

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Pragmatics

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/pragma



Trajectories of love: Affective reciprocity during kissing in the everyday life of romantic couples



Julia Katila ^{a, *}, Asta Cekaite ^b

- ^a Tampere University, Finland
- ^b Linköping University, Sweden

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 19 January 2023
Received in revised form 16 June 2023
Accepted 21 June 2023
Available online 6 July 2023

Keywords: Kissing trajectories Affective reciprocity Romantic couples Intercorporeality Love Video analysis

ABSTRACT

This study inspects the interactional emergence of affective reciprocity—the mutual exchange of affection—in the everyday life of romantic couples in their homes. It utilizes video analysis of naturally occurring interactions to uncover how affective reciprocity is accomplished in and through *trajectories of love* or interaction trajectories ending up in kissing or touching in an affectionate manner. A detailed empirical analysis demonstrates that affective reciprocity during such trajectories is nascent in the participants' similar and equivalent ways of attuning to one another via aligning expressions of affection. A distinct feature of affective reciprocity during trajectories of love is that its participants do not simply agree and respond to kiss or touch, but show their willingness to do so, and display enjoyment when it happens. Utilizing Merleau-Ponty's (1962, 1964a) ideas on love, and his theory on the intercorporeality of bodies, the study proposes that love can be viewed as an affectionate we-relationship that becomes salient in moment-by-moment acts of affective reciprocity occurring during mundane interactions.

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1. Introduction

Previous studies have suggested a link between affectionate touch and kissing and higher levels of relationship satisfaction (e.g., Busby et al., 2020; Wlodarski and Dunbar Robin, 2013). The differences in the amount of affectionate touch in romantic relationships have been explained, for instance, through the lenses of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), proposing that avoidantly attached individuals hold negative attitudes regarding touch (Chopik et al., 2014), and exchange fewer physical touches with their partners (Debrot et al., 2021). While individual differences in affection styles certainly play a role, these theories paint a rather individual-centric image of the occurrence of touch among romantic couples. Moreover, given that this body of research mainly draws from questionnaires, laboratory observations, and self-reports, we still know little about how affectionate touch, including kissing, happens in the naturally occurring everyday interactions of romantic couples in their homes. Instead of merely stemming from the attachment styles of individuals, the intimate tactile connection between romantic partners often consists of subtle interactional work, careful affective attunement toward each other, and consideration of the local environment and ongoing competing activities.

To uncover the anatomy of mundane kissing, we explore what we call *affective reciprocity*—mutual exchanges of affection—during kissing trajectories. To do so, we perform video analyses of naturally occurring interactions (Streeck et al.,

^{*} Corresponding author. Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, 33014, Finland. *E-mail address:* Julia.katila@tuni.fi (J. Katila).

2011) analyzing in detail the everyday life of 10 romantic couples in their homes. Inspired by Merleau-Ponty's theory of the intercorporeality of bodies and his understanding of love as an entrance into an affectionate we-relationship (1968, 1962, 1964a, b), we use the expression "trajectories of love" to refer to the interaction pathways through which romantic partners seek to touch and be touched by each other in an affective manner (Katila, 2022).

Specifically, our aim is to respond to the following questions:

- 1. How do romantic partners initiate, continue, and end kissing amid their daily activities in their homes?
- 2. How do participants establish affective reciprocity throughout these kissing trajectories?
- 3. How can we utilize Merleau-Ponty's theories of love and intercorporeality as foundational theories to study the interactional emergence of affective reciprocity?

We inspect emergent affective reciprocity during kissing trajectories in a specific sociocultural context: middle-class romantic couples living in Finland. Drawing from the framework of *haptic sociality* (M.H. Goodwin, 2017), we start from the notion that (intimate) relationships are established in and through the moment-by-moment unfolding of embodied, affective, and co-experienced interactions. Therefore, how romantic partners affectively orient toward each other during mundane kissing is no trivial matter, and uncovering the everyday interactional and intercorporeal dynamics of such interactions is of great importance.

2. Previous studies of kissing

We follow previous interaction research examining the emergence and uses of touch in mundane interactions (Cekaite and Mondada, 2020). Approaching kissing episodes from the viewpoint of haptic sociality (M.H Goodwin, 2017), we draw from studies that have unveiled the embodied, tactile affective practices of intimacy, such as greeting or farewell hugs (Goodwin and Cekaite, 2018), compassionate soothing embraces (Cekaite and Kvist Holm, 2017), kissing during photo shoots (Mondada et al., 2020), or kissing gestures among family members during videocalls showing "love at a distance" (Gan, 2021).

Treating kissing as a situated practice occurring amid families' everyday lives, Goodwin and Cekaite (2018) have uncovered how kissing often occurs within so-called "boundary intertwinings" (ibid: 136) or moments marking the 'boundaries' of an encounter; such as saying goodbye, hello, goodnight, and good morning. These tactile trajectories are often there "to display their [the participants'] enthusiasm for one another as they reunite." (Goodwin and Cekaite, 2018: 5). Kissing between parents and children has also been addressed by Mondada and her colleagues (2020) in their study of family photography sessions. Exploring the coordinated production of photography of kissing between parents and children, the authors demonstrate that the precondition for kissing is the establishment of a "kissable body formation"—an embodied arrangement enabling contact between select areas of the participants' faces (Mondada et al., 2020: 60). A kissing trajectory includes the embodied initiation, the kiss proper, and then the withdrawal of the kisser.

With a focus on the kissing behaviour of a romantic couple sitting on a park bench, Kendon (1975/1981) suggests that there are highly systematic facial patterns occurring during what he calls a "kissing round". For Kendon, through systematic facial patterns, participants can collaboratively figure out the next moves in the kissing interaction. For instance, when a recipient of a kiss is showing a "closed lip smile," kissing is likely to follow, whereas when the recipient is wearing a "teeth smile" during the same juncture, actual kissing does not happen (pp. 348–9). Accordingly, participants are therefore constantly displaying their readiness and orientation toward kissing through their facial expressions. However, Kendon did not consider a crucial aspect of such tactile encounters—namely, affect. Moreover, in only relying on video recordings that did not include audio, Kendon could not study the significant roles played by aural features—talk and (nonlexical) vocalizations—in the trajectories of intimate affective intertwining.

By also examining facial expressions during kissing among romantic couples, Katila (in press), provided a detailed analysis uncovering especially the interplay of felt and communicative aspects of the face during kissing among romantic partners. According to Katila, something that could be called the "experiencing face" takes place during the most intimate moments of tactile affection. Moreover, Katila unveils the multisensoriality of the face during kisses: besides vision, touch is especially at play. Through direct face-on-face communication, such as cheek touching, the participants of intimate encounters can mediate facial expressions such as smiles through the sense of touch.

In this study we draw from this body of literature, but instead of examining kissing or kissing trajectories per se, we take what we call 'affective reciprocity' as our point of departure to uncover the dynamics of intimate intercorporealities in the everyday interactions of romantic couples.

3. The intercorporeality of human bodies

Occurring at the boundaries of bodies and conjuring up participants' emotional vulnerability, affectionate moments involving kissing and touch make salient the embodied, sensorial, and felt aspects of interaction. Due to the special nature of our topic, we approach the kissing interactions among romantic couples through the lens of the *intercorporeality* of bodies.

Intercorporeality is a theory of human embodiment developed by the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968, 1964a). It refers to a view of the human body as constituted by its corporeal relations with other living bodies. In compliance with this perspective, perception is fundamentally co-experienced by my body and other living bodies in two-way corporeal relationships of sensing and being sensed (Goodwin and Cekaite, 2018; Meyer et al., 2017; Roald et al., 2018.). With the concept of intercorporeality, explains Meyer et al. (2017: xx-xxi),

"Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the fact that even after we have learned as infants to clearly distinguish between ourselves (our own bodies) and alter (the bodies of others), we are still able and even fated to continue experiencing the bodily presences and sensations of others when we are in the same sensory and corporeal space."

What can this experiencing of the bodily presences and sensations of others mean in practice, given that we still feel ourselves to be individuals, corporeally separate from other people? Let us take an example relevant to the current study: the intercorporeality of kissing. Human beings can sense both themselves and each other in various interrelated ways during moments of kissing. First, when my lips touch your lips, I am sensing how your lips feel; their softness, warmth, and moistness, among other tactilely available features. Simultaneously, I am also sensing my own body in relation to yours. Hence, my active perceiving of your body coincides with perceiving my own body in relation to yours (See Roald et al., 2018: 208). However, during kissing as well as during touching in general, I am not just sensing the affordances of your body, like I would sense the affordances of an object. Importantly, I am also able to feel your body while feeling my body. At the same time, you can sense my body sensing you. Like in a handshake, during kissing "I can feel myself touched as well and at the same time as touching" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 142).

The intercorporeality (of kissing) therefore enables, and even insists upon, reciprocal sensing and being sensed by another body. As Merleau-Ponty (1962: 185), expresses:

"The communication or comprehension of gestures comes about through the reciprocity of my intentions and the gestures of others, of my gestures and intentions discernible in the conduct of other people. It is as if the other person's intention inhabited my body and mine his."

It is through this sensed intention in another person's body that I can capture that the body I am kissing is another living body, my counterpart. This corporeally-sensed kinship fundamentally enables experiences of the bodily presences and sensations of other people. Importantly, affect and emotion are fundamental aspects of experiences taking place alongside other living beings.

In this study we take the intercorporeality of bodies as our point of departure, and explore how it can be understood in light of Merleau-Ponty's theory of love, and of interactional perspectives to affect and emotion.

4. The interactional perspective to affect and emotion: love emerging as gestures and trajectories of love

Emotion and affect are salient aspects of intercorporeal kissing interactions between romantic partners. In this study, we use the concepts of 'affect' and 'emotion' in a manner familiar within the phenomenological tradition. We follow a distinction Merleau-Ponty makes in his writings between (1) "affect" as an overarching term, including both "emotions" and "feelings" and (2) "emotions", referring to more distinct experiences, such as anger, joy, or surprise (see Katila, in press; Roald et al., 2018: 205). Importantly, we draw from Merleau-Ponty's understanding of affect as embedded in all perception and inseparable from the phenomenological body capable of sensing and being sensed. Our bodies become existent in certain manners, moment by moment, in their affective relations to other people and the world around them. In other words, affect is an omnipresent feature of all perception and it—as well as the more delineated experiences of emotions—can be viewed primarily as (intercorporeal) *relationships* (See Roald, Levin, and Køppe, 2018 for an elaborate reflection on Merleau-Ponty's theory on affect and emotion.)

In the current study, we are especially curious about Merleau-Ponty's ideas of love (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1964a; Lapointe, 1974) and consider ways in which they can form a background for an interaction analysis of such moments. Interactional perspectives to emotion (e.g., Goodwin and Goodwin, 2000; Goodwin and Cekaite, 2018; Goodwin et al., 2012; Ruusuvuori, 2013; Sorjonen and Peräkylä, 2012) focus on uncovering the moment-by-moment interactional birth of affect and emotion. In line with this framework, emotion and affect are attached to resources of multimodal and sensorial interaction, such as gestures, facial expressions, tones of voice, and touch. Through detailed interaction analysis of embodied behaviour, it is possible to capture the general affective tones and modes entangled with these gestures. However, the existence of specific emotions, such as love, is not possible to conclude solely through interaction analysis. The feeling of love may not be evident for the participants themselves when they are simply living through the mundane fleeting interactions of their lives, including moments of kissing.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) also reflects on this fleeting ambiguity of love: it is not something we often 'know' when we live through situations, yet we are aware of it through our bodies. Love, for Merleau-Ponty, becomes existence in the "acts of love"

¹ In developing his ideas, Merleau-Ponty was highly influenced by Husserl (1989).

² In the field of interaction research, the concepts of emotion and affect are commonly used interchangeably (Ruusuvuori, 2013: 331–332), but their usage also varies depending on the traditions and disciplines engaged with by specific researchers (Sorjonen and Peräkylä, 2012: 4).

(ibid.: 381–3). To love, according to Merleau-Ponty (1964a) "is inevitably to enter into an undivided situation with another" (p: 154). In this situation, both parties are influencing and being influenced by each other willingly. Love then becomes an *existential* we-relationship in the sense that love, as a specific, affectionate way of being with another person, not only enables but even presupposes a specific existence of oneself (Lapointe, 1974; Merleau-Ponty, 1964a: 154). As Merleau-Ponty (2012: 491) explains it: "[love] ... is the way the lover establishes his relations with the world; it is an existential signification". However, Merleau-Ponty's examples of love remain rather romanticized, and as such escape the mundane reality of day-to-day life. Characteristic of phenomenological inquiry, Merleau-Ponty's examples of love are based on self-reflections and not on empirical materials of situated encounters.

In this study, we take inspiration from Merleau-Ponty's notion on of love as an intercorporeal relationship embedded in embodied actions. However, we do so by trying to de-romanticize the notion of love and treating it as something emerging through mundane interactions involving, for instance, gentle touch, smiles, or tones of voice. While we cannot know whether the participants, in each moment, really feel love, we suggest that through detailed analysis of the participants' affectionate gestures, both vocal and embodied, it is possible to uncover how they observably make relevant the saliency of love. Following this line of thought, love exists in loving acts and gestures, or as suggested by the present study, as trajectories of love occurring in the everyday life of romantic partners. As such, love becomes an inherently dialogical (Linell, 2009) relationship; it is not just some inner state being felt inside of our bodies, but something that is also being simultaneously expressed, experienced and (re)negotiated—something that becomes visible and tangible—in the interaction resources used in moment-by-moment interactions.

In our empirical analysis, we explore the emergence of one type of trajectory of love —kissing—and analyze how it is accomplished through affective expressions that combine words, intonations, gestures, body movements, and postures. We follow previous research that has established that affective expressions can unfold in the form of participants' jointly embodied achievement or *co-operative action*. C. Goodwin (2013, 2018) has theoretically conceptualized co-operative action, characterized as the propensity of human beings to "inhabit each other's actions" (2013: 8). It is a crucial feature of the accumulative nature of human actions throughout evolution. Furthermore, co-operative action characterizes moment-bymoment interaction, where it is achieved by recycling various features, including semiotic resources from previous actions and turns.

Notably, co-operative action allows the sharing of emotions across participants. As such, it is a key aspect of interpersonal bonding (e.g., Goodwin, 2008). For instance, co-operative expressions of disgust toward some third entity or person can help form embodied alliances, separating 'us' from other people (Goodwin et al., 2012; Katila and Philipsen, 2019). Interactional establishment of shared emotions often entails reutilizing some affective cues from the fellow interactor's previous turn, such as their gestures, facial expressions, or key words or phrases (e.g., Katila and Philipsen, 2019). Interactional and dialogic approaches have referred to this resemblance between interlocutors' actions as 'resonance'; an activation of potential affinity across utterances (Du Bois, 2007; Kärkkäinen, 2006; see Chen 2022; 5–7 for a summary). Importantly, co-operatively produced and resonating affect in interaction is, at the same time, responding to something having been said or done before—i.e., it is retrospective as well as prospective, as it orients to and anticipates one's own future actions and those of others (Linell, 2009: 177).

To summarize, in the present study we treat affect—and more specifically, the emotion of love—as an affective relationship taking life in and through our interactionally-established embodied relationships with others. Love is therefore at the same time both an interactional and intercorporeal process that is accomplished and co-sensed through the participants' living bodies.

5. Materials and methods

Our data covers video-recordings of the naturally occurring everyday lives of romantic couples at their homes in Finland. One of the authors videorecorded the everyday interactions of 10 heterosexual and same-sex couples for 7 days (10–20 h a day) using 4–5 video cameras mounted in different rooms (the living room, kitchen, dining room, hallway, and bedroom). Given that the videos were recording for longer periods of time, we are also able to utilize our knowledge of the participants' daily activities and habits as well as the larger activity context, in which the interactional events of our focus occur. In addition, after the recording, clips of the couples' interactions were shown to the participants, and they were asked to interpret their own interactional events. The background information gained from the interviews is used to support the video analysis. As there are few previous interaction studies on kissing, the current study's is unique and rare in that it captures interactions in the participants' private (not public) sphere (cf. Kendon, 1975/1981). Prior to data collection, a supportive statement on the part of the Ethical Committee was obtained, and written consent was requested from each participant (See Katila, 2022, in press for more information about the data collection and ethical procedures).

Drawing from a larger collection of up to 250 cases of kissing, in this study we will analyze cases of *spontaneously* unfolding and *extended* kissing trajectories (N = 52). By "spontaneously unfolding", we mean cases of kissing which occur amid daily activities, in contrast with kisses occurring during more patterned rituals such as greetings and farewells, which mark a

³ For example, he describes becoming aware of one' own love in the "enduring hours of boredom preceding a meeting" of one's loved one, or through the "felt elation" when finally meeting the loved one after this long waiting (1962:381).

transition into increased or decreased access to one another (see Goodwin and Cekaite, 2018). Moreover, we have restricted our focus on cases where kissing is extended from a single kiss into two or more kisses or a series of kisses on the mouth. Finally, given that our focus is on uncovering the accomplishment of *reciprocation* during these moments, we have omitted cases of kissing which are rejected by one of the participants.

Most of the cases in our collection entail closed-lip kisses, although a few tongue-kisses are present. The continuity of the kissing trajectories is open; sometimes the trajectory is mutually closed after a few kisses and the participants then continue their daily activities, while at other times the kissing trajectory may evolve into a prolonged tactile moment. In our analysis, we explore, among other things, how the temporality of the trajectories is negotiated while emphasizing and securing the affective reciprocity. All kissing trajectories, including the spontaneous ones that are the focus of the current manuscript, rely on what we view as established bodily routines on how to touch and approach one's partner in, for instance, an affectionate manner. This is because they are performed by participants who are familiar with each other's bodies and habitualized movement trajectories, based upon their shared relationship history.

We chose the two cases for this study as they are representative of the affective reciprocation practices used by the participants in our collection to accomplish an extended kissing trajectory. We utilized Praat software to analyze some of the participants' verbal actions, and Photoshop was used to produce line drawings of the participants, who are identified by pseudonyms. The transcription conventions are presented in Appendix 1. Besides more traditional conventions (Jefferson, 2004) novel signs such as ♠⁴ to indicate a kiss and ♥ to refer to an affective tone of voice were used.

As a method, we apply an intercorporeal perspective (e.g., Katila and Raudaskoski, 2020; Meyer et al., 2017) to video analysis of the interactions, which draws especially from the phenomenological tradition. An intercorporeal perspective, taking inspiration from Merleau-Ponty's (1962) theory of human embodiment, acknowledges the felt and experienced aspect of human interaction (Meyer et al., 2017). Utilizing this framework enables us to make sense of the participants' kissing interaction to include both its communicative, and, importantly, experiential and 'felt' features.

While romantic—sexual kissing occurs in many cultures as a sign of affection or love, it is not even a near universal practice (Jankowiak et al., 2015). In the current context, we will uncover its occurrence in a specific sociocultural context—Finland—however, not all of our study participants are Finns (3 of the 10 participating couples are intercultural couples). Moreover, while we treat kissing trajectories as one important trajectory of love in the couple's lives, kissing is only one of the countless ways human beings can express love towards one another.

6. Findings: Responsiveness, co-embodied participation, and affective reciprocity during the trajectory of love

In the following analysis, we will uncover the emergence of extended kissing trajectories, and demonstrate that their situated emergence is closely linked to affective reciprocation by the participants. Specifically, we show in detail how this is achieved by participants' interactions. We find three common features prevalent throughout our collection of reciprocated kissing episodes: aligning responses, co-embodied participation, and affective reciprocation.

Aligning responses involve the recipient aligning with the action in terms of its communicative and affective potentials. Basically, an aligning response is designed to be an aligning movement that accepts a tactile act such as a kiss, stroke, or embrace. Aligning responses also involve verbal responses. As will be demonstrated, aligning responses within an extended trajectory of kissing can co-operatively (C. Goodwin, 2018) build on both participants' actions.

Co-embodied participation means that embodied trajectories—e.g., trajectories of love—are accomplished through the concerted body movements of the participants. Within the emergent trajectory, various touches and other embodied acts invite active participation and responses from the recipient. The recipient contributes to the emergent trajectory both by responding (e.g., aligning with touch), and, through this response, also suggests a new direction for the trajectory. Leading and following embodied actions can therefore merge with the emergent trajectory, and the role of who initiates the next action alternates. The trajectory is still continuously accomplished in through joint co-embodied participation.

Affective reciprocity indicates that the affective features in the extended kissing trajectory are significant in that the participants communicate similar emotions towards each other. As will be shown, extended kissing trajectories are characterized by reciprocal multisensorial intercorporeal acts that indicate similar affective expressions, or upgrade and intensify them. For instance, indicating a mutual willingness to kiss can be achieved by smiling before a kiss, waiting for a kiss, stroking with an 'expectant' expression and a desire to kiss, enjoying the kiss, and other intimate embodied acts. Affective reciprocity implies a display of a similar emotion or an emotion with intensified (but similar) valence. It is embedded in aligning responses and acts of co-embodied participation.

Specifically, our detailed analysis of reciprocated trajectories of love in romantic couples shows that i) the trajectories emerge gradually, starting from initial actions that established physical proximity and the relevance of affect; ii) the reciprocated kissing trajectories emerge through close co-ordination between the participants and this co-ordination involves both responsive alignment and co-embodied participation with each other's tactile actions and affective expressions; iii) the extended form of the trajectory is closely linked and occasioned by the participants' affective attunement to and reciprocation of each other's (intimate) affect; and finally, iv) the multisensorial acts in the trajectory both respond to and project affection.

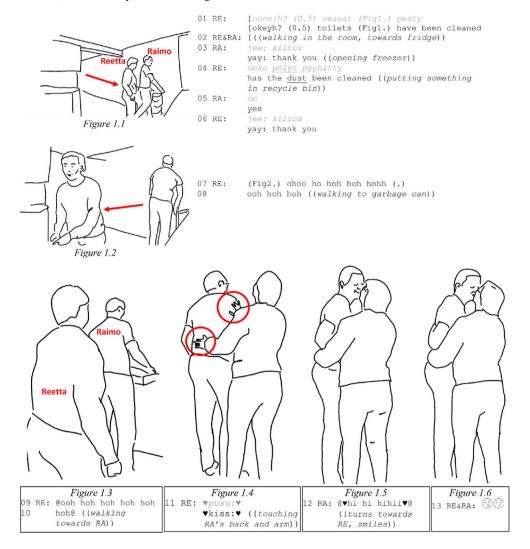
⁴ Original image credit: OpenMoji project. Permission: Free for personal, educational, or commercial use. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 License. Available at https://www.supercoloring.com/coloring-pages/kissing-face-with-closed-eyes-emoji-1.

6.1. Display of enjoyment as an essential aspect of affective reciprocation

In Extract 1, we show an example of an interactional path leading to the establishment of affective reciprocity through aligning affective expressions. Importantly, we illustrate how simply agreeing to kiss is not enough, but participants also perform affective engagement throughout the kissing trajectory: they display a willingness and eagerness to kiss, show enjoyment when it happens, and manifest collaboration when withdrawing from the kiss.

As Extract 1 begins, we enter the life of a heterosexual couple who is married with one child and have been together for around 15 years by the time of the recording. It is the beginning of a Friday evening, and the participants have just finished their weekly cleaning when they arrive together to the kitchen (Figure 1.1). Pizza has been delivered, and as the participants are transitioning into 'leisure mode' the female participant, whom we will call "Reetta" (RE), approaches her husband "Raimo" (RA) and embraces him. Following this, an extended kissing trajectory evolves.

Extract 1, Part 1: Reciprocation during the initiation to kiss



Before they even physically approach one other, the participants affectively reciprocate each other's body movements. This can be observed in the ways in which they build on each other's actions and affective expressions (Goodwin et al., 2012); both verbally and vocally.

As Reetta makes an announcement that she has cleaned the toilets (line 01)—a task that was assigned to her—Raimo not only acknowledges Reetta's announcement but also responds to it in an affective, playful manner, with a markedly high-pitched celebration and appreciation (yay: thank you? line 03; Image 1). Reetta then asks if Raimo has finished the task that was assigned to him—whether he has dusted (line 04). As Raimo confirms that he has finished his weekly cleaning (line 05), Reetta resonates with Raimo's previous celebratory and appreciative response ('yay thank you') by repeating it with a

similar playful keying. She recycles the pitch height, intonation contour (from high pitched "yay" to lower pitch on "kiitos"/ "thank you") (lines 03 and 06, Images 1 and 2). Thus, the participants' utterances resonate in both lexical format and affect. The mutual affectionate exchange here involves everyday cross-turn poetics (Jefferson, 1996).

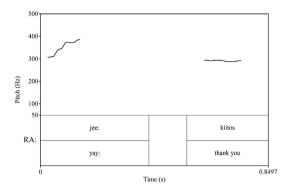


Image 1. Raimo line 03: Maximum pitch in "yay" 386 Hz, drops to 294 Hz in "thank you".

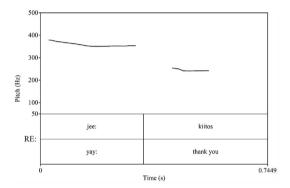


Image 2. Reetta line 06: Maximum pitch in "yay" 379 Hz, drops to 243 Hz in "thank you".

Through the affective reciprocity nascent in these matching acknowledgements, Reetta and Raimo create a shared positive mood and demonstrate appreciative emotions towards each other. This positive and playful coloring of social interaction is sustained by Reetta, who, while putting something in the kitchen cabinet (Figure 1.2), vocalizes laughing sounds in a non-serious or 'goofy' tone of voice ("ohoo ho hoh hoh hohh (.) ooh hoh hoh", lines 07–08, Figure 1.2). Reetta continues her vocal play (lines 09–10) when she walks towards Raimo, who is currently occupied with the pizzas (Figure 1.3).

It is in this positive, co-operatively established and sustained playful affective atmosphere that an extended kissing trajectory is initiated and gradually emerges. When Reetta is close to Raimo, she touches Raimo's lower back and shoulder, looking up at him (Figure 1.4). At the same time, she directs him to kiss her in an affectionate tone of voice (line 11). These touches, together with her verbal request, solve the practical problem of how to get her partner into a kissable formation and how to initiate a kiss. Reetta stays in this position, awaiting a response (to be kissed) (Figure 1.4).

Immediately complying with Reetta's directive, Raimo turns his body toward Reetta, approaching her for a kiss. Notably, through his body Raimo is not just showing that he agrees to the kiss. He is also reciprocating the emotion embedded in Reetta's request to kiss. Raimo's body posture and facial expression embody and project his willingness and eagerness to kiss his partner: when he gazes at Reetta, joy can be captured in his facial expression (Figure 1.5). Moreover, as he moves towards his wife, he makes laughing vocalizations ("hi hi hih hii", line 12) that resonate with the form, affective tone, and rhythm of Reetta's previous vocalizations (cf. "hoh hoh hoh hoh hoh", lines 09–10). The evolving kissing trajectory indicates the partners' intimate expressions, which are both responsive to the previously expressed affect and project their own affective enjoyment of the impending kiss.

When the first kiss begins (Figure 1.6), Raimo (and most likely Reetta, but we cannot see her eyes) closes his eyes, wearing an experiencing face—a facial expression indicating enjoyment oriented toward the touch (see Katila, in press). During the two first short kisses (Figure 1.6, line 13), Reetta embodies the posture of being kissed. Thus, the action of kissing is accomplished through *co-embodied participation*, as the bodies together form and sustain the collaborative posture and acts of giving and receiving a kiss.

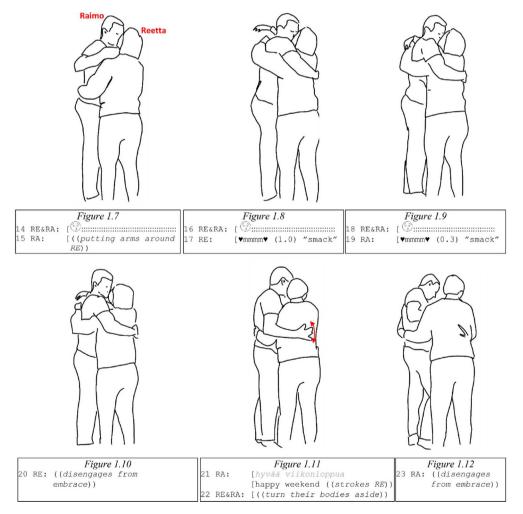
Extract 1, Part 1, shows that the participants were already engaged in affective reciprocity before the kissing trajectory was initiated. Reetta's initiation of a kiss did not occur *ex vacuo*; rather, an affordable context for kissing had been established through the participants' previous actions, which were in affective sync. Moreover, Raimo did not simply passively agree to kiss Reetta. Rather, his approach (and kissing) resonated with and sustained the intimate non-serious affective tenor of the encounter: he recycled with transformation (C. Goodwin, 2018) the affective vocalizations, and via his eager smiling face showed his willingness to initiate a kiss. Affective reciprocity in a kissing trajectory involves multisensorial acts that demonstrate the participant's enjoyment and willingness to engage in the kiss.

After the two short kisses, the kissing trajectory could potentially end, given that the request to kiss has been fulfilled (Figure 1.6). However, we find in our collection that the initial short kiss(es) can evolve into an extended trajectory of love. The established kissing formations take various forms and durations, they involve various bodily acts (kisses, strokes), and they can be relationship-specific: couples often establish their distinct repertoires and trajectories of love.

We argue that the ability to extend the kissing trajectory without friction is a result of carefully coordinated affective reciprocation that evolves incrementally and requires that participants relate their bodily movements and verbal acts to each other. Importantly, the extended kissing trajectories are dependent on the participants' reciprocated expressions of enjoyment, which are both displayed concurrently and projected, making a response relevant.

In the following (Extract 1, Part 2) we will demonstrate how a verbal request to kiss, as documented in Extract 1, Part 1, evolves into an extended trajectory of love and shows how the participants coordinate their actions to initiate, project, and confirm their affective involvement.

Extract 1 Part 2: Achieving reciprocation during the kissing and upon withdrawing from it



After the first two short kisses (Figure 1.6, line 13), the participants sustain their lip contact and intensify their tactile intertwining. While Reetta verbally requested the first kiss (line 11), it is Raimo who makes the next move to extend its duration and upgrade it intensity: in Figure 1.7, he puts his arms around Reetta in a full-body embrace. By doing so, he

terminates the action of preparing pizzas and shows that he prioritizes kissing as his main engagement. Notably, the intensification of the tactile huddle is achieved collaboratively. Reetta immediately reciprocates the embracing movements of Raimo by putting her arms around his upper body (Figure 1.7). Both partners embrace each other tightly as their lips touch in a temporally-extended kiss (Figure 1.7; Line 16).

Affective reciprocity is achieved through the intensity of embrace: both Reetta and Raimo are reaching toward and squeezing each other. The embrace and kiss are embellished with Reetta's creaky-voiced vocalization "♥ mmmm ♥" (line 17, Figure 1.8, Image 3) which lasts approximately 0.8 s and is followed by a smacking kiss sound. Supporting the findings of previous research, intimate tactile moments are often voiced with creaky-voiced murmurings (Goodwin and Cekaite, 2018; Katila, in press). Immediately afterward (on line 18), the participants engage in another long kiss, during which Raimo, now in his turn, produces a similar vocalization of affect; "♥ mmmm ♥", followed by a smacking sound (line 19, Figure 1.9, Image 4). The tactile and gustatory experience provided by the lip contact is therefore made public through the "mmmm" sounds. We suggest that these combinations of the sound of enjoyment and the kissing with a smack sound could be called kissing melodies, as they bring forth the musical and rhythmic aspect of human interaction (Goodwin and Cekaite, 2018: 128−9). The participants simultaneously sense their own and their partner's enjoyment through intimate intercorporeality (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, 1964b: 168), mediated through multiple senses.

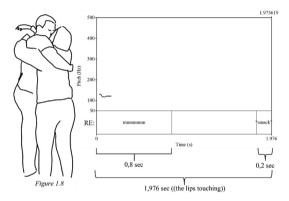


Image 3. Line 17 in Praat.

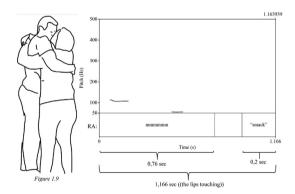
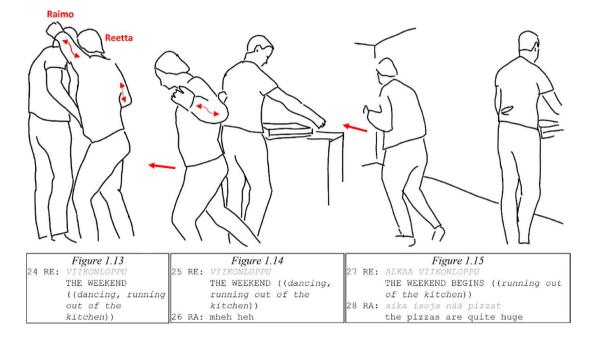


Image 4. Line 19 in Praat.

After these two long kisses, accomplished as reciprocated kissing melodies (lines 17 and 19, Figures 1.8–1.9), the trajectory of love seems to have reached its *affective peak* (Knudsen and Stage, 2015: 8–9), and the participants can either further extend the kissing trajectory or withdraw from it. These moments of potential withdrawal from the kiss are critical for maintaining affective reciprocity, as one does not want to appear unappreciative of the intimate tactile moment. As a result, disengaging from kissing requires fine-grained interactional work, so that the disengagement is made to seem collaborative.

In Extract 1 Part 2, Reetta and Raimo accomplish a collaborative withdrawal from the kissing by building on each other's incipient movement trajectories and disengaging from each other step-by-step. Reetta makes the first step towards withdrawing by releasing her body slightly from the hug but still sustaining the tactile contact and embodied attention towards her partner (Figure 1.10). Then they both, still holding each other, turn their bodies in concert toward the side (Figure 1.11). At the same time, Raimo strokes Reetta's back a couple of times (Figure 1.11) and simultaneously wishes her a happy weekend (line 21). Through these tactile and verbal actions, Raimo is affectively flavoring the departure from the kissing with a cheerful tone and making it a transition into the weekend. Raimo then releases himself from the tactile arrangement and turns back to the pizza boxes (Figure 1.12) while Reetta concurrently embodiedly aligns by exiting the hug. Finally, Reetta continues reciprocating Raimo's weekend wishes by running out of the room in a markedly goofy manner, dancing and singing "THE WEEKEND THE WEEKEND BEGINS" (lines 24–25, 27, Figures 1.13–1.15), thus affectively marking a juncture and transition into the flow of mundane family activities.

Extract 1 Part 3: Collaborative withdrawing from the kissing



The analysis of Extract 1 shows that trajectories of love entail a complex intertwining of simultaneous and turn-by-turn—based multisensorial acts. We find that a crucial feature of a kissing trajectory is that its participants simultaneously enact enjoyment in a publicly available manner. During kissing it is not only the person who is being kissed, but also the one who is kissing, who communicates that what is happening is pleasurable. There seems to be a dynamically-unfolding equilibrium accomplished by both parties in giving and receiving hedonistic acts. Importantly, witnessing the other person's pleasure is as pleasurable as feeling pleasure oneself. This mutually-experienced and displayed enjoyment demonstrates a 'give and take' order of intimacy and affection in the everyday life of romantic couples.

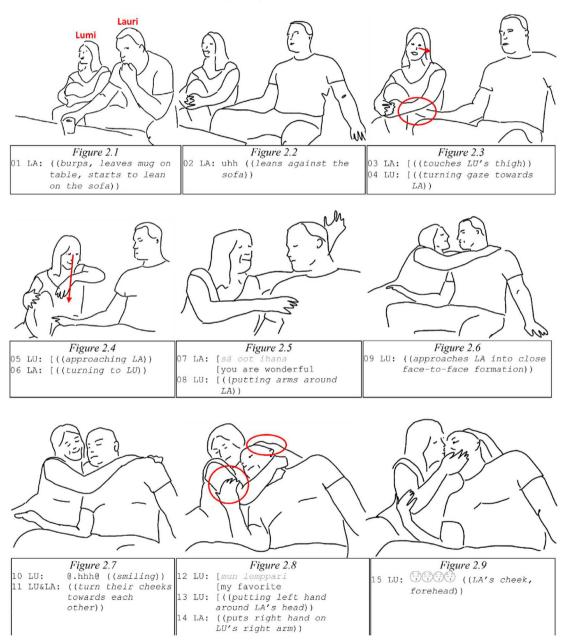
The emerging affective we-relationship is at the center of the encounter. The subtle ways of orienting toward one another appear to be embedded in affectionate, loving tones. This is observable in the way in which the participants carefully orient toward each other's affective invitations, such as through an invitation to show gratitude, to be playful, to hug and to kiss, and through doing this with a delight witnessable through expressed enthusiasm.

6.2. Affective reciprocity as a gradual intertwining of bodies

In Extract 2, we will demonstrate the emergence of affective reciprocity in a kissing trajectory that evolves during a different type of situation and body formation. The participants are reclining on the sofa, watching TV on a regular weeknight; they have just finished eating and are about go to sleep. Therefore, both the positioning and affective mood of the participants

is different from Extract 1. The participants are already sitting next to each other, their bodies are lightly touching, and as it is late at night, the participants are getting tired. The participants, whom we call "Lumi" and "Lauri", are an intercultural heterosexual couple who have been together for one year. We will illustrate how the gradual intimate body-to-body engagement between Lumi (the female participant) and Lauri (the male participant) evolves from gentle caressing into kissing through subtle acts of affective reciprocity. This mundane positioning of bodies in a side-by-side body formation makes approaching one another easily accessible and affords a prolonged intimate trajectory of love involving kissing and caressing.

Extract 2 Part 1: Initiation of an intimate trajectory of love



After he finished eating, Lauri releases his body on the sofa (line 01, Figure 2.2) with a vocal expression of tiredness ("uhh", line 02). He also puts his hand on Lumi's thigh (Figure 2.3). With his gaze and body still pointing towards the TV show, Lauri shows that he still treats the lingering tactile engagement with Lumi as 'subordinate' (Goffman, 1963: 44). However, Lumi immediately orients to Lauri's touch and treats it as affectively and interactionally meaningful by suspending her TV watching and initiating an intimate intertwining. Lumi looks briefly at her partner's touching hand (Figure 2.4), repositions her body to face her partner, and 'upgrades' Lauri's initial touch by reaching towards him with extended arms (Figures 2.4–6).

For the accomplishment of the embracing formation, Lumi's embodied acts require Lauri's aligning body movements: to borrow Merleau-Ponty's (1962: 185) words, Lumi's emerging intention to embrace is "inhabited by" Lauri's body. Immediately orienting toward Lumi's progressing movement and impending affective intertwining, Lauri reorients his gaze and body posture from watching TV to Lumi (Figure 2.5). Moreover, he then initiates a new layer in the intimate trajectory and issues a verbal compliment: "you're wonderful" (line 07), which intensifies the affectionate tenor of the situation. When Lumi puts her arms around Lauri, embracing him (Figure 2.6), she also responds to Lauri's compliment by signaling her appreciation: she deepens her smile making a low @.hhh@ sound (line 10, Figure 2.7). Simultaneously, as she is fully embracing her partner, she lightly moves his head towards her neck. This tactile and interkinesthetic request is accepted by Lauri, who surrenders to the ongoing movement trajectory (Figure 2.8). As demonstrated by Goodwin and Cekaite (2018: 140), an aligning response to a hug can involve a simple acceptance of a so-called 'passive' bodily response; i.e., a non-rejection of touch.

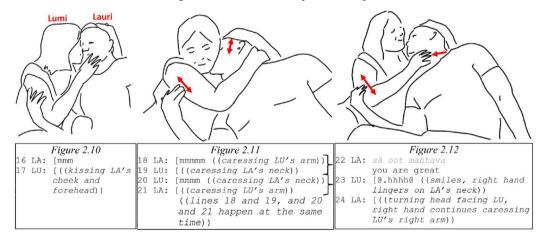
As the couple has collaboratively engaged into a close tactile intertwining, both Lumi and Lauri boost their affective acts. Almost synchronous with each other, Lumi stokes Lauri's head, and Lauri strokes Lumi's right arm (Figure 2.8). At the same time Lumi is complimenting her partner with a verbal endearment—"my favorite"—while smiling (line 12). Lauri responds by aligning with the touch: he leans towards Lumi's body and accepts the role of being caressed—and of being "her favorite" (Figure 2.8).

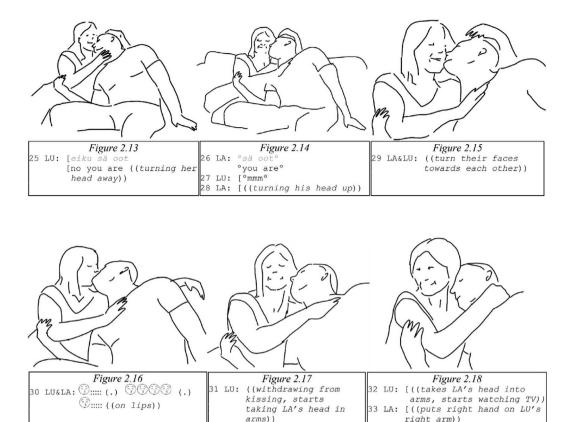
The participants' affective reciprocation is manifested through co-embodied participation—caressing is possible when the recipient of the caress accepts the touch, takes on the embodied position of the one being caressed, and allows one's body to be enveloped into the other person's arms. Lauri places his head on the top of Lumi's right shoulder (Figure 2.8), while Lumi is holding both her hands in an extended caress that envelops Lauri's head.

Next, in Figure 2.9, the intimate tactile trajectory finally evolves into kissing when Lumi moves her partner's head so that they establish a convenient formation for kissing. Lauri, throughout this extended tactile episode, allows his head to be moved by his partner. She then plants four brief kisses on Lauri's cheeks and forehead (line 15).

Following (Figures 2.10–2.18) the intimate kissing trajectory between Lumi and Lauri continues and its progress is achieved incrementally. It involves various acts: kisses, strokes, sustained skin-to-skin bodily formations of intimacy, endearments, positive assessments, vocalizations of pleasurable experiences, smiles and laughter, and facial expressions of enjoyment. Together they serve as bi-directional experiential acts that both provide enjoyment and pleasure and display the participants' own hedonistic experiences to their partner. One participant's feeling body is inhabited by that of the other, and vice versa, allowing for the emergence of the mutually experienced co-existence (see Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 357) that is characteristic of mutual love.

Extract 2 Part 2: The Intertwining of an initiative and responsive body





Lumi continues her affectionate, but also controlling tactile actions of holding her arms around Lauri's head and lightly pulling it toward her face for a kiss (Figure 2.10). The participants' tactile and vocal actions are closely intertwined; while Lumi kisses Lauri, Lauri simultaneously expresses his enjoyment by closing his eyes and muttering a silent "mmm" (line 16). The kissing melody here is produced so that the one doing the kissing (Lumi) makes the kissing sound, while the recipient of the kiss (Lauri) creates the simultaneous sound of enjoyment. Lumi then moves Lauri's head to her neck (Figure 2.11) and Lauri makes another sound of enjoyment ("mmmmm", line 18). As a response, Lumi strokes gently Lauri's neck (Figure 2.11) and in her turn vocalizes "mmmm" (line 20) to reciprocate the enjoyment and demonstrate that she enjoys touching her partner. Through these actions the intimate touch trajectory is progressively extended by both partners, whose tactile and other intimate acts create an affective co-experiential ground that both confirms and projects affective reciprocity.

The participants then rearrange their bodies in a facing formation while still touching and caressing each other (Figure 2.12). Meanwhile, a distinct form of affective reciprocation continues in a cycle of compliments. Lauri first utters "you are great" (line 22) which Lumi appreciates with a subtle vocalization "@.hhhh@" produced with a smiling face and tone of voice (line 23, Figure 2.12). Lumi, in response, turns towards Lauri (Figure 2.13) and issues a gently playful "disagreement" with Lauri ("no, you are", line 25). Lightly pushing his head against Lumi, Lauri in response voices yet another "counterargument" ("you are", line 26) that is received by Lumi with a silent "mmm" (line 27). Nascent in this playful argument is the practical difficulty of avoiding the straight-on acceptance of a compliment (as it implies a risk of appearing to praise oneself, see Pomerantz, 1978), while still appearing appreciative of the complement and affectively reciprocating it.

After a cycle of compliments, Lauri turns his face towards Lumi and positions it so that he is now available for a kiss (Figure 2.15). As a result, Lumi and Lauri kiss each other on the lips six times: the first one a longer kiss, then four fast kisses happening in a "kissing chain", before one additional longer kiss (line 30). Again, the romantic partners produce a unique kissing melody which can be seen to intensify the tactile intimacy and achieve an affective peak in the emerging kissing trajectory (Figure 2.16 and line 30, cf. Extract 1, Part 2). Lumi withdraws from kissing but turns her gaze towards her partner, and appreciation and enjoyment are markedly observable in each partners' face (Figure 2.17, line 31). Lauri aligns with withdrawing from the kiss but sustains his head's close positioning toward Lumi's neck. Lauri thus sustains the position of being caressed, reciprocating affectively through his appreciation with his eyes closed (Figure 2.18, lines 32–33).

Extract 2 illustrates the delicate unfolding of affective reciprocity through the trajectory of love. Similar to a couple's dance, the moves in the trajectory involved the acts of leading and following: the participants' kinesthetic, tactile, and affective bodies were co-embodied. Touch was attended to by verbal or vocal actions and vice versa, leading and

responding with incrementally-evolving trajectories of love. Mediated through feeling bodies, these moments could be interpreted to illustrate the notion of love developed by Merleau-Ponty (1962). The emerging affective reciprocity entailed egalitarian displays of involvement amid hedonistic immersion in the intimate encounter. The mellow tone and slow tempo obvious in Extract 2 demonstrates that affective reciprocation can entail multifaceted affective accents specific to the couple and the interactional situation (cf. The excited playful atmosphere in Extract 1 and the tired mellow atmosphere in Extract 2). The expression and reciprocation of love occurs during these ordinary, spontaneous, and emergent moments in the romantic couples' lives.

7. Concluding discussion

In this study we demonstrated that affective reciprocation during kissing was accomplished through participants' aligning responses, forms of co-embodied participation, and affective reciprocity throughout the trajectory.

Kissing trajectories emerged gradually via participants' carefully coordinated aligning responses which co-operatively built on each other (C. Goodwin, 2018). The embodied and verbal behaviour unfolded as co-embodied actions, or ways in which the individual movement trajectories of the participants emerged as a single trajectory. Throughout the trajectory of love, we found that an essential aspect was the establishment of mutual and congruent affect toward the ongoing action. For instance, the initiation of a kiss was responded to with enthusiasm, enjoyment expressed via vocalized kissing or kissing melodies was reciprocated, and withdrawing from the kissing trajectory was collaboratively accomplished on a happy note. Alignment, co-embodied participation, and affective reciprocity emerged through careful multimodal and sensorial coordination or moment-by-moment body movements that both responded to previous acts and projected the future of the affective trajectory. These little acts of love that secured the affective reciprocity between the participants rely on both routine and knowledge of the other person's body (established through a shared history), yet they are spontaneously created in a novel manner in situ. These sensual routines allow for the simultaneous expression and feeling of love through the moment-by-moment unfolding of an affective relationship in couples' mundane lives.

The results of our close interactional analysis contribute to existing literature on kissing in romantic relationships in multiple ways. By uncovering how kissing emerges in naturally occurring interactions in the intimate, private settings of romantic couples, our study adds observational and interactional knowledge to the ample self-reported or experimental studies that have suggested that kissing is important for romantic relationships but have not explored *how* this is so. Given the fine-tuned, simultaneous, and micro-sequential embodied coordination we find during moments of kissing, we suggest that besides the role played by attachment styles and other factors (Chopik et al., 2014; Debrot et al., 2021), interactional participation—and importantly, affective reciprocity—play a key role whether and how kissing is accomplished and enjoyed.

In addition, our study contributes to interactional research on intimate touch, such as a kissing round (Kendon, 1975/1981) and kissing trajectories (Mondada et al., 2020). Notably, our findings support previous research on intimate intertwinings involving hugs and kisses among children and parents, which has demonstrated that choreographies resulting in kissing appear to be inextricably multisensorial (M.H. Goodwin, 2017; Goodwin and Cekaite, 2018). Moreover, our study unearths that among romantic partners, intimate haptic intertwinings can involve expressions of pleasure, and these experiential, pleasurable aspects of co-presence can be made available for the co-participant through "mmm" sounds (ibid.).

Our study also deployed Merleau-Ponty's theories and conceptualization of intercorporeality and love in the analysis of the empirical episodes from situated dialogic interactions. As demonstrated in Extracts 1 and 2, the concept of intercorporeality can be used productively to describe the ways in which close affective attunement is manifested and made meaningful throughout a kissing trajectory. Intercorporeality describes the mutual embeddedness of the participants' actions and bodies. We suggest that during the specific trajectories of love, intercorporeality was incarnated in ways in which the participants' actions were enmeshed and their bodies momentarily emerged as if one. For instance, kissing was inhabited by an ecology of sensorial actions from both parties, such as a kissing sound from one partner, and a sound of enjoyment from the other, while both participants were continuously touching and being touched on various parts of their bodies. During such moments of tactile togetherness, what could be seen as a 'passive' body positioned to receive and accept the acts of love could contribute to the initiation of such acts (e.g., arranging one's body in a kissable formation invited a kissing response). Moreover, enjoying the kiss was intertwined with kissing and engendering pleasure.

We argue that these closely-linked multisensorial actions can be interpreted with the help of Merleau-Ponty's ideas of love as an affective we-relationship that becomes salient through acts of love which, when reciprocated, are experienced by both parties at the same time. During affective—tactile moments such as those described in this study, each participant feels not only the pleasure of touching the other, but also the pleasure of the other touching their body. It is the simultaneity of these sensations—feeling and being felt—that provides a basis for experiential accountability or affective reciprocity. In other words, establishing the affective we-relationship through affective reciprocity seems to—importantly—also involve accountability in making one's affective experiences available to the other person. Specifically, our analysis illustrated the mundane nature of love: it could occur in reciprocated expressions of gratitude, as in a case when the partner had done their share in the weekly housecleaning (Extract 1); or in tired kissing and touching moments while watching a TV show together (Extract 2). By no means is love communicated and experienced through the acts of kissing and touch alone, even if these tactile actions can be of particular importance in the trajectories of love.

Our detailed analysis of naturally occurring kissing trajectories uncovers how loving forms of intercorporeality unfolded moment-by-moment as affective reciprocity. Unlike intercorporeal experiences in a more general sense, we propose that affective reciprocity can be recognized—both by the participants themselves as well as by the analysts—in mutually expressed and experienced emotions nascent in affective gestures.

Finally, based on our analysis, we suggest that affective reciprocity is at the heart of maintaining intimacy in affective—corporeal social relationships entailing affectionate, romantic, and sexual aspects between participants. As an incarnation of haptic sociality, tactile actions are essential mediums for the establishment of an affective we-relationship. However, our analysis shows that touch is but one—albeit significant—modality in multisensorial trajectories of love.

Funding information

This study was supported by Emil Aaltonen Foundation Post Doc grant "When love is not enough: Touch and affective practices as resources for a successful romantic relationship". We also want to thank Linköping University, Child Studies Department for providing a funding to use an artist to draw pictures, and a proofreader to spell and grammar check the manuscript.

Declaration of competing interest

Nothing to declare.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

Acknowledgements

We want to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments to the earlier version of this manuscript, Elise Rehula for drawing the pictures to the transcripts and Matt Burdelski for proofreading.

APPENDIX 1. The transcription conventions used in the conversations

- (1.5) indicates a time gap in tenths of a second.
- (.) indicates a micropause of less than two-tenths of a second.
- indicates a contiguity between utterances.
- () an unclear utterance or another sound.
- : indicate a stretching of a sound.
- . indicates a falling tone.
 . indicates a continuing tone.
- ? indicates a rising pitch across a word.
- indicates a fishig pitch across a word.
- Under indicates the speaker's emphasis.
- CAPITAL indicates the speaker's extreme emphasis.

 @ @ indicates speech produced with a smiley voice.
- (()) indicates the analyst's comment.
- ♥ indicates affectionate, partner-targeted voice
- indicates a single kiss

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Julia Katila is a postdoctoral researcher from the Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University. Julia's research includes the study of affect, touch, and other forms of intercorporeal sociality in naturally occurring interactions. Her current research considers touch and affective practices among romantic couples and embodied interaction in various health care settings. Julia's dissertation (published in 2018) is entitled Tactile Intercorporeality in a Group of Mothers and Their Children: A micro study of practices for intimacy and participation.

Asta Cekaite is a Professor in Child Studies, Thematic Research Unit, Linköping University, Sweden. Her research involves an interdisciplinary approach to language, culture, and social interaction. Specific foci include social perspectives on bilingualism, embodiment, touch, emotion, and moral socialization. Empirical fields cover adult-child and children's peer group interactions in educational settings, and family in various cultural contexts. With M. Goodwin she has co-authored Embodied family choreography: Practices of control, care and mundane creativity (Routledge, 2018). She has co-edited (with L. Mondada) Touch in social interaction: Touch, language and body (Routledge, 2021).