

# Trust in the other : Understanding the concept of trust in relation to persons with congenital deaf blindness and planned communication intervention

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## Introduction

This paper relates to Ivana Markova's plenary speech on the topic of 'trust' in the conference 'The Magic of Dialogue', in INS HEA Paris June 25<sup>th</sup> 2010. The purpose of the paper is to discuss the notion of 'trust' from the point of view of clinical practice. The influence of dialogical theory is already present in the title, which points at 'trust' understood in the sense of 'trusts in the other'; i.e. as an other-directed relation. We will accordingly pose the question of what dialogical theory adds to the understanding of the notion of *trust*, compared to interactional theories. We will also share some video-clips from the practical field where we can point to observable indications of 'trust in the other.' The video-clips are made by Annica Henriksen who is leader of the Ragna Ringdal Day Care Center in Oslo. Annica and her staff have during later years worked to develop a dialogical practice in the work with the congenitally deafblind (cdb) users of the center. We are going to look for 'trust in the other' in encounters with and between two men with cdb. But first, we share an image in art that foregrounds the bodily postures of trusting interpersonal relations; a sculpture by Gustav Vigeland.

*In Vigeland's sculpture<sup>4</sup> we see a scenario of four people, a mature man, obviously an aging father-figure, embracing his three sons. The older son is standing up from within the embracing space and facing his father's face. The hands of the boy are by touch aligning with his father's embracing hands, suggesting shared attention to the concern for the smaller kids that are totally sheltered by the embracing father. The young boy is sculptured as higher as he is more erect and vital than the sitting, somewhat tired father. The slight difference in height suggests the trusting attitude of the father is dignifying: The young boy is lifting his father's hope by standing up and seemingly growing on the spot through the sense of being trustworthy in the eye of his father, suggesting the sense of trustworthiness is in the process of becoming a dimension of the boy's sense of self. The trustworthy attitude is transacted from father to boy while the boy is still embraced/ i.e. sheltered by his father; i.e. before the time comes when corresponding actual responsible action and agency is required of the boy.*

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<sup>4</sup> There is now formal consent to display the photo of the piece of art on the net, therefore it is not in the text.

### ***From interactional to dialogical theory***

The Dbl Working Group on Communication and Congenital Deafblindness started our development work with reference to research in early development and interactional theories and has developed to add the contribution of theories on meaning making, including dialogical theory. The theoretical positions are not seen as contractictory. Dialogical theory adds a layer of psychological relevance. The purpose is not only to support the co-creation of meaning-making communicative relations, but also to explicitly support the development of self and personhood. With reference to interactional theories, we focused the notion of attachment, *related to exploration/lack of exploration*. There has also in the practical field been a focus on safety in terms of *predictability* and *control*. This notion of trust has reference to the specific problems of deaf blindness regarding overview. *Trust-in-the other* is actualized not only in a few basic and enduring *attachment relations* but also in the context of *situated social companionships*. Attachment relations are understood as equivalent to what Ivana Markova addresses as *basic trust*, and we are concerned here more with relations she refers to as *reflective trust*. Persons with cdb encounter many different persons, many are initially strangers. In some encounters trust may develop, distrust in others. Development of certain aspects of personhood; such as degrees of openness and closure towards the other is presumably influenced by the social experience of self- and-other relations in situated encounters.

### ***Listening to the other***

In a reciprocally trusting social relation, the listening attitude that is taken towards the other may be seen as more prominent than the attitude of speaking ( cf. e.g. Nafstad 2010). To listen-to-the other in a dialogical sense does not mean the same as the auditory perception of sound. Listening is in a dialogical sense to remain sensitive and attentive to and *taking into oneself in the sense of reciprocating* somebody's utterance; that of a **you** . A person with congenital deaf blindness needs like any person to experience that he is trustworthy in the sense of being worth the reciprocating listening attitude of the other-to-self.

*We see a video-clip of a man with congenital deafblindness who is totally deaf and blind, and a female piano player, sighted and hearing. Earlier in the day he was restless, he did not have a good day. He does not know the piano player very well, nor vice versa. Annica told the piano player that she should just play for the man in her way, trusting her ability to do that, and the piano player trusted Annica trusting her. Annika and her staff were surprised to see a very refined tactile form of musical togetherness develop through the encounter. It seems that the piano player is very intensively other- directed in her playing, listening to him listening to her playing into his listening/co-playing hands. She plays in a manner that is clearly dedicated to the listening other, and it seems that the man perceives this other-directedness in the music she improvises: She plays to him and not for him. We may get the impression when we look at the manner in which this man listens with his hand to her playing hand that he really feels that she really trusts his ability to listen not to the piano, but to her playing to him. She is demonstrating in the manner she plays so other- directed, so tuned to his listening curious touch; that she feels trusted by Annica to play with this man in a manner sharable with him.*

### **Sharing something of value to self with the other**

*We see here Annika positioning herself a little bit as the father figure in the Vigeland sculpture, she engages in transition of responsibility. She is setting up a scenario where of one of the two men with cdb is the trusted and responsible one in relation to the other congenitally deafblind man. She trusts the one to be in charge of the task of sharing something of value to both; grapes, with the other one. The one she trusts to be in charge has some functional residual vision, the other is totally deafblind. We can see in the clip that the trusted one is constantly directed towards the other and is letting the other constantly feel and thereby have a share on the grapes he is holding. He is letting himself be prompted to feed the other with the grape,*

*It appears that the two men in the video-clip really reciprocally trust the other, enjoying the complimentary roles they take in relation to the grapes, as the giver and receiver of grapes to/from the other. The scenario is not only about the grapes, but seems to be going about the experience of being in charge of living a smoothly co-operative triadic you-me-it relationship without competition and tension. It is quite obvious that the experience of this relation can only become a reality for the two men because Annika trusts their ability to engage in such a relation. It happens with a little scaffolding of the choreography of collaborating about the grape-eating, but without training.*

### **Reciprocal openness to the face of the other**

The last video-clip is going about reciprocal faceness. The activity is a collaborative making of face-masks, a very fundamental cultural activity. Masks are cultural symbols of self-otherness. Making and taking on facial masks makes it possible to temporarily be as-if another being. The man in the clip with cdb took part in a similar mask-making activity with the same staff member ( Annika herself) two years earlier. The video-documentation from the previous mask-making scenario shows a monological activity: He did not engage reciprocally within a dialogical self-other perspective in the making of masks. He related only to the mask-making as a constructing activity: as an instrumental act of making a physical object detached from the context of meaning-making social and cultural life. He accompanied this solitary activity with a monotonous deep vocalization, a deep and sad tone.

*By contrast he is now silent and concentrating in the relation to a companion about the mask making. The role he ascribes to the other is not that of an instrumental helper, but that of a companion. No accompanying monotonous tone. His touch is refined and other-directed, modified and tender; the touch is of the face of the other through her mask. He offers his own face to her, enabling her in a truly reciprocal manner to co-operate on making his mask on him. His hands are open to be continuously in light touch with her touch and the directedness of her touch. He is continuously by touch following and joining in the direction of her attention in a dialogical manner. The reciprocal positioning of hands during the activity is dialogical, which makes the collaborative activity framed by the reciprocation of perspectives and positions that characterizes dialogical self-other relations.*

### ***Indications of trust***

The sustained other directed use of touch; an open other-directed attitude in the hands seems in cases of congenital deafblindness to be a robust indicator of 'trust in the other; i.e. of 'trust' in the dialogical sense.

### ***Back to dialogicality and culture***

The three video clips have illustrated trust as trust in the other. The examples were found in relations between adults with cdb and staff, and in the peer relation between them. The clips show that culturally valued activities can be transmitted through social relations that are characterized by trust in the other. Trusting the other is the only manner in which persons with cdb can let themselves be moved beyond the state of present knowledge. The readiness to join the other in an expedition into the unknown is indicated by open other-directed attitude in the hands, although the face may express tension.

### ***Forms of trust***

All four forms of trust laid out in Ivana Markova's figure are relevant in relation to cdb. We touched upon the relation between the notions of basic trust and reflective trust, and we have basically been addressing trust in face-to-face relations. i.e. in the micro- social form. But clearly macro-social forms of trust are relevant. Social political systems are very different in the manner in which they can be trusted as solidaric with the unfortunate and underprivileged and political ideologies of solidarity in one and the same society on one or several levels may change over time towards the better or the worse. Such change may affect the mediating other-directed attitude, e.g. of professionals towards person with cdb, and towards their families and personal networks (cfr. e.g. Christeva 2008)

### ***Suggested reading:***

Ivana Markova's plenary paper on *trust* from this conference ( proceedings by Nordicwelfare.dk)

Ivana Markova's plenary paper on *dialogicality* from the Leeds conference, 2008 ( proceedings by SENSE)

Anne V Nafstad (2010) *Communication as Cure* (pdf) ( [www.skadalen.kompetansecenter.no](http://www.skadalen.kompetansecenter.no))

Julia Christeva ( 2008) *Brev til Presidenten* , Cappelen, N Original : *Lettre au President* (Fr)

