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Practitioners' Perspectives

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Translating the City: A Community Theatre Version of Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* in Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Duška Radosavljević *University of Bristol*

Abstract

In Alan Lyddiard's 2003 adaptation of Wim Wenders' Wings of Desire the setting of the late-1980s Berlin was fully translated into the present-day Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Designed by Neil Murray and incorporating John Alder's original film footage, the production also featured members of the community in conjunction with the Northern Stage ensemble. Partly forming a retrospective analysis of the process from my point of view as the company and production dramaturg, this essay explores the ways in which the Newcastle production functioned as an exercise in 'translating a city'. The account of the adaptation process is framed by an analytical discussion of the original text and its transition into a particular socio-political context, in conjunction with an interrogation of the phenomenology of translation and Wenders' deliberate synaesthetic approach to the material. Finally, the article seeks to conceptualize the text with regard to its apparent inter- and cross-cultural mobility.

Keywords

adaptation
Wim Wenders
translation
dramaturgy
city
cultural migration

The central, ongoing paradox of the film [...] is that of pictures and words. [...] *Wings* establishes this polarity at the very outset with images of the eye, the handwriting and the voice-over narration. The tension between word and image emerges from the very genesis of the film; it is the creation of Peter Handke, a writer, and of Wim Wenders, a visual artist. Together they balance a literary script with classic cinematography.

(Caldwell and Rea, 1991: 5)

Despite the fact that individual characters of the film may be more inclined towards either words (such as the storyteller Homer)¹ or images (Marion's past as well as her sense of identity are expressed in terms of photographs),² in their analysis of *Wings of Desire*, David Caldwell and Paul W. Rea go on to establish that the film never quite gives precedence to one over the other. The tackling of this tension between words and images – as well as all the other binary oppositions inherent in the film: high vs low, male vs female, black-and-white vs colour, past vs present etc. – is interpreted by the critics as being a means of transcendence over the trappings of postmodern fictions of their time.

1. Caldwell and Rea (1991) also point out that Homer is named after a blind poet.
2. In the trailer scene, she is surrounded by photographs while pondering the possibility of a reinvented identity through a photomat.

3. "There is a painting by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees [*sic*] one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this storm*' (Benjamin 2003: 392–393).

Numerous other papers have been inspired by the layered nature of *Wings of Desire*. Its auto-reflexive, allegorical and archetypal aspects continue to draw academic attention, and in 1998 a US version of the love story between an angel and a mortal woman was created under the title *City of Angels*.

Wenders himself considers *Wings* to be a B-movie that was conceived as a time-filler while waiting to shoot *Until the End of the World* (Raskin 1999). Key decisions were made at the last moment, while Peter Falk improvised all his lines and most of the action as the script for his part never really existed. Nevertheless, the film's narrative complexity, achieved mainly through a simple but highly unusual combination of celestial and terrestrial points of view, appears to be both a lucky accident and a work of genius – as it immediately struck a chord within the context of the late-1980s Berlin and quickly captured the imaginations of audiences all over the world.

The problem of articulating the narrative content and the narrative position of the film is complicated by the existence of a meta-narrative – which the angels begin to wish to escape. The idea to make a film about angels came spontaneously to Wenders while he was walking the streets of Berlin in search of inspiration. In the DVD commentary, Wenders notes that this was complemented by reading Rilke's poetry and looking at a copy of Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* (*Wings of Desire* DVD, 2002).

Much has been written about a subliminal influence of Walter Benjamin on this film too – not least because Benjamin wrote about the same image by Klee in several of his essays, and most famously in the context of his concept of history.³ While Wenders' film finishes on a much more positive note than Benjamin's reflection, there is another significant circumstantial link between the two authors – contained in the notion of 'displacement'. Benjamin's essay 'On the Concept of History' dates back to the last few years of his life, spent in exile. Similarly, Wenders also returns to Berlin from the United States, where he had been living and working for a few years before he made *Wings of Desire*. Even though the reasons of these two instances of exile may have been very different – and indeed led the two authors to very different ends – it is interesting that the predicament of 'displacement' caused a similar kind of abstraction in both authors' points of view.

[Damiel and Cassiel] are like the 'angelus novus': narrators from above with no sensory-motor determinations. They are not part of the story told. They can recollect spiritual elements in acts and minds, like the camera. But they can not [*sic*] act. In contrast to the angels are the voices of anonymous people of Berlin. They belong to bodies but they are presented as detached. The only exception is the voice of Marion, which is presented as part of her body. On the other hand she lives in her longing thoughts, longing for a history, a place to belong, for seriousness. We have, in other words, a description from the outside (the angels), a description from the inside (the anonymous people) and a description in between: the poetic invocations of childhood, the monologues of Marion and the noisy sounds of the city, the crowd, the traffic or machines.

(Thomsen 1999: 74)

Kolstrup even ventures to say that the need to belong somewhere is 'the fundamental problem or desire of the protagonists of *Wings of Desire*'

(Kolstrup 1999: 115). Even though this film is considered to be less self-reflexive than some of the other films by Wenders, there are considerable levels of both cinematic and autobiographical self-reflexivity in it. The former is especially apparent in relation to Peter Falk's narrative concerning the making of a film for which there appears to be only a location in the place of a script, while the latter concerns some of the more incidental choices made by Wenders. Among the extras, Wenders has cast his aunt as a woman living inside one of the flats, his sound man as 'the sad man on the tram', his doctor as an angel, and his girl-friend, Solveig Dommartin, as the protagonist Marion.⁴ The notion of cultural and geographical belonging is thus compounded with the idea of sexual intimacy and the finding of a soul-mate – both on the fictional and, potentially, on the autobiographical level.

Of particular interest to this paper is the idea of 'displacement', as experienced by the protagonists, and the way in which this theme can be utilized to address both the specific (1980s Berlin) and the universal (love between a man and a woman). The essay will also examine the nature of the film's narrative devices – both verbal and non-verbal – and their manipulation in a theatrical adaptation of the film, as well as the particular advantages derived from the self-reflexive mode inherent to the text as a whole. It also treats the film's 'unrooted internationalism' as one of its most significant features:

Wenders exploits the tensions between the generic and the specific, the global and the local, the foreign and the German. During the first half of the film he offers unrelated shards of urban life in all its banality, alienation and ennui. These fragments – plus Peter Falk's musings on his itinerary: 'Tokyo, Kyoto, Paris, London, Trieste ... Berlin' – suggest an unrooted internationalism. Similarly English and French are spoken as well as German, and two of the main characters are foreigners.

(Caldwell and Rea, 1991: 3)

Northern Stage's adaptation of *Wings of Desire* – context

Following years of post-industrialist struggle, Newcastle-upon-Tyne started to reinvent itself as a cultural centre at the turn of the twenty-first century. In conjunction with Gateshead – the adjoining city across the River Tyne – Newcastle made a strong entry for the 2008 European City of Culture bid. Anthony Gormley's *Angel of the North* had been erected at the entrance to the city, by the motorway. The eye-catching Millennium Bridge stretched elegantly across the River Tyne as if to defy the parallel steel constructions that have traditionally connected Newcastle and Gateshead. Otto Rank's former flour mill – the Baltic – was brimming with cutting-edge fine art, and then a music centre – Sage Gateshead – finally opened on the river bank. Despite such investment into the cultural regeneration of the city, in 2003 Newcastle–Gateshead lost the City of Culture bid to Liverpool. Meanwhile, Geordies⁵ themselves remained seemingly indifferent to the whole affair, prompting immediate speculation in relation to the level of involvement of the local population in the cultural regeneration of their city and giving rise to fears that members of the working class were left unengaged by the proliferating marvels along the quayside. And, despite

4. There is even a picture of Wenders as a schoolboy among the photographs in Marion's trailer.
5. The term 'Geordie' refers to the dialect as well as the regional identity of a person born or brought up in the north east of England, more specifically in Tyneside.

the city's geographical position, which gives it the status of a major cultural and urban centre in between Yorkshire and Scotland, Newcastle has always been primarily a working-class city with a strong sense of regional identity, self-sufficiency and a tight-knit community.

In 1998, Alan Lyddiard, the artistic director of Northern Stage, assembled a group of locally based actors to form a permanent ensemble. This act, unusual for British theatre, was inspired by Lyddiard's admiration of the European theatre model and cemented with the arrival of Lev Dodin in Newcastle to conduct an intensive two-week workshop with the Northern Stage actors at a resort in Northumbria.

Since 1998, Northern Stage has emerged as a major touring theatre company whose productions of *Animal Farm*, *Clockwork Orange* and *1984* received great audience and critical acclaim all over Europe and remained in the repertoire for many years thereafter. Meanwhile Lyddiard continued to forge international relationships with theatre companies in Denmark, Germany, Holland, France and Spain – giving rise to significant collaborations, exchanges and festivals. In order to retain its Arts Council funding for the ensemble, Northern Stage was conceived as a touring company that operated a project-model approach (each major production had a number of satellite events around it) and whose repertoire contained equal proportions of presented, produced and participatory work. A lot of the company's work, however, remained invisible, as it unfolded in local schools or on the road – and the Arts Council support gradually started to dwindle.

Remotely inspired by Pina Bausch, in the year 2003 Alan Lyddiard came up with the idea of doing a community theatre version of *Wings of Desire*. The project was going to bring together a number of his ongoing interests and Northern Stage's areas of activity – members of the voluntary Performance Group attached to the theatre would form a chorus of citizens in a multimedia production featuring fresh video footage of the city. Members of the ensemble would play the protagonists.

As the resident dramaturg in the theatre, I was brought in to work with Lyddiard on his adaptation, which would occur mostly in the process of rehearsal. Our initial problem of sourcing the actual screenplay in the English language became a major issue, even though, thankfully, Wenders' and Handke's agents were making positive noises regarding authors' rights for our proposed project. Having briefly considered hiring a translator for the original screenplay, eventually, we realized the wonders of contemporary technology and derived the very first version of our script by simply downloading the subtitles from a DVD. Meanwhile, Lyddiard's assistant, Annie Rigby, was tasked with devising new stories with members of the chorus to replace those told by the citizens of Berlin in the film. At an early stage we also considered whether or not, following the American adaptation of the film, we would translate the occupation of the romantic lead Marion into something more mundane. I had a strong feeling that in a theatre version of this particular story it would make all the more sense for a real trapeze artist to be brought into the process, and a professional aerialist was eventually appointed to the job. Following completion of location filming, the entire rehearsal, devising and adaptation process lasted for no longer than two weeks – this was quite a feat but not at all unusual for

Lyddiard's way of working. Ensemble work, where most members know each other quite well, usually facilitates speed and efficiency.

***Wings of Desire* in Newcastle-upon-Tyne – a retrospective account of the adaptation process**

In addition to being an archetypal rite of passage as well as a love story and a poetic homage to Berlin at the end of the Cold War, Wim Wenders' classic is also a valuable historical document. Wenders himself considers cinema to be an 'archival activity' and notes that 'almost none of [the film's] locations exist anymore' (Graf, 2002: 118). However, the film's combination of the universal and the specific – whereby the specific finds an expression in the universal and vice versa – enables the story to resonate on a number of levels and in a number of contexts.

Inevitably there is a political undertone to the mere documenting of the city at that particular moment in time – and in the DVD commentary Wenders relates an anecdote whereby his licence to film in East Berlin, although initially granted, was immediately revoked when the authorities found out that the story concerned two invisible guardian angels who can walk through walls unobserved. On a more personal level, this is also a story of homecoming for Wenders.

As established earlier, there are at least three narrative levels to the film (the 'outside', the 'inside' and the 'in-between'), although for the sake of this analysis we shall identify five types of voice: the angels (Damiel and Cassiel), the citizens of Berlin, Marion, Homer and Peter Falk. The co-author, Peter Handke, wrote several poetic speeches, including the ones spoken by Homer, the angels and Marion, as well as a couple of speeches for individual citizens of Berlin (the Dying Motorcycle Man and a Man Committing Suicide).

Building on the existing views that the angels Damiel and Cassiel are effectively observers from the outside – helpless witnesses who are unable to influence the action in front of them directly – it would not be difficult to draw a parallel between them and a theatre audience – ever-present, empathetic, but inhibited by the invisible fourth wall. What is more, it seems that what the two angels actually desire is to step onto the stage of human interaction – they want to be noticed – and to cast themselves, respectively, as a romantic hero and a villain. Cassiel never makes it, while Damiel eventually even acquires the responsibility of keeping Marion afloat – up in the air but connected with the earth – in the last scene of the film.

Northern Stage's theatre adaptation of *Wings of Desire* focuses primarily on the love story between the angel and the trapeze artist, against the background of the cityscape and the chorus of citizens.

The French trapeze artist from the film was replaced by an Irish dancer/aerialist – in both cases 'she can fly' and is an outsider – although in the stage version Marion is monolingual. With the exception of Marion, played by Chantal Daly, the leading characters Cassiel, Damiel, the Actor (a stage version of Peter Falk), as well as Marion's colleagues, the Man on the Roof Committing Suicide and the Man on the Street (who teaches Damiel the colours) – were played by the members of the Northern Stage ensemble.

6. This is a reference to the loyalty scheme introduced by the Co-operative to allow its members to have a share in its profit.

The character of Homer, the old man who bears the testimony of the Second World War, has been excluded from the Newcastle version, alongside with all other references to the war. This is because the culture-specific references to wartime Berlin do not resonate on the same level when translated into the British context. Instead, the function of this narrative strand is shared by the testimonies of a famous actor who has returned to Newcastle for the first time in 20 years and the angels themselves, who reflect on Newcastle's history.

Losing some of the original's literary epicism, as well as the static subplot of the film within the film, the Newcastle version fused the character of Homer with the character of Peter Falk, resulting in Tony Nielson's creation of a Geordie Actor who returns to Newcastle for the first time in many years. Finding the regenerated city to have changed beyond recognition, he decides to take us down his memory lane, thus reinforcing Wenders' own theme of homecoming. Accompanied by a film footage of various sites of his memories, the Actor recalls stories from his childhood (like Falk remembering his grandmother, he remembers his granddad), his Co-op Dividend number,⁶ and recounts the memory of playing a miner in a film about the 1980s miners' strikes. While nowhere near Potsdamer Platz in magnitude, this particular reference is, however, likely to have a greater impact on the local audience than any reference to the Second World War. Just like Falk, the Actor eventually turns out to be a former angel who welcomes Damiel (played by Mark Calvert) into the world of the humans.

The original's self-reflexivity is not lost, but is instead achieved in ways specific to this particular version. In his – cinematic – wanders around the city of Newcastle (black-and-white film footage of the city, which, interestingly, excludes Antony Gormley's *Angel of the North* in favour of some more indigenous statues, is projected on the stage), angel Damiel stumbles upon the Newcastle Playhouse.

The film footage used in the show confirms that the site of action is indeed the Newcastle Playhouse. At the time, plans were well under way to have this university theatre refurbished and rebranded as Northern Stage, and *Wings of Desire* was going to be the last show performed in the theatre. The characters in the piece use Wenders' dialogue to signify that this is the company's last performance in the city for that year. As he enters the theatre, Damiel finds Marion on the trapeze, rehearsing for the night's show. With a view to the reinvention of the 'circus art' and its arrival in theatre spaces – and thanks to Northern Stage's own repertoire politics – Newcastle Playhouse easily becomes a natural setting for the aerialist's performance. Marion's circus is therefore completely transposed into the theatre (her trailer is the dressing-room backstage) – and the newly gained meta-theatricality of the piece is further conducive to the community feel envisaged by the production itself.

Her circus coach from the original version is here substituted by a stand-up comedian/musician figure (played by Jim Kitson), who also seems to assume a kind of actor-manager role in this show. By the time Marion takes on her life-threatening feat, the chorus and we are simultaneously thrilled as we watch her literally swinging above our heads.



Figure 1: A scene from Northern Stage's *Wings of Desire* (2003). Reproduced with permission from Phyllis Christopher (www.phyllischristopher.com).

The autobiographical element (previously traceable only back to Wenders himself) and the notion of storytelling as a means of survival (which belonged to Homer in the film) are now distributed among members of the chorus themselves as well as the character of the Geordie Actor. More so than the citizens of Berlin, they also acquire the angelic function of witnessing (as in Figure 1).

Alan Lyddiard's adaptation for the stage extends the notion of witnessing the passage of time in a city by assembling personal testimonies of both his ensemble and his long-term audience members – the members of the theatre's community group who play the chorus. Furthermore, Lyddiard also documents Newcastle–Gateshead on camera and uses this footage to establish an additional stylistic dimension to the world of the play. This is both a homage to Wenders' archival activity and a natural extension of Northern Stage's working ethos, which already incorporates the use of multimedia on the stage.

Occasionally chorus members appear only on the screen or on the stage – or sometimes simultaneously in split media. They tell stories from their lives or offer jokes or epigrams; sometimes they sing, sometimes they grumble. They refer to their relatives, or to each other (sometimes both at the same time, as in the case of a mother and daughter being members of the chorus, and a mother whose baby daughter is filmed running around the city with angel wings). Most interestingly, however – and in honour of the film's remarkable internationalism (as it is repeatedly pointed out, almost none of the protagonists in the film are actually German) – some chorus members deliver their stories in their own languages – Portuguese and German in this case.

The personal testimonies collected for inclusion in the stage version of *Wings of Desire* are as personal, unassuming and poignant as the thoughts

of the Berliners that Wenders lets us in on. As mentioned before, in Wenders' movie the citizens of Berlin are played by extras and sometimes by non-actors. In the DVD commentary Wenders notes: 'These people had to be seen with more care and more love than the extras'. Similarly Alan Lyddiard comments on his version as

a small sonnet which has incited a desire to create a large piece that is not a community play, but a piece of art about Newcastle/Gateshead with people from the community in it. These are the people of Tyneside and they have stories to tell – emotionally engaging and important stories, keeping us alive in relation to the changing times.

(Quoted in Radosavljević 2003a)

Hence, the extras in Northern Stage's version are also the people living in skyscrapers, travelling on the underground, driving cars and contemplating suicide on rooftops of historic buildings.

As the dramaturg on the piece I worked with Alan Lyddiard and Annie Rigby on outlining and monitoring the ways in which the combination of word, image and action were coming together and coming across. Often I was concerned with the setting up of various conventions which then needed to be followed through:

The vertical scale could be utilized so as to clearly signify different things. It gives us both a human-eye perspective of 'up and down' (angels – trapeze artist – humans) and a birds-eye perspective whereby the staircase becomes the street. We should be careful not to mix the two perspectives at the same time. [...]

Occasionally there is a discrepancy between the told and the seen (e.g. we see Emily awake on the film before Rebecca says 'She'll be waking up in a minute'). [...]

[T]here [is] no reason why Mark shouldn't occasionally take the portable microphone to individual chorus members. If this is established as a convention throughout, it could solve the problem of [Cassiel] having to take the mic up to [the Man Committing Suicide].

(Radosavljević 2003b)

In addition, I worked with some of the cast members – particularly Chantal Daly, who was unused to working with text – on mining the text and occasionally cutting some of the lines. The 'scissors approach' also became indispensable in working with the chorus members on their own stories, so that they would conform with the often-introspective tone and rhythm of the original. Thus, some of the stories, which began their life as verbatim prose accounts, would be honed down to something like this:

That first day. The lift.
14th top floor.
There was a lad once said, 'heights inspire'.
And that window. Amazing.

Sights I'd never noticed before.
 On the opposite bank, a poet. Writing words of city people.
 A symphony of gardens.

(Northern Stage's *Wings of Desire* script)

I was also interested in the ways in which individual pieces would exist as parts of the whole and cross-reference the rest of the story:

Tony's first story should be re-jigged at the end: 'the advert, the telephone call, rehearsals, performance'. He should end [on] 'And we performed it in the Newcastle Playhouse'.

(Radosavljević 2003b)

Like Berlin in Wenders' film, Newcastle–Gateshead is subjected to artistic scrutiny at a critical point in time. However, the Cold War, in the case of the film, or the cultural renaissance, in the case of the play, are never reflected upon in anyone's everyday thoughts and it is this everyday universality that speaks to audiences anywhere. There are moments in the film when Damiel attempts to pick up particular material objects, but appears to only grasp their essence, leaving the actual objects untouched. This is reminiscent of Plato's world of ideas wherein resides the ideal version of everything. Wenders, however, seems to invert this hierarchy and place the 'ideal world' firmly within the here and now and the everyday lives of the humans.

Translating the city – *Wings of Desire* as a migrant text

The process of translation is commonly defined by linguists as being a process whereby the meaning of a text in one language (source language) is turned into another (target language). This process involves the notion of finding semantic equivalence between the source text and the target text. Opinions are divided on whether precedence should be given to form – i.e. grammatical rules and expressions of the original language (at the expense of total intelligibility) – or content – i.e. the meaning (at the expense of linguistic fidelity). Most translations feature a combination of both. The boundaries between translation and adaptation are blurred, although it is generally believed that a translation that features a greater amount of freedom from linguistic fidelity is closer to adaptation.

It is my belief that any process of page-to-stage transition involves a certain level of translation or adaptation, even if no translation from another language is involved. Theatre language should be understood to be distinct from the language of literature, and therefore any play needs to be able to find its appropriate rendition in terms of a *mise-en-scène*.

In adapting Wim Wenders' film for the stage, more than one kind of translation has clearly taken place. In addition to needing to find appropriate semantic equivalents for the film's content in relation to the medium of the stage, the major decision to transpose Berlin of the late 1980s into Newcastle in the early 2000s resulted in a number of similar transpositions on the level of narrative and character, as already discussed above. In other words, interventions were made on the level of the 'words' – the script – in the way that it was itself translated or the way in which particular substitutions and structural alterations occurred.

7. Interestingly, the scene in which the library is introduced as a dwelling of angels is accompanied by a soundtrack consisting primarily of whispering human voices - which Wenders explains as having been intended to represent 'the music of human knowledge'.
8. Statues of angels (except Anthony Gormley's) are included and one of these forms the poster image.

It would be useful, however, to consider also the ways in which the translation occurred on the level of images, having already established that the film's word-image synaesthesia⁷ is one of its fundamental features. In the DVD commentary, Wenders makes a particularly revealing comment concerning the notion of the characteristic use of the black-and-white and colour modes as a means of 'translating' the step from being an angel to being a human.

In the stage version of the film this cinematic use of colour was only possible in the projections themselves, although some attempt was made to mirror this in the set and costume design. John Alder's film-footage of the cityscapes⁸ – taken from rooftops, significant vantage points and places of historical value or natural beauty – forms the backdrop and sometimes the frontdrop to the play itself.

Neil Murray's set design – a gigantic white staircase and a series of hanging or sliding screens – also complements and enhances this aesthetic approach. This enables the opening image of the show to be footage of the sky projected onto a white safety curtain, which then lifts to reveal a stageful of people in motion. Moreover, the design makes it possible for the performers to physically inhabit film projections which assume a 3-D effect across the rugged surface of the staircase. Finally, the protagonists and the community members – filmed on location or simply in a confessional vox pop mode – are placed within this world of increased verticality and constantly shifting perspectives, joined together in a story which is both local and universal, both moving and thrilling, both a document and a kind of template for the future.

It may be useful to add a paragraph regarding the use of music in both the film and the stage versions. Wenders famously included the concert scene



Figure 2: Daniel and the Actor – a scene from Northern Stage's Wings of Desire, reproduced with permission from Phyllis Christopher (www.phyllis-christopher.com).

featuring Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, explaining that this also was a reference to a particular era – the 1980s, when Berlin was a refuge – at the borderline of the western world? – to many rock musicians from the West. The stage version keeps a reference to Nick Cave and simply recreates a crowded atmosphere of a music gig, using lights and the bodies of the chorus. An interesting device that fits in with the paradigm of a music concert but that features throughout the show for purely pragmatic reasons is the use of various kinds of microphones. This becomes particularly interesting in terms of semantic equivalence when one of the angels approaches a chorus member on the stage with a hand-held microphone, allowing for a story to be told into it. The amplification of internal voices of random citizens, which is much easier to signify on the screen through the use of a voiceover, becomes an instance of literal amplification in the stage version – thus establishing the convention of the angels’ ‘listening in’ on the humans – and ultimately coming across as a more ‘acceptable’ theatrical gesture.

In summation, therefore, the act of cultural translation of Wim Wenders’ film into a community play in Newcastle, features the following semantic equivalents:

Place	Berlin	–	Newcastle–Gateshead
	The Library	–	Gateshead Car Park ⁹
	The Wall	–	River Tyne
	The Circus	–	Newcastle Playhouse
Time	late 1980s	–	early 2000s
	artificial delineation	–	artificial unification
	(Cold War)	–	(City of Culture Bid)
Content	citizens’ testimonies	–	citizens’ testimonies
	city documentary	–	city documentary (as film on stage)
	love story	–	love story

9. In the DVD commentary Wenders comments that this library, as well as the statues of angels portrayed in the film, are the only locations that have actually survived since the film was made. Equally, the Gateshead Car Park - made famous by the 1970s film *Get Carter* - has miraculously survived the makeover of the city, partly due to the film’s cult status.

Northern Stage’s adaptation therefore preserves three aspects of the original film:

1. Personal testimonies of the community members – as a means of democratization of the cultural renaissance of the city.
2. Images and historical landmarks of the city – as a means of documentation.
3. The love story between the protagonists, the angel Damiel and the trapeze artist Marion – as a means of dramatic storytelling.

The adaptation’s own variety of self-reflexivity, contained in the meta-theatricality of a theatre that is about to close down for refurbishment and the amplification of the individual voices of the community members, is

representative of the wider concept behind the Newcastle version of *Wings of Desire* – namely the rapid cultural renaissance of the linked cities of Newcastle–Gateshead.

It is remarkable how relevant and eloquent *Wings of Desire* becomes as a community piece in Newcastle. The project as a whole makes sense in terms of both its form and its content – this is a piece that not only gives community members a voice and makes them part of the content of the piece, but also utilizes one of the intrinsic elements of the original text itself concerning agency and choice:

More than anything else, however, Daniel chooses 'choice'. He chooses agency. He chooses consequences. He chooses to live. In harmony with one of the film's key conceits – a variation of that expressed through Homer – Daniel chooses to tell his own story, to write his own narrative, to create his own life. This will be precisely the choice that Wenders wants the viewer to be encouraged to make by experiencing *Wings of Desire*.

(Wolfson, 2002: 10)

This is also the choice that Lyddiard appears to want his audience to make.

It must be noted that the text's openness is contained in at least two of its aspects: the internationalism of its characters inhabiting increasingly cosmopolitan spaces and the archetypal and parabolic nature of the story itself.

Alan Lyddiard's stage version of the play is indeed conceived as an adaptation intended to be taken to any other city in Europe and beyond. While it does feature extracts of key monologues and dialogues from the original screenplay, the actual adaptation also allows for certain intertextual flexibility, depending on which city it is staged in. These sections are marked in the resulting script and also indicate the nature and the thematic content of the material that could be devised with the local cast and chorus. All it takes to stage this version in any city is a few days' filming on site, an aerialist, three to four professional actors and an enthusiastic group of amateur performers forming the community chorus. A particular advantage of this adaptation is contained in the fact that it can capture any stories and any city sites at any time – and a production in a particular city can be repeated after a number of years with new stories and added footage. Thus the process of documenting continues, despite the limitations of either the cinema or the theatre as a medium.

In 2005, Lyddiard directed a Copenhagen version at the Bette Nansen theatre. This version did not happen to have any film footage and the white staircase was scrapped as it was too reminiscent of an earlier set design for a different show. The character of Homer survived, but the concert was replaced with a stand-up comedy routine. In addition, three different writers from different parts of Europe (including the Macedonian Dejan Dukovski as the author of Homer's speeches) were engaged on the project, which also politicized the theme of immigration in some detail. Reminiscent of the original, the title of this version was *Himlen Over Os* (*The Sky Over Us*). Lyddiard's plan to create a Barcelona version of the piece not only enhances the internationalist element of the original, but actually renders this text about 'the desire to belong' as a veritable cultural

migrant. Meanwhile, a Coventry version of the piece is in preparation at the time of writing. Thus, as Caldwell and Rea predicted in 1991, Wenders' angel transcended the postmodernist doom by anticipating a kind of Khunian 'paradigmatic shift' by which the fall of the Wall could usher in a new era and also new patterns of mobility, migration and displacement.

Concerning the archetypal and the parabolic, the last word goes to Wenders himself:

Stories give people the feeling that there is meaning, that there is ultimately an order lurking behind the incredible confusion of appearances and phenomena that surrounds them. This order is what people require more than anything else; yes, I would almost say that the notion of order or story is connected with the godhead. Stories are substitute for God. Or maybe the other way round.

(Wenders quoted in Wolfson 2002: 3)

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Contributor details

Duška Radosavljević is a Teaching Fellow at the Drama Department, University of Bristol. She has previously worked for the Royal Shakespeare Company and as Dramaturg at Northern Stage and Newcastle University. Contact: Department of Drama: Theatre, Film and Television, University of Bristol, BS8 1TH.
E-mail: drxdr@bristol.ac.uk