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Collective, Collage, and Translative Authorship: Writing to and from Multilingual Europe

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Abstract

Letters to Europe (2011) is a collectively authored, transnational literary engagement with Europe as an idea, a place, and a set of socio-political relationships. A print publication and performance, the ambivalent generic status of the Brussels-based project raises productive questions about how collective translation, transnational authorship, and multimedial performance strategies combine to advance new modes of aesthetic and political representation for subjects in transit in twenty-first century Europe. I argue for attention to multilingual and multimedial translations as sites of creative self-documentation on the part of mobile subjects as a critical counterpoint to state-sanctioned forms of documentality (Favorini). To that end, I show how collage as an aesthetic and editorial technique is used to assemble a visual and performative unity of multilingual texts; consider its implications for contemporary debates on language, culture, mobility and belonging in Europe and the EU; and explore the confluence of translation, document, and migration in innovative European literatures today.

Keywords

collage, documentary, epistolary, Europe, EU, migration, multilingualism, performance, translation

Cover Page Footnote

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Collective, Collage, and Translative Authorship:
Writing to and from Multilingual Europe

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Letters to Europe (2011) is an innovative publication and performance situated at the juncture of translational and multilingual poetics. One of several ambitious initiatives undertaken by EU-sponsored cultural organizations, both the project and my analysis take their conceptual cues from experiments in collectively authored, transnational literary engagements with Europe as an idea, a place, and a set of socio-political relationships. This case study provides insight into how collective translation and transnational authorship combine to advance new aesthetic and political agendas in twenty-first century Europe. The politics of language and identity in Brussels (and Belgium) stands in for keen tensions that inhere in Europe's self-fashioning as multilingual, a proposition that takes on new urgency in light of resurgent populisms that appeal to long-standing linguistic nationalisms throughout the region and the political union.

Letters's aesthetic purchase is inseparable from its political and cultural impulse to address European immigration policies. It relies on a set of implied claims to authenticity and the immediacy of direct address even as its documents are carefully crafted and subjected to translation into three languages. Collage and translation—as narrative principles of the performance and visual aesthetic strategies of the print text—serve as key points of entry into complex debates about the integrity of the subject, the text, and Europe itself. After a more detailed account of the project's print and performance modes, as well as some shorter observations on its position in a broader landscape of European epistolary projects, I move on to describe the confluence of translation, document, and migration—and their attendant “patterns of perception” in *Letters*.¹ Next, I attend to how collage as a technique (both aesthetic and editorial/authorial) is used to assemble a visual and performative unity of multilingual texts that is more than the additive monolingualism that characterizes many better known examples of European literature and performance. Ultimately, I consider how *Letters's* formal experiments can help us recast contemporary debates on language, culture, mobility, and belonging in Europe and the EU.

¹ I borrow and extend the phrase from Doris Bachmann-Medick's and Jens Kugele's discussion of migration (“Introduction,” 1).

Transnational Networks of (Self-)Authorship in *Letters to Europe*

Letters to Europe was one of dozens of projects undertaken by the transnational European network Shahrazad—Stories for Life, a five-year collaboration of cultural organizations in six European countries (2007-2012). It was conceived as both a performance and a large-format book, featuring strikingly arranged and illustrated letters from twenty-two authors in twelve languages, some EU citizens and others living in Europe in exile. The Brussels-based performance event featured authors reading their work, musicians, and circus artists.² Several authors are affiliated with the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN), an independent organization dedicated to providing safe haven to endangered authors. All are professional writers. Participants could write in the language of their choice, and several chose to write in a language that corresponded neither to their literary language nor to an official language of their country of origin or residence. Iraqi author Manal Al-Scheikh, who holds a degree in Arabic-English translation, wrote in English; German author Saša Stanišić, born in Višegrad (Yugoslavia) chose to write in both English and German, adopting multiple speaking positions along the way. Other authors are notably active in language advocacy work for small and minoritized languages. Prominent among them is Salem Zenia, a Kabyle author who wrote in Amazigh using Berber Latin script, a choice that bears traces of Algerian language politics dating to the nineteenth century. The largest Berber ethnic group in Algeria, the Kabyle's fight for linguistic recognition of Amazigh takes its place in *Letters* alongside cultural movements associated with minor languages more commonly represented in intra-European conversations on language policy, such as Catalán (author Maria Barbal). Igor Štik, who wrote his contribution to the project in Serbo-Croatian and was a signatory to the 2017 "Declaration on the Common Language," exemplifies the participation by authors and intellectuals concerned with the relation of language to nationalism in Europe. As even this subset of authors shows, project coordinators and editors solicited authors who are themselves translators, who have been translated into a variety of European languages, and who have engaged in sophisticated debates on language politics.

The assembled voices subtly confront persistent language ideologies, opening a transnational space of encounter attuned to an understanding of language as "a diverse, only partly shared repertoire, a practice that not always aims at order or at being understood, but that can also be seen as particularly meaningful where it hides meaning" (Hollington and Storch 4). Without wishing to overstate the importance of a single case study, *Letters* offers valuable critical impulses for research on how literary and multimedia projects might shift the terms of

² For an overview of Shahrazad in the context of its final, 2012 initiative in Stockholm, Sweden, see Trnka.

conversation about language and its representation as they function in parallel to linguistic and social scientific work on ideology, policy, and communicative practices in contemporary Europe. In keeping with work in critical multilingualism studies, I suggest that *Letters*'s editors and contributing authors advance an empowering model for “social change, linguistic creativity, social transgression, [and] global and local entanglements,” (Hollington and Storch 6) even as its ancillary, appended translation into one of three colonial languages may be viewed as participating in the taming or tidying of linguistic messiness that Hollington and Storch critique.

The enduring “metaphor of Europe as a translational space” (Wolf 225) and the resurgence of European epistolary projects (Biendarra 264-73) provide rich contexts within which to situate *Letters to Europe*. Michaela Wolf and others have remarked on the intersection of positively valorized spatial metaphors with real migratory movements that “shape today’s translation landscapes,” highlighting material mechanisms for control that guide and govern identitarian translation policies in Europe (Wolf 232). Pointing toward the alignment of EU cultural and linguistic policies with neoliberal projects, Wolf urges a thoroughgoing examination of “what kind of social relations trigger translational practices in Europe today” and of how “translational practices [are] thought and represented,” favoring Naoki Sakai’s heterolingual model of translation as the language of subjects in transit (Wolf 231-33).

The conceptual nexus Europe-translation-migration is embedded in initiatives to cultivate more self-reflexive and dialogical genres of public discourse, especially in the face of resurgent nationalisms and a sense of European crisis. Notably for this study, Anke Biendarra analyzes the “central function [of literature] in the development of European identity” (259) with respect to a series of European writers’ initiatives that prominently turn to composite texts and the public exchange of letters in the years following the publication and performance of *Letters to Europe*. Her analysis draws special attention to a deceleration of communication marked by the letter in a digital age and to the close connections the medium occasions between personal introspection, identity, and dialogue across European national borders in an effort to generate a contemporary European public sphere along lines proposed by Jürgen Habermas and qualified by Nancy Fraser (Biendarra 258).³

³ While Biendarra’s reference is to Fraser’s 1990 “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” it bears noting that Fraser’s more recent critical attention to the Westphalian political imaginary, with its tacit articulation of a national language with a national public sphere and the elision of the public and the citizenry, adds another layer of complexity to the status and legibility of epistolary forms as markers of changing expressions of European subjectivity—especially in the context of transnational exchanges in translation.

Language itself is downplayed in the public staging of the correspondence Biendarra analyzes: while participants in the epistolary project *FRAGILE: European Correspondences* (2016-2017) could elect to write in their native languages, their work was professionally translated prior to publication, ultimately reinforcing a monolingual mode. Unlike exchanges published only in translation, *Letters* deliberately foregrounds translation and multilingualism as essential to the constitution of an alternative and radically decentered rhetorical space. Approaching crisis as a multivocal place of encounter, *Letters to Europe*, too, contributes to the work of slowing communication, identifying the letter (even the unanswered letter) as an important genre for exploring intersubjectivity and leveraging practices of writing that generate proximity in and through mobility. Wolf's and Biendarra's projects point to many rich connections to European cultural policies and practices underwritten by translation. At the same time, *Letters*'s complex multilingualism distinguishes it from *FRAGILE* and other epistolary projects that sometimes elide linguistic difference in order to advance a progressive, transnational political unity.

In addition, *Letters*'s distinctive institutional genesis, its aestheticization of translation and self-translation, and its collage character yield novel insights into literary and paraliterary engagements with forced migration and the terms of address, redress, and representation available to subjects in transit in contemporary Europe. As I will show, the letters differ substantively from both the epistolary projects examined by Biendarra and, importantly, other recent performance projects that mobilize the conceit of letters to document and transmit the experiences of forced migrants and refugees. Prominent examples of the latter include *Letters Home* (2014) and *Dear Home Office* (2016). Both productions resulted from refugee initiatives (in Germany and the UK, respectively). While the motivation and conditions of production vary widely for each of these works, they share the letter as a mode of address and trope common to both fictional and nonfictional exilic writing. Like the subjects who speak to and from Europe now, the documentary impulse has revealed itself to be highly mobile. Caroline Wake goes so far as to assert that verbatim plays giving dramatic shape to recorded primary source material on “refugees, asylum seekers, and irregular immigrants” in particular constitute a “global genre” (103).⁴

The currency of refugee theatre (which slightly post-dates *Letters* and other Shahrazad-affiliated projects) encompasses a huge range of examples and illustrates how a topical designation has frequently displaced or occluded a generic designation—documentary theatre—which traditionally has invited greater attention to formal and ethical questions surrounding the representation of non-fictional subjects. In what follows, I consider the ambivalent genre status of *Letters*

⁴ For a more robust discussion of verbatim theatre, see Derek Paget, “Verbatim Theatre” and “Acts of Commitment.”

and how, as a more tenuous example or limit case of the documentary genre, it might push us to think differently about both multilingual and multimedia translations and novel forms of documentary praxis.

Its particular form of collective (self)translation poses productive challenges for staging new and inclusive Europes. Editorial strategies that make discontinuity, montage, and non-translation visible in a design concept are valuable to authors who strive to communicate European realities without reproducing stereotypes or reifying experiences of precarity or vulnerability. Editorial decisions to solicit documents and offer contributing authors broad latitude to determine the nature and extent of editorial intervention into their respective contributions serves as a model to create meaningful process-experiences for vulnerable subjects, creating space for the production of dialectical fictions as opposed to the tropes of authenticity that have dogged many projects associated with refugee theatre.

Further, the collage character of both the publication and performance of *Letters to Europe* recalls a thread in the documentary tradition that has often been eclipsed in prominent examples of refugee theatre. The latter have routinely stepped back from early experiments in documentary to embrace verbatim techniques pioneered in the 1970s.⁵ As Timothy Youker notes, documentary theatre of the 1920s was vitally connected to avant-garde aesthetic experiments including collage, bricolage, and Merz that aimed not to produce a heightened realism, but to surpass it in their combination of fact and imagination in multimedia performances (220). In this important vein, elements of the documentary tradition that privilege the performance of dissent from public discourse (Youker 219) align with the literary impulses that undergird *Letters* to make mobile subjects socially legible on their own terms, generating paths to recognition that a state-centered documentality alone cannot brook.⁶

Letters's tandem performance and publication stake out potentially productive authorial positions for a new generation of documentarists—or, to use Carol Martin's related but more expansive term, "real world theatre" (Martin 1) practitioners—who adopt the first-person voice of verbatim theatre to articulate claims of authenticity, but who often cannot do so without assimilating the voices of vulnerable or minoritized subjects or, in some cases, unintentionally reproducing

⁵ While Derek Paget engages with characterizations of verbatim theatre in terms of collage ("Verbatim Theatre" 323), we can usefully distinguish between its selection and reassembly of materials and earlier, avant-garde traditions associated with Erwin Piscator, for example, and more closely aligned with *Letters*'s impulse to connect disparate media and relations of the factual and the real. This is effectively captured in Kathryn Brown's attention to Tristan Tzara's surrealist collage as both form and principle with implications for how we might think about the "relation between visual art, poetry, and theatre" and consider "the role of collage at the intersection of verbal and visual media," (544; 546).

⁶ I return to this pivotal distinction between documentary and what Charlton Payne, in his engagement with Maurizio Ferrari, terms "documentality" in a later section of the article.

racist and colonial stereotypes. On this score, S.E. Wilmer and Azadeh Sharifi take up the need to move beyond good intentions and develop alternate modes of relation between refugees, theatre institutions, and publics (“Reflections on Theatre and Statelessness”). Derek Paget offers an account of the cyclical, context-driven reemergence of verbatim material in “troubled times,” including its continued purchase in committed theatre and single-issue activism. That has prominently included arts activism surrounding forced migration and rights claims in recent decades: “testimony expressed through verbatim material has reemerged as a basis for the claim of documentary truth” (“Acts of Commitment” 176).

Critical and pragmatic assessments of verbatim practices abound against this backdrop. Katrin Sieg acknowledges the power of public documentary performances centered on personal human rights narratives to effect change, even as she identifies the problematic discourses in which they are too often embedded, as well as the extensive and often problematic mediation of refugee speech by experts, translators, and others. Caroline Wake identifies three key strands of critical scholarship that addresses the “ethics of repetition” in testimonial theatre and verbatim material at the levels of production, representation, and reception – and cautions against critics who would “in the name of ethics, find [themselves] practicing a rather exclusive representational politics,” effectively abandoning a tool for increasing political visibility of refugees (103-106).

In tandem with these important ethical discussions and given the production of source documents by professional authors for *Letters*, a terminological issue bears noting: in treating *Letters to Europe* as documentary, I follow Thomas Irmer’s provocative characterization of contemporary documentary performance projects as “documentary with no documents,” projects that “examine the political in the quotidian and represent a new tendency in documentary theatre toward exploring aspects of the unknown present, using techniques appropriated from experimental theatre and contemporary exhibition aesthetics and strategies instead of conventional theatrical representation” (25).⁷ Writing in a US context, Youker has pointed to similar developments that challenge documentary modes reliant on journalistic, historiographic, and social scientific models, highlighting experimental documentary’s “capacity to dissent from conventional thinking about

⁷ Specifically, Irmer’s focus in this passage is on the use of walking tours, research-based theatre, oral and site-specific approaches as new documentary forms in the work of Roland Brus and Rimini Protokoll: “It is a new form of documentary—with no actual documents—using oral history to provide the details of a very local story and to gain a larger perspective on Berlin’s history” (25). Too, *Letters to Europe* conforms broadly to Atillio Favorini’s definition of documentary as “a set of methods and propositions [...] governing its non-fiction features,” (25-26). In a US context, Daniel Warden points to a similar “rise in prominence of a documentary aesthetic” that he dates to the 1960s (23-24).

how evidence is identified, collected, organized, and explained” (219).⁸ Documentarists participate in document creation, but, in the tradition of verbatim theatre’s condensation, combination, and dramatic collage, have tended primarily toward the collection of oral histories; the solicitation of written texts from professional authors departs from this approach (Paget, “Verbatim Theatre” 323, 328-29). Despite increasingly self-reflexive engagements with the genesis and evidentiary standing of source documents, critics and audiences alike continue to assume that documentary literature’s poetic effects result from the process of documents’ assembly as literature.

Because migrant and minoritized authors often confront a set of assumptions that flatten or even deny their literary production, reducing literary expression to autobiography, novel approaches to documentary poetics that foreground authors’ capacity to document the present with recourse to the fictional are essential. To deny the literary character of the letters as source documents is to participate in problematic, positivistic reading practices; to emphasize their literariness to the exclusion of their non-fictional character, on the other hand, risks eroding their documentary function and their complex relationship to a growing “archive of migration” (Utlu). Embracing the heterogeneous styles and approaches within and across source documents, *Letters to Europe* aligns most closely with documentary performances that challenge identitarian notions of authenticity and seek instead to construct what theatre anthropologist Jonas Tinius terms “dialectical fictions” (“Rehearsing Detachment” 21-22). Prior to any act of editorial collage or staging, the authors engage in a process of self-documentation and self-making. Their dialectical fictions are, per Tinius, both political and ethical:

[T]he act of making oneself a reference to one’s own performance—beyond being an aesthetic activity—is also a political and ethical practice. It is a political practice, because it allows for the creation of alternative visions of whichever stigmatized role is being enacted, i.e., what constitutes a refugee, a queer, or a disabled actor. It is an ethical practice because it invites the acting subject to engage in a process of deliberative self-cultivation. (“Rehearsing Detachment” 28)

Aesthetic, political, and ethical—the self-authorship of Europe’s subjects in transit draws attention to the limits of tropes of authenticity in artistic representation and of “Europe as a translational space” (Wolf 225).⁹ In its place, project coordinators and participants articulate new subjects of multilingual address without sacrificing the ethical and political claims long associated with verbatim forms.

⁸ See also Irmer’s discussion of Hans-Werner Kroesinger for an analogous intervention in a European context (20-24).

⁹ See Tinius’s treatment of this limit in “Authenticity and Otherness.”

Indeed, the political claims of the poetics of creative self-documentation and multilingualism stand in stark contrast to the logics of documentality and monolingualism that govern nation-states. Charlton Payne's insightful article on the poetics of documentation draws on the history of the identity document as a signal development in modern technologies of social and political recognition (102). With special attention to the origins of the passport, he recounts early moves to institutionalize identity documents in the face of mobility and displacement in early twentieth-century Europe. According to Payne, states attempted to fix shifting identities, endow them with social significance, and generate legible social objects—documents—such that “[t]he history and theory of migration is [...] inseparable from practices of documentation” (102). As a social function, documentality sits in close proximity to the social object that is the document. Payne recounts the mutually constitutive processes of documentation and invention as he places materialist philosopher Maurizio Ferraris's notion of documentality, “the ability to leave and record traces [that] supplies the performative basis for social institutions,” in dialogue with writers Joseph Roth and Kurt Tucholsky (102). Refugees have drawn attention to the instability of systems that attempt to fix identities and to confer or deny their value for as long as those systems have been in place. Similarly, the social legibility of refugees and displaced persons as mediated by documents has, Payne argues, been in constant relation to document fabrication. Because the legibility of subjects in transit (in history and fiction) as a function of documentality underwrites migrants' and refugees' access to rights, it is a matter of urgency that exceeds the confines of the literary narrowly understood (106).

Payne's attention to how early twentieth-century fiction engages the relationship between documentality and self-invention—perhaps even self-translation—takes on new contours in twenty-first-century Europe. *Letters* refuses to be governed by the passport, which Payne provocatively describes in terms of collage:

an assemblage of a picture, stamps, watermarks, seals and a signature, the passport combines iconic, indexical, and symbolic signifiers in one portable documental object. The efficacy of this collage of signifiers depends, of course, on the existence of state-sponsored bureaucratic apparatus and established procedures for guaranteeing the passport's authority and authenticity. (105)

Letters's epistolary collage stands in opposition to the collage of the passport: the assembly, cutting, reassembly, and performance of unverifiable and invented documents stakes a counterclaim to hegemonic terms of social legibility that constrain the rights and representation of subjects on the move. In its place, *Letters*

to Europe advances a multivocal space of encounter that selectively elides nationality and citizenship as identity markers in favor of non-naturalized language choice and cities of residence, advancing practices of self-documentation that move to reframe social legibility in and by Europe. Here, the act of collective self-documentation confronts and overwrites documentality.

Hope, Crisis, and Beauty: Multilingual Collage as Method and Aesthetic of European Address

The project coordinators, in close collaboration with Passa Porta, Shahrazad's Belgian participant organization, solicited material for *Letters* through a deliberately broad prompt to write a letter to Europe and by asking authors to indicate their level of comfort with editorial intervention (Vermeersch). The resulting letters' direct address to "Europe/ a cousin/ a love" were then organized in three parts: "When we fled, you were our hope"; "Be patient with your crisis"; and "You at your most beautiful." Its carefully crafted documents are disassembled and remounted, appearing in their original languages and accompanied by an appendix of translations available in English, French, or Dutch, respectively, in three separately but simultaneously published editions of the otherwise identical book. The framing salutation's conjunctive slash invites the reader immediately to consider Europe's multiply constituted position as an object in this second person narrative of hope, patience, and beauty which extends across multiple attachments. It conveys a commitment not only to what Europe is, but to what it might become. Individual letters are cut and distributed across multiple sections; the epistolary collage thus reinforces the conjunctive mode of initial address as always inclusive, never exclusive.

The editorial collage of assembled letters is richly punctuated by Flemish illustrator Tom Schamp's colorful images, which emphasize media and mobility in the physical transport and delivery of letters, pigeons, and relay flags.¹⁰ Most double-page spreads bear a single image or a cluster of images, leaving ample open space surrounding the texts. The color scheme incorporates an airmail envelope blue background. The same color creates the final illustration's horizon, and leads the reader from the white pages of the main section to the matching blue of the translated appendix. The sparsely illustrated pages invite consideration of language itself as image; design and layout visually differentiate languages on the page, as for example in the alternation of scripts and languages that may use a common alphabet but nonetheless register difference in the frequency of specific characters

¹⁰ I choose to refer to images rather than illustrations. Schamp worked to produce images with only a small number of texts and brief biographies of participating authors and did not see the final texts prior to publication. As Schamp explained in an interview, images are his own preferred language.

or diacritical markers. The effect of script on the page is as much a discernible editorial principle as is the tri-part division of the book into themes or virtues. The appendix strips the formatting, organizing translations into columns and reducing the font, affirming the primacy of the multilingual text even as it provides an alternate point of entry through the backdoor of translation.

The formal choice to treat text as image and to deploy collage resists readings that might accrue to editorial strategies grounded in additive monolingualism. In considering the complex relationship of visual, verbal, and performance media in *Letters to Europe*, elements of Christine Bischoff's argument about images of migration in journalistic media help to appreciate the turn to collage as a visual medium, perhaps even as a patient visual antidote to a contemporary media regime centered on a crisis represented as originating at Europe's periphery (22-23). Where the media image centers the viewer, the second person address of epistolary collage simultaneously returns the gaze and attempts to reframe the image-text of language in transit. Language as script is not always comprehensible linguistic input; it functions aesthetically and is never assumed to be fully legible to any single reading subject. In this way, the audience sees language difference as difference in common. This is key to how the image of language is activated alongside the absent but commonplace photographic images of migration to Europe to conjure alternate ways of imagining or addressing Europe. Collage preserves both the visibility of editorial operations and the self-representation of the authors. To the extent that images are determinative of social and political discourse in our highly visual culture (Bischoff 21), the decision to wed collage's visually arresting techniques to non-linear, multi-author prose marks an intervention into popular debates about language, mobility, and attachment in and to Europe. It occasions a "multipolar translation" (Bachmann-Medick, "Migration as Translation" 278) that, in the tradition of early twentieth-century theorists and practitioners of collage, breaks familiar patterns of perception and representation. Its democratic potential rests in no small part on its capacity to activate audience attention, interpretation, and extension of alternative visions of European pluralism to everyday spaces, beyond the confines of the published text or its performance (Brown 545-46, 550).

Disrupting assumptions of cultural immediacy in language transfer in favor of transformation (Bachmann-Medick, "Translation" 31-32), multilingual, epistolary collage turns hybrid form to its communicative advantage, showing the unfinished edges of disassembled and remounted letters in their original languages. The transformation of source texts, cutting and rearranging separate texts to craft a single, multivocal text in the three thematic sections, each with its respective attitude of relational address, models precisely the kind of visibility of translation and migration as cultural practices proposed by Bachmann-Medick and her

theoretical interlocutors. In *Letters*, multilingualism is form, content, and strategy alike.

Text as image was present, too, in the performance version of *Letters*. A staged reading at the Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg ‘Royal Flemish Theatre’ lent publicity and prestige to the publication project. At an institution known for embracing Brussels’s diversity and committed to an intercultural program of theatre, music, and dance, *Letters*’s one-time performance featured sixteen of its authors.¹¹ They read their own work in the order of its arrangement in the published version. No attempt was made to speak for authors not present. The removal of sections of text resulted in an alternate set of juxtapositions, but the concept and effect of the publication were retained. Authors read their work in its original language as surtitles were projected in Dutch, French, and English. Performances by musicians and acrobats punctuated the readings in the impressively renovated hall of the historic Lakensestraat theatre. A long-standing pillar of Dutch language culture in a predominantly French speaking city, the choice of venue resonates with authorial and editorial choices to incorporate minor languages and to contest singular national languages in Europe more generally.



Figure 1. Brussels Performance. KSV Johan Van Eyken. Image Courtesy of Passa Porta

According to project coordinator and editor Peter Vermeersch, the questions and techniques that underwrote *Letters* emerged from longer-standing literary experiments in Brussels that sought to give expression to multilingual and

¹¹ The KVS Mission foregrounds its commitments to an open, plural, and intercultural city theatre with reach and resonance that extend beyond Brussels.

multicultural cityscapes and subjects, and which pursued new forms of collective authorship (Vermeersch). In 2008-2009, Vermeersch and David Van Reybrouck of the Brussels Poetry Collective worked with 52 poets residing in every EU country, writing in 30 languages, and with 70 translators to craft a *European Constitution in Verse* (Buekenhout qtd in Duarte). Many of the writers were affiliated with ICORN or PEN. The European Constitution project was launched in connection with *Shahrazad* and also relied on close collaboration with Passa Porta and its director Paul Buekenhout, who later co-edited *Letters* with Vermeersch.

In the case of *Letters to Europe*, the nature of the translation, collaboration, and performance was different in many respects, not least the more modest number of collaborators, and the simultaneous solicitation of individual responses to a broader prompt, to be edited and combined based on an individually agreed upon level of authorial comfort with editorial intervention, rather than an attempt to work with authors responding to one another's contributions sequentially and in a more specifically defined legal and political context. Nonetheless, the experimentation with modes of collectively authoring and translating multilingual European texts to intervene into contemporary European political contexts connects the projects in important ways. Like *Letters*, that project culminated in a 2014 staged reading under the directorship of Ruud Gielens in Brussels. In both projects, the commitment to collective authorship and multilingual, multivocal networks of poetic encounter underwrites and enacts transformative political encounters. In retrospect, given post-2015 representations of forced migration that hinge on the pathos of victim identification, moral indignation, and similarly negative affective moods, the editorial decision to foreground mobile subjects positively engaged in self-imagining marks a path too seldom taken—even as the solicited texts are subjected to collage, translation, and other editorial decisions by their Belgian editors.

The evolution and institutional context for the two projects illustrate how literary activity provides one means of addressing lacunae in Europe's political and legal community through the work of creative cultural projects—projects often funded by the EU itself and which participate in transnational networks promoted directly or indirectly by EU incentive structures. *Letters* is instructive with respect to how forms of collective authorship and collaboration across European cultural networks shape pragmatic and aesthetic choices in Europe's staging and the practical relationships they engender. A small but active organization, Passa Porta aims to reinforce connections between Belgian French, Dutch, and international writers. It hosts international writers and operates as an ICORN partner. Passa Porta thus participates in a city-specific cultural landscape, a national cultural and political context, EU-sponsored cultural projects, and international projects.

While obviously connected to EU-funded cultural projects such as *Shahrazad*, *Letters* co-editor Buekenhout emphasizes his perception of Passa

Porta's bi-annual literature festival, in conjunction with which *Letters* was produced and performed, as an antidote to Brussels's "bad reputation" as the seat of the EU (Buekenhout qtd in Duarte). Buekenhout describes Brussels's reputation as "a kind of phantom city; a city where big decisions are made by phantoms; the neighborhood where the European Parliament is located; a kind of rich ghetto" (Buekenhout qtd in Duarte). Buekenhout emphasized the nature and character of international festivals; Brussels's position as a multilingual and multicultural city; and Passa Porta's extensive networks of collaborators. In his estimation, the festival's 2011 theme "On the Move" provided an alternative vision of Europe that eludes equation with the EU as a political entity. Passa Porta's vision of Brussels as a metonym for the EU traffics in difference from and within Europe. As I shall show below, Tom Schamp, *Letters*'s illustrator, offers a colorful counter-image of the city, redrawing the boundaries of neighborhoods and communities and generating points of contact, mobility, and proximity that are anything but ghostly.

As a pendant to the print text's image of Brussels Park, the performance is closely aligned with broader European performance traditions and trends,¹² while the implications of EU cultural policy and its institutional and structural manifestations for international theatre festivals serve as an important context.¹³ Matthias Warstat explains, in keeping with the findings of the FU Berlin research collective "Theater und Fest in Europa," that European festivals have increasingly influenced aesthetic choices, contributing to a

truly European theatre praxis [...] The aesthetic conventions consistently and decisively extend beyond the boundaries of national theatre traditions. Among these new conventions are multilingualism, that is, the use of different languages in a single production; the emphasis on visual elements of theatre in the sense of a 'theatre of images' whose motifs are comprehensible even without the spoken word; as well as the thematization of apparently universal conflicts whose intelligibility seems assured in all of Europe. (31; translation mine)

¹² *Letters* is clearly in line with the four possible definitions of European theatre catalogued by Michael Bachmann: a theatrical tradition; an institutional economic frame of European cultural promotion; a collective designation for diverse theatrical forms practiced within Europe's geographic borders; and, finally, theatre that engages with Europe itself (69).

¹³ For more engagement with the emergence of a new European theatre praxis, see the editors' forward to *Vorstellung Europa* (8-9). In a related vein, Natalie Bloch addresses changes since the 1990s in funding structures, staffing, repertoire, and aesthetic choices, among other issues. The demands of transnational collaborations and touring productions are particularly interesting as a point of comparison for *Letters* and other projects under the umbrella of Shahrazad ("Tendenzen und Entwicklungen"). While *Letters* shares many features with productions for the festival circuit, its goals and process remain distinct. For example, collaborations were conducted remotely and only one production was envisioned.

Multilingualism, visual motifs, and refusal to translate point toward the reciprocal influence of print collage and performance text in *Letters*.

Yet, as Stephen Wilmer notes in *Performing Statelessness in Europe*, while EU-sponsored cultural projects have consistently deemphasized national identities in service of constructing European identities and counteracting nationalist policies, this “does little to counteract the exclusive privileges of citizenship” (5). One of the festival’s signal innovations in the inclusion of *Letters*, then, is to advance an imaginative political counterpoint in which direct address of the EU by citizens and non-citizens alike equalizes their speaking positions on the stage in a European capital.

The various terms and positions of address in *Letters* emerge as important to defining their collective object—Europe—as a place of possibility. Tom Schamp’s image of Europe’s open gate—deliberately in opposition to a fortress Europe—and the vibrant physical transformation of Brussels Park, an iconic space in the heart of Europe’s capital, reprises figures dispersed throughout the print text and offers a hopeful vision of a Europe as open, plural, and grounded in communication and movement.



Figure 2. Tom Schamp's Europe “à tout le monde”

Schamp's cheerful image presents the reader with a series of complex visual gestures that layer local, national, and European problematics, and so relativizes a symbolic center of power and culture, foregrounding mobile, multilingual subjects in proximity and engaged in communication across unspecified distances marked by the airmail-blue envelopes they carry. The only remaining lock is shaped like a heart and has been attached not to a gate, but to the bars, perhaps the work of vacationing lovers; an oversized lock dangles from the hands of a figure in a red coat that evokes both the red of the Belgian postal service and the style and gesture of a welcoming concierge. The visual metaphor of the hotel replaces that of the fortress. Not to be overlooked is the symbolic inscription and translation Schamp elects: in place of the decorative elements on the actual park gate posts, his drawing of the left-hand pillar renders "Parc/k" multilingual, thereby affirming the place of Dutch alongside French, while at the same time confounding expectations of scale and belonging on the right-hand pillar, where we are invited to reimagine the expected Parc Royal de Bruxelles as a "Parc/k" of "Europe." Orienting the visitor along the three internal axes of the park itself, Schamp's rendering of the gate posts also gestures toward the European Quarter's geographic location to the immediate East. Our perspective on the picture is approaching from the Congolese Quarter of Matongé. The proximity of the Parc Léopold to the immediate south of the European Quarter and East of Matongé underscores the density of linguistic, historical, and political orientations at play in Schamp's image. Subtly, this final double-page spread restores several smaller images interspersed with the text collage in the preceding pages of *Letters* to a panoramic context.

As a multilingual, transnational project that bridges documentary, epistolary, collage, and performance genres, *Letters to Europe* engages Europe as an idea, a place, and a set of social and political relationships. As a practical method, it begins to address many of the key critical demands that Bachmann-Medick identifies in translation as a research category and as "a social condition and mode of existence of migration itself" ("Migration as Translation" 274). It does so by leveraging publishing and performance practices to generate alternate modes of creative and collective self-documentation in tandem with the documentary work of the project editors as a response to documentality's alternating exclusion of mobile subjects from social visibility and their subjection to forms of hypervisibility in news media. The resulting multilingual collage maps one possible path to Schamp's hopefully open gateway to another Europe.

As a collaborative principle and an aesthetic strategy of the print text, multilingual collage expresses the translative and documentary impulses at the core of *Letters to Europe*. It serves, consequently, as a critical point of entry into complex debates about the integrity of the subject, the text, and Europe itself, calling on its audiences to consider such foundational questions as: Who speaks for and addresses Europe now? What future answers might a re-imagined Europe

offer? What are the conditions for the production of solidary subjects in and with a critically defined Europe made up of citizens and foreign nationals who may not be easily distinguishable from one another on the page, the stage, or the street? In the final section of this article, I elaborate on a critical homology between the complex and destabilizing subject positions of the translator and the documentarist in pursuit of tentative responses to these questions.

Expanding and Expansive Modes of Address: Documenting Subjects in Transit

In his writings on the relationship of linguistic and cultural translation to subjectivity, Naoki Sakai avows: “the translator is one who cannot say ‘I’” (“Translation” 75). His insight proves similarly instructive for investigations into representational practices that generate multivocal documentary texts. By yoking mobility, documentation, and epistolary traditions, *Letters*’s editors, authors, and supporting institutions facilitate creative self-documentation in opposition to the widespread practices of documentation of im/migrants associated with the European border regime.¹⁴ The editors cannot properly say “I” in their role as documentarists who assemble and array first-person source materials, nor can their collaborative team of translators do so in their closely articulated role.¹⁵ The constitutive tension that inheres in the documentary/editorial and translative speaking positions at issue contributes powerfully thematic and representational tensions surrounding identity, mobility, social visibility, and (self)translation/(self)representation.

I submit that the changing valence of debates about documentary’s aesthetic and socioanalytic purchase for discussions of mobility and belonging benefits from more explicit critical recourse to a translation studies perspective. How we document multilingualism and translation in relation to complex notions of mobility and bordering grounds and connects what seem on the surface to be discrete problematics. The critical constellation documentation/(non)translation/documentality of the European border regime is possible and useful, not least because, as Sakai writes, “Translation is not a task limited to the written word, but a concept which grants us the possibility of examining social action in general anew, something which offers us an invaluable gateway by which to enter an inquiry into sociality itself,” (“Translation and the Schematism of Bordering”). Attention to the sociality of art and artists that emerges from translation studies also underwrites the relational aesthetics fundamental to

¹⁴ Notably, Nicholas De Genova, one of the most prolific theorists of borderization and the border regime, testified in Shahrazad’s culminating Stockholm event, Tribunal 12.

¹⁵ Vermeersch occupies a double role as contributing author and editor.

documentary and to research-based artistic productions more generally. It resonates powerfully with debates on the role and efficacy of culture in society and politics.¹⁶

Further, Sakai's call for a historical reassessment of translation regimes proves instructive for contemporary investigations of documentary literature as a form and a practice that relies on the translation of various textual representations of the real first into documents and then into literary works. Authors, audiences, and critics of documentary have increasingly touched on historiographical debates that turn on authority, authenticity, and narrative perspective—in short, problems intimately connected to subjectivity. Sakai's specific analysis derives from a discussion of the representation of translation as communication versus the process of translation as a complex articulation of one text to another, wherein the former rests on and co-figures commonsensical ideologies about the unity of ethno-national linguistic community. The commonsensical elision of documentary and document, too, frequently renders the work of the documentarist invisible, effecting an immediacy that does not exist and potentially limiting the scope of documentary's intervention into the social world through analogous operations of (dis)articulation of documents and the real events and subjectivities to which they correspond.

Like the translator, the documentarist occupies a position of foundational ambiguity. The documentarist marks the work of representing a presumed difference not between languages and cultures, but between a source text/document and the literary text that makes a documented reality knowable to a broader audience. As a translator's work is only necessary to the extent that a source text is unknowable to an audience, yet only possible to the extent that it can in fact be known (Sakai, "Translation" 73), the translator is in constant relation to multiple audiences; so, too, is the documentarist positioned relationally. The social function of the document is distinct from that of the documentary; their audiences, too, are distinct. In most cases, it is reasonable to assume that the audience of a documentary text relies on the documentarist's labor in order to secure access to or specific knowledge of its articulated source documents. To continue the homology, documentary's process, too, introduces instability into the sociality of the text (Sakai, "Translation" 74). The documentarist always occupies a position of address that is ambiguous and on behalf of another, akin to the translator's position as described by Sakai: "Ineluctably, the translator introduces an instability into the putatively personal relations among the agents of speech, writing, listening, and

¹⁶ Tinius has productively modified the concept of relational aesthetics initially advanced by Nicolas Bourriaud for documentary work. For the purposes of my argument, its most salient elements are (1) a concept of art that attends to transformative processes and intersubjective encounters; (2) art's potential to impact subject formation and "worlds of subjectivization" beyond the time of a specific performance or event; and (3) an emphasis on "everyday sociality" as manifest in research-based and site- and context-specific art. See "Rehearsing Detachment."

reading. The translator is internally split and multiple, devoid of a stable position. At best, they are a subject in transit” (Sakai, “Translation” 75).

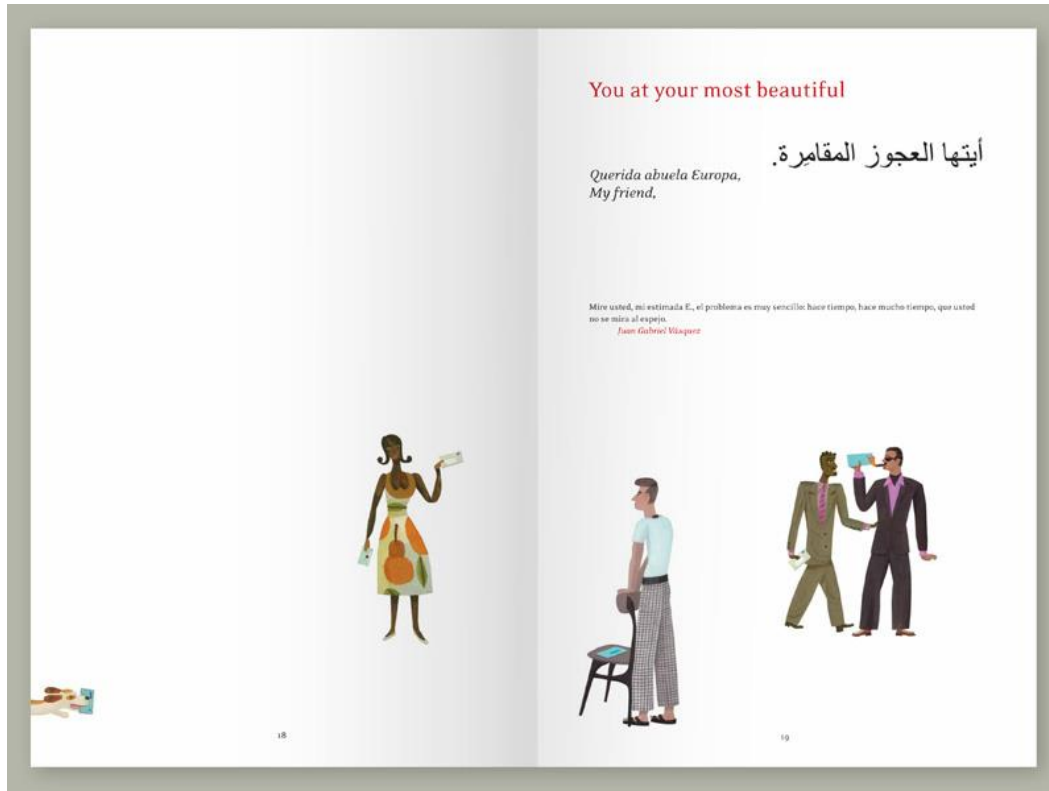


Figure 3: From *Letters* Print Version

Letters mounts a collection of texts that display a range of strategies for the presentation and documentation of mobile subjects as they address a crisis not primarily of migrant subjectivity, but of European identity and integrity (in every sense of the word): like the translator/documentarist, Europe itself is internally split and multiple. In both their selection and arrangement of texts, and in the decision to expand archives of available documents through active collaboration with authors whose citizenship and nationality are deliberately unmarked, the editors of *Letters* use the theme and process of translation to imagine a utopian Europe beyond the documentality of the border regime. Critical approaches that highlight translation as a subjective process share key features with innovative research-based literature, including attention to the fundamentally ambivalent place of the subject of translation/documentary; and, in the case of postmigrant theatre, a cultural construction and “allocation of the foreign” that has long been central to assumptions about translation: “Translation suggests contact with the incomprehensible, the unknowable, or the unfamiliar, that is, with the foreign, and

there is no awareness of language or meaning until we come across the foreign. First and foremost, translation is concerned with the allocation of the foreign” (Sakai, “Translation” 73). In addition to representing foreign bodies and experiences, one might add of documentary that it deals in the allocation of the real in a Western tradition that (in contradistinction to other world literary traditions) associates literature predominantly with fiction.

Tinius’s anthropological work on “dialectical fiction”—mentioned briefly above—captures some key dimensions of the linked “allocation of the foreign” and the real at play in *Letters*. He developed the concept in his close work with refugee actors at the Theater an der Ruhr in order to describe a process of performance and collective self-authorship that moved from the actors’ personal experiences through a process of detachment, and, ultimately, to the “reappropriation of subjectivity during theatre rehearsals by building up fictional characters” (Tinius, “Rehearsing Detachment” 21). With the possible exception of a series of texts by Stanišić, a comparable dialectic emerges in *Letters* not at the level of the individual contributions, but at the level of the documentary text as a whole, producing Europe as a “character effect” of “fragmentary source texts attributed to a figure” (Worthen qtd in Youker 218). Too, its twinned practices of multilingual translation into Dutch, English, and French and in the translation of multilingualism as image generate alternate speaking positions in the face of documentality’s objectivization of mobile subjects.

Where much recent political art prioritizes identification and authenticity in order to achieve a specific political result or product, dialectical fictions disrupt patterns common to documentary of forced migration and refuge and empower vulnerable actors to engage in creative, process-driven work. Tinius asks provocatively: “How can artistic processes that focus on social encounters sustainably affect subject-formation if they remain confined to the temporary realm of artistic exhibitions or performances? What is the quality of the relations and the subjectivities that emerge in ‘micro-utopian’ encounters?” (“Rehearsing Detachment” 22). Building on Brecht’s dialectical theatre and the contemporary dialectics of *dédoublement* or theatrical doubling of the spectator through processes of alienation, dissociation, and self-reflectivity, Tinius uses the term to highlight a process in which reality and fiction do not blur, but exist in a deliberate and decidedly social relation. His notion of fiction, in turn, is indebted to Wolfgang Iser’s observation that fiction itself “disrupts and doubles the referential world” (Iser qtd in Tinius 28). In short, this type of performance practice is utopian; it is aimed at the creation of new worlds and subjectivities for actors and audiences alike. I see a deep affinity with the utopian nature of translation: there can be no equivalence of original and translation, only a doubling of the source text; the “I” of the translator is not and cannot be identical with the “I” of the text, but multiplies and destabilizes it. The conceit of translatability rests on the assumption of

difference or even incommensurability, and it inhabits or ventriloquizes subjects across difference in ways that likewise intervene into the referential world.

Against a rhetoric of authenticity and monolingual identity, both translation studies and a research-based performance praxis in line with the production of dialectical fictions have the potential to reinvigorate documentary aesthetics, addressing long-standing ethical and political challenges to verbatim genres that run the risk of reproducing tragic narratives and stereotypes. Like the rehearsal and performance processes of refugee actors in the Theatre an der Ruhr, *Letters* offers an important occasion to reflect on the meaning of being “a creative subject *in* society rather than a subject *to* society,” and emphasizes intersubjective transformation and the resubjection of worlds (Tinius “Authenticity and Otherness”). To produce documentary—even documentary edited and translated by Belgian editors—offers a powerful response to documentality as the dominant marker of social visibility in contemporary Europe.

In *Letters*, the double problematic of translation/documentation and the conditions of highly mediated social visibility in contemporary Europe are rendered aesthetically at every turn: the letters are nowhere legible in their continuous entirety; they are translated, disassembled, interspersed, carefully arranged in the original languages (into sections and according to motifs, but also visually), and remounted. Its collage form foregrounds the multiplication of the “I” inherent in first-person forms more generally; the visual multiplication of first-person subjects further underscores the multiplication of an ostensibly identical second-person addressee (Europe) vis-à-vis those multiple subject positions. The project manages to foreground the multiple and fractured perspectives of authors without reifying linguistic or national difference in part by welcoming authors (as previously mentioned) to write in the languages of their choice; not all authors chose to write in their first language.

Authors’ names are included after each segment in the appendix, but not their nationality; nor are all names easily recognizable by nationality. No graphic markers indicate whether an author is European or non-European. In each of these ways, the documentarists/editors use the letters as source documents to communicate both the letters’ content and a multivocal, collective subject of postmigrant Europe.¹⁷ I see these editorial and conceptual choices in relation to what Natalie Bloch has described as a broad trend toward the Europeanization, diversification, and medial transformation of national theatres. She further points out the increasing hybridity of performance genres and the difficulty of distinguishing between theatre, performance, musical theatre, dance, and video

¹⁷ On the term postmigrant theatre, see Warstat. For the purposes of this article, suffice it to say that the term is not meant to erase historical movements of people, but to refer to a specific constellation of representational debates and strategies in recent decades that prominently feature second- and third-generation migrants.

installation as forms are not only combined, but transform one another (60-61). *Letters* participates in this broader European theatre landscape.

Different experiences of letter writing as a mode of (ostensibly) direct communication are powerfully visualized, as in the example of Saša Stanišić's decision to construct a heavily redacted postcard to himself (Figure 4) that occasions reflection on censorship. Stanišić's interpretation of the editorial prompt to mean letters addressed to himself in Europe is more striking alongside letters by authors who overwhelmingly treated Europe as the addressee. His distinctive approach is vividly emblematic of dialectical fiction. He adopts multiple, first-person perspectives in multiple languages, visually revealed to the reader as autofiction in the doubling of his authorial signature/text attribution and the signatures of the fictional figures to whom his postcards and letters are attributed: Hana, Michel, István, Verónica, Jen, Emma, and Robert, each writing from a different city and offering laconic observations about Europe, Europeans, and politics alongside what appear to be more pressing personal concerns—a child's first tooth, a family trip, or even WikiLeaks.



Figure 4. From *Letters Print Version*

Balancing Acts

Letters's multilingual subjects and multimedia forms are mutually illuminating. The inability of the translator to say “I” highlights the homologous position of twenty-first century Europe’s documentarists. The unconventional decision to solicit original first-person letters from professional authors rather than to undertake the collection of oral histories or existing documents introduces sophisticated instances of (self-) documentation and -translation, a creative counterpoint to the documentality of the European border regime so roundly criticized at Shahrazad’s concluding event in Stockholm (Trnka). The resulting multilingual text is subject to a type of kaleidoscopic reading in which the lens of a reader’s/viewer’s own linguistic and cultural knowledge variously refracts *Letters's* colorful fragments. Access through the backdoor/appendix of translation instantiates communication, but also a relationship of dependence for the reader, generating a different experience of language and of culture that strategically minoritizes and withholds access to an original from speakers of any single majority language in European countries and around the world.¹⁸ Translation necessarily figures differently in stage performance, where surtitles are projected; nonetheless, it also reveals different dimensions of multilingualism than the print text, as when instances of accented speech potentially make audible that not all authors write in their first language.

The visibility and in some cases audibility of linguistic difference or mediation is punctuated by circus acts. Circus marks an itinerant performance practice that reinforces themes of physical mobility. Further, the integration of non-linguistic performance into staged reading enables a parallel mode of conscious connection with audience members through a shared experience that requires no translation, at once a reprieve from language as a mode of structuring attention and the introduction of a new, physical dimension of contact and mutual dependence in movement. It creates a carefully balanced community that can stage and view Europe beyond national linguistic claims and their attendant cultural politics.¹⁹ Nor was the metaphorical resonance of acrobatic performance lost on the project organizers. Publicity materials juxtapose Europe’s own balancing acts with that of circus artists.²⁰ The premiere of the New Music Collective, a Brussels-based musical group devoted to transcontinental fusion, at *Letters's* performance

¹⁸ The choice to use an appendix in the book was, above all, a pragmatic design consideration. The main text remains the same in each of the three published versions, and the appendix alone is altered according to the preferred language of the target audience (Vermeersch).

¹⁹ Surely this dimension is especially palpable in Belgium. For one point of entry into attempts to shape the language and content of theatre since Belgium’s statehood, see Frank Peeters.

²⁰ “Europe likes to live according to the principle of a fragile balance. Circus artists respond to it nimbly with their breathtaking act.” Transl. from the Dutch mine. Original reproduced on Tom Schamp’s website and since removed.

exemplifies how the event also engendered new, multicultural collaborations within Europe, simultaneously highlighting local communications and transnational address.

The performance and the publication, too, are engaged in a careful balancing act: *Letters* is not a work of stage adaptation or even theatrical translation.²¹ The project exists in multiple modes and therefore ultimately produces distinct intersubjective relationships attendant to each. More than just a valuable document of the project and the stage performance, the book is essential to it, illuminating claims associated with the theatre of intervention that no work can be reduced to a single performance and that we must instead investigate how an expansive concept of form could bridge production, reception, and work (Warstat et al. 22).²²

This meditation on the formal possibilities of collectively authored works of European literature set out to balance a range of questions about the efficacy of the EU-sponsored cultural project *Letters to Europe*: How might translation studies, with its attention to the non-identity of the “I” and the subject of translation, help us analyze other documentary texts that draw on first-person forms to foreground multiple and fractured perspectives and modes of difference? How are techniques that render documentarists’ work visible valuable in working against entrenched and hegemonic conceptualizations of both linguistic and cultural difference and the real, resonant with theatre projects that Youker identifies as “opening up the meanings of the document and documentary to contestation” (221) and, therefore, also engaged in foundational debates grounded in assumptions of “fidelity to a non-fictional subject, defined in journalistic or social scientific terms” (220)? The destabilization of the commonplace *traduttore, traditore* ‘translator, traitor’ simultaneously destabilizes notions of fidelity to the document. Significantly, Youker takes recourse to translation as a metaphor alongside collage, advancing the need to contest commonsensical interpretive paradigms with attention to the “fixative properties” of documents that are rent, placed and displaced, translate and are translated (221).

Collage serves as a medial fulcrum for both sets of questions: as a practice, collage transfers materials (documents of the everyday) into new, poetic frames to multiple effects. Its function is archival as well as aesthetic. As a form that relies on found and altered materials, collage is by its very nature multiply authored and

²¹ For more on theatrical translation as an overlooked and undervalued arena of praxis, see Yvonne Griesel’s work on multilingual European theatre.

²² Many critics have addressed the increasing hybridity of performance genres. In the context of European theatre, Natalie Bloch notes the difficulty of distinguishing between theatre, performance, musical theatre, dance, and video installation as forms are not only combined, but transform one another (“Tendenzen und Entwicklungen” 61). Paget attends to additive or paraliterary elements in his discussion of activist arts (e.g., flyers, programs, or other materials aimed at catalyzing post-performance action (“Acts of Commitment”).

requires the active interpretation of a reader/viewer to recognize and relate disparate, multilingual archives and their frames. Like Erika Fischer-Lichte's insights into the interplay of aesthetics and politics in performances that destabilize cultural identity by interweaving national performance cultures, the performance of multilingual collage within Europe instantiates a transformative and utopian encounter—if only temporarily.

Add to collage's formal practice of assembling and remounting materials the production and translation of source documents themselves: Both translation and documentary multiply source materials and reposition subjects. They inevitably affect the terms of address and engagement. The processes associated with each initiate a reexamination of social relationships and their representation. As creative processes, translation and documentary introduce a variety of new texts and perspectives to audiences, reconfiguring the range of subjects available to representation and interpretation.

Letters participates in the active production of new migrant archives. In his compelling essay "The Archive of Migration," Deniz Utlü describes a rich array of documents, ephemera, and artefacts of material culture—an archive that is as yet without name or fixed location (Utlü).²³ As a project that both created and translated new archives, *Letters* facilitates broader access and visibility for audiences similarly invested in transforming social worlds and their representation in histories and in the arts. The deliberate creation of new documents through projects such as *Letters* expands and creates novel points of entry into the transnationalization of national histories to which Utlü aspires.

The processes through which new documents/texts are produced may be through linguistic and/or cultural translation or through the transformation of documents into documentary forms; both types of transformation and multiplication give rise to a relational aesthetics, a set of position-specific and contingent social relationships at the level of textual production and reception. In the case of *Letters*, both translational and documentary modes pertain: authors create new documents, providing alternate accounts of relationships in and to Europe, and visibility accrues to new subjects in its performance and publishing contexts.

²³ On the related question of collective memory and documentary, see Ulrike Garde's discussion of transnational performance, local audience expectations, and the creation of collective memory.

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