The Trust Debate in the Literature of the American Renaissance

Dietmar Schloss

Trust can be said to be an attitude which we adopt when we confront situations of uncertain outcome. The uncertainty relates to the fact that we do not have sufficient knowledge of—and/or sufficient control over—the elements involved in contributing to the outcome. Trust is thus a cognitive-emotional coping mechanism that facilitates action in insecure situations. The likelihood of encountering such insecure situations has increased in modern, diverse, fast-changing, and anonymous societies (Beck 1986; Giddens 1990). This might explain why trust has become such a central concern and issue in the fields of sociology, political science, and economy (Nuissl 2002; Hartmann 2001). While definitions and conceptual approaches differ greatly, there seems to be agreement that trust is a vital requirement for the functioning of modern societies. In fact, the more modern a society is (i.e., the more functionally differentiated and the more anonymous the relationships between its members), the more trust is needed for coordinated action. However, most researchers agree that trust is a scarce and precarious resource, demanding emotional energy and hard psychological "work" to be generated and maintained.

This essay intervenes in the contemporary academic trust debate from an unlikely quarter, namely the field of American Literature. I argue that central ideas of present-day trust theorizing can already be found in the literary discourse of the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century; in particular, in the works of the authors of the so-called American Renaissance. Trust, as well as such related terms as *confidence* and *reliance*, abound in these writings—Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous essay "Self-Reliance" (1841) and Herman Melville's novel *The Confidence-Man* (1857) being only the most visible expressions of these writers' profound interest in this issue. The period of the American Renaissance roughly coincides with the Age of Jackson, in which the more traditional, predominantly agrarian republic of the Founding

Fathers began to transform itself into an increasingly modern, urban, and industrial mass democracy. The literary writers of this period, I argue, had a profound sense of the social, moral, and emotional challenges of this process of modernization. Even though their works may not reveal it at first glance, they were deeply aware of the precariousness of trust under the conditions of modernity.

That the American Renaissance writers had a profound sense of the challenges of modernity is not new: F. O. Matthiessen, the period's first literary historiographer, associated them politically with a type of modern liberalism that was radically individualist and nonconformist—while welcoming equality, they harbored negative feelings towards modern political, social, and economic institutions. In aesthetic and philosophical respects, Matthiessen considered them forerunners of the literary modernists. Later generations of critics have largely taken over his assessments (for example, Fiedler 1960, Poirier 1966, Baym 1981, Tompkins 1985, Reynolds 1988), and, more recently, efforts have been made to associate these writers with postmodernism and deconstruction (for example, Rowe 1982, Jay 1990). I have no intention to challenge the view that American Renaissance writers were champions of modern individualism, subjectivism, and epistemological skepticism; however, I do take issue with the view that they advocated a retreat from society and social interaction. Approaching them from the perspective of trust, one clearly sees their desire to keep the individual enmeshed in the social process and to have him or her retain his or her capability for action in the world. Even their most radical gestures towards individualism—and Emerson's program of self-reliance is certainly one of these—must be seen as attempts to restore trust under the conditions of modernity.

In another aspect, too, this essay tries to somewhat reshuffle the weights in the established critical balance. The writers of the American Renaissance have generally been divided into two camps—Emerson and the other transcendentalists advancing an optimistic version of American modernity, and Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville reacting to it by providing a skeptical or even tragic view. Here, too, Matthiessen provided the cue: Emerson, he writes (using a phrase from Goethe), was "the cow from which the rest drew their milk" (1941, xii)—specifying that Thoreau and Whitman applied and extended Emerson's vision, while Hawthorne and Melville felt the need to complicate and react against it. In this essay, this sequence will be changed, and we will begin with Hawthorne and Melville first, and then consider Emerson. This will show that in respect to social trust in modernity, they were par-

ticipating philosophically in a two-way conversation proceeding from similar epistemological foundations. Emerson's apparently uncomplicated forward-looking stance of self-reliance will reveal itself as being grounded in a skepticism similar to that of Hawthorne and Melville. In fact, one could say that Emerson provided an answer to a question originally posed by Hawthorne and Melville.

In order to describe the American Renaissance writers' positions in the trust debate, I will draw on the trust theory of the British sociologist Antony Giddens as laid out in his two books *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990) and *Modernity* and *Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (1991). Giddens identifies and elaborates a historical scheme that reveals the different conditions of trust in "pre-modern" and "modern" societies. This distinctive typology can provide a useful tool for the analysis of the trust thinking of the American Renaissance writers. In addition, the particular focus Giddens places on the experiential dimension of modernization, as well as the place he gives to self-reflexivity and temporality (see Wagner 1991), resonates with the trust thinking of these writers. All in all, the understanding that comes out of Giddens' trust theory—namely, that trust in the modern world can no longer be considered a given, but instead needs to be "worked at,"—is vitally present in the works of the American Renaissance writers, and thus pays witness to their innovative socio-psychological theorizing.

In the following, I will first introduce Giddens' concepts of modernization and trust, then move through a small number of trust scenarios in Hawthorne and Melville, and conclude with Emerson's trust philosophy.

Anthony Giddens' Concept of Trust and Its Place in His Theory of Modernity

At the core of Giddens' thinking about trust is the psychological concept of "ontological security," sometimes also referred to as "basic trust" (1990, 92). Ontological security describes "the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action" (1990, 92). Representing the "normal" or non-pathological state of mind in which human beings experience themselves and the world as solid, it is a state in which they do not reflect upon themselves and the world, but take the integrity of self and world for granted. The experience of ontological security is the precondition that we

feel at home in the world and can act in it. If basic trust is missing or overly compromised, we feel anxious and are debilitated in our actions.

Giddens argues that basic trust is the result of nurture, not nature, and that it derives from specific experiences in early childhood. Drawing on Sigmund Freud, D.W. Winnicott, and Eric Erikson, he maintains that the manner in which a child learns to cope with the absence of the primary caretaker determines his or her later trust capacity. He writes: "a fundamental feature of the early formation of trust is trust in the caretaker's return. A feeling of the reliability, yet independent experience, of others—central to a sense of continuity of self-identity—is predicated upon the recognition that the absence of the mother does not represent a withdrawal of love" (1990, 97). It is thus of utmost importance that the child learns to interpret the absence of the caretaker as a temporary measure and not as abandonment; otherwise, the dramatic loss of power it feels will produce a sense of non-recognition and unworthiness.

Trust is thus a psychological mechanism that allows the child to accept separation from the caretaker without falling prey to anxiety. It "brackets distance in time and space and so blocks off existential anxieties which, if they were allowed to concretise, might become a source of continuing emotional and behavioural anguish through life" (1990, 97). In other instances, Giddens refers to basic trust as an "emotional inoculation" (1991, 39) and as a "protective cocoon" (1991, 40).

The category of "absence" and the notion that trust is a psychological "bracketing mechanism" to counter and stem the fears arising from absence are central to Giddens' modern trust theory. They also play a central role in his conception of the modernization process. In his historical typology, he distinguishes between pre-modern and modern societies, attributing to each type of society a different "trust environment" (1990, 102). In pre-modern societies, life takes place within a fixed habitat with more or less the same people sharing experiences over long periods of time. The organizing structures are kinship ties and community relations that can be relied upon regardless of whether the individual is personally appreciated or not (1990, 101). In addition, pre-modern societies are equipped with religious cosmologies providing the individual with interpretations of the human and natural worlds (1990, 103) and with a body of traditions to secure the continuity of past, present, and future, thus supplying the individual with a set of routinised social practices (1990, 105). Like many of the classical sociologists such as Durkheim, Weber, and Elias, Giddens places the beginning of modern

institutions and modern modes of behavior in post-feudal Europe (1991, 14–15) and associates them with the rise of industrialism, capitalism, and the nation state. However, unlike them, he does not conceptualize modernization in terms of a progressive process of differentiation and specialization, but rather in terms of severance and replacement (1990, 21–22). In fact, the central feature of the modernization process for Giddens is the separation of space and time—what he calls "time-space distanciation": "The advent of modernity increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between 'absent' others, locally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction. In conditions of modernity, place becomes increasingly *phantasmagoric*: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them" (1990, 18–19).

According to Giddens, the invention of the mechanical clock was the precondition for this process. In what he calls the "emptying of time," time is depleted of (locally acquired) experiential content and transformed into a universal measure and conceptual unit applicable anywhere. The worldwide standardization of calendars and clocks leads to the "empty[ing] of space" in the course of which space is separated from place and turned into an abstract, universally applicable category (1990, 18). This severance of time from space "provides the very basis for their recombination in ways that coordinate social activities without necessary reference to the particularities of place." The "reintegration of separated time and space" allows modern organization to coordinate "the actions of many human beings physically absent from one another" (1991, 17).

New dynamic organizational structures—Giddens calls them "abstract systems"—emerge connecting the local and the global. These structures have been lifted out of one local context ("disembedding") and have undergone a process of rearticulation in order to do organizational work in other local contexts ("reembedding"). Giddens distinguishes between several types of abstract systems: bureaucratic institutions in the Weberian sense (1990, 20); symbolic token systems (e.g. money) (1990, 22–26); and expert systems such as science and technology (1990, 27). In some respects, these abstract systems take the place of family and kinship relations and make social activity under the conditions of time-space distanciation possible. They attain credibility and authority independently of the personal attributes of the human agents that represent them. Individuals place their trust in these organizational structures in the understanding that they are universally recognized and accepted; often their authority is vouched for by the state. The trust routines

that are integrated with abstract systems are central to creating ontological security in conditions of modernity.

While abstract systems have made day-to-day life of modern societies safer and more predictable than it was in pre-modern societies, Giddens points out, they also create novel forms of vulnerability. Under the conditions of modernity, he thinks, trust changes its quality and becomes something else. For one, trust in abstract systems is experientially not as nourishing as trust in persons is (1990, 113). The trust bonds to family, kin, and community, developed over a long period of time, have an emotional reality ("presence") that the trust routines in abstract systems do not have. The former involve a mutuality of response and intimacy which is missing from the largely "faceless" commitments to abstract systems; the latter remain largely unconscious and are often "taken for granted" (1990, 113). Modern trust routines thus do not contribute to the ontological security in the same manner as pre-modern trust relationships were able to.

The second factor that makes trust in modernity problematic has to do with what Giddens calls the "reflexivity of modernity," which refers to the questioning and self-questioning principle inherent in modernity (1990, 36). The Enlightenment philosophers believed they were preparing the way for a securely-founded knowledge by making critical reason instrumental to all human pursuits. As Giddens points out, however, "the reflexivity of modernity actually undermines the certainty of knowledge" because "[s]cience depends, not on the inductive accumulation of proofs, but on the methodological principle of doubt." Thus: "No matter how cherished, and apparently well established a given scientific principle might be, it is open to revision" (1991, 21). Trust in modernity is thus laced with doubt, which is "not only disturbing to philosophers, but [also] *existentially troubling* for ordinary individuals" (1991, 21).

The third factor that makes trust in abstract systems prone to anxiety is related to new risks produced by the diversification and proliferation of expert cultures. The abstract systems that organize our lives are the product of a great number of expert cultures, each of which has little knowledge of—and even less control over—their combined effects. As these systems extend across the globe, any input at one point of the system can have an enormous impact at another (1990, 124–125). Giddens believes that the fear of catastrophes resulting from unintended effects is the subconscious keynote in modern existence. While human beings in pre-modern societies were exposed to dangers of various kinds (e.g. hazards of nature), they attributed them to fate or *for-*

tuna, that is, forces outside of the responsibility of the individual (1990, 130). Threats under the conditions of globalized modernity, however, are "risks" of a new kind—they are experienced as emerging from a man-made, institutionalized environment for which individuals carry a certain responsibility, yet over which they do not seem to have any control. The resulting experience of powerlessness leads to a feeling of numbness undermining the individual's trust and agency (1990, 127–128).

In light of these factors, to muster trust under the conditions of modernity is much more difficult than in pre-modern environments. The consciousness of risk is always present, and anxiety is built into the process. In fact, Giddens wants us to consider anxiety as a regular part of our "overall security system"; it can be a potential resource that makes us ready for action, but it can also be debilitating, when it is "free-floating" (1991, 43–44). He draws on Kierkegaard's existentialist philosophy considering existence as a "mode of being-in-the-world" (1991, 48). It is not enough for individuals to "just 'accept' reality," but they have "to do" reality. In a similar way, under the conditions of modernity, one has "to do" trust in a much more active way than in pre-modern conditions where kinship and community networks, religion, and tradition provided the script. The "leap to commitment" (1990, 95) requires more courage and moral effort in the modern than in the pre-modern risk environment. Furthermore, the experience of navigating life in modern settings feels much more—to quote another one of Giddens's favorite phrases—"like being aboard a careering juggernaut […] than being in a carefully controlled and well-driven motor car" (1990, 53).

There is one further segment of Giddens' theorizing on trust that is relevant to the trust debate in the American Renaissance. It concerns the modifications modernization wrought upon the practices of private life. Giddens sees a direct connection between the globalizing tendencies of modernity and what he calls the "transformation of intimacy in contexts of day-to-day life" (1990, 114). The separation of time and space and the introduction of abstract systems as bridging mechanisms have made trust processes increasingly tenuous as they leave the individual bereft of firm reference points. To cope with the new insecurities, modern individuals look for new points of cognitive and emotional anchorage and find them in private life. For Giddens, the turn to private life is part and parcel of that self-reflexive movement in modernity that can be observed in other realms of life, too. It leads to new forms of cultivation of personal relationships and to a "turn inwards" towards human subjectivity. While in pre-modern society, as we have seen, the individual was

immersed in a dense network of relationships, these relationships were not "personal" in the modern sense, but tied to relatively fixed social roles, which gave private life almost a semi-institutional character. As public life becomes increasingly institutionalized under the pressure of modernity, the private sphere becomes more "personal" and is turned into an arena of a new quest for personal meaning. The emergence of romantic love and a new, more intimate friendship culture represent the beginnings of that development. While the routines structured by abstract systems have an "empty, unmoralized character" (1990, 120), personal relationships are invested with self-conscious intentionality and carried out with great deliberateness: they become "projects" "to be 'worked at' by the parties involved" and require "*the opening out of the individual to the other*" (1990, 121). In this, they need to live up to the demands of a new ideal of "authenticity" (1990, 119).

Connected to the preoccupation with private relationships is the concern with the self. Under the conditions of modernity, self-identity is not a given, but has to be created through a process of self-inquiry. The individual needs to become engaged in a continuous process of "identity work." Drawing on Charles Taylor's idea of self-identity, Giddens argues that "we must continually integrate events which occur in the external world into our biography, and create a narrative and keep it going" (1991, 54).

Giddens distinguishes his way of accounting for the "transformations of intimacy" in modernity from the accounts of other modernization theorists (1990, 115–120). Most of the latter argue that modern institutions have taken over large areas of social life and drained them of meaningful content. The cultivation of relationships and the quest for self-identity are seen as a retreat from politics and society, signaling the individual's feeling of powerlessness that either leads to quietism or narcissistic hedonism (1990, 121–122). Although Giddens considers the transformations of intimacy as clearly related to the emergence of abstract systems, he does not see them in terms of diminishment and decline, but as a genuine and creative transformation of the nature of the personal in the modern trust environment (1990, 120). This transformation provides individuals with a new form of emotional anchorage that bolsters their ontological security and acts as a stabilizing force in the larger risk environment of modern society.

Hawthorne and Melville: The Dilemma of Trust in Modernity

Hawthorne's and Melville's narratives do not provide "realistic" depictions of the world with credible characters and plots that pass the test of probability; rather, they offer allegories employing character types, plot schemes, and symbols in order to conduct philosophical inquiries and deliver thought experiments. These authors, I claim, are psycho-sociologists who use fiction to theorize about trust and modernity. Although the worlds depicted in their fictions reveal few of the features identified by Giddens as modern, the trust experiences of their protagonists are decidedly so. The three narratives discussed here depict human beings placed at the threshold of modernity. With their emotional and cognitive apparatuses having been molded in a pre-modern trust environment, they are thrown into a modern situation and experience a radical crisis. Eventually they fail to perform Giddens' "leap to commitment" and remain caught in a debilitating limbo. In the following, I will briefly sketch the settings of the stories with Giddens' description of pre-modern and modern environments of trust and risk in mind. In the second step, I will highlight the protagonists' trust careers; and in the third, I will speculate on the reasons of their failure.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown": Self-Reflexivity as a Curse

Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) takes us back to the earlier phase of the Puritan settlement of New England; references to the Salem witchcraft trials and to King William III suggest the 1690s as a time marker. The story is set in Salem Village and the adjacent forest. The protagonist is a young man by the name of Goodman Brown—"goodman" being a title used to address a man of humble, but respectable birth. We meet his pretty wife by the name of Faith—it seems that they have just gotten married. We also hear that he has a prominent line of ancestors, who played important roles in the colony's history. Later we encounter his catechism teacher, as well as the minister, and the deacon; and, finally, we get a glimpse of the whole village participating in a nightly congregation.

As these details show, Hawthorne situates the protagonist clearly in what Giddens calls a pre-modern trust environment. Goodman Brown still lives in a world shaped by kinship; although his immediate family has passed away, his father and grandfather are continuously on his mind and provide models

for his conduct. His mother is mentioned only once, but he seems to harbor a deep sympathy and intense admiration for her. While we do not get much of a sense of Goodman Brown and Faith's married life—they still seem to be in their honeymoon stage—Faith is a constant presence in Goodman Brown's mind, and he considers their fates as immutably united. The church is the only building mentioned in the story apart from Goodman Brown's own house. While he does not seem particularly devout, the representatives of the church have a great significance for him—akin to the members of his family. In fact, he seems to consider family and church followership as identical concerns: "We have been a race of honest men and good Christians; since the days of martyrs" (YGB, 388). At the outset of the story, the pillars of the premodern trust environment—kinship, community, religion, and habit—seem still intact for Goodman Brown. Hawthorne gives us the sense that up to the point when the story begins, the protagonist has lived his life in a state of ontological security—not only does he have faith in his wife, but also in himself and the world.

This trust is profoundly shaken when he enters the forest at sunset, after having given a parting kiss to his wife. Hawthorne does not have him move very far away from the village world—the forest, in fact, borders on the village—and yet in the allegorical language of the story, this step marks the Giddensian time-space separation that comes with modernity: it distances and estranges him from his familiar world and catapults him into a new experiential time. Yet, although the forest is a far cry from Giddens' global, capitalist, urban modernity, Hawthorne has this modernity (or what exists of it in the late seventeenth century) enter the story through some interesting details: the person, with whom Goodman Brown has the appointment in the forest and who becomes his guide, is not a local; instead, he is described as one who "had an indescribable air of one who knew the world, and would not have felt abashed at the governor's dinner table, or in King William's Court" (YGB, 387). The stranger prides himself as having had intense commerce with many members of New England's religious and political elite, listing church deacons, municipal selectmen, members of the legislature, and even the governor as his close friends (YGB, 388–389). In this figure of radical mobility—he does not only move rapidly between places but also between times (he claims, for example, to have been an intimate acquaintance of Goodman Brown's father and grandfather)—Hawthorne brings modernity into the forest. In addition, the congregation that eventually assembles in the forest is not only made up of the residents of Salem village but also of those of "Falmouth and beyond"

(YGB, 391); there are also delegations from Connecticut and Rhode-Island as well as a group of "Indian powpows" (YGB, 391).

Wherein does the crisis of trust that Goodman Brown experiences in the forest consist? It comes down to his gradual realization that the persons that had guaranteed the stability of his self and his world are not what they seemed; the "caretakers" of the traditional world that provided him with a feeling of ontological security are suddenly experienced as unreliable and treacherous. His process of disillusion begins with the stranger with whom he has the appointment. The elderly man has a certain physical resemblance with him—the narrator even suggests that he could be his grandfather or grand uncle—and Goodman Brown wonders why a person like him would be in the forest. His somewhat immoral opinions and his cynical speech—the narrator gives him at times a satanic appearance—make Goodman Brown even more uneasy. When the stranger provides him with compromising details regarding the conduct of his revered grandfather and father, Goodman Brown's uneasiness turns into anxiety. As if that were not enough, when they encounter his catechism teacher, the minister, and the deacon of the village in the depths of the forest, his despair becomes complete. Finding the whole village assembled under the light of four blazing pines in a clearing, the riddle is finally solved: The congregation is celebrating a devil's sabbath with everybody waiting to welcome Goodman Brown and his wife Faith as the new "converts" in their midst (YGB, 393).

Hawthorne's allegorical narrative makes visible the high drama of Goodman Brown's psyche: it carefully records the steps of increasing anxiety when the old certainties are, piece by piece, put into question and crumble. It begins with doubts in the "elders," then moves to a questioning of the creator-God ("He looked up to the sky, doubting whether there really was a Heaven above him" [YGB, 391]), and ends with a questioning of the self, which, however, is aborted. Goodman Brown moves through a number of emotional states in this crisis—astonishment, anxiety, desperation, despair, and finally frustration and anger. In this final stage, Goodman Brown seems to want to give up his resistance, as he is turning into a fiend himself and moving through the forest in a destructive rampage. However, when he is finally facing Faith in front of the altar to partake in the satanic communion, he retracts urging his wife to "look up to Heaven and resist the Wicked One" (YGB, 395). The phantasmagoric action breaks off in this moment and Brown finds himself alone in the chilly and damp early morning forest.

The aftermath of this event, narrated in the brief last section, is important for Goodman Brown's trust career. The crisis of trust which he has gone through in the night in the forest leaves him traumatized for life. Though the narrator suggests that the wild witch meeting might have just been a dream (YGB, 395), Goodman Brown cannot forget it: "A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful if not a desperate man, did he become, from the night of that fearful dream" (YGB, 395). When he hears hymns sung at the meeting house, he thinks of the "anthem[s] of sin" in the forest (YGB, 395). When he listens to the minister give voice to the "sacred truths of our religion," he dreads that "the roof [of the meeting house] should thunder down upon the gray blasphemer and his hearers" (YGB, 395). Waking up at night at the bosom of his wife Faith, he shrinks back.

"Young Goodman Brown" is a story about a failed trust education. Looking at it from the perspective of Giddens' trust theory, one could say that the protagonist does not succeed emotionally in making the transition from a premodern localized trust to a more flexible modern trust. He has not learned—or is not prepared to learn—to negotiate ambiguity and doubt and perform that "leap to commitment" which is necessary to act in the world under the conditions of modernity. Brown suffers from "self-consciousness," which is part and parcel of "the reflexivity of modernity." After the night in the forest, Goodman Brown cannot accept appearances as reality anymore and is continuously plagued by suspicions and doubt: anxiety has become pathological.

Goodman Brown makes others—his ancestors, the church functionaries, the community, and even his wife—responsible for his loss of faith in mankind, perceiving himself as the only one who has remained pure. However, the story makes clear that the desire to leave the village at sunset and meet the stranger in the forest originated in his very own soul. Although Goodman Brown is already anxious and possessed by guilt when he gives the parting kiss to his wife, he never acknowledges his complicity in the depravity he detects in others. It is interesting that the narrator never officially confirms the reality of evil, but represents it as a dream that was perhaps inspired by Goodman Brown's own guilty conscience. Importantly, his abrupt withdrawal from the satanic confirmation ritual is not praised as a virtuous act, but marked as a kind of betrayal of the brother- and sisterhood of humankind. Hawthorne seems to be suggesting that it would have been much better for Goodman Brown's trust career if had he been pragmatic and joined the devil worshippers and thereby accepted his own sinfulness.

From the beautifully laconic description of his death and funeral, we learn that, in his scruples, he was a singular case, and that while he renounced cooperation with a sinful world, the other members of the community (including his wife) went on with their lives and performed their human duties: "And when he had lived long, and was borne to his grave, a hoary corpse, followed by Faith, an aged woman, and children and grandchildren, a goodly procession, besides neighbors, not a few, they carved no hopeful verse upon his tomb-stone; for his dying hour was gloom" (YGB, 395). Placing Goodman Brown's "hoary corpse" in the midst of an active community, which has assembled to fulfill their last duty to him, the narrator expresses a moral critique. The way Goodman Brown handled his crisis of trust had an element of self-indulgence, and his insistence on remaining pure appears selfish. It is the inflexibility of Goodman Brown's mind—his unwillingness to compromise and to accept a certain amount of ambiguity and risk regarding himself and others—that prevented him from transitioning into a modern, more robust trust attitude.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux": Democracy and the Demolishment of Pre-modern Trust

With "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" (1832), set in Boston a decade and a half before the American Revolution, Hawthorne moves closer to the modern age. Preceding the narrative is a long paragraph with historiographical reflections on the frequency of rebellions and crowd actions in the first half of the eighteenth century. Clearly Hawthorne wanted to see the story placed in the context of the American struggle for independence and the emergence of a new, more self-confident democratic mentality.

The protagonist, Robin, is again a young man, 18 and single. When the story starts, we see him on his way to Boston. He has grown up on the farm of his father, who is a clergyman; yet he has to pursue his fortune somewhere else, as he is not the first born and has several siblings. Robin has set his hopes on a kinsman by the name of Major Molineux, a crown officer who lives in "the little Metropolis" of the New England colony, since, on one of his visits, Molineux has promised to help Robin start a career (MK, 374). Religion is present in Robin's mind, yet does not determine his vision of the world as much as Goodman Brown's. We are told of "his father's custom to perform domestic worship" in the evening with neighbors and wayfaring men around the dinner table, the latter being treated like "brothers of the family" (MK, 381). Family,

kinship, and community relations are thus powerful realities in Robin's life. The absolute confidence Robin invests in Major Molineux to provide for his future is, of course, the most significant indicator of how profoundly kinship relations shape his vision of life.

While Robin's frame of mind is thus still pre-modern like Goodman Brown's, his spirit is quite different. Goodman Brown was fearful of modernity. Although he was driven by an urge to leave the world of kinship and community, he felt guilty about it and consequently disowned it. Robin seems to be much more pragmatic about modernity. When he recounts the family's economic situation to a gentleman in the city, he describes his departure in quite a light-hearted way: "Well, Sir, being nearly eighteen years old, and well grown, […] I thought it high time to begin the world. So my mother and sister put me in handsome trim, and my father gave me half the remnant of his last year's salary, and five days ago I started for this place, to pay the Major a visit" (MK, 383). Robin approaches the modern world in a seemingly relaxed, enlightened manner—somewhat in the spirit of a young Benjamin Franklin. His very name—Robin—indicates that he is Nature's creature, an "American Adam" who encounters the world with a fresh spirit, not burdened by the past. The protagonist of "My Kinsman" is thus cast in the new, "American," optimistic mold—one that promises an emotionally unproblematic entry into modernity and that is usually associated with Emerson's idea of self-reliance.

Despite Robin's new, seemingly modern spirit, he does not fare much better in the modern risk environment of Boston than Goodman Brown did in the forest of Salem. He, too, goes through a fundamental crisis of trust that leaves him in the end almost as devastated as it left Goodman Brown. Hawthorne represents Robin's encounter with modernity as a Gothic experience (just like Goodman Brown's). Robin enters the city at night—after having crossed the river by ferry—and is disoriented by the labyrinth of streets, the strange noises, and the irregular lights. In the course of the evening he encounters a wide array of people—they are from different classes (aristocrats, an innkeeper, craftsmen, country bumpkins, a watchman, a prostitute, the members of a mob) as well as from different parts of the world (punch-drinking sailors, British crown officials, a French Huguenot, "gay and gallant figures" from Europe, as well as their colonial imitators [MK, 377]), indicating that the little New England metropolis is well connected with the larger world. The multifaceted reality Robin encounters perplexes him, but for a while he accepts its riddles with a certain fascination and humor ("Strange things we travellers see!" [MK, 380]).

Robin's trust crisis ensues when he asks people for directions to the house of his famous kinsman and does not receive the response he expects. Assuming that Major Molineux is a well-known and well-respected resident, he imagines that people would feel honored to show his nephew the way. This is, however, not the case. When his interlocutors hear the name of Molineux, they behave in strange ways: some ignore him, some rebuff him, some try to detract his attention, some threaten him, some ridicule him, but no one answers to his request. Hawthorne's narrative in the main section of "My Kinsman"—as in "Young Goodman Brown"—makes visible the drama of Robin's inner psyche: Robin tries to find all sorts of excuses for the disrespectful treatment he is given, but with each rebuff, his anxiety moves up a notch—the amused astonishment turns into frustration then to anger and finally to violence. Carrying an oak cudgel with him, he feels the urge to hit back each time he is rebuffed.

Finally, an odd-looking stranger recommends that he wait in front of the church, promising the Major would pass by shortly. Soon, an uproar ensues, and a huge crown enters the scene—the atmosphere is as orgiastic as in the satanic congregation in the forest in "Young Goodman Brown." In their midst, Robin finds Major Molineux placed on a carriage "in tar-and-feathery dignity" (MK, 385). Robin becomes aware that he is in the midst of a revolution and that his patron is its first victim. Robin's eyes and those of his humiliated and powerless kinsman meet while the crowd roars with excitement and pleasure.

This is, of course, the turning point in Robin's trust career and also the moment of recognition. Despite his modern, seemingly self-reliant attitude, he had constructed his identity in the pre-modern mode, relying on family and kinship ties to provide him with a future. Realizing that his kinsman has been rendered powerless, the bottom falls out of his biography. His basic trust is shaken to the very roots. The narrator does not tell us exactly what is going on in Robin's mind at this point, but gives us a sense of profound agitation: "They stared at each other in silence, and Robin's knees shook, and his hair bristled, with a mixture of pity and terror" (MK, 385). Robin sees before his mind's eye all the people who "had made sport of him that night" and the riddle is easy to read (MK, 385). In what looks like a mixture of anger (the kinsman has failed him) and desperation (his future is in jeopardy), Robin joins the orgiastic crowd and sends forth "a shout of laughter" louder than anyone else (MK, 385).

Hawthorne goes to great lengths to portray Molineux as a good leader and an honorable individual—"an elderly man, of large and majestic person, and

strong, square features, betokening a steady soul" (MK, 385)—and the mob as fickle and brutal. Hawthorne indicates clearly that by joining the crowd in shaming his kinsman, Robin commits an act of betrayal and becomes an opportunist. In terms of the iconography of the story, he "falls" and loses his Adamic innocence. At the same time, Hawthorne seems to consider this a "fortunate fall," an emotionally and morally necessary development for a human being. In fact, he dramatizes the recognition scene between Robin and Molineux and Robin's betrayal of his kinsman as an Aristotelian moment of catharsis (Robin stares at his kinsman with a "mixture of pity and terror" [MK, 385]). His joining with the crowd brings relief; the unbearable anxiety that had built up in him during the night disappears and an inner peace of sorts sets in.

As with Goodman Brown, Robin's trust career ends with his trust smashed. At the end, Robin asks a stranger to be shown the way to the Ferry—having grown, as he says, "weary" of town life (MK, 386). The reader knows—and Robin knows, too—that there is no home in the countryside anymore.

Will Robin end in the same impasse as Goodman Brown? The closing scene of "My Kinsman" suggests that Robin might perhaps overcome his trust crisis and not develop a trauma. In the last third of the story, Robin meets a gentleman—the only friendly encounter he has in town—who tries to comfort him and also gives him some advice. When Robin tells him that he wants to go back to the country, the gentleman encourages him to give town life a second chance: "as you are a shrewd youth, you may rise in the world, without the help of your kinsman" (MK, 386). Hawthorne has the story end at this point, and we do not know whether Robin will follow the advice of the gentleman or leave.

The gentleman indirectly suggests a way out of the pre-modern trust dilemma. Namely, that Robin abandon the whole pre-modern trust construct and transition to a more modern one. His reference to Robin's native shrewdness points to a Franklinian or Emersonian individualism, albeit one of a complex sort. Behind his suggestion that Robin give the city a second chance is a sense that Robin is emotionally robust and flexible enough to finally master the new trust environment in modernity. Critics have seen in the gentleman a guardian figure—a more modern stand-in for the kinsman that has failed. As a guardian figure, however, he is not very protective of the emotional welfare of his charge. While he is aware of the truth about Molineux and knows what a devastating effect this truth will have on Robin's

psyche, he does nothing to mitigate this effect. He also witnesses Robin's "fall" (his joining the crowd and shaming his kinsman) and does not try to stop Robin or remonstrate with him afterwards. Although cast somewhat in the role of an eighteenth-century benevolent gentleman, he is a figure of enlightened, balanced, even scientific modernity. He observes Robin's development with genuine sympathy, but does not act as his protector; in fact, he seems to welcome Robin's "fall" as it represents an emotional preparation for an individual's ability to cope in a modern trust environment. In view of the complexity of the modern world, trust must become more flexible and robust: Individuals must be able to negotiate ambiguity and doubt—and above all recognize their own ambiguity. Only then will they be able to act in that world.

Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (1857): Trust in a World of Strangers

Unlike Hawthorne's short stories, Melville's last novel, *The Confidence-Man* (1857), does not deal with the trust experience of a single individual, but with social trust processes in the American society at large. Melville, too, uses the allegorical method to analyze the epistemological and psychological underpinnings of trust activities. In contrast to Hawthorne's short stories, which were set in the colonial past, *The Confidence-Man* is situated in Melville's historical present: his choice of setting makes clear that he aspired to analyze American society in its most modern state. The action takes place on a Mississippi steamboat by the name of Fidèle. It starts its journey from St. Louis and is bound for New Orleans. The timeline takes up one day, from early dawn to midnight (on April 1 in the mid-1850s). The macro-setting is the American West, in particular the Mississippi River, running North to South, separating the more settled areas from the new territory, and crossing the boundaries between slave and free states. In the beginning of the novel, the narrator celebrates the West and the Mississippi as the space where the diverse elements of America come together like nowhere else and create a vibrant modernity: "Here reigned the dashing and all-fusing spirit of the West, whose type is the Mississippi itself, which, uniting the streams of the most distant and opposite zones, pours them along, helter-skelter, in one cosmopolitan and confident tide" (CM, 17).

America's radical diversity is also reflected by the passengers on board. The following list reminds one of Whitman's catalogues, except that Melville's

satiric-sarcastic tone forecloses the possibility that an Emersonian Oversoul might bring harmony to this wild disarray:

> Natives of all sorts, and foreigners; men of business and men of pleasure; parlor men and backwoodsmen; farm-hunters and fame-hunters; heiress-hunters, gold-hunters, buffalo-hunters, bee-hunters, happiness-hunters, truth-hunters, and still keener hunters after all these hunters. Fine ladies in slippers, and moccasined squaws; Northern speculators and Eastern philosophers; English, Irish, German, Scotch, Danes; Santa Fé traders in striped blankets, and Broadway bucks in cravats of cloth of gold; fine-looking Kentucky boatmen, and Japanese-looking Mississippi cotton-planters; Quakers in full drab, and United States soldiers in full regimentals; slaves, black, mulatto, quadroon; modish young Spanish Creoles, and old-fashioned French Jews; Mormons and Papists; Dives and Lazarus; jesters and mourners, teetotalers and convivialists, deacons and blacklegs; hard-shell Baptists and clay-eaters; grinning negroes, and Sioux chiefs solemn as high-priests. In short, a piebald parliament, an Anacharsis Cloots congress of all kinds of that multiform pilgrim species, man. (CM, 16–17)

As regards the composition of society, the West as depicted in *The Confidence-Man* is fully-fledged modern—members of different nations, regions, classes, races, genders, professions and occupations, and religions come into contact. Here the time-space distanciation has clearly left its mark. Melville's choice of the steamboat as a micro-setting is also significant. On the shores of the Mississippi River life may be rural, but on board it is urban: strangers meet strangers, sizing each other up, often trying to do business with each other. The boat is in continuous transit, moving through different climate zones and connecting different cities. It loads and unloads passengers at every stop—the society on board is never composed of the same people:

> Though her voyage of twelve hundred miles extends from apple to orange, from clime to clime, yet, like any small ferry-boat, to right and left, at every landing, the huge Fidèle still receives additional passengers in exchange for those that disembark; so that, though always full of strangers, she continually, in some degree, adds to, or replaces them with strangers more strange; like Rio Janeiro fountain, fed from the Corcovado mountains, which is ever overflowing with strange waters, but never with the same strange particles in every part. (CM, 15)

In this world of anonymity and flux, Melville conducts his trust experiments. When he wrote the novel, the term *confidence man* was new. It was coined in 1849 by the *New York Herald* reporting on the case of a certain William Thompson who would approach people in the street and ask if they would place their trust in him. He would then try and borrow and never return a sum of money or a watch from them (Bergmann 1969). Melville must have been so fascinated by the figure and the term that he used the new phrase in his novel's title and made this figure the protagonist. Of course, "protagonist" is a misnomer as the novel does not have a single protagonist in the traditional sense. Instead, we get a series of different figures—eight of them to be precise—who come onto the scene out of nowhere (often after the ship has made a stop), approach one or more passengers, try to win their confidence and often their money and then disappear. The eight figures do not resemble each other; indeed, they differ greatly in appearance and behavior. If the reader conceptualizes them as one single character, it is mainly because of the title: *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*. Critics have puzzled over the true identity of this figure—Hershel Parker, Melville's biographer and one of the editors of the novel's Norton Critical Edition, wants to persuade us that he is the devil (Parker 2006; CM, 11, n.2); I would suggest he should be approached not as a real character but rather as a principle or tool devised by Melville to perform a particular function in his thought experiment on social trust in America.

If the confidence man is merely a tool, the reader's attention should focus on the passengers whose confidence he tries to win. Here, Melville gives us a fascinating cross-section of American mentalities—highlighting the diversity of trust attitudes as they are shaped by region, class, gender, religion, age, profession, political ideology, race consciousness, and moral temperament. Although the passenger figures (like the personae of the confidence man) are types rather than characters, we receive profound insights into their emotional processes during their conversations with the confidence man, as the narrator renders their utterances in direct speech and gives us Geertzian "thick descriptions" of their behavior. It is difficult to generalize about these conversations, as the objects the confidence man offers in return for the passenger's trust differ greatly: when he appears as a black handicapped beggar, he simply asks for money; in the guise of a man in a gray coat and white tie, he collects money for widows and orphans; as John Truman, he solicits investments on behalf of the Black Rapids Coal Company; and in the role of the herb doctor, he sells natural medicines to cure various ailments. Sometimes there is no object to be sold or exchanged and the confidence man just tries to

convince his interlocutors—via a direct religious or moral appeal or lengthy philosophical argument—to adopt a trustful attitude towards the world. The trust solicitations also differ greatly in their outcome—sometimes the confidence man succeeds in his entreaties, but often he fails, or his gain is small. Trust negotiations in the comparatively secular, capitalistic, democratic modern society are tiresome and enervating—and often when trust is built up after a lengthy persuasive endeavor, it falters and comes to nothing. The anxiety level of many of the passengers is high. In these exchanges, little or nothing can be felt of "the dashing and all-fusing spirit of the West" and the "cosmopolitan and confident tide" of the Mississippi which is celebrated so emphatically by the narrator in the beginning of the novel (CM, 17). In the anonymous, shifty, and fluid atmosphere of the Fidèle's numerous decks, trust has become a scarce resource indeed.

It is not that the passengers of the Fidèle lack faith entirely. Melville shows us that many of them actually have a desire to trust (not infrequently, this desire is seconded by a hope for material gain), but somehow they do not have the stamina to make the "leap to commitment." In a world of strangers, the risks seem too high. Melville's modern world is not equipped with abstract systems or symbolic tokens that could reduce these risks. When asked for a travel document that could vouch for his identity, the confidence man is unable to produce one. The only means available to him to have his identity ascertained derives from the pre-modern world: he suggests another person who can vouch for him. While the mentioning of a third person known to both conversation partners usually gets the trust process started, it falters when the third person is not found. We are given to understand that the third person most likely left the steamboat at the previous stop. As there is no captain or any other official person on the ship who has the authority to ascertain identities, enforce rules, and penalize broken commitments, the passengers are caught in a dead-lock situation.

The passengers of the Fidèle are in a trust crisis similar to that of Goodman Brown. They cannot trust the surfaces anymore and are consumed by doubt, for they suffer from the self-reflexivity of modernity. Using the mask metaphor, Melville analyses this situation in an epistemological way: in one of the instances, when the confidence man is asked to supply the names of persons who can vouch for him, he lists other confidence-man figures who appear in the novel (CM, 21). Of course, none of them can be found onboard because they are his own impersonations. Melville casts social interaction in an anonymous modern society in a quasi-postmodernist way—as an encounter

with masks where the person behind can no longer be found (Lindberg 1982, Wadlington 1975). The modern world is presented here as a surface without depth, or a sign without referent. The novel leaves us with the impression that Melville, like Hawthorne, wishes that the passengers could take their interactions with the confidence man as a game—a confidence game—and play along as if the masks were reality. It would keep the social process going and be healthier for their psychological well-being. However, Melville, like Hawthorne's Goodman Brown, is too much of a truth-seeker to be able to accept a life of surfaces. The novel thus ends at midnight in utter gloom.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance": A Modern Project of Self-Identity

In standard literary histories, Ralph Waldo Emerson is seen as the inventor of a concept of a "modern," democratic American identity that squared with the principles of Lockean Liberalism—for a long time considered to be the base of American political modernity. As individuals find their prime domain of self-realization in (a spiritualized) nature, they do not need other human beings, society, political institutions, or traditions to attain their identity. What for Hawthorne and Melville represents an unsurmountable obstacle—the attainment of a strong identity capable of acting in the world—seems entirely unproblematic for Emerson. Consequently, his concept of self-reliance or self-trust (he uses the terms interchangeably) has long been considered a forward-looking trust philosophy that easily embraces modernity rather than fears it.

Coming from Giddens' sociology of modernity, what are we to make of Emerson's trust philosophy? Of course, Emerson's notion that the self can validate itself goes squarely against Giddens' principal assumption of our sense of self and our experience of the external world depending crucially on the attention we receive from other humans. Giddens would thus probably not consider Emerson's theory of self-reliance as a scientifically sound description of the trust process in modernity; however, he might find it interesting as a phenomenon of modernity itself. In fact, Giddens' sociology can explain why Emerson developed a trust philosophy at the time he did. As shown earlier, Giddens makes the case that, in modernity, abstract systems increasingly take the place of human trust agents. This depersonalization of organizational processes in the public world brings forth changes in the private sphere such as the "transformation of intimacy" and a new concern with the self. Emerson's

program of self-reliance can thus be seen as a Giddensian "project of self-identity" designed to provide a new pillar for the attainment of ontological security and, thereby, making amends for the "depersonalized" and "unmoralized" public trust structures. Emerson's trust philosophy is thus not so much an alternative to modern self-reflexivity, but a creative response to it. It does not side-step or eclipse the crisis of trust that is so troubling for Hawthorne and Melville, but tries to provide a remedy for it. In some of his writings, Emerson shows an awareness of this and gives a theoretical blueprint of Giddens' notion of "doing" trust in a modern risk environment.

If we look carefully at Emerson's essays, we find passages which express doubts similar to those articulated by Melville and Hawthorne. In "Self-Reliance" (1841), Emerson begins his argument by ascribing the state of ontological security to children and adolescents: "Their mind being whole, their eye is as yet unconquered" (SR, 270). Regarding "boys," he maintains that their "nonchalance", their "independent" and "irresponsible" behavior is the "healthy attitude of human nature," suggesting that grown-ups should take their cues from them (SR, 271). However, he next indicates that such a return to childhood confidence is not easy for adults. While "boys" judge the world in a "swift, summary way […] as good, bad, interesting, silly," grown-ups are constantly preoccupied with second thoughts, considering what the consequences of their actions are, and how they may be judged by others (SR, 271). The adult, Emerson concludes, is "clapped into jail by his consciousness" (SR, 271). Emerson describes here a phenomenon highlighted in Hawthorne's short stories; namely, that in the process of becoming an adult, we develop a self-consciousness, which undermines our basic trust and prevents us from engaging in action. In his essay, "The American Scholar" (1837), Emerson connects this action-inhibiting self-consciousness explicitly with the modern age, rendering self-reflexivity in Giddensian terms:

> Our age is bewailed as the age of Introversion. […] We are embarrassed with second thoughts. We cannot enjoy any thing for hankering to know whereof the pleasure consists. We are lined with eyes. We see with our feet. The time is infected with Hamlet's unhappiness,— "Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." (AS, 254)

Emerson describes here the dialectics of Enlightenment in a beautiful series of metaphors. Reason, originally directed at the exploration and conquest of the natural and external world, turns back upon itself—with a vengeance. Hamlet's disease—Giddens' anxiety gone pathological—is holding the mod-

ern individual in its grip. Interestingly, however, Emerson does not let the matter rest here. He adds a third step to the dialectics when he asks: "Is that so bad then? Sight is the last thing to be pitied. Would we be blind? Do we fear lest we should outsee nature and God, and drink truth dry?" (AS, 254). Emerson demands that something new and creative must come out of this crippling self-reflexivity, thereby claiming that the age of "Introversion" must be followed by an age of "Self-Reliance." Emerson does not consider self-reliance as an alternative to self-reflexivity, but rather suggests that it has self-reflexivity at its experiential basis. Consequently, self-reliance cannot be achieved by returning to the spontaneity of childhood or youth, but it has to take the path of "consciousness"; in other words, it needs to become a Giddensian "project" pursued in a deliberate and conscious manner.

There is another strain in Emerson's conceptualizing of self-reliance that identifies it as Giddensian "project"; namely, when he indicates that this form of trust is a response to modern abstract systems. In the fictional worlds of Hawthorne and Melville, these abstract systems hardly figure at all. In Emerson's essays, however, they are constantly thematized, making it clear that, at the time he was writing, in the 1830s, American society had been modernized to a considerable extent. Emerson's critique of these abstract systems and how they shape the life processes in the United States is central to his trust philosophy. In "Self-Reliance" we read: "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company in which the members agree for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater" (SR, 271). What is attacked here are such abstract systems as the shareholder principle, which was originally developed to organize private capitalist enterprise, but then turned into a universal method to structure the life process of the United States. Another example in "The American Scholar" occurs where Emerson criticizes the way in which the division-of-labor system reaches beyond the occupational sphere and organizes human identity as such: "Man is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all. Man is priest, and scholar, and statesman, and producer, and soldier. In the *divided* or social state, these functions are parcelled out to individuals, each of whom aims to do his stint of the joint work, whilst each other performs his." As a consequence, human beings have lost their humanity and "strut about so many walking monsters" (AS, 244). Emerson not only promises that self-reliance will be able to heal the damages inflicted by modernization. He even claims

that self-reliance can supply the central organizational structure for modern society, thus making abstract systems altogether dispensable.

Giddens would consider such a claim utopian. His sociology of modernity invites us to see Emerson's program of self-reliance from a historical perspective; namely, as a project of self-identity that acts as a complement to the abstract systems and compensates for their emotional deficiencies. While the abstract systems establish trust-processes under the condition of time-space-distanciation, however, they cannot provide the rich experiential textures of personal relationships. Thus, new forms of relationship and new types of identity work are needed to supply the modern individual with meaning in life. Emerson's transcendentalism, his program for self-discovery in Nature, is just such a new form of sense-making. In addition, by extending the identity work into the spiritual realm, Emerson provides an individualized substitute for the pre-modern cosmologies.

How is this identity work of self-reliance conducted? Emerson's essays offer theoretical guidance about the procedure. In a sense, there are no particular requirements—the individual does not need to have particular material or intellectual assets at his or her disposal. The identity work of self-reliance has somewhat the character of an aesthetic experience: it involves an act of will (one needs to pull oneself out of the reach of abstract systems) and has to become "deliberate" (one gives a particular kind of attention to nature and/or the inner self).

However, Emerson's essays do not only provide theoretical guidance for the attainment of self-trust: they want to bring it about by rhetorical persuasion. Emerson frequently addresses the reader directly—using imperatives and an incantatory style—turning his essays into an emotional trust generator, as can be seen in the following passage from "Self-Reliance":

> Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine Providence has found for you; the society of your contemporaries, the connexion of events. Great men have always done so and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the Eternal was stirring at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. (SR, 270)

Such a rhetorical mode of trust building would not make sense in a traditional (pre-modern) trust scenario. We cannot be urged in the same way to have trust in other people because their actions are not in our hands. However, we can try and convince ourselves to get up in the morning, suppress our doubts, and

keep our commitments. The tie that Emerson creates between self-trust and Nature is similarly self-reflexive. You can test the reliability of your spouse, your friends, your business partners, but can you put Nature to the test?

In a sense, Emerson's project of self-reliance can be considered as an invitation to autosuggestion, and that on a national scope. Although ostentatiously directed at the single individual, it addresses all individuals of the nation and thus has a collective effect. It works like a daily Sesame Street broadcast for adults, persuading them to feel good about themselves; that they can perform that "leap to commitment" which keeps the American social process going. The American Dream can be considered as such a program of self-reliance on a national scale—a type of modern civil religion invented by democratic modernity and promoted by the culture industry to keep the debilitating forces of modernity at bay and maintain the nation in the action mode.

Considering the Emersonian philosophy of self-reliance as a Giddensian project of identity helps us to see it as a program of social action. In the "American Scholar," Emerson argues that "action" is "essential" for the scholar (AS, 248). All of the figures Emerson wrote about in his book *Representative Men* were "men of action." Paradoxically, the individualistic, seemingly retreatist project of self-reliance serves as a national trust generator. In the insecure environment of modernity, it induces individuals to make a "leap to commitment" and keep the social process going.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience": "Doing" Trust

Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" makes the point that nothing but certainty can satisfy the individual who has fallen into the state of self-reflexivity; however, it also makes clear that this certainty is difficult to attain under the conditions of modernity. While "My Kinsman, Mayor Molineux" suggests that it may be possible to acquire a more robust trust attitude and recover one's capacity for action, it does not show us how this new way of "doing trust" may work in practice. Here Emerson's essay "Experience" (1844) can offer guidance. It gives an interesting epistemological description of modern "trust work," thereby showing a way out of the trust dilemma as presented by Hawthorne and Melville.

Emerson wrote "Experience" under the influence of the death of his son. He begins the essay with the reflection that this event has left him in a state

of numbness. Analyzing this feeling further, he comes to the conclusion that he is numb not because this tragic experience has drained him, but because he has failed to let it come close to him: "I grieve that grief can teach me nothing" (E, 312). The feeling of not being able to get into "touch" with the reality of his son's death leads to a series of generalizing reflections about the unbridgeable gap between mind and world and between one consciousness and another (Cameron 2006).

In the first third of the essay, the individual self is shown in a state of disorientation expressed by Emerson through the image of a staircase, where the individual neither sees the upper nor the lower end: "Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight" (E, 310). In a second series of images, he dramatizes this state of disorientation by metaphors of blurred vision: "All things swim and glitter" (E, 310). This "evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers […] when we clutch hardest" appears to him "the most unhandsome part of our condition" (E, 312). Nature—the guidepost Emerson usually resorts to—seems to fail him here as it is experienced as having no substance. The self, too, is felt as being unreal: "Ghostlike we glide through nature, and should not know our place again" (E, 311). He comes to the conclusion that reality is a labyrinth of fictions: "Dream delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion" (E, 312).

Emerson's descriptions of the nature of experience evoke Hawthorne's world of appearance or that of Melville's masquerades: reality has lost its "solidity" and is perceived as a surface which can be manipulated independently of content. In "Experience," Emerson suspects that the manipulator is actually the experiencing individual self: what it perceives as reality may be the projection of its own subjectivity. The numbness that came over Emerson after the death of his son makes him realize how much of one's experience is colored by one's "moods," the latter regulating what and how one sees: "Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and, as we pass through them, they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world in their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus" (E, 312).

These moods are not arbitrary and isolated experiential moments; but they are subject to a person's "temperament," which is presented by Emerson here as a quasi-deterministic force: It is an "iron wire on which the beads [namely our moods] are strung" (E, 312). Temperament determines our vision,

e.g., the "system of illusions" that we take for reality (E, 313); it "shuts us in a prison of glass which we cannot see" (E, 313). This realization goes entirely against our every-day understanding that life is full of "inscrutable possibilities" and that every human being is a store of opportunities to which we hold the "key" (E, 314). If Emerson's mood and temperament epistemology is taken at face value, trust makes no sense. Every gesture in the direction of the other is a form of mirror fencing. Emerson faces here an impasse similar to the one confronted by Melville in *The Confidence-Man*.

In essays such as *Nature* or "Self-Reliance," Emerson had frequently created the impression that nature or reality is potentially transparent, allowing the individual to directly partake of the divine. In "Experience," Emerson seems to turn his back on this epistemological model and develop a new one on the basis of the temperament and mood imagery. This epistemology places a new emphasis on the temporality and situatedness of individual consciousness (Packer 2006). While earlier in his essay, temporality and situatedness were considered as "the most unhandsome part" of our existence, they now become facilitators of our freedom, however limited that may be (E, 312). The flow of time, which, to some extent, takes the control of our experience out of our hands, reveals itself as a blessing: "The secret of the illusoriness is in the necessity of a succession of moods or objects. Gladly we would anchor, but the anchorage is quicksand. This onward trick of nature is too strong for us: *Pero si muove*" (E, 314). Galileo's insistence (against the authorities of his time) that the earth moves around the sun (rather than the other way around) provides the cue for Emerson to accept the decentering of the human subject and to embrace historicity as the human predicament. While the constructed and temporary nature of experience earlier on almost led him to despair, he now rejoices over it. Rather than forever searching for the true essence "underneath" the surfaces, he now encourages us to develop a certain virtuosity in negotiating their flow: "We live amid surfaces and the true art of life is to skate well on them" (E, 316). Skating on surfaces is an "art"—the movements we perform must not be random, but should be guided by intuition and skill.

Emerson's new epistemology redefines the place of the divine. The conditions of temporality and situatedness preclude permanent access, yet if we "skate well" and with felicity, we will catch glimpses of the Oversoul: "Like a bird which alights nowhere, but hops perpetually from bough to bough, is the Power which abides in no man and no woman, but for a moment speaks from this one, and for another moment from that one" (E, 315). This insight brings the human other again within reach of the individual's subjectivity and opens

a space for "the leap of commitment." Not vis-a-vis everybody and not always and forever, but ever so often the individual will encounter "this one" who for the time being will speak to his or her soul. For this felicitous encounter to happen, a new, robust self-reliance is required.

Emerson's image of the felicitous skater on surfaces captures a new trust attitude under the conditions of modernity. It symbolizes a type of trust that has gone through self-reflexivity and doubt and is able to accept contingency and a certain amount of risk. As for Giddens, modern trust is for Emerson an activity "in time" and a form of "doing day-to-day life." That said, Emerson's new trust concept is still conceptualized in terms of personal trust and not concerned with the dimensions of trust in abstract systems. In addition, it still has a metaphysical grounding. Although Emerson's image of the surface-skater seems remote from Giddens' simile of the individual being onboard a "careering juggernaut," Emerson still gives us a strong sense that we moderns are up for a rough ride and subjected to a process that is to a large extent out of our control.

Conclusion

As I hope to have shown, the major writers of American Renaissance were highly aware of the problem of trust in modern, diverse, and individualistic societies. They addressed the issue so extensively in their fictional and essayistic writings because they were deeply concerned about human agency under social conditions of anonymity and fluidity. Hawthorne's and Melville's protagonists find it difficult to give up pre-modern trust modes (based on kinship, community, religion, and tradition) and to fully engage in the complex "trust work" necessary to cope in an insecure, modern trust environment. Having already developed a considerable amount of "self-consciousness"—Giddens' "self-reflexivity of modernity,"—they continually doubt the reality of themselves and others and are debilitated in their capacity for action.

At first sight, Emerson seems to offer an easy fix for this problem. In "Self-Reliance," he presents a modern trust program—in tune with democratic liberalism—that promises to supply trust without taking recourse to the traditional trust sources and without plunging the individual into a sea of self-doubt. Self-reliance is presented as a trust-building mechanism through which the individual can authorize and validate him- or herself by an act of

moral will. Later essays such as "Experience," however, show that Emerson had second thoughts regarding this "fix." Without renouncing the individualistic basis of his trust concept, he developed a more complex version of it—one that takes a more conscious account of self-reflexivity. In this manner, he was able to pioneer a notion of "doing trust" that anticipates the pragmatist or existentialist trust philosophies from which Giddens's trust sociology has copiously drawn. But even the earlier version of Emersonian self-reliance is interesting to a modern sociological trust analysis. The reformist "work" on the self by the self, proposed by him, can be interpreted as a Giddensian "project of self-identity" through which modern society tries to remedy the emotional and cognitive deficits of modern trust routines and thereby stabilize the social process.

However, there are also important omissions in the trust debate of the writers discussed here. While they are truly avantgarde in highlighting problems of modern trust on the emotional-cognitive level of the human individual, they largely ignore the trust routines connected with the emergence of abstract systems. According to Giddens, abstract systems are an important achievement of modernization; they are vital to stabilizing trust processes under the conditions of modernity. The literary writers, however, do not seem to be particularly interested in them. One party (Hawthorne and Melville) acts as if they did not exist and focuses entirely on the depiction of the existential despair of individuals who have been deprived of their traditional social anchors. The other party (Emerson), while being aware of abstract systems, denies that they are relevant for our existence and encourages us to put our energy into the cultivation of our private, personal selves. Why do these writers exclude abstract systems and institutions from their view? Is it because the development of abstract systems was not far enough advanced in the first half of the nineteenth century and their trust-building capacities were not yet apparent to contemporaries? Or is the omission a consequence of the profound aversion against institutions and abstract systems that has shaped Western culture—and also particularly that of the United States—since the Romantic period? Giddens claims that trust routines connected with abstract systems—unlike trust relations with persons—are largely pursued in an unconscious manner. Only in case of malfunction do they enter our consciousness; otherwise they are taken for granted and remain "unmoralized." This may offer a reason for why the literature of modernity, which is primarily invested in the exploration of private identity, largely disregards the institutional, organizational frame under which this identity operates. Or, if it con-

siders this frame at all, it does so in negative terms, highlighting injustices but ignoring the structures that maintain regular processes. In ancient and Renaissance literature—the ancient epics or Shakespeare's tragedies and histories are good examples—the institutional and the private were seen as being deeply interconnected and were both considered worthy of literary and intellectual exploration. Despite the intellectual depth and sophistication of the American Renaissance writers' analysis of modern trust, the little regard they pay to abstract systems compromises the quality of their sociological analysis. At the risk of sounding like Georg Lukács—who censured the subjectivist, anti-society bias of modern literature—I think that in light of recent political developments in the Western world, it is dangerous if literature takes the institutions and the systems that organize our lives for granted. The ecstasies and anguishes of private life are surely worth exploring, but what maintains and structures our ordinary existence deserves cultural work, too.

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