

Submission for *Choreographic Practices: 'Words and Dance'*

The 'making' of movement and words: A po(i)etic reading of Charlotte Spencer's *Walking Stories*

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Abstract

This article proposes an understanding of Charlotte Spencer's *Walking Stories* (2013) as 'moving poetry'. It navigates through possible perspectives on the 'poetic' to discuss how recorded text and movement interact in this audio-walk for open spaces. In doing so, it moves from Genette's structuralist analysis of poetry to Kristeva's notion of the heterogeneity of poetic language to highlight how poetic texts unsettle signifying processes. While recognizing the value of the metaphors that can be constructed through literary approaches, the article proceeds by arguing that a focus on the ontological dimension of poetry can lead to a notion of the 'poetic' that engages with the transformative possibilities of choreographic practices in which movement and words intersect. Tracing a line between Gadamer's and Rancière's discussions of *poiesis* as speculative and productive activity, it articulates a reading of *Walking Stories* as an event that produces as well as being produced. Specifically, the article suggests that, through its use of recorded sound and text, Spencer's work engages with strategies through which time and space are 'made', advocating a rethinking of how subjectivity and community may be configured.

ARTICLE

Greenwich Park, 18 October 2015. It's been dry all week; we are lucky. The meeting point is the Pavilion Tea House. About a dozen people are here, perhaps more; some have come accompanied, others have travelled solo. We are given an MP3 player and headphones; suddenly we are a group. We join and are joined; each of us alone and together. We look and are looked; we wait and listen: "If you are listening to this recording, it is because you are here with us, and *Walking Stories* is starting. To confirm that you are tuned in, please turn your head to the left and look over your shoulder." This work by Charlotte Spencer is

an hour-long audio-walk in an open space; it premiered in France in 2013 and has since been touring green spaces and city parks in the UK, as well as travelling to other European destinations.¹ The audio recording plays through our headphones for the duration of the event, emphasising listening alongside other sensory experiences, which lead us through a journey of discovery of the park and of ourselves in it. This is a dance work that manifests itself as more than one thing. It is an immersive² performance, in which every participant becomes performer, alongside the creators of the work. It is an interdisciplinary project, in which different art forms converge and re-structure their reciprocal boundaries. It is a piece of choreography, in as much as it carefully orchestrates the movements of bodies in time and space. It is an audio piece, with its soundtrack of music, sounds and words, which impart instructions or provide a commentary on the event we are experiencing. It is lived poetry *in* and *of* time and space.

I am fascinated by the intersections between choreographic works and poetic texts. I am drawn to poetry as a specific form of poetic language whose qualities may be employed as a lens to understand the distinctiveness of choreographic language. In this respect, parallels may be traced between the musical, rhythmic and synaesthetic principles of poetry and similar qualities of danced movement, both on a somatic and on an aesthetic level. Whilst I suggest that literary discourses on poetic language can support parallel interpretations of dance works, in this article I also depart from linguistic and textual approaches to the 'poetic', to interrogate philosophical uses of the term. I propose that a focus on the speculative and ontological dimensions of poetry can lead to a notion of the 'po(i)etic' that is able to engage with the transformative possibilities of choreographic practices in which movement and words intersect. Further to a growing philosophical interest in the intersections between practice and theory in choreographic investigations, I invoke the discourses of thinkers as distinct as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jacques Rancière, and their return to the Greek etymology of the word 'poetry', to construct theorizations of *poiesis* as a productive activity. In doing so, I negotiate an understanding of interdisciplinary choreographic practices as involved in making as well as being presented as made. In the case of *Walking Stories*, the concept of *poiesis* establishes the work as an event that produces as well as being produced. Furthermore, with reference to an articulation of similar concerns in media philosophy through Wolfgang Ernst's (2016) notion of

'chronopoetics', which theorizes the time-making potential of digital technologies, I suggest that the use of recorded voice and sound in Charlotte Spencer's audio-walk and the role they play in generating movement are ways of engaging with 'making' time, as well as, I argue, space. This in turn leads to an interrogation of how, by producing time and space, the work promotes a rethinking of how subjectivity and community may be configured.

(Un)defining the poetic

In addressing the question of how words are used in this example of interdisciplinary, immersive and participatory dance practice, I propose to start from a reading of *Walking Stories* as a form of moving poetry, prompted by my experience of the work as an event that produces significance by both awakening and unsettling relationships between subjectivity and the outside world. This will involve navigating through possible interpretations of the poetic to reflect on how the implication of movement and audio-recording informs the sensorial, kinaesthetic, and I suggest, ontological experience of the work. My aim is not to find a perfectly fitting definition of the poetic through which to explain *Walking Stories* as choreographed poetry, but rather to confound, and be confounded by, existing readings of it so as to engage with the possibilities they open up. Spencer is a choreographer based in South East England, whose choreographic and curatorial projects bring together different art forms, are often devised for outdoor spaces and address diverse audiences. After my first encounter with her work as spectator/participant, I further investigated Spencer's approach to choreography by observing and experiencing her creative processes in the studio.³ Here I learned that her approach is strongly informed by maps and writing, in terms of the interplay of structure and freedom they provide through the compositional principles and near-automatic processes they can be shaped by. To engage with the specificity of the words that were spoken in my ears in *Walking Stories*, I have examined the scripts of the audio-recordings for the piece⁴ and other reflective texts which were written by the creators in the form of a blog (see especially: Spencer 2013; Crawford 2013). There are four strands of scripts, which correspond to four groupings of audience members/participants, each presenting variations of instructions, timings and offerings in the form of thoughts and propositions. The texts were written by Spencer in collaboration with Jennifer-Lynn

Crawford and Bruno Humberto. In the recording, words are carefully arranged in an aural dramaturgy in which they intersect with music and fragments of sounds, composed and designed by Tristan Shorr and Tom Spencer. The voice of the narrator Tristan Shorr carries an intimate tone, which communicates proximity and empathy, with friendly assertiveness.

The words of the audio-recording combine evocative moments, which awaken the listener's imagination and memories, with reflections, statements, questions and instructions. In this respect, the poetic potential I identify in the work is not due to a predominance in the language spoken in our ears of what Roman Jakobson (1960) called the 'poetic function', that is of language that privileges the utterance itself over the contexts and interlocutors of the verbal message. On the contrary, the language of the audio-walk scripts centres on the 'referential' and 'conative' functions, describing what the participants encounter along the way or inviting them to perform specific tasks.

When pilgrims begin to walk, they walk one step after another. The back foot becomes the front foot, one foot to the future, one foot pushing off what has already past. As they walk through the landscape it changes at the rate of their steps. Their bodies change too, slowly. [...]

Have a look at the people you are standing with; they look at you too and you exchange a nod. Together, move towards the group ahead, the people you have been watching, disappearing into the distance. [...]

Some of the others have stopped. Turn to watch them. It is difficult to see what has taken their attention. [...]

We trace lines as paths, as threads winding through a landscape. We watched a thread wind between our stacks. We grew the line up and took it for a walk, passing invisibly through the line formed by the others. We drew threads out into the landscape, getting tangled up in what we found there...

(Spencer, Crawford and Humberto 2013)

Nevertheless, the language used focuses strongly on the senses and on the physical and affective dimensions of the experience, reminding us to pay attention to what we see, hear, feel, touch, find, imagine, remember. The synaesthetic perceptions the work aims to generate in their participants are spelt out:

As you stand still, look into the distance. Track something moving with your eyes; your body still, until it passes out of sight.

If you close your eyes, can you hear what you've been looking at?

Keep your eyes closed and take a few steps backwards from the sound.

Keeping your eyes shut, change your direction.

Open your eyes and take in this new perspective. Are you facing the way you expected?

What catches your eye from a distance?

You are going to run towards it for six seconds. Go.

(Spencer, Crawford and Humberto 2013)

On one level, through its focus on the senses and on their interconnectedness, the script reproduces poetic rhetorical devices, generating a suggestive communication with the participants without focusing specifically on the 'poetic' and 'emotive' modalities of language. In Spencer's words, the emphasis on senses and imagination was both one of the main aims of the project and a critical component of the creative process:

I wanted to dismantle the edge between performance and audience space/stage and life, to invite our audience into a physical and tactile experience of the work almost without them noticing. And I decided that in order to be able to do this well, we the creators of that walk also needed to take a journey together. A long one. To remain in the landscape and *feel* the work seeping into us, not just think about it in a 'brainy' way from the bubble of a studio.

(Spencer, 2013)

Heightened senses, which are put 'on high alert' (Mackrell 2015), are also an outcome that, alongside reviewers, the creators of the work have recorded in the audience, both by observing their body language, 'watch[ing] people gradually sink into themselves [and] leave refreshed, more present' (Spencer 2013), and by collecting feedback 'indicat[ing] that people feel generally "better" for doing the walk. Some people feel weird and some get irritated with the instructions. But mostly, they *feel*.' (Crawford 2013).

On one level, *Walking Stories* is poetic in that, as a multi-sensory event, it produces synaesthetic effects, as poetry might do through rhythmic and rhetorical devices. Literary perspectives can inform readings of choreographic works, as semiotic and intertextual approaches to the study of dance advocate. In linguistics, poetry is generally defined in opposition to everyday language (Yaguello 1998). The term 'poetic' is used in this sense to refer to those texts which break with the conventional syntactic codes of ordinary language

and that, by defying the denotative value of signs, stand outside the verifiability of their correspondence with the object of their discourse. The focus is either on the formal qualities of the poetic texts or on the expectations of the genre, which is defined in antithesis to prose. According to Gérard Genette's (1982) structuralist analysis, for instance, modern poetry 'corrects', 'makes use of', 'replenishes, eliminates, and exalts' the 'shortcomings' of language through the 'poetic ambiguity' generated by the 'simultaneous presence' of denotation and connotation in the poetic word and its attempt to overcome the arbitrariness of the sign (Genette 1982: 90). Drawing on a comparison made by Paul Valéry, Genette (1982) assimilates poetry to dancing and distinguishes them from prose and walking, on the basis of how they infringe conventional norms of ordinary language and movement.

Read from this perspective, walking, as the main component of the kinaesthetic experience of Charlotte Spencer's work, would equate the piece to prose rather than to poetry. Combined with running, pausing, standing, lying down, and alongside gestures and actions that invite a relationship with the space, objects and other participants, walking is the choreographic fabric of the work, which in this sense is made entirely from a pedestrian vocabulary. And before the walking paths were choreographed, the project revolved around another kind of ordinary activity: cycling. To support the making of *Walking Stories*, the project team embarked on a bike tour between creative residencies across France. This was then documented in *Cycle Stories*, a film by David McCormick which was first screened in January 2014 at Greenwich Dance (Spencer 2013). Whilst the French countryside may evoke lyrical images, Spencer (2013) discusses the hiatus between the 'idyllic' expectations of that journey and the 'physicality', 'intensity', 'discomforts' and 'exertion' of the experience of 'camping, eating, sleeping and working together' for ten weeks, covering 3000 kilometres by bike – all radically prosaic activities, in conventional terms.

Cycle Stories was like delving into the unknown. It was ambitious, bold and ventured dance into unfamiliar territory both in terms of the process through which it was created and the formats of presentation it proposed. [...] Cycling between residencies [...] had little in common with our mostly computerized experience of creating *Walking Stories*. Making *Walking Stories* was technical, theoretical, hypothetical, static. Meticulously crafting and designing an experience for others to take. [...] It is this living *Walking Stories* (rather than the making of it) that mirrors

our lived experience of *Cycle Stories* so fully. It was full of unknown, uncertainty, challenge, surprise and stretch. And sometimes that was unsettling.

(Spencer 2013)

The dance root of *Walking Stories* is to be found in the expertly composed trajectories of movement, arrangements of pattern and formations of groups, in the experience of space, time and rhythm the bodies of the participants/performers are guided through. It is a work of dance which operates outside of the conventions of the genre, but still within recognizable choreographic principles.

A solo voice as many voices: the question of the speaking subject

In the same way that, for decades, movement practices have problematized the relationship between dance and ordinary movement, explicitly rephrasing it in non-dichotomous terms since the early-postmodern movement of the 1960s, a reading of this kind of choreography as a form of poetry might embrace theorizations of poetic language which interrogate the qualities of poetry alongside, rather than in opposition to, those of prose. Within this framework, the question of the 'poetic' shifts from concerns of form and conventions to that of its ontological potential. A link with literary discourse is provided by Julia Kristeva's (1980) notion of 'poetic language' as a system complementary to ordinary language, in which the constraints of the linguistic code are challenged and subverted, in both poetry and prose. Kristeva's definition of poetic language characterizes it as a 'heterogeneous process', a 'complex operation' in which 'the dialectics of the subject is inscribed' (Kristeva 1980: 24, 25). The dialogical, ambivalent, parodic nature of poetic language is read in relation to how the speaking subject unsettles both conventional signifying processes and its own identity.

The question of the speaking subject opens Spencer's work to a number of reflections. Who is the speaking subject in *Walking Stories*? Not only was the script written collaboratively, but it was also the result of a collective experience through the cycle touring project, with an artistic team comprising two dance artists, two sound artists and a film-maker, with the addition of a tour manager, Alex Moran, '(also cook, bike fixer, and website maker)' (Spencer, 2013). Whilst it is argued that the solo voice spoken through headphones in

audio-walks is associated with ‘proximity’, ‘depth of character’ and ‘sincerity’ (Myers 2011: 73), in the case of *Walking Stories* the source and the subject of this voice are not univocally identifiable: Spencer and other collaborators accompany the audience members/participants on the walk, so we are aware that the singularity of the recorded voice aspires to stand metonymically for a wider community of speakers. While we attribute the work to Spencer, the voice of the recording is not hers – ‘I was keen for it not to be my voice’, she explains (Spencer 2016). The choice of Tristan Shorr as the audio-walk narrator was based on practical observations, concerning clarity (Spencer 2016).⁵ It could be argued that the qualifiers of the speaking voice (young, male and English) raise identity politics questions due to how the clarity and neutrality of the voice are made to coincide with certain dominant categories, thus seemingly assuming a homogenized listening process.⁶ In another sense, the affable tone of the speaker has the potential to put the listener at ease and engender a sense of familiarity beyond the specific community it speaks from.

Media technologies have transformed interpersonal communication by producing disembodied voices through recording and playback devices (Ernst 2016). However, recorded voices are said to conjure both bodies and inner speech (Myers 2011), depending on their framing, acoustic contexts and on the perspectives of their transmission. The identity of the speaking voice is confounded by the ‘implication of interiority and exteriority’ (Myers 2011: 75), shifting between visible bodies and imaginary bodies and between outer and inner voices. In *Walking Stories*, multiple voices are made possible already at the level of the script, through both the interlocutory tone of the monologue and changes in the sentences’ subjects. The recorded voice asks us questions, which our inner voice(s) may choose to engage with, producing a dialogue:

How was your journey to get here? [...] As you look back, what do you notice? [...] Can you feel the pace of the person next to you? [...] How fast is too fast? [...] How is your breathing? [...] Are the things that you remember more important than the things you forget?

(Spencer, Crawford and Humberto 2013)

This openness also complicates the distinction between speaking and listening, as the questioning implies the possibility of answering and of an interchangeability of roles. The task of speaking/listening is distributed amongst all participants – in the same way that in the participatory framework of the event we all simultaneously watch and perform. The text

also regularly changes personal pronouns in addressing the subjects of the discourse, so that the perception of self and other is constantly, if subtly, shifting: who are 'we'? Who are 'they'? Is 'you' just me, some of us or all of us?

You are not alone this time. Like **you**, **many** have found **their** way and arrived here. [...] Try not to lose **anyone** and make sure that **no one** loses you. [...] We'll walk together for a little while. Stay together, keep walking. [...] It's time to let **some** of the group walk away. Come to a stop. Watch **them** go. [...]

(Spencer, Crawford and Humberto 2013; my emphasis)

As the walk develops and time goes by, we/you/they/I start noticing that, whilst we started all together, we are now split into groups. These are not fixed and, as we come to realize, assume new configurations without us being able to track and trace the changes. Who is 'everyone'? Who are 'the others'? Are they with us or are they *others*, i.e. random people who happen to be here as well, having a walk in the park? Is 'I' me or the speaking voice?

We start to reach **the others**. Caught in our energy **they** join the rhythm. We spread to collect **everyone**. [...] **We** scattered and stood still. As **you** stand still, look into the distance. [...] **Everyone** has scattered. [...] Notice **some of the others** have started to gather. Move towards **them** [...]. It's time to leave **some** of the group behind. Carry on walking. Keep walking ahead. Notice **who** is walking with **you** and **who you** have left behind. Walk together. As **I** walked **I** wondered where **I** was walking and why. **I** wished **I** could never stop – **I** wondered if **I** could just keep on walking and walking into nowhere...

(Spencer, Crawford and Humberto 2013; my emphasis)

To what extent are we one and the same? To what extent are we different? As I (we) notice others, I (we) notice more of myself (ourselves); we become aware of the multiplicity within us (or perhaps you/they/the others are more aware of the unity?). The recurring emphasis on togetherness, on moving together, on acting as a group, is regularly accompanied by remarks on the positioning of 'the others', which we are asked to notice and respond to. This, however, does not create an opposition; due to the floating identity of the speaking/listening subject and to the changeability of the groupings, it invokes an idea of subjectivity which is dialogical and multi-faceted. I suggest that the journey that this disoriented and extended subject embarks on in the audio-walk produces an equally open idea of time and space, by stretching the boundaries of experience – of the imagined and of the visible.

***Poiesis*: making time and space**

The question of signification and of the relationship between the subject and the world in terms of representation and *mimesis* is central to discourses on poetry, and on artistic activity in general, in both hermeneutics and political theory. In advancing my understanding of how words and movement may be seen to engage in a poetic process in *Walking Stories*, I move to philosophical perspectives on poetry and to the concept of *poiesis*. In this respect, the links that Gadamer and Rancière trace between *mimesis* and *poiesis* elicit further reflections on the productive possibilities of artistic practices – in terms of their potential to introduce possible worlds and to generate significance. Words and movement are directly interconnected in the work, through the instructions they impart and the reflections and sensations they provoke; in this sense, movement reacts to, mirrors or is produced by the words. Movement is intertwined with the words also because these carry movement that came before, through the cycling and the travelling that informed the creative process; in this sense movement has produced the words. Finally, words and movement together generate more words in the form of the inner speech they are likely to conjure, in the potential dialogue they open up.

Revisiting the ancient Greek notion of art as ‘imitation of nature’ in relation to poetic theory, Gadamer draws on the Aristotelian ‘meaning of the word “mimesis”’ as ‘letting something be there without trying to do anything more with it’ to arrive at an understanding of poetry (Gadamer 1986: 116, 119). Gadamer refers to the etymological link with the word *poiesis*, which designates both ‘productive activity’ and ‘poetic creation’, to argue that poetry is ‘properly speaking something “made”’: ‘poetry is something that is made in such a way that it has no other meaning beyond letting something be there. There is no respect in which a linguistic work of art has to be there *for* anything’ (Gadamer, 1986: 118, 119). Poetry, and all artistic activity, are based on ‘mimetic experience’, where ‘mimesis [...] does not imply a reference to an original as something other than itself, but means that something meaningful is there as itself’ (Gadamer 1986: 122, 121). Through this concept of the mimetic quality of poetry, a link can be traced to Gadamer’s notion of the ‘speculative’ dimension of poetic language: ‘the poetic statement is speculative inasmuch as

it does not reflect an existent reality [...] but represents the new appearance of a new world in the imaginary medium of poetic invention' (Gadamer 1989: 470).

The connection between *mimesis* and *poiesis* is discussed also by Rancière who, questioning concepts of representation and unrepresentability in art, explains *mimesis* as the interconnection between 'a way of making [*poiesis*] and an economy of affects [*aesthesis*]' (Rancière 2007: 112). The stability of the relationship between *poiesis* and *aestheis* is subject to the understanding of art in different historical instantiations, and 'harmony' between these terms only pertains to the 'representative regime', which precedes modern art (Rancière 2007: 136-37). The 'aesthetic revolution' which characterises artistic modernity 'counterposes to the norms of representative action an absolute power of *making* on the part of the artwork, pertaining to its own law of production and self-demonstration' (Rancière 2007: 119). One of the consequences of the 'aesthetic regime' of our times is that it rejects the idea of art forms as autonomous from each other; different art forms now operate on a communal territory. The 'shared surface' produced by this shift also leads to the 'abolition of the principle that separated the practices of imitation from the forms and objects of ordinary existence' (Rancière 2007: 105, 106). Artistic activity no longer holds the monopoly of meaning production, as 'the world itself, at all levels, including the material ones, is seen to entail meaning' (Deranty 2010: 127). In this respect, I suggest that interdisciplinary practices which employ participatory, immersive processes, by advocating an exchange between the arts and by operating within social relations and engaging with the significance of the material world, face and deal with the complexities, contradictions and challenges of Rancière's modern world and, like 'all genuine artistic projects', 'establish [...] the possibility of free, creative action' (Deranty 2010: 131).

Theorizations of art and poetry as poietic processes emphasise their possibilities: poetry makes, as well as being made. The implication of movement with words in *Walking Stories*, combined with the participatory nature of the work, extends the 'making' to involve subjectivities beyond those of the creators. Spencer comments on how this creative approach foregrounds an expanded notion of authorship:

Walking Stories [...] is not 'my' work – it is co-owned and all of the contributors feel a sense of ownership towards the project because indeed they invested so much of themselves into its creation. When our audience finish *Walking Stories* they leave

with a feeling of ownership of their experience and kinship with the others that they shared the walk with.

(Spencer 2013)

The pluralization of the speaking subject through the shifting nominatives and the reverberations of voices produced by the interlocutory approach of the recorded monologue conjure the possibility of many 'owners' and, most importantly, overturn the author/receiver distinction. The participants contribute to shaping the work and the creators become witnesses to the 'fascinating and beautiful' ways in which the project develops (Spencer 2013).

The immersive character of the work, achieved through the use of technical media, extends its 'making' potential to other domains. The use of portable audio technology for the recording and transmission of words, music and sounds has creative implications on the poetic character of *Walking Stories*. In his journey through communication processes and recording technologies, which is both media archaeology and media philosophy, Ernst constructs a reading of electronic and digitized media as 'chronopoetical', that is, as 'timing agencies', 'time-giving technologies' – as makers of time (Ernst 2016: vii, viii). By dealing with time and intervening in the relationships between different temporal occurrences, these technologies do not simply operate in time: they manipulate it and fabricate it. The process and technology of sound recording produce a 'shifting of presence on the time axis' and 'suspend the actual voice of the present in the real' (Ernst 2016: 100). Electronic and digital technologies for the storing and transmission of sound and image repair the 'abrupt separation between the past (recording) and the present (replay)' that is produced by mechanical media and lead to a theory of 'dilatatory time': 'media storage is thus less an archive of the transmission than a form of decelerated, temporally extended present' (Ernst 2016: 104).

The voice, music and sound of the audio-recording of *Walking Stories* were spoken, composed, collected and recorded over periods of time. Each component brings with itself the presence of its past occurrence as a presence which is at the same time suspended in its reality and dilated to encompass different instances of the present. At each performance of the audio-walk the sounds are replayed and add to this process of time-layering, which both contains the shift between then and now and expands the notions of past and present, as

they simultaneously merge into each other and multiply. Within this extended present, the texture of time can be explored virtually *ad infinitum*. The recording of the spoken words connects the present of the lived experience of which they are traces with the present of the writing, with the present of the editing, with the present of the speaking, with the present of the listening, which contains in itself the potential to happen again and again. The words of the scripts are layered with other sounds and voices, which were captured through a process of field recording; they are traces of other presents and other presences. When the recording is played through the headphones in the ears of the participants, it speaks of times which are concurrently past, present and future.

I want to stretch this idea of the *chronopoiesis* of technological media to account for the other crucial dimensions of the work: as an audio-walk, rather than simply an audio-recording, it exists in time, but also happens in space and through movement. This thought can be articulated in two further claims: first, I suggest that the way in which *Walking Stories* uses sound technology also has the potential to create space, alongside time, in which case we may want to call it ‘choropoetical’⁷ as well as ‘chronopoetical’. Secondly, I propose that, because the *poiesis* of time and space happens through movement, through the physical involvement of bodies as/and subjects, the ‘making’ extends to notions beside and beyond time and space, to encompass human and social experiences such as memory and community, amongst others.

Thoughts about the making of space: as we walk, run, turn, bend, collect things, sit, lie down, engaging in the series of activities the audio-recording choreographs, we are immersed in space. Space is however already conjured in the recording, which, as we have seen, developed from a physical journey through geographical space and contains traces of the places the creative team travelled through.

As you walk, broken sounds will sustain your steps, pushing you forward, holding you back. Sounds from here, compositions that once belonged there and many voices... Voices that will tell you stories from an imaginary landscape; a landscape that is suspended above this one, sometimes above your chest.

(Spencer, Crawford and Humberto 2013)

In the same way that digital recording dilates the notion of ‘now’ conflating and confounding many pasts/presents/futures, I perceive an equally expanded idea of ‘here’ as

resulting from the experience of the audio-walk, which connects and merges the many instances of the 'here' (turned 'there') of the journey of the work, as a creative process and as a performance event. Drawing on the cycling experience, the audio-walk employs specific indicators of direction, positioning and proximity ('next to', 'in front of', 'back to', 'straight', 'closer' etc.) to re-present the journey, but does not make reference to exact places. *'Walking Stories*, to quote Charlotte, is "an outdoor, sited work, but designed for many sites – a 'site-unspecific'".' (Crawford 2013). This not only ensures the adaptability of the walk to different open spaces, but also enables the production of space through the walking and the participants' experience. A new space is lived each time, each time becoming the 'here' that contains, assumes and precedes the many possibilities of 'there'.

Thoughts about the making of memories and communities: a similar approach to specificity guides the choreographic instructions of the script. The movement of the participants is composed according to positions, relations, shapes and patterns. The actions that are suggested to us involve selecting, arranging, ordering; the objects we become attracted to in the searches we are prompted to embark on are identified by quality, colour, texture, appeal. For them to be transferable, to survive multiple transitions between now and then, here and there, they cannot be exact gestures, particular objects.

Look down. Crouch down. Life operates on a different level down here. There are smaller details to notice. Collect a few things – something flat, round, straight, strange, soft. Arrange your things in a way that pleases you. Re-arrange. Look up; have you seen the group ahead are moving off in a new direction? Track which way they're heading.

(Spencer, Crawford and Humberto 2013)

The emphasis on perception and on negotiating personal judgement with group dynamics invites reflections on how the work engages with imagination and memory and on how it shapes social interactions. The audio-walk guides the participants through a lived experience which is able to make memories, rather than simply evoking them. We gather stones, sticks, leaves, various scraps, including abandoned objects and waste; we make and unmake lines and bridges, piles and circles – a childhood memory of making dens, building shelters, designing homes, junk modelling forms in my mind. Except that I do not exactly remember doing this as a child. The reality of this memory is suspended between the

speaking and the listening, between the doing and the watching and acquires tangibility in the dilated experience of time and space the work produces.

The extended subjectivity the audio-walk conjures, through the involvement of multiple subjects and the blurring of roles, also invites a rethinking of notions of community and social relations. The project exposes the plurality of available choices and perspectives, whilst also modelling how these can function coherently – both through the cohesiveness and engagement of the creative team, who, almost invisibly, accompany and guide the walk, and by asking us to make decisions and watch their effects. Our own instincts and deliberations are in constant dialogue with the choices made by others and we are aware of our potential to shape and direct the event. The work presupposes and engenders a community and, as such, it is as open to the possibility of success as to the risk of failure. It invites us to follow and to lead, to make physical contact and to respect personal space, to occupy the centre or gravitate towards the periphery; and we always have the option to disregard or ignore instructions, with consequences for ourselves and for the group.

We wanted [*Walking Stories*] to be accessible and appealing to a really broad range of people and for it to 'do' many things – to re-engage people with green spaces; to bring them into a closer relationship with themselves; to build community; to take them on a journey; to give space for listening and watching; to give space and opportunity for transformation; to allow excited and energetic people to run and equally allow others to be quiet and still; to encourage people to do things that perhaps they might not normally be comfortable doing, and then realize how lovely those activities are.

(Spencer 2013)

In my reading of *Walking Stories*, inspired by notions of poetry and/as *poiesis*, I have proposed that, as a time- and space-making event, the work is produced by and produces a continuous dialogue: between exteriority and interiority, between visible and imagined, between past and present, between there and here. The potentialities inscribed in these dialectical relations seem to resonate with multiple approaches to the poetic: with Kristeva's intertextual reading of signifying processes, through the heterogeneous identity of the speaking subject encompassing both the audio-recording and the lived experience; with Gadamer's hermeneutic perspective, in the sense of the work's implication of processes and conditions of symbolic communication and understanding; and with

Rancière's political reading of aesthetic practices, due to the project's re-presentation of social relations and immersion in the real world. In particular, a focus on *poiesis* has unravelled ways in which intersections between recorded words and movement may generate productive potentialities and uphold ever-changing and ever-expanding notions of social groupings and of the identities of the subjects within them.

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¹ The performance I took part in was presented by Dance Umbrella 2015, which had programmed Spencer's work in four green spaces around London (Greenwich Park, Brockwell Park, Springfield Park and Waterlow Park). Since its creation in 2013, *Walking Stories* has toured a wide range of locations, nationally as well as internationally (the audio-walk has been translated into French and Portuguese) and has engaged both traditional dance audiences and less traditional ones, including primary and secondary school children and community groups from different backgrounds.

² In using this term, I do not intend to enter into the specificities and questions addressed in recent theorizations of current immersive practices (see for instance Alston 2013, Machon 2013, White 2013, Harpin and Nicholson 2016), as this would be beyond the scope of this article. My main aim here is to address the

concerns foregrounded in this special issue, surrounding the relationship between words and dance. Nevertheless, I do endorse a broad understanding of the phenomenon of immersion, which derives from a reading of spectatorship as always a potentially ‘emancipated’ and ‘attuned’ experience if we understand the positions of ‘acting’ and ‘viewing’ as subject to transformation and redistribution (Rancière 2009). Such openness is advocated, amongst others, by Adam Alston (2013), Gareth White (2013) and, most recently, Royona Mitra (2016), who question dualistic readings of participatory/non-participatory, interactive/non-interactive performance practices and articulate an idea of immersion as “a form of critically aware yet empathetic and embodied spectatorship” (Mitra 2016: 99).

³ Between November 2015 and April 2016 I invited Charlotte Spencer to lead a series of choreography workshops for students on the Dance BA programme at Kingston University. In April 2016 I also participated in a sharing and discussion of her more recent project *Is this a Wasteland?* at London’s Olympic Park, during its development phase. This new work adopts a similar compositional, dramaturgical and technological apparatus to *Walking Stories* to question ideas around space, its utility and waste, as well as notions of home, belonging and community.

⁴ I would like to thank Charlotte Spencer for allowing me access to the *Waking Stories* scripts and consenting to the reproduction of excerpts in this article.

⁵ ‘The French version is with a female French speaker and the Portuguese is male, each with native speakers to those languages’ (Spencer, 2016).

⁶ I am grateful to my referee who, in the peer review process, pointed out the need to problematize this assumption. A discussion of the politics of listening in relation to how intention and identity are too easily projected onto vocal timbres can be found in Eidsheim (2014). Here Eidsheim questions and overturns assumptions concerning how meaning is ascribed to sound and how differential vocal markers are read. Eidsheim argues for an understanding of listening as an act which is ‘always already political’ and invites us to reflect on the ‘positionality of the listener’ and on how ‘listening and the meaning derived from it are never stable’.

⁷ I have found this term used to construct a theory of spatial practices in Thurgar-Dawson, C. (2006), ‘Negotiating Englishness: Choropoetics, reciprocal spatial realities and holistic spatial semantics in William Renton’s “The Fork of the Road” (1876)’, in Burden, R. and Kohl, S. (eds.), *Landscape and Englishness*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 27–45.