CONSIDERATIONS TOWARDS A
PHENOMENOLOGY OF TRUST

Fiona Utley (University of New England, Australia)

Merleau-Ponty identifies an intertwined affective state of anxiety and courage, claiming that these are one and the same thing, as a fundamental characteristic of human existence. I argue that trust, understood as phenomenologically basic, is the unity, or the something beyond, the singularly conceived states of anxiety and courage, and that trust itself cannot be conceived apart from these states. Merleau-Ponty says little, directly, about trust in his work, yet his focus on the fundamental precariousness of existence demands such an exploration. I explore how our ordinary day-to-day experience of existence is related to an intertwined affective state of anxiety and courage and how trust is operative in affective depth, in order to understand how it is we come to speak of trust not only in terms of proximity and distance, emotional depth and extension across time, but most markedly, in terms of how we see someone and what it is like to be in relation to them.

In a series of radio lectures from 1948, Merleau-Ponty identifies a fundamental characteristic of human existence as an intertwined affective state of anxiety and courage. He says:

[the human species]...charged as it is with a task that will never and can never be completed, and at which it has not necessarily been called to succeed, even in relative terms, should find this situation both cause for anxiety and a spur to courage. In fact, these are one and the same thing.1

This task is to strive for coherence, a coherence that will never be attained, but remains as an “idea” or “limit.” (WP, 72) That this task is a “cause for anxiety and a spur to courage” refers to our experience of what it is like to be in this fundamental situation, that is, it refers to this situation as it is lived. Such a reference establishes

1 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The World of Perception, (tr) O. Davis (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 88. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as WP.
existence as experiential and acknowledges that our experiences have a subjective character and that this character is experienced in the first-person mode of givenness. Since the experience of *what it is like* in question here is a *fundamental* characteristic of human existence, it requires that we consider this experiential dimension in its relation to the lived body, that is, as subjective and also as the ground for this subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty argues that if we are to see how a thing or a being begins to exist for us, we must look to affective states, such as desire or love, that exist with “significance and reality only for us.” This existence for us suggests the presence of a self in such affective states. The subjective character of our experiences, as the phenomenal quality of “what it is like” to have those experiences, suggests that there exists a minimal or core self who is conscious of such experience. (SS, 106)

Examining this affective dimension of existence, Merleau-Ponty claims, will also allow us to “understand better how things and beings can exist in general.” (PP, 154) If we are to understand this intertwined affective state both as fundamental and as “the birth of being for us” (PP, 154), it needs to be situated in the moment of instituting the self, that is, in the moment in which subjectivity has “upon itself and upon the world only a precarious hold.” (PP, 404) Such a subjectivity may not even be considered to be a minimal or core self, as it is both Being-for-itself and coming into Being-for-itself. The operation of the fundamental affective state of anxiety and courage, which consists in presenting the world as it is for us, appears to happen in the moment in which personal existence is instituted, so that this fundamental affective state is the ground, intertwined with our fundamental corporeality, for our subjectivity. The world that is significant, therefore, is, at this point, both world and

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2 Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 115–32. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as SS.


4 I refer here to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of institution as it is explored in his Institution and Passivity Course Notes. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity: Course Notes from the College de France (1954-1955)*, (tr.) L. Lawlor and H. Massey (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2010). While Merleau-Ponty himself uses the term constitution throughout the *Phenomenology of Perception*, he also later contrasts institution to the Kantian sense of a constituting consciousness and says that “[t]o constitute...is nearly the opposite of to institute: the instituted makes sense without me, the constituted makes sense only for me and for the ‘me’ of this instant.” (8)
the possibility of a world for a subject. Personal existence is thus intermittent (PP, 84), and the experience of striving for a coherence that will never be attained is an experience of indeterminacy as an indispensable feature of human experience. Lived experience remains, “in principle,” precarious, thus always open ended and ambiguous. (WP, 87) This indeterminacy, this openness to the future and the meaning it will bring to the present, places us in a fundamental situation where trust is a quality of this experience rather than a chosen contingency.

The notion of ambiguity has been taken to characterize Merleau-Ponty’s early philosophy.5 While Merleau-Ponty does variously claim that “a genius for ambiguity ... might serve to define man” (PP, 189), or that “ambiguity is of the essence of human existence, and everything we live or think has always several meanings” (PP, 169), this notion is also linked to the precariousness of existence. While the focus on ambiguity emphasizes the way in which human existence is open to multiple interpretations, and, thus, the task of finding a coherence that can never be attained, the notion of a precarious existence turns our attention to indeterminacy as corporeally lived. In this paper I will emphasize the notion of a precarious existence. Merleau-Ponty uses the term precarious only a handful of times, yet in these mentions he sketches out the direct relationship between precarious existence and ambiguity, and also extent and range of this relationship. For Merleau-Ponty existence is thus precarious in multiple directions: my contact with myself is always mediated by intertwined relationships with nature and culture, by the intertwinnings of the biological and personal (PP, 84), of pre-reflective bodily intentions and reflective conscious intentions (PP, 404), and of my subjective and intersubjective (WP, 87), and, thus, by the intertwinnings of the corporeal and intercorporeal dimensions of existence.

Merleau-Ponty does not directly address, in the radio lectures or elsewhere, what he means by this intertwined affective state that can be experienced as both anxiety and courage. It is presented to us as a state in which these parts are, at the same time, one and the same thing. In positing such a state, Merleau-Ponty introduces the idea of a relationship of divergence that is present in our fundamental affective experience. As two sides or parts of the same thing, anxiety and courage need to be considered to exist as “differences, extreme

5 This is however an identification that he “did not readily endorse...as a title for his entire philosophy up to 1951.” See Stephen Priest, Merleau-Ponty (London: Routledge, 1998), 4.
divergencies of one same something.”⁶ This intertwining then is more than a mere mixture of two affective states; it should, rather, be conceived as something beyond but simultaneous with these singularly conceived affective states, and yet as being able to be known as two states.⁷

In this paper I explore the unity of this intertwined affective state through the notion of trust as phenomenologically basic. I claim that trust is the unity, the something beyond, the singularly conceived affective states of anxiety and courage, and that trust itself cannot be conceived apart from these two states. Merleau-Ponty says little, directly, about trust in his work, yet his focus on the fundamental precariousness of existence demands such an exploration. It is quite clear for Merleau-Ponty that we give ourselves over to the risk of existence—we are never in full possession of life, nor are we entirely estranged from it—thus making trust central to existence. I suggest that we can think of this intertwined affective state as being the phenomenological ground of trust.

That the states of anxiety and courage are “one and the same thing” suggests, in Merleau-Ponty’s terms, a chiasmic relationship. As chiasmic, this fundamental affective state can be thought of as having two aspects that cannot be properly understood except in relation to each other. As one and the same thing they have a unity, but as the two sides of this one thing they are different from each other. In The Visible and the Invisible, describing the relationship between mind and body, and between body and world, Merleau-Ponty uses terms such as being “doubled,” “overflowing” into the other, “encroaching” upon the other, “hidden” in the other—a relationship of “transgression” or of “overlapping,” where one part “needs” the other, “terminates” in the other and is “anchored” in the other, and where there exists a “chiasm” between them. (VI, 248, 259) Importantly, the structure of the intertwined affective state of anxiety and courage reflects the structure of the lived body as a field of difference, through which other dimensions can be instituted. Merleau-Ponty says: “My body is to the greatest extent what every thing is: a dimensional this.... But, while the things become dimensions only insofar as they are received in a field, my body is the field itself.” (VI, 260)

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⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, (tr.) A. Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 84. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as VI.

Trust, as phenomenologically basic, I argue, can be understood as the state experienced when a certain equilibrium is achieved, where anxiety and courage exist in a balance that does not cancel either state out. In this balance, we get on with life, and this phenomenological ground of trust hides its operation from view. This balance can be experienced in different ways. The two states can encroach on, overflow into, or be anchored into, each other, where what we experience as the balance between anxiety and trust accords with our broader beliefs, desires, and expectations about lived existence. Trust as phenomenologically basic can also come into view in our experience of these states pulling apart, or standing in radical divergence, so that, at any moment, one of the two faces is more present to us; we then feel anxious, our courage is demanded when we feel least courageous, or we are propelled towards courageous transformation when what we have known in our world vanishes. As fundamental and as the ground for subjectivity, phenomenologically basic trust propels us into the world despite its inherent risks and our vulnerability.

If, as Merleau-Ponty claims, anxiety and courage are a fundamental intertwined affective state, and given that affective states are corporeal states, then our precariousness is felt and known in our corporeal existence. Yet, despite this precariousness of lived existence, we do not typically falter; we get on as if it were the most natural thing for us, and this naturalness can also have the quality of confidence, optimism, and generosity. That is, we don’t always live with the explicit consciousness of the feelings of anxiety and courage. Hence, we need to ask: How can our ordinary day-to-day experience of existence be related to a fundamental precariousness, an intertwined state of anxiety and courage as fundamentally constitutive? This is the first question that this paper will address.

A lot of studies have looked at breaches of trust in order to explore the way in which trust is operative but little attention has been given to cases where, rather than the breach having a negative character, it is experienced as enhancing trust, as amplifying it so as to make lived experience feel natural, optimistic, and generous. While love is not coincident with trust, I believe that the case of falling in love provides another example of a breach, and equally brings the role of trust into view. Falling in love forms the frame for the second part of this paper. In it, I explore the structures of perception with a particular focus on the dimension of depth as affective depth. I will argue that phenomenological trust as the ground for ordinary day-to-day trust is operative in affective depth, which is indeed the most existential dimension. Thus we come to speak of
trust not only in terms of proximity and distance, emotional depth and extension across time, but, most markedly, in terms of how we see someone and what it is like to be in relation to him or her.

The Special Feel of Trust: Trust as Affective, Intercorporeal, and Intersubjective

Claiming the affective state of trust as expression of our inherent state of precariousness, gives precariousness a special feel. A phenomenological account of the grounds of trust can add to existing philosophical explorations of trust, such as Annette Baier’s, who claims that trust has a “special ‘feel’” that combines affective, cognitive, and conative aspects, while also claiming that the “special ‘feel’” of trust is, significantly, “most easily acknowledged when it is missed.”

I consider trust as an affective tone or tension that can feel just right, so right in fact that its operation in bringing things into existence, as those things that have significance and reality for us, sinks into phenomenological invisibility. In this way, phenomenologically basic trust operates to bring the world into view as it is for us, while at the same time erasing its work from view. Therefore, it appears to play a role in perception and, thus, have deep ontological significance. In this section I explore the way in which we can think of anxiety and courage as the originary ground of trust and as giving human existence its special feel. It is this special feel, I contend, that makes primary three distinctive features of human existence: our vulnerability, understood not merely as intersubjective but as intercorporeal; our experience of self as de-centred through the other who is understood to have a claim on the status of being a centre of meaning; and, our contribution to a climate of trust as enabling a social, future-oriented existence with all the associated uncertainty that this entails.

Our task to strive for coherence is intimately related to our intersubjective existence. Just as this task remains a “limit,” so too the other, encountered as another sensing sensible, is also experienced as a limit. As John Russon identifies, “[t]o encounter another...is to encounter our own deficiency, our incapacity. The other person is

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the necessary route along which I must pass in order to have access to the very world I open onto—my very own world.”

Our experience of the other intensifies our experience of ambiguity and risk, yet it is also through the other that my subjectivity forms itself. Understanding that our own cares and concerns are only achieved within “an intersubjective project of mutual recognition or confirmation,” and that such projects form the core of our identity, means that our identity only emerges because of our involvement with others. Yet this involvement is one in which “[w]e are continually obliged to work on our differences, to explain things we have said that we have not properly understood, to reveal what is hidden within us and to perceive other people.” (WP, 88)

Central to the process of trust, as well as to our understanding of trustworthiness, is this recognition of the other as a centre of value and meaningfulness, a recognition that reflects our own incapacity to be the sole creator of meaning. It is through the continual work that this recognition demands that the limit of the other is revealed. This limit of the other is most often described as intersubjective, but is experienced primarily as intercorporeal and affective. Deepening our understanding of trust as affective and tied to our body as opening onto the world is to embrace intercorporeal existence as crucial to understanding the significance of trust for our shared sense of situatedness. Kym Maclaren, in the context of describing an ethics of “letting others be,” makes a brief reference to trust, identifying it as [a] bodily assumption that is both expressed and enacted in our ways of dealing with each other and in the directions we pursue in our determination and extension of each other’s thoughts. It is because it is a bodily assumption (and not a self-reflective assumption) that—when it is challenged through the other’s assertion of a new positioning—we do not experience it initially as an incompatible positioning on the other’s part, but rather as an irksome tension within our dealings with these others, and a sort of gap that has opened up between us.

Breaches of trust, in both their mild or more extreme forms, are generally situations where the other’s assertion of a new positioning


11 Ibid., 51.

12 Ibid., 52.

is exposed. Where a sense of concordance of concerns once existed, there is now discordance, experienced as a divergence or a tension. This irksome tension is the *special feel* of trust as it is disturbed. The irksome tension can be explored as the two faces of anxiety and courage emerging as they are disrupted from an equilibrium that forms the basis and expression of the phenomenologically basic trust that allows us to get on in the world.

This brings us to the question I raised earlier: How can the ordinary day-to-day experience, where we are not continually feeling this irksome tension, but rather, where we get on as if it were the most natural thing for us, be related to a fundamental precariousness, an intertwined state of anxiety and courage? This question has been asked before, though only in relation to one part of this mixture—that of anxiety.

**Trust, Fundamental Openness, and the Indissoluble Intersubjective Field**

In looking at Merleau-Ponty’s work again, searching more closely for an explication of how he understood anxiety and courage as intertwined and fundamental, or indeed any discussion of trust, there emerges an interesting connection to Heidegger’s account of anxiety. Not only does Merleau-Ponty’s claim that anxiety belongs to an intertwined state that is fundamentally characteristic of human existence echo, in part, Heidegger’s claim that anxiety is our “found- ing mode of attunement,”¹⁴ but Heidegger asks the very same question as the one we just raised in regard to our fundamental mood—why is it that we don’t feel this all the time? Their accounts of anxiety differ, however, in focus and extent.

It is in the radio lectures that Merleau-Ponty gives his most direct comment on anxiety; it is “vigilance, it is the will to judge, to know what one is doing and what there is on offer.” (WP, 88) True to his understanding of emotions and affective states as fundamentally corporeal and thus as having a publicly exhibitive nature, he describes anxiety in terms of human action in the world. In his paper “Cezanne’s Doubt” Merleau-Ponty says of Cezanne that “[h]is nature

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was basically anxious.”  

Merleau-Ponty bases this claim in descriptions from both Cezanne himself and from Cezanne’s friend, Zola, and a few other visitors, so the remark is clearly about anxiety as it manifests and is publically observable. What is variously described is the following: fits of temper, including violent, tormented overwhelming passion, depression, instability, weakness, indecision, ennui, low toleration of discussion with others, and preoccupation with thoughts of death. Cezanne himself said that “[l]ife is terrifying” (CD, 10) and despite attempts to take up religion as a salve, it is concluded that “[h]e became more and more timid, mistrustful, and sensitive...” (CD, 10) Manifestations of his mistrust in others are reported in accounts such as his “shouting that he wouldn’t let anybody get his ‘hooks in me’” and therefore refusing even to have those who might assist his own projects—models or priests—in his house. (CD, 10)

Here we certainly find echoes of Merleau-Ponty’s comments regarding “vigilance” and the “will to judge.” Yet we also see these actions of Cezanne’s as out of the ordinary. Certainly they are not how we seem generally to handle our fundamental being in the world, for as I have said, we get on in the world as if it were the most natural thing for us, and this naturalness can also have the quality of confidence, optimism, and generosity. This thought is echoed by Heidegger, who argues that anxiety is a fundamental mood. Heidegger says that while it is in the state of anxiety that we “hover...constantly in order to be able to exist at all,” we also find this state of original anxiety “rare” and “above all else, we all do exist and relate ourselves to beings which we may or may not be—without this anxiety.” (WM, 104) Merleau-Ponty too sees Cezanne’s behaviour as exhibiting a morbid constitution, involving a “loss of flexible human contact” and a subsequent “flight from the human world...[and] alienation of his humanity.” (CD, 10–11) The anxiety of Merleau-Ponty’s fundamental affective state must be differentiated from anxiety conceived as a singular affective state. The relationship of the former with courage in a chiasmic unity and its operating at the level of the emergence of the self, are central.

Claudia Welz, in a recent exploration of trust as basic openness, asks whether trust can be understood as phenomenologically basic

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in terms of Heidegger’s account of anxiety.\textsuperscript{16} She concludes that while anxiety, like trust, is fundamentally related to our basic openness, anxiety has “experiential qualities [that] do not correspond to those of trust.” (TSS, 60) While Heidegger’s anxiety does not correspond, for Welz, to the basic openness of trust, there are aspects of his account, unexplored by Welz, that are interesting in relation to our exploration of phenomenological trust in terms of a fundamental affective mixture. Presented as an emerging account of trust as phenomenologically basic, and in the light of my exploration of a fundamental affective state as the deep phenomenological ground of trust, Welz’s focus on Heidegger needs to be taken up in order to demonstrate how Merleau-Ponty’s claim directs us back to the notions of the chiasm and reversibility, and radical divergence as fundamental to understanding the lived experience of our body as opening onto the world.

Welz explores trust as basic openness and, using Heidegger as her phenomenological basis, argues that trust is not only a performance of self, but constitutes the existence of “an inter-personal world-revealing movement of transcendence.” (TSS, 60) Welz’s account covers ground familiar to existing accounts of trust: it emphasizes the fact that trust is a form of affective judgment, that it is understood in relation to our vulnerability, that forms of hopeful trust enable a social, future oriented existence, and that we experience ourselves as fundamentally de-centred selves. Her important contribution is in emphasizing the problem arising from an understanding of trust as being in another human, thus creating an artificial separation where the space in-between can be characterized as “a place of isolation, closure, spooky loneliness” rather than one of “encounter” in which an “ecstatic relationality” is possible. (TSS, 54–55) Welz claims that, while trust can be considered a basic openness, this openness “is not identical in its openness in anxiety” as given by Heidegger. (TSS, 60) I will explore the parameters of this approach in order to demonstrate the overlap between Merleau-Ponty’s claim and Heidegger’s, while demonstrating that it is to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology that we must turn in order to properly see how our basic openness is coincident with the openness, the affectivity, and the vulnerability of trust.

For Heidegger, feelings or moods are “modes of attunement,” and anxiety is a fundamental mode of such attunement, or the “original

\textsuperscript{16} Claudia Welz, “Trust as Basic Openness and Self-Transcendence,” in Trust, Sociality, Selfhood, (ed.) A. Grøn and C. Welz (Tübingen: Moir Siebeck, 2010), 45–64. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as TSS.
mood." (WM, 100) For Heidegger anxiety is the attunement in which one is brought before the nothing. The nothing belongs to being’s essential unfolding—it is what makes possible the openness of Dasein to beings. Dasein exists as its own ground of determination—there is no world as the ground for Dasein’s existence—and Dasein as being-in-the-world is in a process of continual becoming. As a fundamental mode of attunement, anxiety is not anxiety of the nothing or anxiety for the nothing, even though it exists in the mode of “for” and “of.” Its directedness is towards an indeterminateness that is “the essential impossibility of determining.” (WM, 101) It is Heidegger’s placement of anxiety at the moment of the openness of Dasein, thus indicating a movement of “withdrawal from the world rather than its exploration” (TSS, 60), that leads Welz ultimately to conclude that we cannot “account at all for the phenomenon of trust within a Heideggerian framework [of anxiety, which] [o]n Heidegger’s view,...is not even equivalent to mistrust or distrust.” (TSS, 60)

However, and importantly, despite anxiety being a revelation that is the basic occurrence of our Dasein (WM, 100), we do not experience this original anxiety all the time, Heidegger argues, because Dasein is at the same time an ecstatic reaching out—that is, the nothing is “distorted with respect to its originality” in that we “usually lose ourselves altogether among beings in a certain way.” (WM, 104) Heidegger claims that we “lose ourselves” in the turn that gives us ourselves because “existence in its essence relates itself to beings—those which it is not and that which it is...” (WM, 103) For Heidegger, anxiety remains and “its sway is...thoroughgoing.” It is merely “repressed” or “sleeping”; it is ready and “can waken in existence at any moment.” (WM, 106) Heidegger has distinguished anxiety from anxiousness, which he identifies as fearfulness, and always directed towards something. Anxiety, rather, has a peculiar calm; it is the “basic occurrence of our Dasein” (WM, 100) and “makes possible in advance the revelation of beings in general.” (WM, 103) For Heidegger, however, anxiety transforms itself in the face of other beings, and, significantly, its presence is perceptible “most assuredly in those who are basically daring.” (WM, 106) Daring does not eradicate anxiety; daring, or what we might also call courage, “preserves the ultimate grandeur of existence.” (WM, 106) So while Heidegger isolates daring as an affective state that reveals the existence of our originary anxiety, anxiety is also intertwined with other affective states, but less readily apparent than its existence in our daring. For Heidegger, anxiety remains as a singular state that can be mixed, and the resulting mixture is the intermingling of
affective states. This does not make anxiety and daring a fundamental affective state characteristic of human existence as Merleau-Ponty claims.

Claudia Welz's exploration does not go so far as to take up Heidegger's discussion of the transformation of anxiety through its intermingling with daring, because for Heidegger this transformation has taken us away from the originary openness. Heidegger's framework here is I think the stumbling block. In Heidegger's account, anxiety is the basic occurrence of our Dasein, which both induces the slipping away of beings and the turn towards beings, our preoccupations and public self, in order to lessen this slipping away. (WM, 104)

The limitations of Heidegger's account in terms of understanding our essential relatedness of being mean that Welz is right to say that Heidegger's framework cannot take us further into an account of trust as belonging to our basic openness, but I do not think that this is the end of the exploration of the relationship between anxiety and trust. It is more fruitful to return to Merleau-Ponty and his sense of a relationship between my subjective experience and my relationships with others as an indissoluble mixture, as an “intersubjective field.” (PP, 452)

In turning to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the lived body, and understanding that his account of anxiety is a mere sketch, it is important to locate ourselves in Merleau-Ponty's account of a primordial experience of being in which indeterminacy exists for us. Most prominently, indeterminacy exists in what Merleau-Ponty calls a primordial depth of blind adherence, where existential experience is still “simply the opening of perception upon some ghost thing as yet scarcely qualified.” (PP, 266) This depth is a space where “the world of clear and articulate objects is abolished...it is pure depth without foreground or background.” (PP, 283) It thus precedes any situated spatial orientation, but also, importantly, has the capacity to “almost destroy” (PP, 283) one's sense of identity. Perception as our opening onto the world is rooted in the body, which is itself one with the world until perception keeps this oneness at bay. It is in the inauguration of perception, which is itself always in the middle of the “pell-mell” (VI, 84) of the world, that we experience this intertwined state of anxiety and courage. This inauguration is the ground of a fundamental affective response or tension in our encounter with the world. This tension is experienced as the special feel of our intercorporeality, that is, of our body as opening onto the world becoming the world it is for us.

We must turn to the structures of perception in order to get some sense of how what we come to identify as trust arises out of a pri-
mordial experience of an intermingled anxiety and courage, a felt experience of the chiasmic nature of perception itself. The fixity of perception, its operations that make it what it is, give us a primordial experience of getting a sens of things, of implicit and explicit perception. In looking at these structures I will develop an account of them in relation to our experience of others as other subjects in the world. Trust is strongly associated with our experiences of affective depth, our perception of others and with the way in which these others position us and make our lives as they are for us. Trust can thus be explored through the notion of depth as a dimension of perception.

Perception, Depth, and the Special Feel of Love

Discussion of the phenomenological dimension of trust involves looking again at some of the ways in which perception operates. In this section I turn to an exploration of the dimension of depth as affective and thus to structures of perception—here, the horizontal nature of perception, implicit and explicit perception, and the possibility of maximal grip—as having an affective aspect. I explore perception as consisting in a felt tension of the lived experience of precarious existence, with this tension being experienced differently whether we encounter objects or other subjects. In this exploration I will take up the example of our experience of love, in particular, the experience of falling in love. I position this as an alternative example of a break in perception that is transformative, implicates both the perceiver and the perceived, and highlights the way that trust is present in the process of institution.

I have referred to the fundamental affective state of anxiety and courage as an intertwining that can exist in equilibrium, whereby these states not only exist in a balance that does not cancel either state out, but also produces the special feel that is the unity beyond the singular parts. This phenomenological ground for trust, as the affective dimension of perception, can be thought of as having horizontal properties. As horizon it exists for us as the affective setting of trust as phenomenologically basic, and hence as the ground for our perception of others and things with which we engage. Thus the phenomenological ground of trust is implicated in our affective existence. As setting it gives us our world, and we experience this affective state as the special feel of our existence. We are therefore open to the abundance of affective states as they roll through a particularly human existence—an existence that is fundamentally open—with this affective ground being implicated throughout. This sense of balance can be disrupted and experienced as radical diver-
gence, and we can thus be disoriented, displaced, even destroyed. This break in our affective perception of the world and others impacts what we see and how we experience our sense of self.

But so too can we be disturbed by a break that is seen as positive; the experience of falling in love also can disorient and displace, even destroy what we have known. The state of falling in love is here differentiated from that of being in love. Falling in love is commonly characterized as an experience of our openness to the world and of our intertwining with another, which is both transformative and opens limitless possibilities through this transformation. Psychological studies have identified falling in love as the experience of the “onset of a strong desire for a close, romantic relationship with a particular person: it is the transition from not being in love to being in love.”17 The transformative power of this transition is characterized by its ability to change the concept of self of a person in a positive way; the individual feels “a greater ability to accomplish goals and a greater sense of self-worth.”18 Additionally, the concept of self is expanded through a process of integrating the other in the self that results in our treating the other as if they were a part of the self.19

This particular study recognizes the many “loose ends” in its empirical data because of the “complexity of real-life research,”20 thus further supporting a phenomenological reflection about intersubjectivity and selfhood, especially in the pre-reflective states of intimacy where the particulars of a self, while providing the pathway to intimacy, dissolve in its intertwining with the other.

It is the previously mentioned “irksome tension” in all its forms, the “what it is like” to experience a breach of trust, that disappears in the experience of falling in love. Whereas in cases where our trust is breached our world, or the relevant portion of it, is shattered, what it is like to be falling in love is an experience of binding with another, a binding that constitutes a break or breach that takes us out of our habitually perceived subjectivity. It is a movement that leads to transformations whereby we see things differently. In both the case of a breach of trust and the case of falling in love, a shift in perspec-

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18 Ibid., 1110.
19 See Ibid., 1103.
20 Ibid., 1110.
tive occurs. We can see this as a break in perception, a break in which, as Sue Cataldi describes it, a Gestalt unifies or forms itself by de-forming some other Gestalt that nonetheless remains latently behind it. It is this ongoing process of Gestalt formation that becomes habitual and whereby we see things the way things are. The shattering of a habitual view exposes latent Gestalts that have always been there as possible views. What has been habitual is now eclipsed, or, in the process of change, shifts between one view and another. The task of striving for coherence, a coherence that will never be attained, is again brought out of the inconspicuous equilibrium that enabled us to get on despite the fundamental “limit” of this task.

Anthony Steinbock has recently provided a phenomenological account of trust, with a focus on articulating the temporality and transcendence of trust, but also, importantly, the way in which in trust I “invest myself ‘personally’ in the other person” and thus “bind” myself to her. Where Welz used anxiety as belonging to our basic openness, in order to differentiate this from the openness of trust, Steinbock focusses on love, as unconditional love, to differentiate such states of openness from trust. (TSS, 99) Trust, he says, is distinctive from love. This is an important distinction. Love, Steinbock claims, as a state of openness, is openness not only to the future, but also to the potential that it is to be a self. Thus we are open to the potential of the other and the potential of the self—the unconditional nature of loving is hence open to infinity. (TSS, 99) In the case of love, trust is experienced as a primordial intersubjective temporalizing trusting. In the case of love, there is no sense of “in respect to” a particularity about that person that might act to qualify the person for one’s trust (TSS, 100); we simply trust them. Steinbock also differentiates this sense of modal trust from the trust that is merely context dependent.

I think there always remains a sense of “in respect to” in relation to the person who is loved, even “unconditionally.” I unconditionally love my child, but this is in respect to them being my child. As there is no way they cannot be my child, my love is unconditional and...
appears to be beyond change. Unconditional love, even for my child, is a state that demands things from me and is subject to change over time as its work is achieved; it is not necessarily a love that I experience as an easy incorporation. Unconditional love allows for our singularity and encompasses the work of expanding our love across the multiple modes of the other. This differs from falling in love where one experiences an expanded sense of self and incorporates the other into one’s sense of self, so that one comes to treat the other as one would one’s self. Importantly, in this experience of an expanded sense of self and an intertwining of one with the other, we also experience the desire to be with the beloved to the exclusion of all others. When we are falling in love we cannot bear to be parted, we forget our friends. We become “blind” to the needs or cares of others, even to the attentions of others. We are consumed by the other. In this experience, it is not simply that no one else exists, but as Martin Buber says, that the object of love’s attention “fills the firmament”—“[n]ot as if there were nothing but he; but everything else lives in his light.”

I suggest that particular to the breach of falling in love, the loved other becomes for a time the horizon of our perception; all their implicit sides exist as “for us,” and when we turn and shift our view, the loved one, as horizon, turns with us so that they never leave our view. As horizontal the loved other is implicit in all our views. We experience a sense of expanded perception of the self through the horizon of the other, and they too consume the horizon of the future so that our love is experienced as feeling “into infinity.” Whereas in the breach of trust the institution is shown in the break and in the de-formation of the other as a horizon in our perception, the case of falling in love displays for us the role the loved other is playing right now.

In a negative breach of trust, the trusted person is eclipsed by the not-to-be-trusted person. After a breach of trust, we will tend to say things like: *I can’t look at you in the same way, I see you differently now, I don’t feel like I am looking at the same person, or now I see what you are really like.* The past receives a different meaning through this *Gestalt* shift as part of a process of institution that opens onto a particular present. At such times we do not feel that trust is still present—after all, it has been breached—however, the states of anxiety and courage, whatever mix of these we feel, are still being expressed as the constitutive presence of ambiguous and precarious existence, propelling us as we continue to strive for coherence.

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Falling in love can also shatter an existing *Gestalt*, not only of the other, but of the self and world and their possibilities. Here we might use the example of falling in love with someone we have known for some time. Where this person may have been a friend, we can all of a sudden experience that fall into love—whatever love we felt as friend had been directed towards that person seen as friend. The fall into love indicates the transformation of that love whereby we experience a break in our perception; another side of the person comes into view, eclipsing the view of them as friend. A new *Gestalt* forms by de-forming the existing *Gestalt* that now remains latently behind it. However, whereas the breach of falling out of trust causes a rise in anxiety at the expense of courage, the falling into love, as a state where trust is enhanced, emphasizes the expansion of courage, of heart, at the same time as there is an expansion of anxiety.

Trust affects our acts because it is operative in perceptual consciousness. Trust is closely associated with our perception of others and how these others position us and make our lives as they are for us. We have seen how trust is operative in the dimension of depth. In this depth we experience others as co-constitutive, and this is most profoundly so in the experience of love. While I have said a little on the functioning of the *Gestalt* in perception, I want to say just a bit more about the structures of perception as affective structures. In order to further explore perception as affective, I turn to the idea that we can also be fooled by love. When we fall in love it is always with the perceived other that we do so, and thus we invest in the accuracy of our perceptions. This means that falling in love is a risk we *fall into*. In order to see how this might be so, let us look again at cases of perception and misperception, understanding them in their affective dimension.

We can be fooled by our perception of objects—what looks to me like a stone from a distance may be the body of a small bird. It is only when I get up close that I can see my error. We can also be fooled by our perception of others. Our initial perception can suggest that someone is a certain kind of person, someone whom we may not trust; however, when we get *closer* to this person, our perception of them can change. While we also talk in terms of getting to *know* someone, we tend to speak of the experience in terms of perception. We might say that now we *see* them as they *really* are. This mirrors the way in which we will talk about our misperception of objects.

25 There are of course nowadays many cases of falling in love over the internet where perception of the other is carried through the many forms of intersubjective expression that are now possible.
When we go closer to the small round object, for example, we see that the light obscured the feathery look of the bird and made it look like the rough and irregular surface of a grey stone. We could not see how the bird had tucked its head under its wing, making its shape roundish. These things were only revealed when I came closer and looked at the object from other perspectives. If there is a correct perception, this is not to say that there is a character the thing has independently of the perceiver. Rather, in Merleau-Ponty’s account, certain appearances are privileged over others, and they appear when “my body has a precise hold on the spectacle” (PP, 297), or what has been called a maximal grip on it. This hold or grip refers to the optimal distance and the direction from which we view the object, which allows “most of itself” to be viewed. (PP, 302)

We can also misperceive others, not only in the sense of misrecognition, for example, when we see that someone is a person, but misrecognize him or her so that we see that the person is “someone else” and not the one we know and can name. We can misperceive in another sense, that is, in terms of affective misperception, and this sense of misperception reflects the important link between emotion and depth. The experience I am referring to is the one where we believe we know someone as being trustworthy, or, alternatively, untrustworthy; however, time and experience shows us that this is not the case. Not only are time and experience of a person important in our perception of this person as worthy of our trust, but so too are other factors such as our own moods, needs, and pressures. Together all these factors have created better conditions for seeing what the person is really like. While this might seem, for example, to be a case of misjudging the person, our judgments in perception are pre-reflective judgments, and, importantly for our case of falling in love, we can and do trust others without much reflection. These pre-reflective judgments are operative in perception and its affective dimension. Our pre-reflective judgments begin in terms of how we perceive things, and getting it wrong begins in cases of misperception.

The example of the bird presents us with an example of the way in which perception is always dynamic and occurs through a motile body. But misperception can also occur because we experience things through our use of them, that is, we experience their qualities as the ways in which our bodies conform to the qualities of the object. This can be impacted by our relationship to the task—we can enjoy or dislike something, need or not need to do something. In all these respects, this experience of the dynamic nature of perception is occluded when our habit body forms “around” things and activi-
ties—our perception of the familiar will feel comfortable and “just right.” These repeated interactions and their “frequent confirmation” acquire “a favoured status for us” and the “sedimentation of our life” that results is experienced as our habitual being in the world. (PP, 441) This does not preclude, however, these complexes from being blown “sky-high” (PP, 442) because the fundamental precariousness of my habitual being in the world remains in each moment. For Merleau-Ponty the perceptual faith is “beneath affirmation and negation, beneath judgement” and is “our experience, prior to every opinion, of inhabiting the world by our body,” a world that is “taken for granted, rather than disclosed.” (VI, 28) This experience is chiasmic. The perceiver and the perceived cross over and into each other. Thus it is that “the thing is correlative to my body and, in more general terms, to my existence, of which my body is merely the stabilized structure.” (PP, 320) This means that both perception and misperception implicate the perceiver—that is, the perceiver is already in the misperceived object and rectification of this perception will come from an alteration in the perceiver as well as the perceived. This crossing over of body and world, as the ground of perception, is experienced as the affective tension of a nascent trust. This is also the ground for trust understood as modal—the person who is trusted is the person perceived “in the hold which my body takes upon it.” (PP, 320) Thus while the person has presence in the world which occasions our perceptual experience of them, they are perceived within the context of our competing claims to being the centre of meaning.

At all times, the person whom we see, and who is implicated in our projects, is also potentially a sibling, a child, an employee, and a friend, and has thus a range of implicit “sides” and is implicated in a range of other projects of who they are, and who we perceive. Thus, for example, my friend who has read my conference paper and has set time aside to discuss it with me is also a son and sibling who potentially needs to take a call from his family during our meeting. This implicit view of my friend exists while explicitly his attention is turned towards me and my cares and concerns. When the call comes I understand that he needs to turn his attention elsewhere and that the side of him that has been explicit to me—my friend—will become implicit, while he as sibling becomes explicit. I see this, though not directly, since he is not my sibling, as he speaks with his sister. The call takes a long time because my friend’s father is unwell and his sister needs him. I understand that he cares about these concerns in this moment and not mine. I trust however that his concerns for my cares continue to exist but are for the moment implicit, and I do
not need him to demonstrate them to me in order for me to know they are there, just as I do not need to keep checking to see if the legs of my desk exist. I can understand this person as trusted or relied upon by their family, as well as trusted and relied upon by me, and all those others with whom my friend has constitutive ties. To ask that the other be only concerned about my cares, to the exclusion of all other concerns, is not trust but suffocating control.

Conclusion

In trusting we allow the web of connection to ease and be flexible. The nature of our trusting is therefore also an acknowledgement that institution is occurring in multiple directions from and to any subject at any time and such institution happens within and is reflective of the dimension of depth within which significance is conferred upon the other. It is important to recognize that trusting is not a state where we necessarily feel fully reassured about the other; to trust is always to risk that something is not so. It is to go ahead regardless. The multi-dimensionality of institution is through the lived experience of depth that sparks transcendence and thus consciousness. It is depth that ultimately lifts or expands our perception to summons consciousness—it is thus that consciousness is a project of perception. The other solicits my attention and summons my body to a new situation—the other is “instituted-instituting”26 and this is “in relation to me, because I am, in relation to myself, instituted-instituting.”27 This perceptual experience has affective depth, so the other is experienced not only as himself or herself, but also as what it is like to perceive him or her. It is this experience of what it is like, inseparable from the perception, that either draws me towards them or pushes me away, so that “[t]he distance from me to the [other] is not [experienced as] a size which increases or decreases, but [as] a tension which fluctuates around a norm.” (PP, 302) Whereas in the perception of objects this tension relates to the sense of optimal conditions for correctness of perception and is fundamental, in our perception of others we will experience this tension as the affective dimension of our necessarily perspectival and co-implicated perception.

The implications of recognizing trust as phenomenologically basic do not preclude us from asking questions about trustworthiness—

26 Merleau-Ponty, Institution and Passivity, 6.
27 Ibid., 80.
what constitutes trustworthiness and in what circumstances it is appropriate to trust—nor from asking questions about the importance of making distinctions between when we might be relying upon others as opposed to trusting them. The aim of this discussion has been to understand the ways in which trust is present in perception, thus is operative in the spaces where crossovers imperceptibly take place and the co-constitution of our intersubjective existence occurs. Relations of trust are deeply rooted in the body as our opening onto the world. Whereas accounts of trust typically emphasize intersubjectivity, a phenomenological account emphasizes our experience of what our fundamentally intercorporeal existence is like, here understood not simply as the interrelationship of embodied subjects, but as a manner of belonging to an ontology of flesh and its characteristic depth. 28

futley2@une.edu.au

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