

TO YOU  
TO YOU  
TO YOU

LOVE LETTERS TO A (POST)EUROPE

EDITED BY LISA ALEXANDER

*For Vassiliki*

Vassiliki Dimou 1973 - 2018



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παρά μόνο ένα ευχάριστο βράδυ μετά τη  
ποτήρι κρασί... μερα ένα ποτήρι. Αύριο ένα  
ποτήρι. Η Ευρώπη δεν είναι πουθενά  
και η Ευρώπη παντού.



## Foreword

The Live Art Development Agency (LADA) is proud to be publishing *TO YOU TO YOU TO YOU: Love Letters to a (Post)Europe* and grateful to Lisa Alexander for inviting us to be part of this hugely significant project.

Developed from the *Love Letters to a (Post)Europe* programme at Bios, Athens in 2015, the book explores the action, idea or form of the love letter and does so against the backdrop of the social and cultural polarisations we are increasingly witnessing across the UK and mainland Europe.

*TO YOU TO YOU TO YOU* could not be more timely. Whilst the artistic riches and influential thinking that have been generated through the relationships, collaborations and exchanges of ideas and practices between artists, writers, producers and cultural activists across Europe over the decades have opened up all kinds of connections and possibilities, the prospect of Brexit threatens to undo so much of what has been achieved by so many and to drastically diminish the cultural life of the UK.

This book is a testament to the idea of Europe and what it means to artists, and to the power and potential of acts of imagination and of friendship.

*Lois Keidan*  
Co-Director, Live Art Development Agency

## Introduction

“...the artist’s superb reach...[is] a kind of lovemaking with the mountains of the soul.”<sup>1</sup>

This collection marks a critical moment in Europe’s recent past through the singular, intimate address of the letter and the power of performance to bring people together. Each address moves with us into the present. A letter is always in relation to another. It is singular and it is multiple. Hélène Cixous tells us “If only we listen, a language always speaks several languages at once, and runs with a single word in opposite directions.”<sup>2</sup> From many to many with many. To you to you to you.

The letters assembled here were created for *Love Letters to a (Post)Europe* at Bios, Athens in October 2015: a performance event whose premise was to curate a process of coming together and collective witness, following the referendum on financial bailout measures to Greece that summer, and amidst economic and social precarity across Europe as a whole. In spite of capital controls and media scare-mongering, Greece voted an overwhelming *oxi* (no) to the measures, but no clear outcome followed.

In this context I sent out a provocation<sup>3</sup> to the artists collected in these pages to respond with the action, idea or form of a love letter to Europe: a form that explores our connections and exceeds boundaries through its expressive frame of witness. This was to be presented live: a personal address whose reception would be shared.

To address each other and to gather together in person, acts whose wisdom and form are intimately entangled, goes back to the root of the word ‘prosody’ in procession and in the moment of approaching another. Jacques Rancière describes the Ancient Greek concept of ‘prosodos’ as “...the point where the path approaches the goal. In political parlance, this approach takes on a more precise meaning: the fact of presenting oneself to speak before the assembly.”<sup>4</sup> He describes the ‘surplus’ that makes this possible and gives the process time and space. This ‘plus’ refers to having the leisure to take part in politics, and to privilege; but it also refers to the possibility of shifting the ground, created in the midst of struggle, or in the midst of the act of gathering, itself.

1. Griffiths, J (2008) *Wild*, London, Penguin Books p.346

2. Cixous, H. (2005 (1998)). *Stigmata*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire, Routledge. p.xii

3. For Provocation see Appendix.

4. Rancière, J (1995) *On the Shores of Politics*, Heron, L (trans) London, Verso p.16

My provocation was a call to assemble at a particular moment in time, as an act of solidarity, friendship and dissent against the language of financialization that values trade and efficiency over human life. To gather, show support, to bear witness and to be there in person where possible. Later that summer, and just before the performance event in Athens, Hungary (a country that lies at the EU's eastern edge) closed its borders to refugees. The humanitarian disaster known in Europe as 'The Migrant Crisis' escalated.

The summer of 2015 feels like a lifetime ago, given all that has ensued in the three years since, and is still ongoing. There has been a referendum of a different order in the United Kingdom,<sup>5</sup> from where many of the artists who performed in Athens, travelled. Debts of all kinds grow. Safe harbour and freedom of movement diminishes. Polarisation increases. Locally and globally.

This book is a kind of offering from the past and a space of prefiguration to the present; an approach that doesn't specify a goal but continues the approach. It is a letter of love.

This book took more than three years to travel from provocation to performance to page.

At the beginning of 2018 I lost a dear friend; she is with us in these pages.

In the summer of 2018 I began writing to Mary Paterson, as we came to encounter the letters remotely, together, on the page. Mary came to them for the first time as an archive of materials, while I re-read letters I had also witnessed live. I often wrote as I travelled between London and Athens and later from the Greek island of Andros, drawing from notes made in the months and years before and against a backdrop of unrelenting and not always welcome change. We roamed together and singly between time and place. Themes gathered as each performed letter met its postscript, after the event. Registers of time and loss. Psychical and physical distance. Storytelling and agency. Water gathering, language and assembly. Debt, fire and love. Inscription and erasure.

In thinking about all this I came across a letter that began its life as a speech, written for *Performance Research Journal* by Dragan Klaic in the late 1990s, which argues for the arts as "the only viable cornerstone for European integration..."<sup>6</sup> The

5. In June 2016, the UK held a referendum on its continued membership of the European Union. The 'Leave' campaign won with 52% of the vote, following a bitterly fought campaign. As we go to print, the Brexit vote is still widely contested, and the Vote Leave campaign is being investigated for electoral fraud.

6. Klaic, D (1997) *A Letter from Holland* in: MacDonald, C and Allsopp, R (eds) *Letters from Europe*, Performance Research Journal Vol 2 No. 1 Spring 1997 The letter was a "A re-worked version of a closing speech given in Krakow, Poland at the annual Forum of European Cultural Networks."(1996) pp.11-13.

letter references a (horrifically) prophetic play *Ony (They)* written in 1920 by the Polish writer Stanislaw Ignacy, in which a junta attempts to stage a coup and to ban art, as it might give the populace agency: "art is a repository of individual creativity, dissent and imagination and therefore must be eliminated before an order of total obedience can be introduced."<sup>7</sup>

The journal issue was entitled *Letters from Europe* and co-edited by one of the artists in this book, Claire MacDonald. Her essay in these pages, *Bosk*, is both from and to Europe, and speaks of great loss but also of great potential. Can our cities, our ways of cohabiting on this planet, become redemptive, with attention to time and movement over space and boundaries? Can we seed openness, plant to nourish instead of for growth as a regime of monetization?

Klaic reads Ignacy, I read Klaic, you read me. Europe is in many ways a place for and of the imagined. These re-imaginings constitute our history and pose a problem for the future. How do we build relationships across our ideas? How do we live with nightmares of our past and present? Can we engage social imagination that acknowledges both and that remains open?

In April 2018 the UK-based human rights organisation, Liberty, published *A Guide To The Hostile Environment*:<sup>8</sup> a handbook to the insidious systems prohibiting basic human rights and access to health, education and welfare, to those subject to new immigration controls in the UK, and as a tool for groups defending migrants' rights. This is a grim way to mark fifty years on from 1968, a year when freedoms were fought for in Paris, whilst elsewhere tanks were rolling; a moment of mass civic uprising across the world and one that also saw equal rights legislation won by the civil rights movement in America. What about peace, unity, liberty now?

Lawyers are writing survival manuals to an intentionally cruel system for migrants in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. As artists, we acknowledge this terrible present. And we write love letters to hold it close while we imagine a better future. Each letter is a question. Each letter is an invitation. Each letter is an open environment, imagining more questions, more invitations, more, more, more. Art can be about asking questions and creating spaces for that questioning process. For new worlds to form and grow, however tiny or brief.

7. Ibid.

8. LIBERTY (eds) (2018) *A Guide To The Hostile Environment: The border controls dividing our communities and how we can bring them down*, National Council for Civil Liberties, UK (freely available online)

In 2015 these letters were performed 'to' Europe. Responses straddled boundaries between form and register: letters as letters, poetry, prose, lyrics, autofiction, surreal satires, science fantasy, manifestos, visual translations, diary entries and factual accounts. Together and singly they are witness to a period marked by brutal austerity and closing borders. They consider the epic with the infinitesimal. They are in situ with love, rage, flirtation, grief, and friendship. In this sense, they are all philosophical, all political. With love there's room for irreverence, warmth, dissonance and freedom of movement. The opportunity to see the horizon or be a grain of sand on the shoreline. In that moment of performance and in this one of re-imagining we need every register, form of address and approach. To be open and to close the distance between us.

Since October 2015 many of these letters have travelled or germinated and read like acts of foretelling. All issue from a place of generosity and openness. Some as poems of institutional and social critique, some exploring modes of being-with and all are acts of friendship.

We *re member* the letters here.

To quench our thirst and to leave room for more.

Even with the sound of police sirens *The sound of [these] words presses back, now more urgently, if that is possible, that "more," for poetry*

For these live letters.

'Grammata' (γράμματα) is the plural of the word 'letter' in Greek.<sup>9</sup>

It is also the name of a place on the island of Syros reached only by boat or on foot; so-called because of the letters inscribed into the stones along the shoreline. These inscriptions are Ephesian grammata or ancient magical formulas. They were scored into the rocks by sailors long ago as protection from stormy seas and for safe harbour. The letters collected here might also be considered a form of inscription, or incantation, or as talismans and spells, but they go beyond a prophylactic on imagined future threat, to embody the action of transformation in their imaginary, poetic or performative frames of witness. *Imagine every crossing made on every sea*  
scattered  
we are

but are  
seeds

unfix  
*unfish*  
sing together *reparation and care*  
and caress

Here. Now. A place to continue

*Lisa Alexander*

*Italicised* phrases are taken from the artists' letters/postscrips of Catherine Hoffmann, Matthew Goulsh, Kate Adams.

9. Letter as a sign or symbol

# LETTERS



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