Working the Boardwalk: Trust in a Public Marketplace

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Abstract

This article argues that trust emerges as a key interactional mechanism through which vendors, artists, and performers that work in a public marketplace turn daily conditions of uncertainty into enduring stability. Drawing on four years of ethnographic data, I empirically illustrate a process of building, maintaining, and protecting trust. Following trust from the level of one-on-one interaction through to the level of a community, I expose the particular interactional work trust does for different people across different situations. In the end, the way a social psychological mechanism plays out over time has significant social and material consequences for people working under highly uncertain conditions.

Keywords

trust, ethnography, interpersonal relationships, informal work

How do people working under conditions of ongoing uncertainty manage to carve out a stable living? Along Los Angeles's famed Venice Beach Boardwalk artists, vendors and performers find a rare opportunity to earn income outside the confines of formal employment. The western edge of the Boardwalk operates as a Free Speech Zone, loosely regulated by a municipal ordinance developed in the 1980s and 90s—and frequently revised over following decades—to exempt free speech and expressive activities from the city-wide ban on public vending. Today, there is not an official registration, credential, or license required to sell goods, merchandise, and artwork. There is no centralized method for reporting and monitoring transactions, and income generated remains largely unreported. Unable to officially reserve space from which to work, vendors, artists, and performers must pull and push carts and wagons piled with tables and chairs in addition to merchandise, in order to face the daily uncertainty of "first-come, first-serve" access. And with only about 200 spaces from which to access more than 16 million visitors who pass through each year, interest often exceeds availability and competition is ongoing. In addition, conflict and contestation over the "appropriate" use of this space causes the sale of goods and services to fall in and out of permissibility, making violations

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uneasily and unevenly punished and workers consistently wary of fines. Those who do "make it" onto the Boardwalk find themselves working among an extremely diverse set of participants, differing in national origin, race and ethnicity, education, skill set, routes to participation, and ideological attachments to the place (see Deener 2012). Furthermore, the same lack of licensing and permitting that offers a clean slate for individuals otherwise marginalized from formal employment because of immigration status, criminal records, dependency issues, and/or mental health problems also infuses interactions with added perceptions of suspicion and unpredictability.

However, in spite of these conditions of uncertainty, those working along the Venice Beach Boardwalk are able to carve out a stable living. Many workers occupy the same spaces each day and maintain income across shifting parameters of permissible behavior and competition for access. By all indications, these workers have constructed both social and economic stability in a context primed for turnover and change. The public marketplace of the Venice Beach Boardwalk therefore presents an ideal setting from which to explore an interesting empirical puzzle: How do workers confront and manage ongoing conditions of uncertainty to carve out a stable living?

This article argues that trust emerges as a key interactional mechanism through which people working here turn conditions of uncertainty into enduring stability. In order to make my argument, I draw on four years of ethnographic data to present a process of building, maintaining, and protecting trust. This approach builds on trust as an outcome of interactional processes to provide a clear empirical illustration of the interactional *work* trust does to mitigate the uncertainty of making a living in a public marketplace.

My findings first show how an initial form of trust allows people working here to manage the most pressing practical dilemmas of uncertainty in a public marketplace, including protection from theft, a need for cash reserves, and a need to capitalize on every available sale. Next, as workers maintain the positive expectations they form and exchanges become increasingly vague, trust works to informally construct various forms of job security. This includes access to food, public concrete, and long-term "sick leave." Finally, I find that in protecting trust, individuals construct "insiders" and "outsiders" to limit the negative effects of law enforcement, restrict access for newcomers, and manage internal "threats" to stability—a process that both forms the contours of a rather unlikely community and also sparks ongoing exclusion.

The ethnographic data presented thereby follows trust as it moves from one-on-one interaction through to the level of a community, enhancing our understanding of trust as it plays a role in turning uncertainty into enduring stability. This research provides keen insight into the way a social psychological mechanism plays out in an everyday setting to maintain the everyday livelihood of people who are largely marginalized from formal employment. In the end, we gain a textured portrait of the way individuals face daily uncertainty as they carve out a living and interactionally locate "private solutions to public problems" (Lozano 1983:341).

BACKGROUND

Uncertainty as a Condition for Trust

Ethnography has a history of documenting the lives of individuals working outside the confines of legal wage labor (for

review, see Duneier, Kasinitz, and Murphy 2014). We recognize a host of barriers to formal employment, including criminal records, lack of education and credentials, immigration status, and mental health problems (Contreras 2012; Duneier 1999; Gowan 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). In addition, a paltry minimum wage, regimented schedules, lack of child care, strict authority structures, and an inability to locate "meaningful" employment both push and pull people into unregulated work (see Snyder 2004). Yet, as people choose to work outside of formal employment, they also relinquish the assurances and protections of routine state regulation, such as regular pay, sick leave, and social security benefits. As a result, many vulnerable and marginal social groups continuously confront the uncertainty of "'working' without being 'employed'" (Lozano 1983:340).

Scholars have documented a host of strategies used to reduce uncertainty and economic vulnerability in unregulated and informal work. Domestic workers form horizontal network ties to share information and form collectives (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Gourmet food-truck vendors develop trade associations to attain stable presence, create collective identity, and develop self-governance (Esparza, Walker, and Rossman 2014). Street vendors organize to enforce informal property rights (Peña 1999), develop standardization techniques, and provide financial safety nets (Rosales 2013). Traders engage in mutual "help arrangements" to manage the vulnerabilities of public marketplaces (Lyons and Snoxell 2005).

Such conditions of uncertainty—where workers lack legal contracts, lengthy credentialing processes, and regulatory assurances—become fertile ground for the emergence and development of trust (Barbalet 2009; Cook 2005; Dunn 1990; Seligman 1998; Venkatesh 2006). In fact, greater amounts of trust are required the more interactions and exchanges occur without legal constraints and contracts (Barbalet 2009; Cook 2005; Seligman 1998). Yet, trust remains empirically elusive, warranting greater attention to the way it builds and plays out over time to do the work of producing stability for people working in uncertain conditions.

The Role of Trust in the Informal Sector

Research that offers more precise analytical attention to the role of trust in unregulated and informal work most often emerges within social capital frameworks. Here we gain insight into the ways informal workers utilize social ties and strategies to manage uncertainty and vulnerability, reach economic goals, and achieve social mobility (Lyon 2000; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Zhou and Lin 2005). Though useful, the concept of social capital tends to bundle interactional processes—namely, Putnam's (1993:197) "networks, norms, and trust"—and we are left unable to disaggregate different social phenomena (Cook 2005; Woolcock 1998).

In addition, emphasis on networks characterized by homogeneity and coethnicity allow such group characteristics to emerge as necessary, or highly conducive, to reducing the uncertainty of informal work (see Portes 1998; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Portes and Zhou 1992; Zhou and Lin 2005), thus limiting our understanding of the way trust may play out among an increasingly diverse set of informal workers. While we gain insight into the type of outcomes made possible by a group of social mechanisms, it is less clear what particular work trust is doing to produce stability. Stepping outside of a social capital framework allows for an approach suited to distinguishing interactional mechanisms, like trust,

from the social ties or networks through which they flow (Jeong 2013).

Trust-Building Processes

Experimental research offers greater attention to trust building as process and provides encouraging findings related to the relationship between trust, risk, and varying conditions of uncertainty. For instance, in his study on exchange, Kollock (1994) finds that the greater degree of uncertainty, the more actors form committed relations with exchange partners, thus facilitating the emergence and development of trust. Cook et al. (2005) find evidence that the very process of risk taking plays a crucial role in building trust, particularly in the U.S. context. Evidence also suggests that the more exchanges occur under certain conditions, the less people interpret reciprocation as evidence of trustworthiness (Cheshire, Gerbasi, and Cook 2010).

Though much research focuses on trust itself as an outcome, the overarching role of trust-building processes are linked to material and interpersonal consequences. For instance, Meyerson, Weick, and Kramer (1996) offer the concept of "swift trust" to explain the form trust takes within the uncertain context of temporary groups. In doing so, they offer insight into the way trust emerges quickly to facilitate highly consequential outcomes. Building on such work, we may then seek to understand how trust plays out at different levels of interaction, moving from initial one-on-one encounters to the level of a community, which can lead to different outcomes for different people.

The Dynamic and Interactional Nature of Trust

While prior research has widely recognized trust as emerging in and through social interaction, some recent scholars have offered greater theoretical attention to trust as a dynamic process (see Möllering 2001). Lewis and Weigert (2012) emphasize trust as a "feedback loop" and highlight the complexity of causality. Studying informal exchange networks, Khodyakov (2007:128) argues for attention to temporality—how the past, present, and future influence the trust-building process through the "creation, development, and maintenance of trustworthy relationships." Weber and Carter (2003) build on work by Luhmann (1979), Simmel ([1908] 1950), and Seligman (1998) to offer an interactional theory of trust, using interview data of romantic relationships to illustrate the way trust builds, plays out, dissolves, and is reconstructed. Building on such theoretical interventions, an ethnographic approach furthers our understanding of trust as dynamic and interactional by providing data of the situated interactions themselves.

Attention to trust as an interactional process—as it plays out among people working in a public setting—further contributes to urban scholarship aimed at shifting attention from broader structural processes of urbanization to focus instead on "everyday dramas of urban life" (Borer 2006:174; Kusenbach 2006; Lofland 1973, 1998). Such a lens allows us to understand the interactional ways urban spaces gain meaning (Milligan 1998) as people organize and routinize the uncertainty of urban life (Lofland 1973), produce and reproduce urban identities (Wynn 2010), and build community (Jerolmack 2007; Kusenbach 2006; Monti 1999). As such research shows, critical attention to the seemingly mundane social interactions of everyday life is crucial to understanding the communal life of cities.

The Study

In this article I draw on a conceptualization of trust offered by Mayer, Davis,

and Schoorman (1995:712) as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party." This conceptualization has the advantage of highlighting actors' perceptions and enactments of trust as well as the way trust may change over time. Utilizing ethnographic data, I then present a dynamic process of building, maintaining, and protecting trust. In each of these moments, I expose the interactional *work* trust does to produce stability under conditions of uncertainty. This research therefore puts trust in motion—moving from the level of the individual to the level of the community and doing different work for different people across various situations. We gain a better understanding of trust as a dynamic mechanism through which people otherwise marginalized from formal employment carve out a daily living through interaction. Additionally, the dynamic approach reveals that while trust acts as a mechanism of social stability for some, it simultaneously becomes a mechanism for instability and exclusion for others, sparking the ongoing marginalization of already economically vulnerable individuals.

DATA AND METHODS

This article draws on ethnographic data collected between January 2010 and January 2014. During this time, I resided adjacent to the Venice Beach Boardwalk and worked alongside the workers who sell goods in the marketplace. I also served on two subcommittees of the Venice Neighborhood Council, visited individuals in their homes, and traveled to downtown Los Angeles to purchase merchandise. Throughout the entirety of my data collection, I jotted into a notebook

and returned home to type up detailed fieldnotes. The current analysis therefore draws on approximately 750 pages of typed fieldnotes.

Data collection followed prior conventions in ethnographic research, shifting between periods of intense fieldwork—where I spent an average of 10 to 20 hours per week on the Boardwalk—and periods of preliminary analysis (see Bosk 2003). My role in the marketplace also shifted over time. During the first years, I commonly observed and spoke with individual vendors and artists as they worked, sitting alongside them and assisting when necessary. From January to June in 2013, I began to work as a "business partner" to one vendor and then as a vendor and artist myself, a role that offered vital opportunity to understand daily practices and interactions as I personally navigated participation in the marketplace. As such an embodied practice, my own presence during fieldwork—and the way others made sense of my presence—undoubtedly influenced the nature of data collected (see Orrico 2015). Yet, the time span of fieldwork and the breadth of interactions and situations I witnessed provided a solid foundation from which to expose trust as a differentiated and highly consequential process.

I utilized an "abductive" approach to data analysis, building on "grounded theory" by moving back and forth between surprising empirical findings and existing sociological theories (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). This approach allowed trust to emerge from the situated interactions I observed. My attention centered on the way participants confronted the uncertainty of working each day without guarantees of place or pay, as well as how they navigated threats from potential competitors, opportunistic passersby, and inconsistent law enforcement. I paid explicit attention to the interactional moments in which workers confronted

and managed this uncertainty, focusing on the social and material consequences of such interactions. In coding the data, I located the ways people addressed the challenges of work by making themselves vulnerable to one another, moments that facilitated their ability to continue making a living. As I sifted through the data, I focused attention on people at different stages of working on the Boardwalk, from initial entrance to long-time participation. What emerged was therefore a *process* of trust as it played out for different people across situations doing different but highly consequential *work* to construct stability.

ANALYSIS

Building Trust: The Formation of Expectations

In this section, I show three interactions through which trust builds between individuals who have little to no preexisting relationship. First, I show how they leave belongings unattended. Second, I show how they make change for one another. And third, I show how they procure continuity of profit. As vendors, artists, and performers arrive on the Boardwalk, they immediately address practical dilemmas of working in an open and public marketplace—from the possibility of theft while they use the restroom to ensuring no sale is missed. In assessing risk from visitors and tourists, workers often engage new "colleagues," making themselves vulnerable to opportunism or mistakes by people for whom they have little to no prior information. As they quickly "suspend" (Möllering 2001) a lack of knowledge about one another's future behavior, they gain concrete results like short-term security, cash reserves, and ongoing profit.

Leaving merchandise unattended

I sit against the closed store fronts on the east side of the Boardwalk, waiting for the 9 a.m. set-up time when I can cross the pathway and set up along the western edge. I notice the block is particularly empty today, even for a weekday. A man walks around the corner, rolling a small cart nearby and placing it on the east side across the pathway from an "open" space. He is about 5'8 and has a happy-go-lucky attitude. I've never seen him working before, although I noticed him earlier yelling loudly with a woman in a long dress whom I also did not recognize. Eventually he walks over to tell me that the woman is "his ex." After meeting in Miami they spent two years together working as vendors. For the past year, they had driven their van across the country and ended up here in Venice. But now, he tells me, they just broke up and "she's got his stuff hostage." At 9 a.m. Kevin and I both move our belongings to the west side, setting up a couple of spaces from one another. As I unpack he comes over to officially introduce himself. "Kevin," he says, and I tell him mine. He shows me some stones he has recently cut to make into pendants, all the while his "ex" walks by intermittently, yelling that he should return her stuff or she'll throw his backpack in the dumpster. He tells me "she is all drama." After she has been gone for a while he comes back over to my space and asks if I'll watch his things while he goes to shave. I agree and Kevin walks away leaving all of his belongings sitting in his space. After about 20 minutes Kevin returns he flashes me a big smile, showing off his newly clean face.

This interaction demonstrates a practical dilemma that Kevin faces shortly after arriving to the Boardwalk; he must use the public restroom and leave his belongings unattended in an openly accessible space. By following Kevin's behavior, it is clear that he assesses some risk of leaving his belongings in the open. Given the

ongoing stream of unknown tourists, visitors, and individuals looking to resell stolen goods for quick cash (see Deener 2012), Kevin likely assesses a potential threat from passersby, which may also include the "ex" with whom he appears to be arguing. What emerges is a practical dilemma to leave the space, risk theft and consequently economic loss, or engage the help of others. To manage this practical dilemma, Kevin chooses to approach me as a nearby worker in order to safeguard against theft. This choice, however, is made without any preexisting relationship and despite having no prior knowledge of my own behavior, reputation, or shared interests. Having just arrived, he cannot claim knowledge of credible sanctions, nor does he have reason to believe that I perceive there to be any credible sanctions. Yet, as Kevin engages my assistance, he acts as if there were some assurance that I will not act opportunistically and steal the goods he relies on for income.

Trust is shaped by the practical needs Kevin faces and the lack of knowledge he has about me and the marketplace. Kevin demonstrates that trust in its emergent form is task specific, as he sets the parameters for the type of investment he expects—"watch over my stuff"—and the time frame—"while I go shave." This interaction is representative of one of the most common exchanges between vendors and one that arises only shortly after arrival to the Boardwalk marketplace. Here, trust emerges precisely in response to a practical problem of working in an open public space over long stretches of time. In this case, trust emerges to facilitate an immediate exchange, leading only to short term benefits.

Making change

Ricardo, a Latino man in his thirties, stands at his table making a sale when he turns to see if I have a ten-dollar bill. I hold up my open palms to motion that "I'm out." Umar, an Egyptian immigrant in his fifties, sees this and steps up, handing a ten-dollar bill across the table. After handing the customer change, Ricardo jogs from behind his table across the pathway to the nearby merchant. He quickly returns and walks over to Umar's table, handing him a ten-dollar bill.

In this moment, Ricardo faces the practical need to complete each available sale and garner all potential profit, even if he lacks the spare cash from which to produce change for customers. This is common, since the high volume of tourists means many customers carry $50 or $100 bills to purchase $2 and $5 items, leaving workers in an ongoing struggle to keep cash on hand. Here Ricardo chooses to engage Umar in an exchange, one that also requires an investment from Umar and a communication that he has cash on hand.

Making change thus forms part of building trust because it constructs an opportunity for actors to place uncertainty aside and make themselves vulnerable to one another, regardless of how little they know about one another. As a result, they form initial expectations that others will act in ways that do not harm them or take advantage of them. In addition, this practice moves trust further by requiring effort and resources, thus demonstrating the way such practices begin to foster collective behavior.

Similar to leaving merchandise unattended, making change addresses a pressing practical need—the need to garner profit from each potential sale. Since each bill has defined monetary value, the parameters of exchange are well defined, allowing for mutual clarity on the terms of reciprocity. While change can be made immediately—as in the exchange of a $10 bill for two $5s—it

may also require the vendor requesting cash to locate change in order to pay the lender. As with leaving merchandise unattended, the gains made by making change are immediate and short term. Importantly, making change pushes the trust building process by requiring colleagues to invest money and forges collective action among otherwise autonomous workers.

Procuring continuity of profit

I met Paul through another longtime vendor but we had yet to engage in a direct exchange. Paul had been working along the Boardwalk on and off for over five years and after only a few days of working next to Paul, he stood up and walked over to my table. "Come with me," he said walking the couple of feet to his own table. I stood next to him as he began pointing, quickly rattling off prices. "These are four dollars, these ten, these twenty-five, these over here are seven, these ten. I'll be right back."

Here Paul confronts the practical need to leave his space in order to use the restroom and still capitalize on each potential sale. As he does, he sparks interactions to ensure continued profit in his absence. This interaction requires greater investment of time, effort, and resources while exposing individuals to greater vulnerability. In fact, though I occasionally sold merchandise for Paul, he remained vulnerable not only to opportunism but to mistakes. Paul's table is full of diverse items, from jewelry to statues to artwork, many of which vary in size and material. At one point, for instance, I handed him $5 for a small figurine I had sold in his absence, the price he had quoted me for similar items. What I had failed to realize was the difference in weight and material of the figurine I sold, which he had valued at $20. He expressed his disappointment, but shirked it off, smiling rather than

getting angry. In fact, when I later vacated my spot for ten minutes I turned to Paul to say I'd "be right back." Upon my return he handed me $25, the full amount for which I sold my items. Given my correct intentions, the earlier gaffe did not disrupt the process of building trust, as evidenced by Paul's reciprocation.

This demonstrates the way in which procuring continuity of profit pushes the trust building process further, as those working here make themselves increasingly vulnerable to theft, opportunism, or mistakes by colleagues, who could pocket goods and profit or simply misquote prices. In addition, such a practice moves the trust-building process forward by requiring additional time, effort, and resources, thus fostering a greater sense of collective action and cohesion among autonomous workers.

One day Randy, an African American artist in his early forties, confronts an immediate need to secure long-term profit in his absence. For months, Randy worked with Tony, a lanky white man in his thirties who suffered from alcohol dependency. Tony, however, took things too far when he began to scream racial slurs at Randy. After breaking his ties from Tony, Randy had to make a quick decision, choosing to entrust Jorge, a 40-something Latino man who also admitted to and engaged in frequent drinking, with the sale of his belongings while he was away. This is representative of the many ways in which conditions on the Boardwalk require quick decisions.

I talk with Jorge, who's been working for Randy since Tony was "fired." Jorge says he's averaging $100 day with Randy's stuff. "Randy was really between a rock and a hard place," he tells me. "He had 12 hours to make a decision after Tony got drunk and started yelling the N-word." Jorge recounts Randy's decision. "He asked

me if he could trust me and I said yes. You could ask anybody on the Board-walk." Jorge tells me the job was somewhat of a surprise, "Normally I've only hung out here," saying "Randy didn't really know me."

Here Jorge discusses the way in which Randy's decision emerged from a pressing practical need to secure ongoing profit. This interaction forms a part of a process of building trust specifically because it moves Randy and Jorge from having no expectations of one another into a rela-tionship in which expectations become embedded. Though Jorge is paid a small commission for his effort, there is no con-tract, no credentialing, and no way to establish official knowledge of his identity or home address. In addition, Jorge also considers himself to be alcohol dependent and frequently drinks during the day and night. This particular form of uncertainty constructs their relationship as one based on trust rather than assurance, where Randy must choose to interact as if Jorge will not steal his goods, pocket profit, or make mistakes. Over the following months, this decision would prove posi-tive, and Randy talked about the initial decision as a kind of "gift," saying that after Tony, Randy needed "God" to send him a "clean employee," and he "got Jorge."

In this section I have empirically illus-trated the way in which trust, in its emer-gent form, works to facilitate three practi-ces: leaving merchandise unattended, exchanging cash, and procuring continu-ity of profit. Each of these practices occurs as those working along the Boardwalk manage the pressing practical needs of work in a setting with constant flow of strangers, possibility of theft, and a need to vacate one's belongings without miss-ing a sale. By choosing to place them-selves vulnerable to other workers, with whom they have little to no prior

relationship, trust becomes the safeguard against ongoing uncertainty. In these ini-tial interactions, trust plays out through direct one-on-one exchange, where the focus is less on the relationship itself than the task at hand. As a result, trust garners only immediate and practical results, but importantly, these are the ongoing exchanges that become the prece-dent for the formation of positive expecta-tions among social ties.

Maintaining Trust: Cultivating Expectations

In this section, I show three interactions through which trust is cultivated and maintained—exchanging food, organizing the block, and providing a safety net. These interactions highlight the way workers construct routinized interactions among known social ties to allow for ongo-ing exchange with increasingly vague parameters. These interactions effec-tively push expectations further into the future to garner more long-term results among increasingly connected social ties.

Exchanging food

I sat with Kahled one afternoon when he told me he was going to grab lunch. He returned with three cups of soup from a nearby store, taking one for himself and offering one to me and the other to a Paul. He told me Paul had purchased a few lunches in a row, so it was important for him to get lunch today. As he leaned over his table, spooning out clam chowder, he smiled at me. "It'll come back. I don't know what it will be or when it will come, but you just watch." Hours later I returned from a break to find him eating from a large pile of pea-nuts. He looked at me and said, "See. What did I tell you?"

Through the practice of exchanging food, trust moves beyond addressing a mere

practical necessity, since vendors could conceivably bring or purchase their own meals. The unstated expectation of reciprocity works to push such expectations further into the future. Kahled notes his own understanding of the expectations at hand, stating that it is "important" for him to purchase food since it has been provided for him multiple times without reciprocation. Yet, quite different from practices like making change, where the amount of the loan is clear and there is mutual clarity on reciprocity, the terms of exchange here become increasingly vague, as the value of food is unclear and the time period for reciprocity is left unstated. Notably, the vendor states that the exchange is not about the type of food, the cost of the food, or even where it is coming from. He states, "I don't know what it will be or when it will come," demonstrating that the expectation itself is the significant aspect of this social interaction and indicating a belief in a general and ongoing flow of food at the group level. He speaks comfortably about the uncertain time frame in which this expectation will be met and nearly relishes in this uncertainty, thus pushing expectations into the future and presuming a greater degree of ongoing interaction. When his expectation is met, the vendor does not focus on value or time frame but rather his ability to count on the expectation itself. "See. What did I tell you?" he says.

This common and ongoing flow of food helps to build and cultivate expectations among social ties, weaving a web of increasingly connected trust relationships. A result of this practice is also to construct a type of "lunch break," thus showing how investment of time, money, and effort to purchase food for others fosters cohesion and collective experience in an otherwise atomized and unstructured workplace.

Organizing "the Block."

It is 7:30 in the morning as I walk past a quiet coffee shop and turn onto the Boardwalk. The block is empty, but each "designated space" along the western edge is marked with a cardboard box. The space I have been setting up on recently is marked with a gray paint can. I drop my stool next to the can, placing it in the sand behind the space, and walk south to get the cart from storage. I run into Juan, who tells me that he and Ricardo "saved the spaces" last night. At 8:00 a.m. Paul comes around the corner pushing his cart, piled high with bins and canvasses, and places them in front of Mr. Park's store. "Are you here?" he asks me, pointing to the paint can. I tell him I'll go there, but I don't really care which one I take. He agrees I should go there, pointing to the paint can and my stool. "I'll go here," he says, pointing to an adjacent space where Umar typically works, and "Ricardo will go there," he says pointing just south of my space. Within about 30 minutes Ricardo arrives, wheeling his own cart to the eastern edge. "Is this me?" he says, pointing to the space where Paul has now placed some of his own plastic bins. "Yes," he says, repeating the roster of people for the day. Soon afterwards Leia, a Latina woman who works with her "husband" Manuel, walks onto the Boardwalk and sets a chair down against the store just north of us. She walks over to Paul and I to say hello and looks across to the west side, commenting that Paul gets to be next to her today since Umar is not coming. At 9 a.m. we walk west and begin sweeping up the sand on the concrete, setting up tables and chairs, and unpacking merchandise.

By following individuals as they organize the block, we see how those working

here not only build positive expectations of one another through ongoing interaction but also come to interpret and anticipate one another's expectations and future cooperation, thus allowing trust to do the work of constructing long-term economic stability. Paul states, "Ricardo will go there," as he surveys available space, illustrating his own expectation of Ricardo's future cooperation. Ricardo's behavior illustrates his own set of expectations since he arrives to verify with Paul, "Is this me?" Ricardo appears happy to oblige, further allowing block organization to emerge as a communal act. It is clear that upon arrival there are particular expectations already in place, and what unfolds is an expression and meeting of those expectations.

The consequences of such interactions become both interpersonally and materially significant, since a practice like organizing the block builds a foundation for interaction to become routinized in a workplace premised on potential turnover. This process provides opportunity for workers to invest ongoing time, effort, and resources in reproducing expectations among not just any social ties but social ties that remain nearby and thus accessible on a daily basis. Organizing the block forms part of the process to maintain trust, and it works to garner long-term results. As workers predict and interpret one another's expectations, this collective act turns a "first-come, first-serve" policy in a "first-come, many-served" policy.

Providing a safety net

One day I noticed Umar has not been at work in a few days. Leia had mentioned he would not be working the past weekend, but come Tuesday he had still not returned. As I watched Leia unpacking her own merchandise I saw her set up Umar's artwork as well, using two-thirds of the table for his goods and one-third to display

her own. I asked Leia what was happening and she told me Umar was quite sick, but at least this way he could continue to make some money.

Here we can see how Leia and Umar push expectations further into the long term, requiring even greater investment of time, effort, and resources. They make themselves vulnerable to one another and allow trust to do the work of garnering increasingly significant benefits of durable social and economic stability. Due to Leia's assistance, Umar—who supports his wife, two teenage children, and pays $2,000 monthly rent for a house over an hour away from Venice—was able to not only recuperate, but to also maintain a basic flow of income and return to work as before. Together, Leia and Umar's actions grant Umar a type of informal "sick leave." By working together to enhance one another's long-term profit, such interactions also indicate the production of collective interests and behavior.

When Kahled, an African-American vendor, was arrested one morning, I watched people begin to act in ways that made trust both real and highly consequential. Soon after his arrest, a man I had never seen working the Boardwalk approached me to hand over Kahled's belongings—a small bag with his wallet, identification, some clothes, and a couple of cell phones—to see if I could "keep them safe." While Kahled was in jail, two nearby merchants also located me to deliver letters he had sent, allowing him to relay messages. Interestingly, both Paul and I struggled to receive information about Kahled during this time, since we became aware that none of us knew his legal name. The closest we came was when Sheila—who had known Kahled for years—told us, "About ten years ago he got hit in the head real bad, and in his state of delusion he told me his full

name. I can't remember it though." Eventually I did check his state-issued ID and found his official name to be nowhere close to anything he went by on the Boardwalk. Yet, however little people really knew of Kahled, because of their and my efforts, he returned from over a month in jail to seamlessly continue his work.

In both the case of Umar and Kahled, the expectations cultivated through ongoing interaction are mobilized in times of unanticipated emergency. In the case of illness and arrest, both Umar and Kahled utilize social ties to maintain continuity in profit and preserve a symbolic presence on "the block," highly significant in a context with ongoing potential for turnover each day and competitors attempting to stake a claim. What shines through, particularly in the case of Kahled's arrest, is that social ties along the Boardwalk are not rooted in acquiring any official knowledge of one another, neither legal names nor addresses. Trust, after all, is not all encompassing but emerges from the specific context of the Boardwalk marketplace to do the work of constructing stability and ongoing profit.

The practices that maintain trust move beyond interactions to address the most pressing practical dilemmas workers face on the Boardwalk and instead cultivate a set of connected social ties as trust relationships. This allows for increasingly long-term benefits of social and economic stability. As individuals invest more resources, time, and effort they also increase their own vulnerability. Others could act in opportunistic ways over longer periods of time or take advantage of one another's assistance by holding off reciprocation. Yet, trust in the context of this uncertainty garners even more significant results. By exchanging food, workers invest in one another without clear terms of exchange or reciprocity and create communal lunch breaks in an otherwise atomized workplace. They create block communities to allow for routinized interaction, moving from merely building expectations to interpreting and predicting expectations. They invest in one another's long-term security by establishing a type of sick leave to ensure durable economic stability. Trust garners increasingly long-term results and can be mobilized in times of emergency. Moving beyond the mere one-on-one interaction that is task specific and immediate, here trust spills over into a broader web of connected social ties to generate job stability.

Protecting Trust: Constructing "Insiders" and "Outsiders"

Building and maintaining trust become key social processes to produce familiarity and bring durability to material benefits, economic security, and a sense of collective experience. How then will these economic actors protect the social and economic stability they have forged? Here I show how participants construct boundaries between "insiders" and "outsiders" to protect trust on the Boardwalk, and subsequently create a sense of collective belonging to a cohesive community and allow for strategies of reorganization that maintain dynamic stability.

Buffering from the LAPD

Paul turned and tells me "the cops" were walking up the Boardwalk with video cameras to ask questions. Sure enough, a few police officers approach Paul's table and begin to ask his name, questioning the jewelry he claimed to be merely "display" and reminding him that such items were no longer permissible to sell. After they passed by my own table I heard Paul speaking on the phone, saying "the cops are making their way up," and warning to get rid of some items. Afterwards I asked Paul if he had

called Michelle, an African immigrant who works about four blocks north and often includes jewelry in her display. "Yes," he said, "I just called her."

Given vague and shifting restrictions on permissible behavior, as well as hefty citations for minor offenses like oversized umbrellas and cigarette smoking, LAPD emerges as a major predator for those working on the Boardwalk. Warnings of police presence therefore become common practices to maintain familiarity. When working, I was quickly told to "keep an eye out" for officers and "always let us know," demonstrating the pervasive perception of possible fines. Here, Paul draws on the linearity of the Boardwalk as a tool to push trust beyond the confines of "the block" and protect Michelle from the economic shock of hefty fines. Paul thus invests in the ongoing development of collective goals and positive expectations at the community level, from which he will also benefit. Workers engage in a process of protecting trust as they provide unsolicited and proactive assistance, which also demonstrates and fosters collective goals.

> I sat next to Paul after a shift in a local ordinance that newly banned the sale of "jewelry" in the marketplace. Paul walked away to use the bathroom and upon noting heavy police presence he had stayed away from his table. In a flash I saw Manuel run over to Paul's table and gather up piles of necklaces, rings, and bracelets, sweeping them off into piles and putting them in one of Paul's bins. "What's going on?" I asked, sensing urgency. "The cops," he said, "get rid of the jewelry."

Manuel's willingness to invest his own time and effort in saving Paul from a fine cannot merely be explained in terms of expected reciprocity. As an artist, Manual belongs to a group of workers regularly constructed in city regulation as the "ideal" participant. As a result, he will likely never be as vulnerable to potential fines as Paul. Yet, while public debate often pits artists against vendors (see also Deener 2012), in everyday practice, workers on the Boardwalk often join forces. The development of expectations that those working here will protect insiders from predators constructs a sense of collective experience and goals, even when artists and vendors do not share the same type of vulnerability. Thus, the willingness to invest effort and time to provide job security and economic stability for insiders pushes trust toward the level of a broader, and rather unlikely, community.

Constructing outsiders

> At 7 a.m. I walked up to the store front, pulling my cart of merchandise and supplies. Manuel and Leia said hello as I placed my cart against the east side store fronts. They told me I would be working in "that spot" and Manuel pointed to one of the spaces across the Boardwalk, all of which were marked with empty cardboard boxes. They recounted an interaction with a man they had met earlier that morning. "We came at 5 a.m.," they told me, "and had to fight that guy off." They continued, "He said he'd been working here all week, we told him it was full!"

I later discover the man they "fought off" was Kevin, who I had met the week prior (see first vignette). Kevin had set up successfully on the block from Monday through Friday, during a particularly slow week in which more than a few spaces were available for him to work. While he interacted through face-to-face contact, setting terms for immediate exchanges and favors, his initial process of building trust was cut short when Manuel and Leia, who have long engaged in ongoing processes of maintaining trust, enact their own strategy to protect that trust.

Since the city designated the Boardwalk a Free Speech Zone, it has purported open access as a desirable feature of the space, and the city often laments any attempts at informal ownership or monopolization of spaces. Yet, the city's desire for openness contradicts the desire for stability among those working, and we see how workers informally protect their own access. What emerges is a clear tension between a newcomer and long-time participant's reading of the first-come, first-serve policy, and this interaction demonstrates the way in which social organization on the Boardwalk reproduces and shapes the type of change that is possible. Interactionally drawing boundaries between insiders and outsiders, we see how Manuel and Leia protect the trust they have formed between the insiders on their block, a practice that leads to the exclusion of Kevin and any other potential newcomer.

In addition, a desire to protect trust relationships by maintaining familiarity can emerge as a collective goal beyond the block to the larger community of workers. Benson is a trusted African American odd-job worker most often responsible for removing and returning merchandise to a small storage space at the start and end of the workday.

> I pack up the cart and begin to secure it with a blue tarp and bungee cord. As I am making the final adjustments a man approaches me. He is White, probably in his late thirties, though his skin has taken on a red leather quality from repeated exposure to the sun. His brown hair is short and messy and he has a nervous energy. "Can I help you move your cart?" he says, making a clear effort to concentrate as he speaks. "No, I'm ok," I respond. "You don't need help?" he asks again. At that moment Ricardo, who is working nearby, stands and

walks over. "Benson moves this cart," he says matter-of-factly. Frustrated by the lack of available work, the man says, "Oh, Benson moves every cart. He has this whole Boardwalk." Ricardo seems to want to end any back-and-forth, saying quite aggressively, "Well, Benson moves this cart." The man walks away.

Given the prevalence of drug and alcohol use among groups of tourists, transients, and a large homeless population, there is a constant flow of willing odd-job workers desiring quick cash. Yet, rather than accept services from the lowest bidder, Ricardo's decision to interject and aggressively decline this man's offer indicates the importance of protecting already established workers with dependable reputations. Securing such jobs, therefore, is not always as easy as offering one's services for a cheap fee. Here, Ricardo ensures the ongoing presence of a man who maintains trust with others working here, which further constructs a web of connected social ties as insiders.

Constructing outsiders through daily interaction thus informally shifts control over access into the hands of those already working here, limiting availability of spaces for new arrivals. As people erect added boundaries for newcomers, they construct a collective threat, further building a communal experience to limit turnover and change. The process of constructing outsiders protects existing processes of maintaining trust, ensuring the continuation of routinized interaction and allowing for long-term benefits and ongoing expectations. As these interactions protect the collective experience of insiders, however, they simultaneously reveal the way in which trust can contribute to exclusion and further marginalization of people who may already be economically vulnerable. Here, we begin to see the dark side of trust.

Making outsiders out of insiders

I am walking down the street at 5 a.m.
towards the Boardwalk, choosing to
walk in the middle of the street rather
than the cramped sidewalk. It is dark,
and I see a figure walking towards me
covered from head to toe in a large
blanket. Though startled at first,
Kahled eventually reveals himself
and laughs, telling me he likes to
reserve his space "incognito," thereby
giving everybody the illusion that he
is always present.

Kahled's omnipresence was not received
well by the block on which he worked,
and others thought Khaled took too
much control over space allotment on
the block. A group of nearby artists joined
together to officially charge him with
extortion, and he was arrested and jailed
for over a year. Over the course of that
year, Kahled lost all of his belongings.
Though some of his social ties tried to
keep things going for a while, he eventu-
ally lost his van (where he had been liv-
ing), his belongings, and his merchandise.

Protecting trust does the work of main-
taining familiarity, allowing for consis-
tency of interaction and stability of access
and profit. When insiders, however, begin
to threaten community goals like economic
stability, they too can become outsiders.
Although those working along the Board-
walk often protect one another from LAPD
officers, such a breach of conduct and a per-
ceived threat to the informal system of
access caused vendors to engage authorities
and take legal action, with life-changing
consequences for those involved. Here we
see that insider and outsider status can be
fluid, not defined merely on the basis of
who one is on the Boardwalk but the inter-
actional role one plays. In this case, LAPD
officers may also work to protect trust,
thus showing how boundaries between
insiders and outsiders are interactionally
relevant and fluid rather than static.

Protecting trust can be characterized
by interactions that work to define
insiders and outsiders, thus creating, as
it maintains, a sense of community. Inter-
estingly, protecting trust can be charac-
terized by turning outward—to limit
threats from encroaching newcomers
and law enforcement officials—as well as
inward—to construct outsiders from for-
mer insiders and spark change. Protect-
ing trust along the Boardwalk draws the
contours of an unlikely community and
allows for dynamic reorganization.
Through these practices, workers create
the opportunity for routinized and famil-
iar interactions that bring added durabil-
ity to social and economic stability.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I argue that trust is a key
interactional mechanism through which
individuals confront and manage the
uncertainty of working in a public mar-
ketplace to carve out a stable living.
Drawn from four years of ethnographic
observation of vendors, artists, and per-
formers along the Venice Beach Board-
walk, I present a process of building,
maintaining, and protecting trust. This
processual approach exposes the particu-
lar interactional work trust does to turn
conditions of uncertainty into enduring
stability. These interactions bring keen
insight into the way a social psychological
mechanism builds and plays out with sig-
nificant social and material consequences
for a diverse group of people largely mar-
ginalized from formal employment. In so
doing, this research provides a textured
portrait of the way people locate "private
solutions to public problems" (Lozano
1983:341) and the way urban settings
become meaningful places of communal
interaction (Borer 2006; Kusenbach
2006; Lofland 1973, 1998; Milligan 1998).

My findings show that in its emergent
form, trust allows participants to manage

the most pressing practical dilemmas of uncertainty in a public marketplace, including protection from theft, a need for cash reserves, and a need to capitalize on every available sale. Next, as workers maintain the positive expectations they form of one another, their exchanges become increasingly vague. Here, trust works to informally construct various forms of job security, including ongoing access to food, public concrete, and long-term sick leave. Finally, I find that as people protect trust among a set of connected social ties they manage both internal and external threats to stability. Participants are therefore able to mitigate the negative effects of law enforcement and restrict access of encroaching newcomers. In the end, this process works to both form the contours of an unlikely community and allow for change.

The findings presented build on prior scholarship of trust as an ingredient in social capital (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993) by disaggregating interactional variables to pay particular attention to the interactional work that trust does to manage uncertainty. In addition, while social capital frameworks have been particularly helpful to address the experience of coethnic networks, adding to what we know about the tendency of people to trust in others who share characteristics like national origin (Misztal 1996), this research captures the social mechanisms key to the formation of collective behavior and community where solidarity, shared national origin, and shared histories are absent or unclear.

This article also offers a complement to experimental findings that link trust-building processes to risk (Cook et al. 2005) and ongoing exchange in conditions of uncertainty (Kollock 1994). The inter-actional data presented confirm the role of initial and ongoing risk taking as well as the important ways that ongoing exchange can cultivate more robust trust relationships over time. By following

a group of vendors, artists, and performers working in an everyday setting over time, my findings reveal the significant social and material consequences of trust for day-to-day economic survival. In addition, the ethnographic approach allows for situated interactional data of different people across varying situations, adding empirical illustration of the dynamic nature of trust (Lewis and Weigert 2012; Möllering 2001; Weber and Carter 2002) as it builds, dissolves, and has differing effects for different people. I show that as trust acts to produce stability for some, it may simultaneously emerge as a mechanism for instability and further marginalization for others. So although the Board-walk is purportedly "open to all," we see that "getting on the Boardwalk" remains a challenge and newcomers continue to face an array of informal obstacles. Trust, in the end, has a dark side.

While this study is able to locate trust as a key interactional mechanism to turn conditions of uncertainty into stability within the spatial and social confines of the Boardwalk, one of the limitations of this research is that it may overlook the many different ways trust that emerges *on the Boardwalk* plays a significant role in the lives of workers *off the Boardwalk*. In addition, it may miss additional processes to build and cultivate trust as they take place in other settings. A more thorough understanding of the interactional work trust does beyond the marketplace would offer greater insight into the role trust plays in carving out stability for otherwise vulnerable and marginal social groups.

Finally, the way trust emerges and plays out on the Boardwalk is influenced directly by the local conditions of uncertainty that characterize this open and public marketplace. It remains an open question as to how durable these trust relationships will be in the future. In February 2015, I returned to my Venice

apartment to find a six-page pamphlet rolled up in my mailbox. It read "Venice Beach Solutions: An Action Plan for a Safe, Clean, and Vibrant Venice Beach." In it, L.A. City Councilmember Mike Bonin proposes a plan to solve "two big problems—homelessness and crime." Among the many plans proposed, Bonin suggests "a strict permit system" for those working along the Boardwalk. In what ways will this change the way trust emerges and unfolds? In what ways will it influence the type of interactional work trust does?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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BIO

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