



Face to Facelessness: Imagined Intimacies and Socially Distant Desires

Steve Fossey, School of Fine and Performing Arts, University of Lincoln, UK, stephenfossey@gmail.com

This paper revisits a performance titled *Falling in Love Again – and Again* which was first performed in 2014 as part of a series of works I created questioning relational intimacy and proximity in public space. During *Falling in Love Again – and Again* participants were invited to explore public space with the intention of anonymously falling in love with strangers. The details of these encounters were shared with me as the leader of the piece via mobile phone text messages, but never with the subjects of the participants' desires. Understanding the dynamics of intimacy and proximity in 2014 was a very different experience to how I understand them in 2021. The Covid-19 pandemic, social distancing, and two periods of lockdown has drastically influenced how relationality and physically being in the world with others is performed. This paper is concerned both with the intimate and proximate dynamics of relational bodies during that performance as I understood it then, and, as a consequence, how we might understand relational proximity and intimacy now.

Critical points of departure for the paper include art historian Grant Kester's writing on conversational art practices and his framing of dialogic encounters through the use of Jeffrey T. Nealon's *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity* (1998). Models of 'dialogical' experience and 'responsibility', as situated by Mikhail Bakhtin and Emmanuel Levinas respectively (Nealon, 1998, cited in Kester, 2004, 118) are used in this article to frame a rethinking of the dynamics and ethics of face to face contact and physical proximity, as bodies in space maintain distance from one another, connected only by our digital devices and our imaginations. The voyeuristic practices of Sophie Calle and Vito Acconci converge with theatre makers Forced Entertainment's 'writing over' of place (Kaye, 2000) to explore imaginary relational connectivity. The writing of geographer Doreen Massey supports this framing through the use of Massey's thoughts on the fictional poetics of social interactions and 'stories so far' (Massey, 2005). Ultimately the paper asks what happens when we are required to imagine being with others in physically distant and imaginary ways with only our mobile devices as depositories for our fictional desires.



Introduction

I will begin by saying that this article has a few different lives. Things began with a performance I made in 2013 titled *Falling in Love Again – and Again*. The piece was part of a series of works I created that explored intimacy and proximity. These works questioned how dialogue and interactions with strangers (positioned as audience-participants) might generate what I positioned as social spaces. Much of this work fed into my practice as research PhD titled *Site Specific Performance and The Mechanics of Becoming Social* (2018). To give some context to my practice/research and the piece I'll discuss in this article, I'll briefly discuss two examples of these works. The first is *Hello, I Love You* (2014) which involved sitting 50 feet opposite a series of individual participants. Over the course of several hours of individual 10-minute mobile phone conversations with my participants, I attempted to fall in love with them through the exchange of personal histories. Another example is *Host(s)* (2014) which involved hand-feeding audience-participants in a city street whilst exchanging secrets, playful confessions, and tales of our pasts.

I began writing this article in 2020 with *Falling in Love Again – and Again* as the focus. I also wrote about the piece in 2013 after making it. My 2020 reflections coincided with the first lockdown of the Corona virus Covid-19 pandemic. Writing about intimacy and proximity under those circumstances gave both texts a different feel. In 2021 I returned to this article during another period of lockdown. It is now (at the time of writing) 2022 and the current situation with the global pandemic continues to influence the proximity of our relationships with others. Our relationship with the spaces between us continues to feel fragmented, and this sense of fragmentation has influenced the composition of this article.

Each adjustment to the article seems to take place in an ever-evolving situation that destabilizes the dynamics of how to be with others, and my written reflections over the past couple of years destabilize how I understand the piece now in relation to how I understood it when I made it. Relational dynamics across times and spaces is what sets the framework for the text as it stands, here. This article, then, is concerned both with the intimate and proximate dynamics of relational bodies during that performance as I understood them *then*, and how we might understand relational proximity and intimacy *now* (at the time of completing this article, in this moment in time).

The critical territory and theoretical research that framed the relational performances I have begun to discuss above took as a point of departure geographer Doreen Massey's propositions for ways to think and act spatially. I asked questions through these performances about how we might think about our dynamics alongside one another as interconnected relational beings. I was concerned with what it is that

might connect us socially in space, and indeed what might constitute social space at all. This would result in thinking about the physical space of our surroundings, the creative space of our imaginations and, importantly in the context of this article, the space that connects us through mobile communication.

In *Falling in Love Again – and Again*, my mobile phone inbox became a depository for shared anonymous fantasies of imagined intimate connections. It involved inviting participants to walk around the city and fall in love with strangers anonymously, playfully producing intimate connections whose premise was purely imaginary and fictional. These participants were asked to use their mobile phones to send text messages directly to me, giving me details of their imaginings. The mechanics of the piece, including a discussion around the problematic dynamics of the term participation in this context, will be discussed as the article unfolds, but first I would like to position some contextual points of departure.

Where Narratives Intertwine

Massey's positioning of space as a collection of narratives that coalesce and intertwine is an idea I return to again and again as a framework for creating dialogic performance. To create and imbricate an anonymous digital collection of 'stories-so-far' (Massey, 2005), is what *Falling in Love Again – and Again* sought to do. Indeed, it was the piece's intention to actively foster creative imagining by encouraging the sharing of stories-so-far, but the stories in the context of this piece would be intimate thoughts generated in distant proximity.

The 'so-far' part of Massey's statement evokes a sense of the unfinished and yet to be discovered, so encouraging an active seeking out of connections to add to our stories seemed to me to further Massey's thinking on the possibilities of space. *Falling in Love Again – and Again*, then, encouraged its participants to see others as connected to their own stories. It asked its participants to reconsider intimacy and proximity and connect on relational levels that destabilize what we might understand to constitute the social, relational, or/and participatory.

I was keen to explore what happens when we create and share narratives by encouraging a reimagining of the dynamics of intimacy and proximity bound up in our relational space with others. I posit that the construction of social space as seen here may create tensions, and the dynamics of the process of making social space reveals ways of relating that load places with narratives and reveal challenging dynamics. Some narratives are revealed (shared) and others concealed (thought but not disclosed), but all comprise power relations and complicated levels of active, and indeed inactive, participation and relationality – something I explore later in this article.

What is being proposed here is a process of social spatial construction that has the poetics of imagination wrapped up with narratives that question the ethics of interaction in the places we share socially. With the dynamics of shared social space altered by the pandemic, how we see, move with, and think about one another has undergone a renegotiation, and with this renegotiation, a moment is opened to think again about relationality. It was a provocation of what might determine intimate relationality that *Falling in Love Again – and Again* in 2013 explored, and it is the same provocation that this article picks up in the wake of a global situation that has turned notions of intimacy and proximity on their heads.

I have used Massey's description of theorist Raymond Williams's observations of travelling across the landscape in previous writing to frame ideas of destabilised site-specificity, but this anecdote is also pertinent to this article when thinking about the dynamics of dialogue. With this in mind, I would like to revisit it briefly. Massey (2013) describes a train journey that Williams took, and how the sight of a woman carrying out a menial task outside her house viewed from the moving train became stuck in his head as though an image had been captured forever in time. Upon hearing Massey recount this anecdote, I became conscious of what it is to have a relationship with someone, however fleeting, and for the other to never know that it had happened.

This imagining, though poetic in the romance intimated by Massey's account, also exemplifies something of how one's mind constructs a narrative of a relational encounter that objectifies the other within the relationship. The term relational is intentionally made problematic here as, it could be argued, the woman that Williams sees is not consciously part of a relationship and has no way to respond. She is forever etched into his mind, repeating that action, stuck in time and space, with no right of reply.

However, and it is here that I posit this kind of relational observing as something positive, the ability to imagine social space as an intimate network of intersecting events and locations with people moving in and through one another allows the possibility to imagine our sociality with a greater interconnected sense of being together. This, it seems to me, is important at a time of increasing isolation. I am thinking back here to my comments about writing this during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, feeling that the ability to look on and imagine others as intimately connected to ourselves, without necessarily knowing the entirety of their stories, is important.

Using Massey's thinking as a point of departure, I sought to explore being together across various planes of consciousness. Thinking about the connectivity of stories is not to place bodies physically in space together necessarily, it is more about a way of thinking spatially that allows a way of being together without being in close physical

proximity. It is also potentially about not even being conscious of one another at all, but being together all the same. It is this level of consciousness that will lead me onto another theoretical frame for the article in 'The Dialogics of Facelessness' section of the text, but first I would like to discuss the performance itself.

Falling in Love Again – and Again

Falling in Love Again – and Again took place in the city of Wolverhampton, UK. The piece began with the act of leading a group of participants into the center of the city. I gave the group some brief directives: they were to follow me to the center of the city and find someone to fall in love with. I shared my mobile phone number with my participants and told them that they had a set amount of time to complete this task. They could fall in love with anyone of their choosing, but were asked not to let their chosen subjects know that they had fallen in love with them.

Before communicating the rules of the performance and leading my participants out into the city, and to give some context to the experiment, I established a provocation. I suggested that, arguably, the anonymous subjects that artists Sophie Calle and Vito Acconci followed around city streets were active in a relational process of becoming social that connected both the follower and the followed. The subjects we were to fall in love with, I playfully suggested, would provide us with another person with which to locate ourselves, or as Acconci put it, 'become dependent on (and) 'need' (Acconci, 2006, 77).

This need or desire to locate oneself and be 'swept along by the energy of other people' (Calle, 2003, 77) opens up a way of seeing our relations in social space that I argue allows a relational connectivity whose dynamics of intimacy and proximity are unfamiliar in the constitution of social space. This way of seeing would be further problematized by the addition of the mobile phone as a distributor of, and depository for, intimate imaginings. With ideas of distribution and mediation in mind, Maria Chatzichristodoulou and Rachel Zerihan's 2012 book *Intimacy Across Visceral and Digital Performance* adds a relevant frame of reference.

Chatzichristodoulou, in opposition to Sherry Turkle's assumption that intimacy is about being with others in person (2010), argues how her and Zerihan's book 'set out to explore those very instances of intimacy where encounters are established over distance, in contexts of physical absence, or in distributed settings' (Chatzichristodoulou, 2012, 216). She goes on to comment how Turkle's assumption of a here and now, physical intimacy 'perpetuates dichotomies between the live and the pre-recorded, immediate and mediated, the visceral and the digital, the proximal and the telematic, which are unproductive in their strategy of polarizing practices and philosophies of being' (ibid).

This reading supports my assertion that *Falling in Love Again – and Again*, and the particular works by Calle and Acconci that I will explore below, exemplify relational encounters whose dynamics of intimacy and proximity problematise the relational and open it up to broader readings. In much the same way that Chatzichristodoulou and Zerihan's aim in their book is to build bridges, make connections and avoid polarizing the visceral and digital in terms of how intimacy is understood, I too am interested in 'complexifying relations' (ibid, 217) to rethink what might constitute the social and the relational and, I argue, this is what *Falling in Love Again – and Again* does in practice.

Art critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) includes Calle's work. In the section of Bourriaud's book titled *Conviviality and encounters* he notes how a work (of relational art) 'may operate like a relational device containing a certain degree of randomness, or a machine provoking and managing individual and group encounters' (Bourriaud, 2002, 30), echoing the objectification and indeed mechanisation of the other implicit in the idea of the other as a vehicle which I will discuss further in relation to Mikhail Bahktin in the final section of this article.

In *Suite Vénitienne* (1980) Calle followed strangers around Paris in an effort to orient herself in space that felt foreign to her. Bourriaud points to how Calle 'formalises, after the fact, a biographical experience which leads her to "collaborate" with the people she meets' (ibid). Bourriaud's use of the word collaborate is interesting here. What we can see is a foregrounding of relational acts that destabilize the balance of power in the relations being played out.

Acconci's voyeuristic performance methods preceded Calle's by some 11 years. In *Following Pieces* (1969), Acconci followed people at random through public spaces until they entered a private space such as a house or office, with the pieces lasting anything between a few minutes and several hours. The details of these encounters were written up as letters and sent to Acconci's friends and acquaintances. In applying a language to the work Acconci asks how, 'I – a person, an agent, attends to it, a world considered as if it's out there'. 'How' Acconci asks himself 'do I find some way to tie myself into that world, key myself into that world?' (2016). What we see in Acconci's work and reflections could be argued to be an attempt to locate a relational subjectivity by anonymously connecting to others from a distance, mediating this sense of intimacy to those he already feels connected to.

The idea I have begun to provoke is that anonymity can be understood as social and relational, with face-to-face encounters not categorically defining relationality and where ethnological practices of solitude, moving on from French anthropologist Marc Augé (1995), are seen as methods of orienting oneself in social space. This provocation is further supported by sociologist Fran Tonkiss's proposition that 'solitude should be

understood as a social relation and a way of being with others' (Tonkiss, 2005, 22). *Falling in Love Again – and Again* explored how these levels of anonymity, proximity, consciousness and social relationality might be activated in performance.

I am not proposing here that the fantasies that lead to stalking are to be considered as formal performance elements, and I acknowledge the glaring ethical problematics of orientating oneself in space at the expense of another by following them and making them feel unsafe in the way that Acconci might have been in danger of doing. I do, however, propose that there is potential to explore the mechanics of the social relations in the space between the imaginary and real. Through the embrace of this imaginary space there is, I argue, a potential to see our relationships in social space as more intimately connected than once thought. This picks up on what I began to explore earlier with regards to Massey and extends this thinking to propose the potential of overlaying facts and fictions, realities and fantasies. A *writing-over* of sorts takes place as stories are imbricated in social space.

Palimpsestuousness and Writing-over

In providing a framework for ideas of writing-over, I am mindful of UK-based theatre company Forced Entertainment's work, particularly *Nights in This City*, first shown in 1995 in Sheffield, UK. During *Nights in this City* an audience is taken on a coach trip hosted by a performer from the company who acts as the tour guide. During the performance, the seemingly inebriated guide describes events and locations according to a creative agenda that has little to do with site-specific historical fact, allowing the relationship between audience, place, and performer to be instrumental in hijacking the seeming realities attached to the sites they encounter.

This method of layering truth destabilizes not only the identities of the places encountered, but also the identities of the subjects doing the encountering, as they become complicit in their subscription to the ruse. As theatre scholar Nick Kaye observes, the piece 'emphasize(s) the constructed nature of role, identity and place, performing a 'writing over of the city' (Kaye, 2000, 8). Kaye foregrounds the palimpsestuous mechanics of the piece, describing how, as a site-specific performance, the piece 'attempts to define itself in the very sites it is caught in the process of erasing' (ibid).

In *Falling in Love Again – and Again* the metaphor of the palimpsest is useful in understanding the process of adding to and building upon social experiences in the world with others. Through the practice of embodying a place and documenting the experience of falling in love with strangers as we did in *Falling in Love Again – and Again*, fantasies of people and place are created and written-over the realities. The

tacit agreements of our relationships to one another in social space and what we think we are to one another becomes disrupted as we see one another more intimately than before.

The palimpsest and its metaphorical importance in understanding place can be understood here in the writing of anthropologist Marc Augé who writes that ‘place and non-place are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten’ (Augé, 1995, 79). Both *Falling in Love Again – and Again* and *Nights in this City* encourage an engagement with one’s own sense of place where, in the acknowledgement that the reality of one’s *being here* is open to creative interpretation, and by extension improvisation, a sense of shared social space can be produced that allows place to feel less alien.

Forced Entertainment play a socio-political role in encouraging us to imagine a concept of place where we can consciously overlay our own histories upon the histories that we erase by virtue of our locational unfamiliarity. It is a form of *getting to know you* by way of creative dialogue, where a performer and an audience drift through space making up their shared histories as they go along. As Forced Entertainment themselves comment, *A Night in This City* ‘explore[d] the different histories written in urban space — from the official and the historical to the personal, the mythical and the imaginary’ (1995), and it is this movement through fact and fiction that I position here as a dynamic of relationality.

Falling in Love Again – and Again saw an imbrication of the historical, personal, and imaginary. What I am seeking to do here is deconstruct the relational mechanics of social space in such a way that allows relationality to be perceived in ways that make the case for both the active participant and the silent onlooker. I would like to expand on this idea of a psychological drift through fantasy and reality, and how this might subvert the tacit agreements of intimacy and proximity and relationships between people in social space.

Questioning the Tacit Agreements of Space and Place

As a practitioner-researcher, I enter places with the intention of exploring the effects of the location I am in. The agreements of the places I research, it could be argued, have tacit rules governing how the spaces operate. They are unsaid but understood, and there is arguably an order based on some generally shared principles that allow space to operate in what can loosely be described as a *right way*. The movement of individuals within a city street for instance, can be said to be productive of social space in a way that maintains the order of that place, and in turn perpetuates a shared understanding of *city streetness*.

I begin the process of being in a place by maintaining the stability and subscribing to its etiquette. However, as a method of finding out more about the stability of the etiquette of a place, I begin actively questioning how these agreements function, and how one might know more about the experience of being in a place by orienting oneself in relation to others. This approach has parallels with the methods of Acconci discussed above. Acconci describes his approach to performance as an attempt to become a 'passive receiver' of 'somebody else's action' (Acconci, 2010).

This method employs elements of improvised movement led by another. *Falling in Love Again – and Again* used drifting through the city with an openness to chance opportunities to fall in love as a way to open up the possibility of traveling somewhere unexpected, revealing something about an experience with another that my participants and I did not expect. Our mobile phones would be the essential technologies by which we would share these experiences.

If one is to consider the imaginary texts that Forced Entertainment write-over place as a collection of fragmented real narratives spliced together and articulated as fact, albeit theatrically, then the real/imaginary dichotomy loses its polarity. The ways that one reads or produces meanings from the everyday events of place can, then, be said to be both/and narratives: both fiction and fact, imaginary and real, constructed through our creative abilities to negotiate a relationality with one another.

The Act of Walking to Fall in Love

As my participants and I set out into the center of Wolverhampton to fall in love with strangers, one of my participants asked me if I was from Wolverhampton. I told them I had grown up here. This was not the truth, but my participants and I had already contextualized the work and had foregrounded ideas of the imaginary, so my response here played into this sense of improvisation and the agreement to play with the truth. Not being from Wolverhampton (a place unfamiliar to me) put me at a disadvantage in terms of my knowledge of the place, and this first lie was an initial attempt to forge familiarity by layering a fictional narrative over the place in order to locate myself with both my participants and the place itself.

In a performed act of disruption to the lie of me knowing the city, I asked various passersby where the center of town was. Both a hairdresser and a builder both directed me to a small public square with a statue of a horse in it. When we arrived at the elected center, I asked my participants where the cinema was. I then went on to tell them about one of my first loves who I remembered kissing in that cinema, and how it took me the length of the film to pluck up the courage as I couldn't find the right words or actions to initiate the kiss.

Parts of this story were true, although the cinema wasn't in Wolverhampton, and I wouldn't say that this person was one of my first loves. I then asked my participants the question, 'where is the shoe shop where I met my wife'? They couldn't tell me the answer to this question obviously, but I recited the story of how we fell in love there just the same. I did indeed meet my wife in a shoe shop, but not in Wolverhampton.

After the piece ended and everyone had text messaged the details of their experiences to my phone, my participants and I walked back to where we had begun our journey and reflected on the experience. The performance positioned the mobile as the place where all our stories would be deposited. It became both a communication tool to mediate the experience, but also a site for our shared fictional expressions of love. The text messages that I collected on my phone became confessions (that remained secret and were subsequently deleted) of intimate but anonymous social relations.

As a performance imperative, it is very difficult to prove love, but as a theme through which to create performance mechanics to research intimate relationality in social space, it has great potential. I cannot prove the being of love, but what I can do is gather material that, when composed as layers of text, demonstrates a process of intimate becoming with others in social space that has love as its catalyst. The people we fell in love with didn't know that we had fallen in love with them. The text messages that arrived in my phone were sent by my participants, but I didn't know which of my participants sent me which of the messages. The mobile phone allowed an anonymous circulation of fantasy exchanges and imagined intimacies to take place.

The Dialogics of Facelessness

As this article draws to its conclusion, I will dovetail Massey's poetics of imagination and Calle and Acconci's voyeuristic tropes with a discussion of art historian Grant Kester's writing on conversational art practices and some thoughts on the ethics of the relational in the way I have explored it here. It is important to say at this point that the terms relational (which I have been using) and dialogic become wrapped up in the same discussion, but Kester privileges the term dialogic over the term relational.

In discussions around the ethics of dialogic encounters, Kester uses Jeffrey T. Nealon's *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity* (1998) to provide a focus for models of 'dialogical' experience and 'responsibility', as situated by Mikhail Bakhtin and Emmanuel Levinas respectively (Nealon, 1998, in Kester, 2004, 118). Through these thinkers Kester begins to position the physical encountering of others as generative of an ontology that is central to art created dialogically, describing relational ethics in term of the concrete reality of the other experienced through face-to-face encounters. It is the corporeal interaction, says Kester, that is central to a dialogical aesthetic.

Falling in Love Again – and Again can be seen to critique what constitutes corporeal and face-to-face and, if these are central to a dialogical aesthetic, questions how close does one have to be to one's interlocutor to be face-to-face, echoing the thoughts of Chatzichristodoulou above. I am curious about the meaningful relationships that Kester discusses in his framing of Levinas and Bakhtin through Nealon. Kester himself is aware of the complications wrapped up in understanding what might constitute meaningfulness and the problematics of reciprocation in the dialogic and relational, so, mindful of my performance that this article centres on, I would like to discuss these problematics and some of the ethical positionings that Kester points to.

Nealon observes Levinas and Bahktin's argument that 'ethics is constitutively linked to corporeality, the direct experience of 'lived' time and place, and our affective and meaningful relationships with others' (ibid,119). The idea of an affective and meaningful relationship is problematic though. There is the implication that a mutually agreed efficacy occurs, so power relations are balanced. This implication is critiqued by Nealon and it is Kester's observation of this that supports my reading of the strategies I employed in my performance.

In *Falling in Love Again – and Again* I was interested in how the people my participants and I fell in love with were, to a degree, vehicles for our relational orientation – in much the same way as the woman clearing out her grate was for Raymond Williams during his train journey. I would argue that this moment observing the woman was meaningful, affective, and indeed relational; the object of Williams's observation affects Williams as a subject at that moment.

This thinking is supported by Nealon's critique of Bahktin, with Kester observing that Bahktin 'describes a subjectivity that is formed through dialogical interaction', but 'the ultimate goal of this interaction is the expansion of the authoring subject, for whom the other remains a mere vehicle' (ibid, 120). Bahktin's positioning of relational dynamics suggests a power imbalance that Nealon observes sets him apart from Levinas, who points to a more equitable relational ethics. But again, the power dynamics of relationality and problematics of face-to-face encounters are called into question by Kester's observation of Levinas:

{T}he Levinasian subject is precluded from communicating with the other (the act of communication assumes that the other occupies a provisionally finite point of elocutionary authority and receptivity) or, in fact, having any "knowledge of the other at all" (which would, again, require fixing the other's identity within determinant conceptual or descriptive limits)' (ibid, 120).

I have been discussing the problematics of relational dynamics and how levels of active/inactive participation and relational consciousness and awareness coalesce to make ideas of participation, dialogue and intersubjectivity difficult to determine. Among other things, it was the intimate ‘knowledge of the other’ or indeed the knowledge of the self in social space through intimate proximate relationships with others that *Falling in Love Again – and Again* was concerned with.

In Conclusion

The relational ethics seen in Levinas and Bakhtin and the problematic nature of orienting one’s subjectivity through relational opposition to the other as object resonated in the experience of leading and being in this performance. I position the text messages as clues which articulate the process of our social becoming, where the imagination is used to orient oneself with another more intimately than one might normally with a stranger. These clues reveal the criteria that my participants used to determine who they chose to engage with, demonstrating some of what the act of self-orientation relies on.

The texts I received became confessions of imaginings that allowed me to imagine those being imagined. Whilst reading through the mobile phone text messages, the anonymous characters being spoken about and watched became less alien to me. Senses of absence and presence were (and are) evoked that raise questions around our consciousness of our interrelating stories. The expressions of desire here were made from a distance, where anonymity between me, my participants and their objects of fantasy was maintained. The use of communication technologies to share intimacy anonymously continues to question the stability of what and where it is to be together.

The act of sending strangers out into spaces to fall in love anonymously is developed as a performance mechanic in *Falling in Love – Again and Again*, with intimacy between individuals developing concepts around one-sided participation provoked by Acconci and Calle. The thoughts we imagine are made digital and become text messages that are stored and circulated in and through handheld technologies. Satellites in outer space enable the technologies that connect our fantasies in public space, both serving to create social space. The creative act performed as we fill in the blanks places us in the position of the performer and/or the performed, depending on whether we are watching or being watched. Questions of public and private space and the activeness of the participant become destabilised. We walk together in the city and we see one another. We walk together in the city and we think about ourselves. We walk together in the city and we think about ourselves in relation to one another.

Now, more so than ever before, we input these ‘stories so far’ into our mobile phones and exchange them at a furious pace with ‘friends’ on social media – friends we perhaps will never meet. We see digital acknowledgment from some by way of a ‘like’ or a comment, but we are conscious that our shared stories are seen but unacknowledged by other others. The exchange of intimacy and the imbrication and writing-over of reality and fantasy is part of our everyday social dynamics today.

Falling in Love Again – and Again was a prescient moment of exchange that seems oddly quotidian at the time of writing this in 2022. Although Covid-19 is not a dominant feature of this article, the case that our relations with one another have recently been more veiled than ever is a fact of many of our social lives. Being together in 2013 when I made *Falling in Love – Again and Again* meant something different to what it means in 2022. Through necessary distant proximity we have become used to creating new ways of being together again, finding new ways to connect with those we know and those we don’t. Often this begins in our imagination.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

Author Information

Dr. Steve Fossey is Senior Lecturer and Fine Art Programme Leader at the University of Lincoln. He has been working in education and the creative industries for over 20 years. As an academic he has written, led and taught on programmes across the visual and performing arts, and as an artist working in live art, text, and video, he has exhibited and performed nationally and internationally. His practice-as-research PhD explored how site-specific performance can be used to rethink and create social space. He has published widely in peer-reviewed journals, books and online platforms.

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