibility of loss resulting from violation of the existing social relationship of trust is present. If there is no potential loss then trust cannot exist. However, where such losses are not deemed serious or of concern to the trusting party, the act becomes nothing more than recreational or some kind of bet rather than a contingent social relationship.

The act of co-operating implies a certain symmetry to the social relationship. If A co-operates with B then B co-operates with A. In a trusting relationship, the potential asymmetry existing between A and B does not lead to reciprocity by which the act of A trusting in B implies that B trusts in A. Co-operative social relations reach out across a potentially broader horizon than those of trust. The violation of norms of co-operation corresponds to an absence of involvement and unequal shares and non-proportional effort put in by one of the actors but not necessarily amounting to betrayal. In turn, the violation of norms of trust is something more than an imbalance in the levels of equitable effort. The destruction of trust is socially defined by negative features such as betrayal, disloyalty, lying, deceit, misleading or mystification. Where the violation of co-operative norms might be nothing more than a lack of will, the violation of trust inherently implies a wish to mystify (a thought out deliberation), moral cowardliness or emotional cruelty or irresponsibility.

The breaking off from informal trust arrangements is facilitated when the specification of temporal limits provides an incentive for opportunist behaviour and the desertion of those actors participating in a particular relationship. In these cases, behavioural patterns are clearly unable to foster trust and guarantee production co-operation. Indeed, trust, even while being a relevant relational asset, does not in itself serve to guarantee co-operation where there are no other forces at play. Furthermore, there is a trust associated to behavioural consistency and it is in this predictability of stable action that can result in trust being created between enemies or hostile parties. While honesty and credibility are factors in trust, it cannot be ignored that relative trust may be extended to enemies even while not to certain friends. This point takes on significance because it throws into question the commonly held idea that the emotional, rational and institutional dimensions to trust are necessary and intimately connected. Such a

position does not stand up to the test of reality. Friendship is not trust just as co-operation and solidarity are also different to trust.

In any case, reputation standings guarantee a certain trustworthiness that rises in accordance with the extension of the temporal horizon of the relationship. In truth, those that set about playing with trust on a reputational basis with the objective of fooling and mystifying their relational partners will experience difficulties in maintaining such a strategy for an indefinite period of time, either through lack of patience or because such a strategy comes with costs greater than the expected gains from deception and lying. Given this, the endurance of the relationship and continuity of interaction enable the creation of relational bonds that create either a genuine trust or situations in which functional substitutes for trust prevail. Examples would include that of reciprocity or cases of relationships defined by minimal exposure or when there is a non-avoidable potential for retaliation.

Trust implies a relationship contingent on time. Luhmann (1979: 10) highlighted that before going onto specifically state the fact that trusting in some way meant pre-empting the future adding that whoever acted based on trust did so as if the future were certain. However, this question is not merely restricted to projections of future behaviour even when capable of producing certainties or reductions in complexity. The temporal chains of trust are played out across various surfaces. Furthermore, there is the reputational facet to trust that thrives and prospers due to information quietening spirits held over from the past via the personal confirmations of the decency or justice of those with whom we are to interact. In terms of trust, it is not so much the aura of prestige emitted by those we meet for the first time but rather the memory of past and repeated interactions that are responsible for constructing credible registries. Assumptions as to future events are not a shot in the dark and rarely do social actors set out on a new relationship without any type of relevant data. On the contrary, trust involves a credible belief in a future course of action relative to which there are various uncertainties both due to the presence of uncontrollable forces and due to the reactions, only to a greater or lesser predictable, of those in whom we place our trust. The risk dimension to trust is obviously present in this projection into the future ensuring each social actor is him/herself left partially exposed and momentarily subject to another on whom he/she is forcibly going to have to depend.

Trusting social relationships in modern society are ruled by phenomena of decontextualisation defined by Giddens (1992: 16) as the “deinsertion” of social relationships from local contexts of interaction through their restructuring across undefined space-time extensions. According to Giddens, there are two fundamental mechanisms to decontextualisation: symbolic guarantees and expert systems. Symbolic guarantees are means

of exchange that enable circulation without dependence on the characteristics of those actors and agents taking recourse to them at whatever the specific moment. These guarantees produce temporal suspensions and spatial hiatus, implying decontextualised changes. Contracts or money are clear examples of such guarantees. From the point of view of trust, the presence of decontextualisation corresponds to that which might be called personal forms of de-coupling, de-bonding or de-bundling trust. The actor submits to the symbolic forms that drive the relationship. In such cases, there is a strong possibility of the interchangeability of actors within the progress of the relationship. Legal bonds or symbolic bonds take the place of personal bonds. The abstract character of trust takes the place of concrete interactions.

Expert systems, in turn, are technical or expert based systems inherently professionalised and thereby moulding the social, technical, political and economic environments in which actors move. Indeed, the emphasis placed on expert fields and professional competences brings Giddens close to Bernard Barber (1983). The latter author considers that technical competence and the credible expectation of responsibility are the two key factors for building up a clear definition of trust. Giddens clearly distinguishes between the periodic aspect of our regular meetings with various professionals and the permanent meeting up with expert system influences and their determinisms. Thus, while we may be able to perpetually avoid a specialist meeting with a lawyer, we can never free ourselves of expert systems of a juridical nature in our daily routines. Still more importantly, generalised distrust regarding the behaviour of an entire professional class, does not determine generalised distrust as regards their work or actions as a professional class. Simultaneously, this generalised distrust is based rather on vague sensations or diverse indications rather than on any on grounds of technical recognition.

The lack of knowledge and control over such professional fields does not enable us to call into question the particular knowledge held by any given sector. However, we may opt to head towards areas of isolation and refuge where we continue to act through 'as if' behavioural modes, that is, accepting the expert system while denying the validity of its professionals accredited for a particular practice. This radical separation between the credibility of an expert system and a lack of trust in its experts is one of the most notable characteristics of modern societies. This double evaluative standard may allow appreciation of architecture but play down the role of architects or appreciate the benefits of medicine but reject the doctors supplying them. The total transfer of trust to the system causes the abandonment of direct, believable interaction with actors preferring to take up self-sealed areas of a 'do it yourself' nature. The validity of a knowledge system does not extend to appreciation of the individual that actually knows. The causes of this short-circuit may be varied but it results in overall terms from a lack of trust regarding mechanisms of certification and guarantees of specific practices. The growing presence of litigious societies points to the reasonability of this argument. Interactions with the medical class are increasingly defined by legal action for alleged malpractice even if that does not imply that medical knowledge has lost its aura of respectability. In the same way, distrust regarding the legal world does not imply any rejection of litigation as a conflict resolving mechanism.

The juxtaposition of the diverse expert systems makes modern life a constant exercise in implicit credibility. Neither knowing nor controlling, social actors, in possession of only vague ideas as to the dynamic of the processes governing their existence, end up having to seek support in system reliability even while aware of the risk dimension present in their daily routines. The growing presence of overlapping and often conflictual expert systems in our lives produces a constant rise in situations of risk for which coherent responses are frequently

lacking. Another problem undermining the trust placed in professionals and specialists, particularly those operating in highly technical-scientific fields, relates to the nature of their understanding, knowledge and systems of recognition and evidence. Thus, given contradictory evidence, controversial evidence and results pointing to diametrically opposing conclusions, social actors unaware of the workings of the expert system are almost inevitably left perplexed and doubtful as to the merits of the results. Unable to attribute identical levels of plausibility, trustworthiness and credibility to contradictory data, actors experience difficulty both in recognising the validity of knowledge and in extending trust to the professionals involved. Against a backdrop of controversial plausibility, it is acceptable for social actors to seek refuge in individualist expressions of decisions or wrap themselves up in neo-traditionalist type protective cocoons.

### Contingentiality, Inclusion and Partial Revelation

Trust, in its weakest sense, involves credibility regarding the achievement of expectations, the desired results and not the breaking of promises or commitments. In this weaker interpretation, trust equals the establishment of a safe climate among the social actors involved. Giddens (*op. cit.*: 71) actually affirms that it is in this connection with trust that there is to be found what he terms ontological security defined as the security that one holds in the continuity of one's own personal identity and in the stability of one's surrounding social and material environments. A sense of faith in things and credibility in people is basic to feelings such as ontological security hence the two are closely related. This basic level of trust results from an ongoing reassurance that there are continuities in our social life and that we can effectively behave as though there were a certain degree of security. Ontological security may be seen as a zero level of trust that represents a land of social permanence in which overlying layers of socialisation are inculcated assisting in the definition of attitudes, actions and slightly optimistic emotional states. It defines a state of acceptance of the existing that encourages actors to trust in that such security represents a certain primary naivety that enables all the more complex forms of trust. Accepting the interactionist manner in which social relations mould the subject who then moulds the relationship in a process of dual contingency, it may be stated that such optimism and this predisposition to trust makes individuals more trusting both in themselves and others. In any case, this type of trust may lead us to a certain psychologising reductionism or to believe that a successful level of socialisation will result in confident, trustworthy and moral social agents.

Trust, in its strong sense, transcends this framework and is to be identified in situations of risk, where there is no such security as regards the results or the status of promises given. Modern trust is born of doubt and uncertainty susceptible to measurement to a greater or lesser extent. Heading in the direction of the domestication of risk opens up new procedures and new modalities for building trust. The contingent character<sup>1</sup> of results ensures the notion of risk is the master support for the concept of trust. The identification of situations of risk determines a contingent dimension to trust. Given that modern trust lives on situations of partial inclusion, any act of trust presupposes the existence of contingency plans and valid alternatives in the case of relational failure.

Such contingency is easily observed in what trust turns to following cases of disappointment or the breaking of confidential relations. Violated personal trust becomes institutionalised confidence through litigation. Unmet institutional confidence evolves into a personalised refuge and so forth. The existence of convertibility in trust and its functional equivalents (such as reciprocity, family bonds or the neo-traditionalist refuges) define the dynamics of trust in modern societies.<sup>2</sup> Relational failures caused by a definitive or partial break in the trust deposited also add consequences at the reflective level of social actors when questioned as to the means used to establish social relationships and then hesitate in the choice of the best means of action. Interactive distrust further provides a certain level of reflective distrust, along with the accompanying worry and decisional hesitation.

Trusting means believing in actions or results deriving from the intentions expressed by actors or institutional or organisational dynamics. The resulting contingency comes about

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<sup>1</sup> However, trust is not only contingent and complex. Trust is also essentially a fragile construction under permanent threat. If we owe anything to Garfinkel's famous breaching experiments, this debt may easily be defined in terms of demonstrating the fragility of the social order and the routines of trust making up our daily world. The rupture of expectations or the meeting of social codes lacking distance and flexibility may be sufficient to shake the foundations of our daily realities. Beyond technical competence and loyal responsibility, trust requires a certain maintenance of appearance and a daily *savoir-faire* that dictates a greater or lesser extent of alienation in the social role performed. Social tact and the management of impressions and appearances have a striking impact on the way we develop relationships of trust.

<sup>2</sup> There are some not particularly profound variables maintaining trust – responsibility, autonomy, sense of duty, loyalty or professionalism are all good examples. Each society, at each historical point in time, holds a set of values marking the parameters of trust valid in that particular social structure. The same levels of trust may result from totally different value and normative frameworks. What works to gain trust in one context is not the same as in another context. Professionalism and the logic of *noblesse oblige* may produce the same results in societies with totally distinct value systems. The contextualisation of trust reaches out both to a logic of substitutes and functional equivalents and to the idea of a plurality in approaches.

from a certain lack of clarity as to results and an impossibility to control them in an absolute manner. However, it is clear that trust is simultaneously connected to risk and to contingency. It may however prove to be possible that modern trust is more consistent with an environment of uncertainty than of risk given that the majority of current results are difficult to measure. The impossibility of attributing subjective probabilities to determined contingent events makes this ever more difficult.

Trust, like the secret, falls into the dominion of partial revelation and limited ignorance. In effect, both dominions are only operative at moments in which doubt or uncertainty come into effect against one or another subject that is the target of communication and a source of relationship. Total revelation kills any secret in the same way that total awareness renders trust unnecessary. The retention of all information makes the secret a social nonentity while total ignorance about somebody ensures that the act of trusting in “something more” may be compared to the blindness of faith. It is for this reason that partial revelation, ambiguity, ambivalence and controversy are the appropriate circumstances for the social construction of trust. It is also for this reason that friendship or family relationships only fall into the trust category at points in which the bonds of love, friendship and loyalty prevailing in such ties are broken. Similarly, that is the reason social relationships of trust are dominant in trading activities, commerce and whenever a member of a community is confronted by the presence of a stranger. Trust is a relationship, which involves transactions on the border with that which is foreign and can be understood as a signpost of critical sociability in modern societies. They are equally a relationship involving fear with trust existing as a cautionary mechanism and a clear strategy to reduce perceived dangers and threats.

The shadow of fear hangs over all relationships of trust. In establishing a conditional or contingent relationship with others, all actors involved hold some means of control or substitution of the trust granted. The act of trusting assumes the existence of behavioural alternatives. Without the option of choice, there may be resignation or faith but there will be no trust. Thus, we seek to affirm that trust, even while contingent, necessarily implies that social actors are endowed with a certain freedom of choice. Whenever restrictions prevail unchallenged, trust is metamorphosed into another type of social display and practice. In associating trust with the option of choice and the existence of alternatives, we are not identifying the defining guideline in such a relationship as the individual decision. Trust is relational and not the fruit of individual decisions stripped bear but rather that the freedom of action should always be taken into account.

The primacy of that decision is however clearly absent from fields of trust present in abstract systems resulting from 'taken for granted' social processes representing perfectly well established social routines. Whenever social domination is internalised and made routine to such an extent that its existence goes unnoticed or called into question, we can refer to a supporting order for the social life of the society or civilisation in question. Such a type of unconsidered routine, underlying activities based on scientific or technological supports, has dominated the advent of modernity. An important part of the current sensation of decline in trust results from the slow erosion of the faith deposited in science. The onset of questioning of this field of support is an indicator of the crisis in the vector of trust sustaining part of social routines. From this point of view, the crisis of trust in modern societies is less a true crisis of trust but rather a crisis in security (or, à la Giddens, in weak inductive processes) and the faith deposited in the great integrative systems.

## Trust and Interactions

The general level of trust in certain spaces may be perceived through the evasive postures, and the extent they take, of social actors when confronted by the look or presence of others. Care taken in posture, movement and look not only identify groups and communities but also contribute to a full clarification of the existing levels of security and trust. Furthermore, partial trusts are crucial to modern societies as they force continuous and renewing contact between actors sharing only residual or partial knowledge. Thus, each action involves certain risks with their being no certainty as to whether its results will come to successful fruition. If this situation holds valid for face to face interactions that determine a meeting and shared presence, it is even more reasonable to consider the relevance to situations involving space-time separation, a significant proportion our current social relations. Giddens (*op. cit.*: 62-63) referred to presence commitments resulting from implicit relational guarantees subject to control from moment to moment by the actors involved. This contrasts sharply with the non-presence commitments involving an abstract belief system, that is, what remains from the aggregation of symbolic guarantees and expert systems. Although there is no perceivable evolutionist approach to trust<sup>3</sup> on the horizon, it is also true that trust is

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<sup>3</sup> The origins of trust are difficult to establish. Some consider trust to be a phylogenetic process, involving trust as a mechanism enabling co-operation, sending us into the fields of biology and ethnology. It should also be understood that there is an individual dimension to the education in and learning about trust. It seems fair to accept that experiments and the results of extending trust to others are important points in the process of trusting. Good results from past interactions strengthen the predisposition to trust just as disagreeable experiences result in the contrary. Trust is decisively influenced by a chain of events. It is for this reason that laboratory experiments involving trust frequently prove unable to replicate accurate forms of social behaviour in the sense that they ignore the sequential chains and the repetition of social meetings and operate in a memorial emptiness that checks the establishment of any complex form of social relationship. Furthermore, the trust dynamic (as with that of reciprocity) demands the opening up of a relational possibility of retaliation and punishment for behavioural deviation. In addition, the significant difference that exists in establishing trust when comparing contexts of anonymity with repeated social encounters (irrespective of the level of emotional tie, and whether positive or negative, established). The very presence of a face or a name creates unavoidable differences in the establishment of complex social relationships.

now strongly anchored in non-presence systems. Trust is a fundamental resource in moments of partial unawareness, the identification and recognition of problems, in mitigated involvement, temporal discontinuity and wherever there are no implicit guarantees. In these cases, trust is validated by abstract systems that reduce such uncertainty and risk, providing explicit guarantees and context to the interaction.

In a clear form, the resource of trust becomes more important and decisive in modern societies characterised as they are both by decontextualisation and by risk. In non-mediated direct relationships, even when shared presence brings together two strangers, there are forms of implicit control that help in defining trust. The rules of courtesy present in social meetings, careful respect for the social norms or mere tact by one party or affirmations of power and influence by the other, help in building operative patterns of trust. It is of little relevance whether such trust takes the form of symmetrical or asymmetrical reciprocal trust. What interests us is determining only whether such face to face relationships enable a far easier and more direct form of social control than in non-presence relationships. Continued face to face interactions end up evolving into situations in which the confirmation of statutes becomes a relaxed demand and where the primacy of the non-contractual is strictly maintained. This does not happen in relationships based on abstract systems where the confirmations and re-questioning of competences are repeated. We should, in any case, emphasise that friendship or familiarity are not the criteria for distinguishing between these two types of trust. More important than the emotional proximity between the respective actors is the relational decontextualisation.

Even when trust is placed in abstract systems, its level depends greatly on the piecemeal and momentary interactions that social actors go about establishing with their representatives. The fact of each actor being representative of a social instance of the creation of trust (each one of us is part of a technical and/or reliability expert system) and considering how our own results are anchored to the preservation of trust in the system we represent, our functional performance of roles to a greater or lesser extent standardised becomes crucial. This performance, however, cannot be limited to the wielding of strictly technical skills and has to be extended into areas of emotional labour. The skill and emotional authenticity simultaneously guarantee the actor's credibility and certify the validity of the knowledge displayed. This authenticity and originality are less proofs of trust than the establishing of routines and functional completion of a particular script or role. Each encounter with a social actor representing an expert system ends up recontextualising the relationship of trust moving it from the abstract to become a partially concrete relationship.

Momentary interaction is the creator of trust within the framework of the routines defined by the prevailing expectations but which should avoid transparency of any dissonant information that is only to be accessible beyond the stage of public interaction. Thus, it may be included that expert systems are trustworthy in themselves but that they also depend on the performances of those who provide their public face in social encounters. However, beyond the trust resulting from direct interactions, there is a means of constructing auras of reliability emerging from the concerted efforts of professional groups seeking to control dissidence, dissonant images and professional practices that do not align to the rules established. The reliability of an expert system partially stems from its capacity to provide a single response deriving from its monopoly over the requirements for practising an expert activity coupled with its capacity for moral, symbolic or actual physical sanctions against the transgressor. Expert groups become more trustworthy and socially recognised in line with any rise in their ability to monopolise the evaluation process granting access to the group, restricting new members and controlling their actions. An expert group tends towards homogeneity and to protect itself against all external threats. The moral codes and the passing of strict deontological rules simultaneously serve to strengthen group power and maintain underlying levels of trust.

According to Giddens, the fragility and vulnerability of abstract systems, especially expert systems, comes about out of the relational tension that gathers around points of access (those areas where there are points of contact between experts and the lay people). A poor inter-individual encounter at such points may entirely call into question the level of trust placed in such abstract systems. Giddens correctly understood that such unsatisfactory encounters (and their repetition) might generate manifest cynicism in social actors resulting in their complete withdrawal from the system. The most predictable consequence is the transformation of the non-expert into an expert (though not socially recognised as such) resorting to autonomous usage of the expert means that are the exclusive domain of professionals in whom the actor no longer holds any form of trust. The lack of satisfaction in meetings with the system can lead to both the isolation and usurpation of the technical legitimacy in what becomes a 'do it yourself strategy'. This can be extended into multiple areas of our daily realities where the actor preserves the technicity of the expert system but expresses distrust of the system itself or at the very least of its relational figures. Thus, trust is handed over to alternative circles, granted social legitimacy in common but not institutional terms. Cynicism and neo-traditionalism may be responses for such crises of trust resulting from the relational breakdowns at points of access. In any case, whatever the reaction of the social actors, the truth remains that total escape from the system is practically impossible – the abandonment of a particular type of trust relationship comes at the cost of conversion to other mechanisms of trust.

In such terms, it is important to highlight that we tend to grant excessive coherence to social processes that overall are characterised by their own diffuse nature and the existence of various platforms for articulation. When we affirm that we trust in the therapeutical power of a particular medication we are effectively expressing trust in a series of overlying and interacting platforms where the violation of trust in a particular field may result in the destruction of the trust placed in the system as a whole. There is trust placed in the evidence presented by chemists and biochemists confirming that the active ingredient of a particular medication does actually assist in treating the respective condition. Such trust extends to the pharmaceutical companies and their laboratories ensuring the production of the medication in accordance with previously defined norms. That trust must also incorporate the doctor actually prescribing the medicine believing that he or she is able to carefully foresee its appropriateness both as treatment and in terms of any eventual side effects or similar. Then,

we must trust ourselves and the belief that we shall carefully follow the instructions issued for that particular course of treatment.

Trust processes in modern societies involve the dynamics thrown up by multiple overlying platforms whose articulation fosters the development of systemic trust. When we state that such articulation is necessary, there is no intention to simply state that any partial breakdown in trust equals the total disappearance of trust. What should be highlighted for contemporary societies is that it is important to identify those platforms where trust has been ruptured or broken in order to foresee the aggregate effects of that failure. In the aforementioned case, a breakdown in trust in doctor does not have to cause any rupture at the therapeutic level given that previously experienced results from treatment with the same medication may ensure the patient retains belief and trust in its therapeutical validity. In such a case, the patient might opt for a new doctor or, in cases where distrust spreads to include the entire medical expert sub-system, self-medication might be the answer, a highly common approach taken by patients suffering chronic or ongoing diseases that cannot obtain any cure or systematic improvement in the conditions afflicting them. However, where the rupture in trust takes place at a higher level, in this case at the level of the pharmaceutical manufacturing of the drug, the patient's response might include seeking out an alternative medicine or a product produced by a rival company. Repetition of dissatisfactory results might send the patient off in search of alternative therapeutical systems, frequently falling beyond medical and pharmacological expert systems.

Given the role played throughout years by science as the very cornerstone of faith in the arch of trust, in some cases (and particularly in western society) substituting religion as an unconditional and unmitigated element of trust, its current crisis prepares the ground for the emergence of new forms of faith. In any case, the identification of the point of rupture and the critical platform enables an understanding of the mechanisms governing the convertibility of trust in modern societies in addition to highlighting the manner in which functional trust equivalents can appear. Trust placed in expert systems and their specialists depends greatly on the level of internal control to which they are subjected. However, the existence of rigorous means of control and evaluation ensures expert groups are increasingly homogeneous and less able to develop alternatives.

## Risk and Uncertainty

Given how trust represents a fundamental asset to all societies, it is important to consider the means of its development and the conversion mechanisms typifying societies

with high levels of complexity and diverse forms of differentiation. From the perspective of neo-functionalist models, Luhmann takes trust as one of the most significant elements capable of reducing complexity and to such an extent its possible combinatory options are multiple in nature whenever its forms remain flexible and open. The social life of groups displaying a high level of complexity needs to find means to ensure reductions in complexity. Trust is one of the most significant. However, this process of reduction bears its own costs with one of the most relevant being exposure to risk or, to be more precise, to uncertainty. Paradoxically, the reduction of complexity generates new complex forms in an endless process contributing to systemic inputs. Given patterns of increasing complexity and considering the inherent risks to the ongoing interchange between differentiation and complexity, reflective actor capacities (and self-reflective), in addition to the creation of valid expectation systems, take on a predominant role.

Reflectiveness and expectation are critical factors in the characterisation of trust phenomena given how they involve two mechanisms enabling labelling, identification, categorisation, classification and generalisation without which the inherent distinctions to trust cannot be generated. If trust is the contingent product of various interactions, then the inputs enabling the creation of expectations and encouraging the decision making process are central.

Traditionally, consistency may be seen as one factor favourable to the creation of trust. Behavioural predictability and stable expectations are conditions for the existence of social patterns of trust of a non-problematic character. A simultaneous absence of stability and behavioural continuity, coupled with the observation of erratic lines of action and discontinuities, contrarily cause social tensions and problematic expectation systems. In such social environments, trust becomes a necessary asset but subject to fundamental questioning. The implicit control enforced by rules of reciprocity forces social actors into taking up riskier and more exposed lines of action. This does not imply, however, that the universe of modernity be dominated by oceans of distrust. In fact, it is the multiple subjections and dependencies required by social complexity and differentiation that give rise to the source of expositions of all in relation to all ensuring that trust is maintained as an operative value. The presence of erratic and discontinuous forms of action, coming with difficulties in prediction, knowledge and control does not only create tensions in direct or distant social encounters but also an internal tension for social actors that results in the questioning of their very selves.

In any case, trust does not come about via simple decision making processes defined by any dichotomy of a “I trust or do not trust in individuals or institutions with the characteristics of x!” nature. Trust requires the bringing together of situational, emotional,

normative and calculated aspects. It means that one might be “forced” to trust at points in which such a risky option is the only choice left open. In alternative situations, trust might also mean that it is not possible to trust in an emotional attraction in which a series of halo effects transport social actors from a relationship of affection to one of trust extendible to all relevant social situations.

If one accepts the thesis of progressive differentiation in society with an accumulative increase in the existing levels of complexity, the perception that trust plays an increasing role as regulator and organiser of social relationships becomes easy to accept. In truth, the growing complexity and differentiation generate new sub-systems of action producing further socially relevant sectors and multiplying creative instances for interaction. Instead of a myriad of repeated interactions with the same relational partners or within a perpetuated institutional framework, we now encounter multiple, low level relationships, without either memory or continuity against a backdrop of growing numbers of institutional inputs. Even while the actual number of interactions may not have risen with the transition from a pre-modern social to a differentiated modern environment the fact remains that the product obtained results from differing ratios – an average of 30 relationships with 10 actors is clearly different to 3 average relationships with 100 actors. In modern circumstances, there lacks the time to build the certainties and guarantees that result from the ceaseless repetition of procedures and the unambiguous management of social processes. Thus, trust becomes simultaneously more important and more problematic given how the establishment and fostering of social mechanisms of confirmation are rendered more difficult. Nevertheless, it is necessary to avoid the temptation to label existing modern or pre-modern societies as bearing greater or lesser extents of trust. It serves simply to affirm that there are various complex forms of converting modes of trust demonstrating their very centrality in very different forms of society.

The fact that we consider the question of converting trust to be central to social processes results from a simple premise. If for one moment we imagine a specific social actor shunning interpersonal contacts and relationships and if this same actor simultaneously proves unable to establish whatever the type of bond of trust in social systems be they of an expert or symbolic nature, it becomes easy to notice that he/she has carried out a translation of trust that pushes him/her in a different direction. Lacking trust in financial or insurance specialists belonging to the banking system, the option taken is to trust in the unquestionable value of money hidden away at home and in the high security locks installed to protect against any eventual break in. Lacking any trust in anyone at the supermarket or the local market, he/she opts to survive by purchasing directly from the producer therefore ensuring the reliability and safety of the products obtained in that fashion. Not trusting in car producers, our citizen

switches to the train and holds faith in the quality of services and whatever the company so similar to those in which he/she does not trust. Without overextending such examples to their logical limits, the refusal of trust is always a partial process that does not annul the centrality of trust as a resource rather moving it into its own zone and area of competence.

The refusal of a mediation system or a nuclear, symbolic guarantee of modern society, as is the case of money, is not achieved without significant dislocation in forms of trusting. Lacking trust in means of exchange, the social actor ends up heading towards alternative communities which define themselves in terms of their refusal to accept "mercantile" means of exchange preferring instead to establish "fair" and "just" currencies. The theory of trust needs to ascertain the strengths and mechanisms that ensure the convertibility of trust's multiple relevant forms while always remembering that trust is a socially plural phenomenon. Clearly, the different social contexts may lead to actors expressing forms of trust stemming from symbolic systems that seem to clash with previously expressed preferences. A distrust in the banking system may end up in home-based "bank" deposits with notes and coins squirreled away in a safe place just as it may result in those who seek out the best opportunities and conditions to seek refuge in alternative financial systems and structures. Low interest rates may encourage social actors to make changes to their patterns of consumption resulting in greater consumption and in areas that were not traditionally sources of trust. An inability to obtain credit from the formal systems may result in segments of the population heading to the fringes of financial systems to request credit from companies in which they neither trust nor bear any loyalty. The granting of such trust results far more from conjunctural availability than any question of preference or rational choice. Taking recourse to a cash converter store or an automatically granted system of telephone credit rather than a traditional pawnshop is not just a question of trust but rather a question of availability or even of the association with certain images of modernity and anonymity.

## Foreigners, Hospitality and Distrust

The theme of trust assumes the existence of strangers and others different to ourselves. Discussions as to issues relating to meeting an agreement or as to free access to our spaces are caused by contact with figures from beyond. Implicit to trust is a strong component of cosmopolitanism and decontextualisation. Without the presence of temporal and spatial separation and without the co-involvement of individuals external to a homogeneous community there can be no discussion as to trust. The trust requirement brings together careful consideration on two cores questions: doubt (created by a situation of risk or unknown derived from a lack of information or the absence of social mechanisms for confirmation, legitimisation and proof) and attachment (that involves the acceptance of one's own vulnerability, opening oneself up to others about whom there is scarce information).

Assuming that trust demands the presence of strangers, that is elements that throw into question the unanimity and homogeneity of a group, it may be accepted that trust represents part of a conceptual framework incorporating forms of acceptance and partial inclusion of the other. In this case, trust comes in at the same ontological level as tolerance, respect or decency, transformed at its base into a moral philosophy projected onto the other. It is hardly surprising that in one of the approaches illustrated by Eisenstadt, it is easy to encounter the moral echoes of the dialogic philosophy of his mentor Martin Buber, an important part of 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish philosophy, particularly in terms of exploring the idea of the presence of the other as a moral imperative. However, while the theme of trust ensures very particular attention is paid to the other and his/her unavoidable moral statute it is equally true that such a reflection as to the other does not always lead us to accept a moral philosophy totally

occupied with the absolute dimension of the other and any moral obligation to act out of interest of the other. Such difference ensures, in practical terms, that we have to face up to someone bringing with him/her not only novelty but also the hypothetical seed of discordance or even the future grounds for dissent and conflict.

The stranger may throw the existing order into jeopardy, shaking previously held convictions or breaking with social ties gradually built up over significant periods of time. Hence, the welcoming in of the stranger throws the established order into great uncertainty and without the creation of mechanisms for suspending or limiting doubt homogeneous communities tend to definitively annihilate any erring stranger, vagabond or whatever is different. Although it is clear that all human cultures sooner or later have to learn in some way to deal with difference, there is no doubt that the norms of hospitality that may be considered as universal across cultures functionally serve to calm those left more ill at ease and manage the means needed to attenuate the risk run in taking in the stranger. The very classical conceptualisation of hospitality, with the identified etymological ambivalence between host and enemy, proves that reception of the other is always carried out with great care and concern. Any careful reading of the *Odyssey*, that great fresco of relationships of hospitality, will provide an understanding up to what point the themes of trust and hospitality coincide. In the *Odyssey*, the receptions granted to Ulysses (and Telemachus) reveal a hospitality-based trust that is not based strictly on friendship/knowledge but rather on themes of recognition/identity and genealogy. Even among enemies, these ties from the past may result in a trust that could never exist between those close to each other. Rules of hospitality and frameworks for reciprocity build up a web of trust that falls beyond the world of friendship or ritual familiarity. What guarantees the validity of this trust is the existence of a series of safeguards that may oscillate between the implicit fulfilment of rules of courtesy supported by dynamics of reciprocity and the awe of prevailing institutionally established logics.

Hospitality may be understood as a demonstration of how social proto-trust mechanisms are created. Such a process involves the emergence of evidence and caution as to the behaviour of others in societies slowly abandoning their traditional parochialism in favour of more cosmopolitan relationships. Hence, it is hardly surprising to come across the developed forms of canonical orders of courtesy for the receiving of the unknown guest and that the latter knows how to behave when in front of his host. Such hospitality creates trust out of respect for consecrated social norms susceptible to being met by social actors otherwise separated by values, beliefs, habits and practices. Hospitality ensures the creation of a minimum common civilising denominator momentarily capable of overcoming doubt and

uncertainty. Genealogy and the community of origin of the guest is reflected in the food, bathing habits and accommodation offered by the host and represents a visiting card capable of calming even the most fearful. Hospitality is neither able to overcome hostility nor to totally dispel doubts nor even to create a new community. It only works as a temporary and calming effect on those involved enabling a social encounter that does not necessarily have to end in a fight to the death.

The breaking of almost natural relationships like trust or the exposure of one social actor to hitherto ignored co-presences presents society with a dilemma – either the radical cloistering around an original community of the faithful, loyal to an ideal, a belief, a leader or a cause – or to accept the roots of a new social model, guided by interaction of a cosmopolitan nature. Societies suddenly forced to deal with strangers and their actions are required to look out into the distance and this may result in the development of isolationist tendencies as well as safeguards to institutionally compensate for the lack of trust between the two parties. It is for this reason that we may affirm how cosmopolitanism, inter-community competition and distrust may be transformed into powerful social mechanisms of refinement and sophistication. That is, they work to create what may be termed modern civilisational features. In a paradoxical fashion, the development of commercial relationships over distance, the incremental power of inter-state trading, the establishment and development of reliable means of payment and other adornments of the modern capitalist system are more the product of inter-personal relationships of non-trust, or even of distrust, than any relationships of proximity and communion between groups. The very emergence of credit systems in the Europe of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries only came about by the canonical duplicity derived from a free interpretation of the book of Deuteronomy (cf. Clavero, 1996 and Nelson, 1969). The laws of the altar (for the community) and the wall (for foreigners) sought to ensure the best of both worlds with interest bearing loans only possible through a relationship with strangers (who clearly could not be trusted). Xenophobia and fear as regards the unknown is thereby tempered no longer by any rules of courtesy typical of archaic, aristocratic or noble societies but by a rule of bourgeois civility associated with the potential gain to be had from the relationship. Interpersonal distrust thus holds a not insignificant role in the civilisational process of the modern western world.

The greater the level of interpersonal distrust, in a social framework that imposes continuous and long lasting relationships with a stranger you either cannot or do not want to destroy, the greater the need for guarantees in the exchange patterns established. Nobody blindly bets on a relationship unless there is reassurance through the presence of forces capable of acting to dissuade attempts at opportunism, deceit and mystification. In this way, relational reliability undermined by the spectre of rampant opportunity is converted into institutional reliability with intervention to ensure nullification of conflict and judgement of disputes. Nevertheless, this conversion of trust is only possible within a social dynamic marked by the emergence of a state (and its corresponding institutions) able to openly intervene and working as a point of balance, an arbiter in social relationships and monopolist of the instruments of coercion and violence. Only the need for repeated interactions with the stranger or whatever figure from beyond that is characterised by distrust or low level reliability not only has the ability to effect a limited transfer of relational trust to institutional trust. It further works as a spill

over type of mechanism with the social conversion catalysing a crisis in the traditional forms of guaranteeing agreements are kept to – one's word, honour or spilt blood lose their operative power. Evidence and safeguards take central stage.

As is known, the progressive substitution of forms of trust grounded in reciprocity for relational contractualisation based means implies a dislocation in the forms that ensure contracts are kept given that the retaliatory mechanisms necessarily differ. The presence of a civilisational mechanism fostering sophistication and contractual refinement, however, implies two important consequences for our discussion on aspects of trust. On the one hand, as relational distrust rises, it becomes ever more important to design increasingly specific and detailed contracts with clauses included for possible failures to meet contractual terms, predicting the intelligent reactions of a relational partner. This process generates a series of self-fulfilling prophecies given how the greater the level of pre-empting of dishonest and opportunist behaviours, the greater the level of expectation of finding them. Similarly, there are greater incentives to breach agreements given that such a process creates distrust in the party who perceives the lack of trust being expressed towards him/herself. In this way, an unstoppable and self-expanding strategy of contractual sophistication and distrust is established. As a corollary of this process, contracts become ever more expensive forcing a rise in visible transaction costs. On the other hand, contractual sophistication feeding on interpersonal distrust means more expensive contracts, only possible as societies producing such contracts turn into highly professionalised societies. As core elements of their dynamics are the very actors specialised in arbitration and social brokering acting as experienced mediators that gain their own interests in the continuity of relationships defined by mutual suspicion. A point of balance in this situation comes through the development of ever more complex contractual relationships that are generally opaque to signatory parties and only understandable to the mediators themselves in possession of a clear interest in the continuation of a scenario of mutual distrust and therefore working to further such opacity.

While contractual sophistication combines with distrust we are pushed into the arms of mediation and arbitration, with clear costs for anyone hiring their services, there is another solution on the horizon. This involves transferring contractual relationships in the marketplace into internalised relationships internal to a company or a firm. In this case, the solution of authority will be presented as a means to combat the soaring rise in transaction costs. In a prevailing environment of suspicion and risk in interpersonal relationships, but where contractualisation has only produced unsustainable costs, the authoritarian solution would seem to be the preferred. Communalising the other and transforming him/her into part of us might take us back to an original situation in which the problem of trust transforms not into a problem of guarantees and proofs but rather a disciplinary problem. In such a scenario,

trust would be reduced to a question of inculcating the necessary values for adjusting the respective participant parties (of the organisation, the group or community) – the old Hobbesian problem resolved by culturalist mechanisms – or a question of rational solidarity guaranteed by adjusting mechanisms of shared dependence (raising the visibility and profile of costs of exit) and control (vigilance and coercion). At this level, problems do not disappear. Whilst the transaction costs presented by high levels of contractual sophistication are burdensome, the costs of authority are no less so. Contractual opportunism found in shirking labour tasks, relational free-riding and the problems included under adverse selection and moral hazard in all their respective forms have to be met by authoritarian solutions.

Thus, we are faced with a dilemma. The decline of interpersonal relationships of trust and the rising institutional forms of confidence that were enabled by the presence of a regulatory state able to intervene has led us to increasing rates of social attrition and the notable presence of consequent social and economic costs. It is on this reality that many contemporary theorists hold forth as to the state of civil society and its organisations and the results of their work. The image of social crisis and panic result from readings that vary from a defeatist acceptance of catastrophe through to calls for radical reform of contemporary society. Proposing intermediate solutions, such theorists consider the rehabilitation of trusting relationships will lead to patterns highlighted by their recourse to semi-markets and semi-firms as the most appropriate forms to simultaneously combat crises in the marketplace and in authority.

Luhmann (1979: 71) highlights how distrust is not the opposite of trust but rather its functional equivalent. This position is easily understandable through taking into account that the principal function of trust is the reduction of complexity. Indeed, anybody who does not trust returns to a state of original complexity but that same distrust operates a cross-cut thereby reducing the complexity of the respective system. In this sense, distrust can be seen as a functional equivalent of trust. Distrust is an operator of social simplification. As Luhmann (*op. cit.*: 72) highlights whoever distrusts is more dependent but on less information. However, Luhmann concedes that distrust comes at a much higher price given how it involves cuts to countless sources of information thereby reducing the potential for learning. Contrary to how trust is a means to relational openness, distrust is a means of reducing or eliminating relationships and thus contributes to the segregating off of all that is not familiar. Failures in trust, disappointments, breakdowns do not necessarily result in distrust but rather permit the creation of ever more conditional trust – trust with limited validity and very well defined in scope. In a similar way, Luhmann (*op. cit.*: 79-80), in referring to the question of security and insecurity of expectations, considers that trust does not correspond to an increase in security with a parallel decrease in insecurity. Rather, it represents a means of raising acceptable levels of insecurity as the cost of one's own security. Relationships of trust internalise and foresee a certain constitutional insecurity. In the most appropriate manner, it might be considered that trust operates transformations at the level of security and insecurity tolerated by the respective actors.

We have already stated how trust assumes a determined level of partial involvement and 'as if' behaviour. Distrust plays an important role in the evaluation of others but rarely serves to totally block a particular course of action. A lack of trust in journalists and in the information carried in newspapers may ensure we read the news with a certain degree of distance but it does not cause a total abandonment of newspapers as a source of information. Distrust or a lack of a trust aid in establishing reliability filters that reduce, on the one hand, the uncertainty of not being informed and, on the other, put a brake on the acceptance as truthful and real all the available

information. The separation between truth and fiction (or lie) obeys socially constructed criteria but which are never total guarantees for a full and correct evaluation. Distrust punctuated with trust may be partially overcome when social actors, taking advantage of the centrality of their position and privileged status in a social network, are able to gain restricted information that enables them to make a more refined judgement that remains inaccessible to other group members. Simultaneously, there are those social actors able to moderate their distrust regarding certain expert systems and manifestations of technical competence through the juxtaposition of intense emotional relationships to gain use of these expert systems or symbolic guarantees. Distrust of doctors is momentarily suspended when receiving advice on a specific form of treatment from a doctor who happens to be our brother. Doubt as to the purchase of a car may be lifted by the action of a friend and mechanic able to testify as to the quality of the motor. While friendship and familiarity are not obviously the same as trust, there can be no doubt that they represent potent means of reducing the interplay of complexity and uncertainty working to create both trust in abstract systems and visceral distrust regarding those same systems.

#### Final Remarks

This theoretical digression enabled us to reach some important conclusions that will be summarized in 20 points:

1. Trust becomes a central issue in Social Theory whenever we face difficult moments defined by the ideas of crisis (moral, economic or political), transition or stalemate. Facing the debacle of the usual recipes, trust is generally presented as a last resort solution.
2. The current centrality of the trust concept can be linked to a series of important events that shaped societies and theoretical movements from the 80s onwards: a) the search for conceptual third ways, capable of avoiding the excesses of rational choice and structuralist approaches; b) the *cultural turn* of the social sciences, granting particular importance to the so called *soft variables*; c) the questioning of the rationality pattern by the experimental economists who offer the *homo reciprocans* figure as an alternative to *homo oeconomicus*; d) the recovery of the civil society approach and the revamping of the Tocquevillean theses on civic virtue; e) the Management shift towards the exotic and the informal as explanations of why some are able to travel the road of development and others not (e.g. the *guanxi* in China); f) the economic and social transitions in Eastern Europe after 1989; g) the declining levels of civic and political participation in the richest democracies; h) the rising salience of deviance and criminality in advanced societies; i) the growing concerns on litigation and interpersonal trust erosion.
3. The constellation of trust involves multiple concepts that should be made clear in order to avoid spurious associations and erroneous correspondences. Cooperation, solidarity, friendship, familiarism, social capital, social networks, security, reliability, reputation, trustworthiness and faith are certainly part of the same conceptual set, but are not synonyms. A clear and non-ambiguous concept should enable us to understand the dynamics that pervade each society's arch of trust, namely the conversion mechanisms.

4. Risk, potential threat, menaces and crises are all important elements in the definition of the trust environment. On the other hand, reflexivity, freedom of choice, decision willingness and the capacity to depict alternatives are also important dimensions of the actions framed by trust. Crossing these two sets gives us a hint on the reasons why trust is so central to modernity.
5. Convertibility and dissipation make it possible to understand why the dichotomy trust societies vs. non-trust societies is spurious. Each society has its own pattern of conversion and dissipation of trust.
6. Distrust is not the opposite of trust, but one of its functional equivalents. Distrust forces the celebration of totally specified contractual arrangements supporting complex and contingent social relations. Distrust jeopardizes action if and only if we are embedded in parochial relations or autarchic settings. Distrust is a civilizational construction central to modernity, thanks to its refining and sophisticated dimensions that made it possible the development of regular and decontextualized relations in cosmopolitan societies.
7. The trust asset can be seen as social cement, relational lubricant or communitarian glue, meaning that it represents a Dasgupta/Hirschman effect – it increase as long as we use it; it diminishes when stored.
8. Trust is by definition an asset generated in the context of social relations linking actors, through a social bond that is both contingent and problematic, and entirely dominated by risk and uncertainty. The trustor has good reasons to trust the trustee, granting him/her some liberty of action which will make it possible to produce gains or reduce costs (whenever the agreement is respected) or the inverse situation (when a violation subsists). Anguish, fear and potential losses are always imminent.
9. Trust is a contingent social relation established between two independent actors playing potentially reversible social roles, pursuing potentially differentiated goals, but submitted to an interdependence framework that anchors one's result to the other's actions. The canonical form of trust may be typified as: X trusts Y to do Z in context K, under conditions F1, F2, ..., Fn.
10. Trust differentiates and reduces social complexity. Whenever we face situations that are unknown, uncontrollable or in the absence of relevant information, trust enables action thanks to an *as if* social mechanism that triggers a response that mimics the existence of guarantees, certainties, knowledge and tranquillity. In this strict sense, trust acts as an action mobilizer and social enabler.

11. The social mechanisms of trust are central in decontextualized situations, i.e., whenever we face situations where the co-presence in space or time is not possible. Trust operates as an implicit credit system.
12. Trust can contribute both to the taming of transaction costs and to the reduction of authority costs. In these terms, trust economizes on relational costs, and paves the way to the solution of important collective action problems.
13. Despite being a fundamental asset to contemporaneous societies, trust is fragile and can be shaken by multiple crises, disloyal behaviour, lies, mystifications and deceit. The strict adherence (without latitude) to social norms can also rule out trust.
14. Trust is a relation constituted at the edge of the social systems, inasmuch as it is established with actors who are partially unknown and about whom there are not complete and totally reliable information. Trust plays the role traditionally played by the rules of hospitality and courteous behaviour, being a functional equivalent of these practices. Trust enables the relation between locals and foreigners.
15. Trust articulates the cognitive, normative and emotional dimensions but its existence does not imply a full match between the three. The different trust layers do not fit entirely. Therefore, emotional closeness can lead either to trust or to distrust, depending on the relevant situation considered. On the other hand, the complete distrust of someone's technical ability does not have to imply emotional distance.
16. The professionalization of the expert systems, certification, deontological codes, and explicit socialization are all modern examples of the conversion of interpersonal trust into institutional confidence. These systems assume a role of guarantees and act as legitimizing mechanisms, substituting the traditional forms of inculcation build upon tacit socialization and personal based compromises.
17. Each society has its own rupture points in the trust arches. These points permit the visualization of the conversion and dissipation systems of trust that permeate each society. The dissipation and conversion patterns illustrate the different ways and means by which societies solve their trust problems.
18. Trust blindness is as costly (if not more) as the absence of trust. Excessive trust can generate spirals of groupthink, parochialism, diversity destruction, exploitation or even slavery. The costs of trust include social rigidity, communication impairment, Abilene type of phenomena, and social paralysis. At the same time, excessive trust can lead to confidence games, frauds, hoaxes and large-scale mystification.
19. Trust relations depend largely on the actions of mediators, regulators and social brokers that impinge the trust realm. Reputation games, informations about credibility

and reliability, certifications and assessments are highly associated with social brokerage activities.

20. The trusting act comprises expectation frameworks towards the behaviour, values and attitudes of the relevant others. These expectations are generated in social settings dominated by a general agreement on rules and correct forms of acting. Trust can be simultaneously pro-active and reactive. Predictability is an important part of all trust relations, meaning that trust reduces the surprise dimension of all social relations.

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