

# Recognition, Vulnerability and Trust

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## Abstract

This paper examines the question of whether recognition relations are based on trust. Theorists of recognition have acknowledged the ways in which recognition relations make us vulnerable to others but have largely neglected the underlying ‘webs of trust’ in which such relations are embedded. In this paper, I consider the ways in which the theories of recognition developed by Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth, not only point to our mutual vulnerability but also implicitly rely upon mutual relations of trust. The paper first offers a novel examination of the relation between recognition, vulnerability and trust in Habermas’ account of communicative action with the aim of arguing that such a consideration helps to elucidate important features of recognition. My claim is that a consideration of the dynamics of recognition and vulnerability in language-use, leads to an acknowledgment of the forms of trust that not only underpin communicative action, but recognition more generally. I conclude by considering the elements that are underplayed in Habermas’ account by turning to an examination of Axel Honneth’s alternative affective theory of recognition, specifically considering the interrelation between vulnerability and recognition. In doing so, I also turn to a consideration of the kind of trust that must be assumed in Honneth’s account of mutual recognition and point to a recognitive notion of trust.

**Keywords:** Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth, Annette Baier, Jennifer Hornsby, Rae Langton, Recognition, Vulnerability, Trust

Recognition is intrinsically a relation of vulnerability, but is it also one based on trust?

Theorists of recognition have acknowledged the ways in which recognition relations make us vulnerable to others but as yet have largely neglected the underlying ‘webs of trust’ in which such relations are embedded.<sup>1</sup> As Jay Bernstein has argued, however, “basic trust is the necessary presupposition of everyday intersubjective life” and is a “prereflective attitude guiding responses to the appearance of routine interaction partners” (406). Given recognition is not only the mode by which we acknowledge partners to interaction but also the basis of subject-formation, it seems important to consider the relations of trust that

characterize recognition. This is especially the case as Bernstein (402) has noted, because trust is an attitude that “takes others as persons who take you as a person” and, therefore, it is possible to claim that recognition relies upon a relational notion of trust.

Recognition theorists have identified the way in which vulnerability and recognition are intrinsically related, such that our integrity and agency are understood to be indubitably dependent on others.<sup>2</sup> Our need for recognition makes us vulnerable; it reveals fundamental forms of relationality, but it also makes us vulnerable to the risk that such forms of responsivity may be withheld. However, as intersubjective beings, recognition and vulnerability are an essential part of our sociality and to deny such interdependence is to exist outside the social relations within which we develop as subjects (Anderson 2014, 143). In its most fundamental form, then, to recognize means to acknowledge our reciprocal vulnerability, our constitutive and needful openness to others, and the dynamic nature of the human condition that requires forms of social action and cooperation.<sup>3</sup>

Although prominent theorists of trust have not framed their analysis in terms of recognition, they have explicitly identified the intrinsic relation between vulnerability and trust. Annette Baier argues, for example, that “[w]hen we trust we accept vulnerability to others” (Baier 1991, 112). In her particular formulation, she suggests that: “Trust is accepted vulnerability to another’s power to harm one, a power inseparable from the power to look after some aspect of one’s good” (Baier 1991, 113). Baier points to the way in which forms of interdependence and mutual cooperation are based upon underlying relations of trust. As she suggests, quoting from Sissela Bok: ‘Whatever matters to human beings, trust is the atmosphere in which it thrives’ (Baier 1986, 231) and, more explicitly in terms of mutual cooperation, she suggests that “any form of cooperative activity, including the division of labour, requires the cooperators to trust one another...” (Baier 1986, 232). I suggest that

these claims apply not merely to forms of mutual cooperation and interdependence as defined by Baier, but more specifically to an account of recognition.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, I consider the ways in which theories of recognition developed by Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth, not only point to our mutual vulnerability but also implicitly rely upon mutual relations of trust. In what follows, in section one, I first consider the relation between recognition, vulnerability and trust in Habermas' account of communicative action. Although this complex of issues, has been little explored in relation to Habermas' work, I argue that such a consideration helps to elucidate important features of recognition. More specifically, a consideration of the dynamics of recognition and vulnerability in language-use, leads to an acknowledgment of the forms of trust that not only underpin communicative action, but also recognition more generally. In section two, I consider the elements that are missing from Habermas' account by turning to an examination of Axel Honneth's alternative theory, specifically considering the interrelation between vulnerability and recognition. In doing so, I also turn to a consideration of the kind of trust that must be assumed in relations of mutual recognition and move to develop a recognitive notion of trust.

## **1. Trust, Recognition and Communicative Action**

### **(a) Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action**

Habermas's project has been directed toward reconstructing a notion of communicative reason based on linguistic speech acts and mutual understanding. He aims to identify the intersubjective orientation of language and the manner in which knowledge and meaning are determined through practices of communicative action. His early formulation of the

'ideal speech situation' encapsulated the ideal of the public and non-violent strength of the better argument, which Habermas understands as rational practical discourse. For Habermas, social acts oriented to mutual understanding are effectively recognitive, and for him, are the primary form of social practice or praxis. As Habermas explains, "participants in communicative action must reach understanding *about something in the world* if they hope to carry out their action plans on a consensual basis, on the basis of some jointly defined action situation" (Habermas, 1990, 136; Habermas 1984). In this manner, communicative speech acts provide the basis for a normative theory based on the moral premise of mutual understanding. Language is seen to serve a performative function: speakers of a language presuppose that it is possible to use speech to bring about an action or resolve problems of interaction—they literally 'trust' in the communicability of speech acts. Habermas suggests, therefore, that human discourse aimed at reaching agreement has built into it an awareness of the conditions of reciprocity (Habermas, 1990). However, these conditions are not merely a claim about what morally 'ought' to be. Rather, his argument is that that reciprocity and recognition are intrinsic to language itself and that communicative action has primacy over other modalities of interaction. In this way he argues that language, by its very nature, is a medium that is always already oriented towards intersubjective agreement and understanding.

For Habermas, speech acts are tied to giving reasons such that a speaker's utterance must be able to be backed by reasons if she is pressed to do so. In Habermas' schema, mutual understanding is achieved when a hearer can respond with a 'yes' or 'no' position to a speech act, confident that said act can be justified by valid reasons. When there is a problem arriving at understanding, both speaker and hearer can shift from ordinary speech to what Habermas terms 'discourse'. Discourse refers to processes of argumentation and

dialogue in which the claims implicit in a speech act are publicly tested for their normative and rational validity, such that all those affected by the norms in question could agree as participants in rational discourse (Habermas 1992). The aim for interaction partners is to reach an understanding through a universally valid procedure of justification that is achieved through discursive practices of deliberation and critique. Ideally this results in what Habermas terms consensus as a result of the strength of better arguments, ones that do not involve forms of domination, strategic action or instrumentalism.

Significantly, the norms structuring communicative action concern three different kinds of validity claims: a) claims to truth; b) claims to normative rightness; and c) claims to sincerity or truthfulness (Habermas, 1987; 1990). For Habermas, then, there is not one but rather three forms of rationality, or three different relations to the world. In this respect, it is possible to reach understanding not only regarding empirical or external reality, but also in terms of norms and rights, and in terms of subjective experiences. Habermas then distinguishes between: (1) a cognitive construction of reality with justification and validation in terms of objectivistic criteria of *truth*, and for Habermas, this pertains to external or natural reality; (2) social reality or intersubjective life forms, which pertains to the validity and justification of norms rather than objective truths. These norms are understood in terms of *normative rightness* and are constitutive of everyday settings as well as the public-political sphere; (3) the third form of justification and validation pertains to the inner world of the subject, which is understood in terms of *sincerity* or *authenticity*. In this form of action, the subject's inner life is communicated and derives its meaning from the intersubjective context and perceptions from others (Habermas, 1984; 1990). This form of truthfulness is therefore not understood by Habermas to be representative of a pre-social inner psyche, but rather refers to intersubjective expressiveness, reflexivity and the

expression of genuine intentions. For Habermas, each type of rationality accords with the way human beings intersubjectively orientate themselves as language users, and have the ability to distinguish between three different basic attitudes towards the world with corresponding notions of validity.

In developing his account of communicative action, Habermas draws on a variety of resources, including Hegel's early Jena account of recognition and Austin's speech act theory. In regard to the former, Habermas specifically identifies the importance of Hegel's early account of recognition in which he differentiates between two types of (inter)action, or what he terms language and labour, placing the emphasis in his own theory of recognition on the former (Habermas 1973). In regard to Austin, Habermas is particularly interested in the distinction Austin makes between three different types of speech act: (1) locutionary acts that refer to "the saying of words that have a particular meaning"; (2) illocutionary acts that refer to "the saying of certain words such that, *in* saying those words, [the speaker] performs an action"; (3) perlocutionary acts, referring to the way in which, by saying particular illocutionary words certain other consequences follow or other things are done (See Austin 1975.; Habermas 1984; Hornsby and Langton 1998, 24). Habermas only identifies illocutionary acts with communicative action, because in his view, these acts are orientated to reaching mutual understanding and, in turn, such understanding is linked to reaching agreement and bound by rational motivation (Habermas 1984, 278). For Habermas, then, "communicative agreement has a rational basis [and] it cannot be imposed by either party, whether instrumentally through intervention in the situation directly or strategically through influencing the decisions of opponents" (Habermas 1984, 287). In this respect, for Habermas (following Austin), whereas in illocutionary acts a speaker partakes in communicative action *in* saying something such that she lets a hearer know she wants to be

understood, in a perlocutionary act, the speaker aims to produce an effect *on* the hearer, and “thereby brings about something in the world” (Habermas 1984, 288–89). Thus, in Habermas’s view, perlocutionary acts are associated with a further intention and are considered a form of goal-directed action more generally. In Habermas’s schema, perlocutionary acts then represent forms of strategic action given their intent is to bring about some particular end, rather than merely a form of communicative action directed toward mutual understanding.

In terms of tracing the connection between trust, vulnerability and language-use in Habermas’ work, these distinctions become significant. As Habermas suggests, “[w]henver the speaker enters into an interpersonal relationship with a hearer, he also relates himself as an actor to a network of normative expectations” (Habermas 1992, 190). As will be discussed further below, this network of recognition relations and implicit normative expectations also seems to rely on an underlying sense of trust. This is particularly so, in terms of his three-world theory or in relation to the three different kinds of validity claims, based on truth, normative rightness or sincerity. In this sense, as Habermas emphasises:

[I]n communicative action a speaker selects a comprehensible linguistic expression only in order to come to an understanding *with* a hearer *about* something and thereby to make *himself* understandable. It belongs to the communicative intent of the speaker (a) that he perform a speech act that is right in respect to the given normative context, so that between him and the hearer an intersubjective relation will come about which is recognised as legitimate; (b) that he make a true statement ..., so that the hearer will accept and share the knowledge of the speaker; and (c) that he express truthfully his beliefs, intentions, feelings, desires, and the like, so that the hearer will give credence to what is said (Habermas 1992, 307–8).

In this regard, the intentions of the speaker and the sincerity of their speech-acts become central and, it might be argued, also rely upon a form of trust. First, by engaging in illocutionary speech-acts, the intentional content of a speaker’s utterance is directed to a

*shared world* of agents, which by virtue of the web of recognition-relations upon which this lifeworld depends, imply relations of trust. Second, when referring to the objective world, both speaker and hearer place trust in a shared external world based on mutual understanding, one that stems back to primary relations of infant and caregiver trust (as shall be discussed in section two below). Third, in performing an illocutionary act, the speaker also reveals her intentions and genuineness of an utterance, and in this context the speaker-hearer relation relies upon the truthfulness and sincerity of the speaker's words. We trust the sincerity of the speaker's utterance, but we also trust their words will be taken up by the hearer as authentic or sincere, as without this basic form of trust, no communication could take place at all.

Standing behind these three different types of validity claim and three world relations is what Habermas refers to as the shared lifeworld. As he explains, the "lifeworld ... offers both an intuitively preunderstood *context* for an action situation and *resources* for the interpretative process in which participants in communication engage as they strive to meet the need for agreement..." (Habermas 1990, 136). As Habermas suggests, forms of agreement cannot be reached through domination, force or manipulation. Rather for something to be considered an agreement, it cannot be achieved by means of 'external pressure', and both parties must be able to trust that agreement can be reached based on "rationally motivated approval of the substance of an utterance", rather than by other means (Habermas 1990).

Habermas' account, then, implicitly points to relations of trust. As mentioned above, the lifeworld forms a background that "offers a storehouse of unquestioned cultural givens" (Habermas 1990, 135). Communicative participants are the product of certain traditions, forms of socialization and communities of solidarity that rely upon relations of trust. It is



against this 'intuitively preunderstood' background of trust that participants "in communication draw agreed-upon patterns of interpretation for use in their interpretative efforts" (Habermas 1990, 135) and can trust in such patterns of interpretation. As Habermas suggests, forms of communicative action depend upon mutual cooperation and the coordination of actions. Participants in communication "must reach understanding *about something in the world* if they hope to carry out their action plans on a consensual basis, on the basis of some jointly defined action situation" (Habermas 1990, 136). Thus, in a speech act, a speaker not only represents a state of affairs with reference to the 'objective world', but also renews interpersonal relations with reference to a social world and, expresses her intentions with reference to the subjective world. It is on the basis of these three relations to world, that communicative participants attempt to reach understanding. As Habermas, then, puts it: "agreement in the communicative practice of everyday life rests simultaneously on intersubjectively shared propositional knowledge, on normative accord, and on *mutual trust*" (Habermas 1990, 136; my emphasis). Thus, it is possible to say, that the "unquestioned, intersubjectively shared, nonthematized certitudes that participants in communication have 'at their backs'" (Habermas 1990, 138), can alternatively be understood as based on a *recognitive or relational notion of trust*.

In the following, I first consider the vulnerability of speaking and communicating subjects in light of issues raised or neglected by Habermas' account of communicative action. This becomes even more salient when one considers the forms of reciprocity, responsiveness and interdependence that underpins Habermas' account of language-use and communicative action. As the proceeding discussion reveals, the vulnerability evident in communicative action, also discloses the significance of trust as intrinsic to the fabric of recognitive-relations in which communicative action takes place. It is often only when a

communicative act 'misfires' or goes wrong that we notice the underlying relations of trust upon which such acts are based.

### **(b) Trust, Vulnerability and Speech in Habermas' Work**

Although not often acknowledged, Habermas's account of communicative action is oriented towards the vulnerability of speaking agents. This is evinced not only through the rules of communication and discourse that he goes to such lengths to construct, but also in the claims he makes in regard to moral intuitions and norms.

In this respect, as discussed above, Habermas builds an account of normativity and recognition into his theory of communicative action and discourse. Implicitly, the formal structure of Habermas's theory of discourse and notion of the 'ideal speech situation', already acknowledges the vulnerability of speaking agents by providing measures aimed to protect persons in the realm of communicative action. His account of language-use points to what he regards as our primordial *interdependence* as language-users and the basic uncertainty of this endeavour. The account of the ideal speech situation makes a claim for equality of speaking-agents by having the opportunity to speak and to express one's viewpoint *without coercion or interference*. Moreover, Habermas argues for the need for free and equal argumentation and the use of reason in practical discourse, with the view to reaching mutual understanding and fostering mutual cooperation. However, he does not assume this process is seamless. Rather, he points to the fragilities and uncertainties of communicative action.

Habermas explicitly ties his account of discourse to a notion of vulnerability in texts such as *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1990). In this context, he restates

that “[a]rgumentation insures that all concerned in principle take part, freely and equally, in a cooperative search for truth, where nothing coerces anyone except the force of the better argument” (Habermas 1990, 198). However, what is significant in this account is that Habermas also makes clear the anthropological claim underlying his discursive approach as it pertains to moral intuitions. As he writes:

Moral intuitions are intuitions that instruct us on how best to behave in situations where is it in our power to counteract the extreme vulnerability of others by being thoughtful and considerate. In anthropological terms, morality is a safety device *compensating for a vulnerability built into the sociocultural form of life* (Habermas 1990, 199; my emphasis).

Here, Habermas makes clear that his theory of communicative action is in fact underpinned by a constitutive notion of vulnerability that is inherent to every social and intersubjective context. It also brings Habermas within the vicinity of other recognition theorists, such as Axel Honneth, when he ties this notion of vulnerability to our constitutive interdependence as human beings and to forms of subject-formation dependent upon recognition from others. For, as he states: “[t]he more the subject becomes individuated, the more he becomes entangled in a densely woven fabric of mutual recognition, that is, of reciprocal exposedness and vulnerability” (Habermas 1990, 199).

In Habermas’s view, then, moralities address or respond to what he terms the “fragility of human beings individuated through socialisation” (Habermas 1990, 200). The protection of these fragilities requires a two-pronged approach that safeguards not only the individual subject but also the community in which that subject is embedded in a web of “intersubjective relations of recognition” (200). These two elements point to two related principles that Habermas terms ‘justice’ and ‘solidarity’, and as he sees it, both principles

are rooted in “the specific vulnerability of the human species, which individuates itself through sociation” (200). In this respect, Habermas’ theory makes an important contribution to the discourse on vulnerability, particularly as it pertains to the neglected elements of speech and communication. In the essay ‘Morality and Ethical Life’, he explicitly argues that “linguistically mediated interaction, *is both the reason for the vulnerability of socialised individuals and the key resource they possess to compensate for that vulnerability*” (Habermas 1990, 201). It is clear, then, that Habermas acknowledges that forms of vulnerability are inherent to speech and linguistic forms of interaction as well as by implication, the impact of vulnerability in individual subject-development.

Habermas only occasionally refers to the mutual trust underlying speech, but I argue that his account of mutual recognition, responsiveness and communicative action, points towards an *underlying assumption about trust*. Notably, Baier has more explicitly pointed to the importance of trust and language-use arguing that:

Speech is our cooperative and trust-facilitated activity par excellence, and speech acts are successful only if they ‘take in Company,’ if they get across to our conversational partners ... We *do* cooperate in speaking, even in our uses of speech to wound and insult. We do trust each other to play more or less according to our unformulated and not fully formulatable (and perhaps shifting) norms of ‘decency’ in speech. And trustworthy speech ... is one of the tough pervasive webs of trust that we can, if we are clever, use to strengthen and proliferate other life-enhancing webs of trust. (Baier 1991, 167)

Although such an explicit statement about trust might be missing in Habermas’ work, he has, however, more directly acknowledged the forms of vulnerability that are involved in recognition and language-use. In fact, as the discussion above reveals, at certain points in his work he explicitly acknowledges the way in which, as recognition-dependent beings, linguistic forms of interaction not only contribute to our mutual vulnerability but are also the means by which to address it. In this sense, Baier and Habermas share a similar view of

the connection between vulnerability and speech. In what follows, however, I want to argue that despite Habermas' anthropological claim in regard to linguistic forms of vulnerability, he does not give an adequate account of the vulnerable aspects of subject-formation and corresponding forms of power in his account of communicative action.

### **(c) The Distortion of Linguistically Mediated Interaction**

Although Habermas has acknowledged the vulnerability inherent to linguistically mediated interaction, the way in which he addresses this issue is conceptualised at a rather formal and abstract level. As a consequence, he does not take adequate account of the more embodied, pre-reflexive and affective aspects that characterise recognition, nor give full credence to the forms of harm tied to identity and subject-formation. In other words, Habermas does not adequately account for injustices replicated in patterns of socialisation that impact on discursive practices and communicative action, nor the forms of subordination that are potentially replicated in speech acts. This points to one of the key sites of vulnerability in communicative practices more generally, and is related not only to the vulnerable dynamic between speaker and hearer in speech acts, but also to the constitutive power of language in subject-formation.

As Amy Allen has identified, one of the few places Habermas has acknowledged these problems is in relation to forms of 'systematically distorted communication', whereby the "social context of speech or its external organization distort the internal organization of speech and thereby disrupt the universal and necessary presuppositions of communication" (Allen 2007, 645). As Habermas has acknowledged, this in turn may disrupt the very 'validity basis of speech' itself. This dynamic, however, occurs 'surreptitiously', in Habermas' view,

without leading to a break in communication or to “openly declared ... strategic action” (Habermas 2001, 147; Allen 2007). The validity basis of speech is disrupted if at least one of the three universal validity claims—truth, normative rightness or sincerity—are violated even though communication nonetheless continues on the ‘presumption’ of it being orientated to reaching understanding. This occurs when in fact it conceals the speaker’s strategic intent, thus we might say, breaking down the implicit relations of trust upon which communicative action relies. In this sense, Allen notes “[c]ommunication becomes systematically distorted when the external organisation of speech is overburdened, and this burden is shifted onto the internal organisation of speech” (Allen 2007, 645). As addressed in section two below, this may mean we need to take better account of the forms of distorted subjectivity that arise in individual development that in turn impact on participants in communication. This is the case not only in relation to the vulnerabilities inherent to the identity development of subjects who enter into communicative acts, but also to the vulnerability and unpredictability that might play out in speech acts themselves.

Below it is instructive to take a closer look at the vulnerability entailed in the dynamics of speech acts and the potential instability of such acts, to understand why the relation between recognition and trust might be important to consider.

#### **(d) The Vulnerability of Speaker and Hearer Relations**

As discussed above, Habermas draws on Austin’s analysis of speech acts in developing his account of communication and discourse, where the account of illocutionary acts is central to the theory of communication action and the discourse theory of ethics. However, as mentioned, vulnerabilities can also be identified in relation to inequality and power that distort the internal organisation of speech.

The interrelation between the performative nature of speech and inequality has been more fully addressed by philosophers such as Jennifer Hornsby and Rae Langton. Although these debates have seemingly not included a discussion of trust and vulnerability as inherent to speech acts, it is possible to identify both as inherent to language-use. Hornsby and Langton have highlighted the way in which, as speakers, certain people suffer what they term 'illocutionary silencing'. As they put it, "people are silenced when they are prevented from doing certain illocutionary things with words. People who utter words but fail to perform the illocution they intend may be silenced" and this produces what they term "illocutionary disablement". In this scenario, a person's speech maybe said to "misfire" and a person "is deprived of illocutionary potential" (Hornsby and Langton 1998, 21).

This kind of illocutionary silencing illustrates the kinds of vulnerability inherent to speech acts, and by extension, to communicative action. If there is uncertainty about whether a speaker's speech may misfire or be taken-up by a hearer, this causes certain vulnerabilities as a participant in communication. Here it is worth examining the dynamics of the vulnerabilities associated with illocutionary acts that Hornsby and Langton implicitly allude to in terms of their account of illocutionary silencing in more detail.

In many respects, Hornsby and Langton's reading and development of Austin's speech act theory accords with some of the basic interpretations also offered by Habermas. Hornsby and Langton point to the slightly unstable differentiation Austin marks out between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, which in regard to the former, rest on "the saying of certain words such that, *in* saying those words one performs an action", whilst in contrast the latter refers to "the saying of words" such that certain other consequences follow from saying those words (Hornsby and Langton 1998, 24). As Hornsby and Langton remark,

however, given that Austin ties illocutionary acts to a hearer's uptake, the outcome of the hearer's responsivity itself could be deemed a kind of consequence.

Nonetheless, like Habermas, Hornsby and Langton want to retain a distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. This is because, in their view, perlocutionary acts are not merely communicative but, "introduce the idea of *extra-linguistic* or *incidental* consequences of speaking", in other words, further actions follow from such acts that are not attached to the conventions of speech *per se* (Hornsby and Langton 1998, 24). Importantly, illocutionary speech acts are not only tied to, what Austin terms, 'felicity conditions' associated with certain formal conditions, conventions and institutions, such as an order, request or proposal, that ensure the force of a speech act. They are also related to certain conditions that involve "the institution of language itself" (Hornsby and Langton 1998, 25). In this regard, Hornsby and Langton point to the relation of recognition—and by implication relation of trust—underlying a speaker and hearer in speech acts and argue that "[b]y involving the hearer as well as the speaker, illocutionary acts reveal language as communicative" (25).

In this sense, the success or otherwise of illocutionary acts relies upon the hearer's uptake but more generally also requires *mutual reciprocity and receptiveness of uptake*. As they explain:

[u]ptake consists in the speaker being taken to be performing the very illocutionary act that, in being so taken, she (the speaker) is performing. Language use then relies in a mutual capacity for uptake, which involves a minimal receptiveness on the part of language users in the role of hearers. This minimal receptiveness does not mean the hearer will agree, or is even capable of agreeing, with what a speaker is saying; but it does mean that a hearer has a capacity to grasp what communicative act a speaker might intend to perform (Hornsby and Langton 1998, 25).



Ultimately, then, mutual reciprocity, recognition and trust are required for a speaker's utterance to do the work it means to do, and this brings Hornsby and Langton's view close to the spirit of Habermas's account.

However, in certain cases, this dynamic of illocutionary acts fails because as Hornsby and Langton point out, certain sayings are unspeakable for certain speakers. Some examples they give are, a man who tries to marry by saying 'I do', only to discover the celebrant was merely an unauthorised actor; or a woman living under Islamic law who wishes to divorce her husband who utters the word 'divorced'. These examples represent what Hornsby and Langton refer to as "illocutionary disablement" (Hornsby and Langton 1998, 26), in which the saying of something misfires as the speaker does not satisfy certain felicity conditions. Somewhat like Habermas, Hornsby and Langton refer to the centrality of a hearer's recognition of a speaker's intention in order for a speech act to be successful. Furthermore, they effectively point to the importance of reciprocity and trust for such recognition conditions to be met. In their view, when reciprocity is at work, a hearer recognises the speaker's attempt to perform an illocution, and the speaker's attempt is performed. For example, in the situation of an unwanted sexual advance, a speaker says 'no', and the hearer recognises this as a refusal (See Hornsby and Langton, 1998, 27–28). It is precisely when this kind of reciprocity—and we could say trust—fails and a speaker's illocution is not recognised for what it is, that a speaker is exposed to a particular form of vulnerability as she is unable to do things with words in the manner of successful illocution.

In a related manner, Rebecca Kukla has also drawn attention to the way in which a "speaker's membership in an already disadvantaged social group makes it difficult or impossible for her to employ discursive conventions in the normal way, with the result that the performative force of her utterances is distorted in ways that enhance disadvantage"

(Kukla 2014, 441). However, Kukla questions how convincing it is to maintain a strict differentiation between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Her argument is that sometimes the full force or consequences of an illocutionary act are not known or do not materialise in the act of speaking itself. Rather, as she points out, recognition of the other as a speaker as well as the form of responsiveness required for hearer uptake, in her view, do not seem solely intrinsic to illocution but are a perlocutionary effect.

Her claim is that it is not really until people respond to a speech act that it can be deemed fully completed. It is only at this point that the effects of a speech act are really known, and in her view, this needs to be considered an “integral part of the entire context of the utterance” (Kukla 2014, 454). In other words, various norms and conventions contribute to determining not only whether a speaker is entitled to speak, but “in placing that performance in social space after it is complete” (Kukla 2014, 443). Moreover, certain sayings or words might be vulnerable to what Kukla terms a form of “*discursive injustice*” (Kukla 2014, 445; 441). As she explains, “[v]ictims of discursive injustice are, in virtue of their disadvantaged social identities, less able to skilfully negotiate and deploy discursive convention as tools for communication and action than others” (Kukla 2014, 445). In this regard, Kukla draws attention not only to the recognition condition of a speech act that underpins Hornsby and Langton’s view of the necessity of the recognition of a speaker’s intention, but also to the impact such an act has in social space more generally (See Kukla, 2014, 444).

The types of illocutionary silencing that Hornsby and Langton name, and the notion of discursive injustice that Kukla highlights, not only demonstrate the vulnerability of speech and communication, but also better articulate some of the neglected aspects of Habermas’ account. However, without explicitly naming it, all these accounts of communication and

language-use also point to an underlying relation of trust within which recognition relations are embedded and upon which the recognition of a speaker's intention as well as hearer uptake depend.

In addition, it is important to note the ways in which a hearer's uptake not only enables a speech act to function but also "plays an active role in shaping power relations", which points to the vulnerable dynamic involved in unjust speech (Stawarska 2017, 186). Austin had already pointed to the way in which only those persons delegated with authority could successfully perform certain illocutionary acts, recognising that such authority whether celebrant or divorcee, is underwritten by an entire social order. However, Beata Stawarska argues that historically disempowered or de-authorised groups can also come to "make words speak somewhat differently than they did in the past" (Stawarska 2017, 190). This requires recognising that linguistic meanings and language use are themselves vulnerable to change, in the sense that they have a certain "socially contingent plasticity" that has the potential to rupture inherited and sedimented meanings and usage. Extending insights from Hornsby and Langton, this shift not only requires an alteration in terms of who has authority to speak, but also requires a form of "active heeding" that enables forms of "re-authorisation". Thus, akin to Hornsby and Langton, Stawarska argues, the "process of re-authorisation vitally depends on cultivating a stance of productive listening that empowers the utterance to become felicitous by virtue of the recognition it bestows upon the speaker" (Stawarska 2017, 190; 192). Stawarska therefore highlights the vulnerabilities played out at the 'micro-level' of linguistic encounters. She argues that "[l]anguage users can re-shape the social world by being active listeners to those who have historically been disempowered", and whose illocutions often remain unrecognised (Stawarska 2017, 186). As she suggests, "we therefore need to expand the horizon" of communicative acts, "to include the inherited

social conditions of power and the received histories of the said words and the situated identities of the person's saying and hearing them" (Stawarska 2017, 185).

As we saw above, Habermas' theory is able to account for some of the vulnerabilities inherent to communicative action, but his account falls short when it comes to addressing the constitutive dimensions of recognition and vulnerability specifically related to identity and subject-formation. This is due to the way in which his theory relies upon a distinction between the quasi-transcendental constitution of speech-acts and moral practical questions, because he specifically argues that such a separation must be maintained if the universalist normative presuppositions of communicative rationality are to succeed (See Rehg 1994). As a consequence, Habermas concludes that moral-practical dilemmas can be resolved on the basis of a universal sense of communicative reason, whereas questions relating to individual needs and identities can only be considered in terms of the ethical values within a particular form of life.

However, as Honneth has argued, normative claims are experienced and articulated by people in *everyday life* as disturbances that may, or may not, make mutual recognition possible *prior* to them reaching the level of discourse. These disturbances may therefore disclose the *processes* through which recognition is, or is not, achieved prior to the articulation of moral norms. Consequently, these are processes and conditions that individuals must feel are safeguarded even before they can attain the competency considered necessary by a theory of discourse ethics. The universalist principle of Habermas' discourse ethics demands from interaction partners a willingness and refined ability to enable consideration of normative questions from a generalised standpoint whilst leaving aside their concrete relations with others in everyday experience. As the above discussion has indicated, however, it is not only a matter of identifying forms of systematically

distorted communication but also forms of systematically distorted identity-formation that impact upon forms of communication. Thus, as Honneth has argued, normative criteria must not only be concerned with the intersubjective presuppositions of language but also the intersubjective presuppositions of human identity development that impact upon speech acts. In the following section, we turn to an examination of Honneth's alternative account of communicative action that emphasizes precisely these elements of recognition and consider the implication for an underlying assumption about trust.

## **2. Towards a Recognitive Notion of Trust: Honneth's Affective Account of Recognition**

Like Habermas, Honneth develops an intersubjective theory based on a notion of mutual recognition. However, in his own work he seeks to shift the emphasis from the normativity of language to what he terms the moral grammar of social interaction more generally. He therefore conceives of communicative action in terms of broadly conceived communicative conditions fundamental for subject-formation in the context of a multiplicity of everyday interactions and moral experiences. Honneth claims that Habermas' conception of recognition is limited by its reduction to language and therefore overlooks the normative expectations inherent to *all* forms of interaction, including the conditions required for successful self-realization. Therefore, although both Habermas and Honneth develop theories of recognition, Honneth's account is concerned with the extra-linguistic, normative conditions of subject-formation, whilst Habermas' theory is oriented around speech-act theory in the manner of a formal pragmatics. Honneth's original aim was to account for the affective, gestural and embodied relations of recognition, as well as the contexts of human vulnerability and suffering and their consequences for identity-formation. He is critical not only of the

proceduralism of Habermas' discourse theory but also his account of normativity conceived as 'intuitively mastered rules of speech', arguing that this approach screens out the forms of injury and harm that might occur "through processes of socialization" (Honneth 1999, 331).

Instead, Honneth theorizes the conditions of vulnerability in terms of a theory of mutual recognition and attempts to account for the complexity of processes of subject-formation. According to this account, "the integrity of human subjects, vulnerable as they are to injury through insult and disrespect, depends on their receiving approval and respect from others" (Honneth 1995a, 248). In Honneth's view, affirmation and respect occur not just in linguistic but also extra-linguistic forms. In this sense, not only breaches of physical integrity, but also abuses of psychological integrity pose the "risk of injury which can cause the identity of the entire person to collapse" (249). One of the benefits of Honneth's account is that he identifies three forms of recognition that subjects require for successful self-realization and to which they remain vulnerable to the ongoing need for recognition. These include: (1) corporeal vulnerability that requires primary relations of care that are crucial for embodied confidence, physical integrity, and the expression of bodily needs; (2) vulnerability before the law and the need to understand and experience oneself as a subject who has equal rights, which requires recognition-relations based on respect; (3) vulnerability in regard to the denigration of one's personality or lifestyle, or membership in society, which requires affirming relations of recognition that foster esteem. In Honneth's view, injurious forms of behaviour are harmful not only because they represent an injustice in relation to the constraint of freedom or cause individual or social harm, but also because they prevent the individual from establishing a positive understanding of self, something that can be achieved only by intersubjective means. He therefore points to a shared susceptibility to and

dependence upon others and attempts to construct an ethics on the basis of a notion of recognition that can address primary forms of human vulnerability.

Honneth argues there is a taken-for-granted assumption at the level of everyday life that we implicitly owe the recognition of our social existence to affirmation from others (Honneth 1995a, 248; 1995b). On this view, self-formation is a product of everyday interactions with others, and this means the form these interactions take is paramount to identity-development and the capacity to become a reciprocating partner to interaction. In developing this ontogenetic account, Honneth conceptualizes what he understands to be the deep-seated normative demands intrinsic to the structure of recognition relations or elementary intersubjective bonds of social life. In his earlier formulation, Honneth claims:

...every philosophical theory of society must proceed not from the acts of isolated subjects but rather from the framework of ethical bonds within which subjects *always already* move. Thus, contrary to atomistic theories of society, one is able to assume, a kind of *natural basis for human socialization*, a situation in which *elementary forms of co-existence are always present* (1995b, 14, my emphasis).

Honneth argues that not only must subjects have accepted one another in advance as partners to “interaction upon whom they are willing to allow their own activity to be dependent” but that both parties must have “already mutually recognized each other even if this social accord may not be thematically present to them” (1995b, 45-6). In other words, Honneth argues that mutual recognition occurs ‘behind the backs’ of social actors, so to speak, whereby a primary affective form of recognition forms the underlying ontological fabric of social life.

Moreover, Honneth claims that inherent to “the structure of human interaction there is a normative expectation that one will meet with the recognition of others, or at least an implicit assumption that one will be given *positive consideration* in the plans of

others” (1995b, 44). Although Honneth does not theorise the normative expectations underlying recognition as ones based on trust, it seems pertinent to claim that both the network of social bonds and mutual relations of recognition to which he refers, must intrinsically be orientated around a notion of trust. Baier, for example, conceptualises trust in terms of the good will we have towards others. As she says, “[w]hen I trust another, I depend on her good will toward me” (Baier 1986, 235) even when I do not acknowledge this trust or explicitly thematize it, as without trust “life would be intolerable” and thus “[d]efault trust has to be the norm” (Baier 2013, 180). In a compatible manner, Honneth refers to an assumption of being given positive consideration by others in forms of everyday interaction. Although for Honneth, recognition fundamentally relies upon its mutuality, we can extend his account by arguing that recognition must equally be based upon a relational form of trust.

In this vein, following Bernstein, it is possible to claim that “[t]rusting relations [are] the normatively basic mode through which individuals recognize one another as persons” (2011, 406). Taking his cue from Baier, who suggests that “*persons are second persons*, ‘essentially successors, heirs to other persons who made them’”, Bernstein writes that “[i]f I can be undone by others refusal of acknowledgement, then *a fortiori* others are also the source of my very being: others both make me and can unmake me, my life is only possible through them” (Bernstein 2011, 399; Baier 1995, 84). In fact, Bernstein argues that “[t]rust is the ethical foundation of everyday life.” As he puts it following Baier, “[t]rust is trust in others before whom we are unconditionally vulnerable that they will not take advantage of our vulnerability” (Bernstein 2011, 395). Notably, relations of trust typically remain unnoticed in everyday life; we largely take relations of trust for granted and they remain unthematized until they are disrupted or damaged (Bernstein 2011, 395). “We often come



to realize what trust involves only retrospectively”, says Baier, “once our vulnerability is brought home to us through actual wounds” (Baier 1986, 235).

As mentioned above, Honneth’s account not only demonstrates the primacy of recognition relations but also identifies three different forms of recognition that he argues are necessary for successful subject-formation. The three intersubjective patterns of recognition constitute Honneth’s version of ethical life in the sense that they presuppose the conditions for subject-formation or the development of an ‘ethical personality’. These three forms of recognition relations, which Honneth conceptualizes in terms of love, rights and achievement, are central to the development of three corresponding forms of practical self-relation, thematized in terms of forms of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem respectively, which can only be achieved through affirming relations of recognition. Honneth’s means of articulating the necessary structural conditions for what he terms a formal concept of ethical life is provided by the connection he makes between the necessary experience of the three forms of intersubjective recognition, the three corresponding forms of self-relation, and the forms of social organisation required to ensure successful self-realisation (Honneth 1995b, 173; also see Zurn 2000, 115).

It is possible to argue that this recognition-complex is grounded on the normative presuppositions of social interaction that rely on a form of mutual trust, which is presupposed in its most basic form. For Honneth, there is a developmental logic between the three forms of recognition and corresponding aspects of self-relation that a subject acquires through processes of socialisation. First, a subject must acquire basic self-trust or self-confidence attained through loving relationships in which she has the capacity to express her own embodied needs and know they will be met by the care of significant

others. Second, this basic self-trust is a prerequisite for the subject to be able to secure a positive feeling towards herself as a person worthy of self-respect because she is considered a morally responsible and autonomous being equal to all others in the context of legal relations. Third, this principle of equality before the law subsequently provides the capacities required to experience oneself as an individual who is valued for her contribution to society as well as deriving a sense of self-worth in the knowledge that she is integrated into a shared value-community.<sup>5</sup>

As Bernstein has argued, loss of trust is at its most acute when it represents a loss of trust in the world. It is through this absence that the taken-for-grantedness of cognitive forms are also thrown into relief. The destruction of trust is acutely evident in the most extreme abuses of vulnerability experienced by victims of torture and rape, and in this respect Honneth and Bernstein share the view that rape and torture represent the paradigms of moral injury and vulnerability. This is also one reason why Honneth posits physical integrity and self-trust as the most basic form of recognition, one that fundamentally relies upon trust from infancy onwards. Bernstein demonstrates the manner in which such ruptures of basic trust represent not only a loss of embodied confidence, but more fundamentally the destruction of world. In recounting Jean Améry's first-hand experience of torture, he explains how, "at the first blow his 'trust in the world breaks down'"; he describes only being able to exist in the world as long as the other does not transgress the border of his skin and does not force "his own corporeality on me" (Bernstein 2011, 396).<sup>6</sup> Bernstein argues that first-hand accounts of rape and torture indicate to us why "trust is the ethical substance of everyday life" as the violations displayed by such violent acts, indicate a "loss of trust in the world, as if ethically, no further or more far-reaching harm were conceivable" (396).

It is this basic trust in the world and embodied integrity and emotional well-being, that Honneth also tries to encapsulate in his account of primary recognition. For Honneth, love or 'primary affectivity', represents not just the first stage of mutual recognition but is also its structural core (Honneth 1995b, 107). Through love, subjects mutually confirm each other with regard to the concrete nature of their needs and in the reciprocal experience of loving care, come to know themselves as needy beings who are permanently dependent on their relations with others. The normatively guided emotional attachments between caregivers and children are fundamental to Honneth's account of subjectivity and subject-formation, and for the development of subjective capacities required for participation in public life (Honneth 1995b, 95). His argument is that because infants establish their identities in relationships with certain significant others, the nature of these relationships structures the formation of identity and more mature forms of relationality. For Honneth, the primary relationships of infants are crucial if they are to successfully construct a sense of self-confidence in their bodies as reliable sources of expression for their emotions, feelings and needs (Honneth 1995b). Only with a particular quality of primary care can the individual be confident enough to allow for the creative exploration of her inner impulses without fear of being abandoned. This emotional, body-related sense of security provides an underlying layer that forms the psychological prerequisite for the development of all further attitudes of self-respect. Attacks on this core sense of physical and emotional integrity, such as torture, rape, neglect, or lack of engagement, tear at this confidence in self, damaging a sense of self/other boundaries.

These formative relations also point to the basic form of trust between infant and caregiver that form the basis for all mature forms of trust. As Bernstein suggests,

the radicality of the infants' dependence, their utter helplessness, requires them to anticipate that their needy incompleteness will be completed by the parent. What happens here is not that infants learn to trust their primary caregivers; rather, they learn a fundamental antecedent to trust, namely they develop a sense of their self-worth and value in an unrestrictedly intersubjective setting; in being able to count on their needs being met [and their interactions reciprocated] they come to feel that they count and matter in the eyes of the other (Bernstein 2011, 407).

Furthermore, Baier explains that relations between caregivers and infants not only represent forms of dependence but also unequal forms of power and vulnerability, ones that we experience in different settings throughout the lifecycle (Baier 1986, 242). As Baier and Bernstein both point out, though, trust proper is not something we learn. Rather we can "assume that adult trust develops out of the innocent trust that infants are required to have in caregivers, and hence trust is not an optional stance towards the world but the attitudinal concomitant of coming to have a world at all" (Bernstein 2011, 406). Baier refers to this as an "innate" form of trust that "serve[s] as the explanation [both] for the possibility of other forms of trust but also their fragility (Baier 1986, 242). This trusting stance goes so deep that, as mentioned in section one, it not only forms the basis of our trust in a shared social world, but also our ability to trust in an objective world and the fact that we perceive the same world as others.

In his own account, in order to legitimate a primordial recognition stance, Honneth emphasizes the fundamental importance of recognition in its most affective register.<sup>7</sup> In this respect, Honneth's account of recognition extends beyond infant development to a more general notion of recognition as 'affective attunement' understood as a basic existential and emotional stance to others and the world. Such an account is premised on a notion of non-reified social relations that Honneth distinguishes from what he terms forms of detached cognition. In this schema, Honneth refers to reification—whereby others are viewed as

thing-like—as a deviation from a more ‘genuine’ mode of relating to others. A breakdown of affective forms of attentiveness can therefore be understood as the temporary loss or ‘forgetfulness’ of elementary forms of recognition and the taken-for-granted trust relations such forms entail. In this sense, such deviations must already presuppose what Honneth terms a more genuine or primordial form of relatedness “in which humans take up an empathetic and engaged relationship towards themselves and their surroundings” (Honneth, 2008, 27). Affective recognition is, then, associated with a pre-reflexive form of experience rather than a detached or contemplated stance, and forms the precursor for all higher-level forms of cognition and judgement, as well as higher-order normative stances (Honneth, 2008, 38). An affective form of recognition therefore indicates an evaluative perception of the other in a way that affirms her social validity. My claim is that Honneth’s account of originary recognition relations implies a relational and affective account of trust. This is a relational account that is orientated around affective forms of trust prior to higher levels of cognition and judgement. In other words, recognitive trust forms the basic fabric of social independence that we “fail to notice until they become absent” (Bernstein, 395). Honneth, then, implicitly builds an account of trust not only into his account of love and self-confidence in infant-caregiver relations, but also into a broader account of affective recognition as a primary existential orientation to a shared world.

## **Conclusion**

As we have seen, forms of recognition not only involve interdependence and reciprocity, they are also based on relations of trust. However, the forms of relation that characterize recognition are also vulnerable ones that by their very nature mean that subjects are constitutively open towards others and the world. The openness that vulnerability evokes is

complex and multidimensional and is characterized not only by positive modalities of intersubjectivity such as love and friendship, but also negative modalities that expose subjects to injury and harm. As discussed above, the forms of reciprocity and responsiveness that characterize recognition are not only intrinsic to language-use, they are also crucial for successful subject-formation, the intersubjective creation of meaning, and trust in a shared objective world.

My aim in this paper has been twofold: first, to demonstrate that the notion of recognition found in the work of both Habermas and Honneth is implicitly reliant upon a notion of trust. Second, I wish to make a stronger claim for a cognitive conception of trust, one that in its most basic form, might be considered an affective attitude. Although a reciprocal and cognitive notion of trust can be found in the work of both Habermas and Honneth, its accents are different in each respective approach. In Habermas we find a cognitive notion of trust that underpins language-use, specifically illocutionary speech acts, as the basis of an account of communicative action; whereas in Honneth's work we find a more broadly conceived account of recognition in terms of subject-development and the extra-linguistic elements of communicative action. The crux of the argument with regard to Honneth's work is that his affective account of recognition also points to a corresponding affective notion of trust. As I have argued, both Habermas' and Honneth's accounts of recognition—in relation to language-use, subject-formation and our existential relation to the world—disclose the constitutive forms of vulnerability intrinsic to recognition and to a cognitive notion of trust. Trust involves mutual recognition of others who take us to be persons and thereby acknowledge our social validity. Thus, although relations of recognition make us intrinsically vulnerable in our interdependence with others, they are also fundamental to the social fabric of trust in which we are necessarily embedded.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> For this formulation and discussion of the notion of 'webs of trust' see Baier, 1991; 2013.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Judith Butler, 2004, 69; Axel Honneth, 1995a.

<sup>3</sup> Some formulations and sections of the discussion on Habermas and Honneth have been explored in my other work but are redeployed here in an alternative manner to consider the relation between trust, recognition and vulnerability. See for example, D. Petherbridge, 2013; 2016 and 2021 (forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that this paper is focused on recognition theory and the omission of a more explicit consideration of trust in most accounts of recognition. The notion of trust employed in this paper is therefore one defined in terms of mutual recognition relations and points to a relational account of trust. In this paper I do not have the scope to engage in detail with the debates about trust raised in the important work by Annette Baier, Onora O'Neill and Karen Jones, for example, but must leave that for a future occasion.

<sup>5</sup> Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 173-4. Honneth provides a typology of different types of recognition and their role in the development of practical identity, which include relations of love and care for the development of basic self-confidence; rights and legal recognition for the development of self-respect; and relations of solidarity for the development of self-esteem. However, he also juxtaposes these three positive forms of recognition against forms of disrespect that arise in cases of denial of the three forms of recognition. When any of the three forms of recognition are violated in terms of abuses of physical integrity, denial of rights, or denigration of identity, this may cause a threat to successful self-realization. In terms of the denial of love and care (the first form of recognition), Honneth identifies forms of abuse, torture and rape as typical forms of disrespect; in terms of legal relations, he identifies the denial of rights as typical of legal vulnerability; in terms of forms of solidarity he identifies forms of denigration and insult as the most typical forms of harm.

<sup>6</sup> Bernstein also provides a discussion of rape and loss of trust in the world drawing on the first-hand account by Susan J. Brison in her *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (2002).

<sup>7</sup> Honneth argues that a child's affective attachment to a significant caregiver is fundamental to his or her ability to adopt the perspective of a second person and the ability to take a decentred perspective. It is only through affective relations towards other significant persons that subjects experience the significance of their perspectives on the world and an openness and receptivity to it. Thus, the ability to

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perceive an external reality is also oriented by forms of affectivity, embedded in early attachments to concrete others. The temporal acquisition of affective or emotional receptivity and attachment in infant-caregiver relations are the prerequisite for cognition and symbolisation and forms the basis for all higher levels of recognition (see Honneth, 2008, 45). In a related manner, Susan Bredlau has argued that perception be understood as a “collaborative endeavor”, one that characterizes both infant and adult perception and is based on trust. As Bredlau suggests, “[a]s infants, our trust in others is our perception of the world we share with our caregivers” and becomes more generally a shared world with others such that we take our primary forms of perception as real. In this sense, Bredlau argues that trust is not merely “a feeling that we perceive but also a way of perceiving.” Moreover, “as adults, we live our trust in others by perceiving the objects that surround us in a way” that continues those primary affective and cognitive bonds and that also maintains the “worlds that we create in our relationships” with primary caregivers. Bredlau draws on Merleau-Ponty’s work in arguing that “perception is our way of having a world, and, as such, perception is primary.” See Susan Bredlau (2019).