

Making Paper Liquid: Thoughts on Erasure and Translation in the Poetry of Uljana Wolf

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Residing prominently along the margins of literary history for decades, appropriation literature has recently undergone a renaissance among academics, critics, and writers alike.¹ This is not to say that the hybrid practices of what Gérard Genette once coined *la littérature au second degré* or, more generally, the Barthesian concept of a text as always created of “multiple writings”² ever fell out of favour within literary discourse. Yet reiterative and citational practices of de- and re-contextualization, strongly advocated by conceptual poets,³ are beginning to see a revitalization spurred on by the cultural momentum of the digital age (e.g., artistically advanced copy-and-paste techniques); and it is within this accelerated global proliferation, circulation, and violent manipulation of texts, images, and bodies, as erasurist Travis Macdonald postulates, that one of the most commonly known and practiced forms of appropriative reductionism, erasure poetry, “concerning itself with the deliberate removal (or covering over) of words on the page rather than their traditionally direct application thereto,”⁴ appears to be flourishing again, unfolding new creative and critical potential.

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1. See, for example, *Reprint: Appropriation (&) Literature*, edited by Annette Gilbert, Wiesbaden: luxbooks, 2014.
 2. Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *A Barthes Reader*, edited by Susan Sontag, New York: Hill and Wang, 1982, 143–148, 148.
 3. See the introductory essays by Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith to their seminal volume *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011.
 4. Travis Macdonald, “A Brief History of Erasure-as-Form,” in *Jacket 2 38* (2009), n.pag, available at: <http://jacketmagazine.com/38/macdonald-erasure.shtml> (accessed 20 February 2018).

In recent German-language poetry, this tendency can be felt most prominently in *SONNE FROM ORT* by Uljana Wolf and Christian Hawkey, a collaborative erasure piece of Rainer Maria Rilke's German translation of Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. It is no wonder that they connect erasure to the literary politics of another so-called second-order form of signification, namely translation, which is central to their poetical thought, as well as that of many contemporary poets. There is certainly no other current body of work in German literature (perhaps apart from the philological writings of Yoko Tawada) in which engagement with the theories and strategies of translation (both as model and metaphor) causing poetry and language to turn upon themselves becomes more evident than that of Uljana Wolf. In the following, I shall examine how Wolf's disruptive and playful use of erasure emerges in the context of her translational poetics and, accordingly, consider how particular forms of both rewriting practices are linked.

According to Emily Apter, translation offers a "particularly rich focus for discussions of creative property and the limits of ownership"¹ (one of the main if not the most important attacking points that defines appropriation art). But where Apter sees translation in general as a "unique case of art as [...] authorized plagiarism,"² practices of erasure (or effacement) inherently run the risk of copyright violation. Nevertheless, both translation and erasure claim "to be of the original" and are "possessed of no autonomous textual identity,"³ and this is where they become of particular interest for Wolf, as they both make "paper liquid"⁴—not only on the linguistic level (lettering, syntax, lexis, diction, metrics, pragmatics, discourse), but, as we shall see, also in the very basic sense of non-linguistic materiality (the position of text on paper, the white space of the page, the materiality of the color applications, the deletions, the tools, and techniques, et cetera⁵).

One of Wolf's first published erasures can be found in the last section of her second book, *falsche freunde*. First it should be noted that there is obviously a strong vein of postcolonial criticism running through her illegal crossings (English "false friends," French "faux amis"), which operate in categories of linguistic,

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1. Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, New York: Verso, 2013, 303.
 2. *Ibid.*
 3. *Ibid.*
 4. Uljana Wolf, "Whiting Out, Writing In, or," translated by Katy Derbyshire, in *Asymptote* 2012, n.pag. www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/uljana-wolf-whiting-out-writing-in (accessed 6 December 2017). The original German version of the essay (in a different form), entitled "AUSWEISSEN, EINSCHREIBEN," is available at karawana.net, <http://karawana.net/content/ausweissen-einschreiben-uljana-wolf> (accessed 5 March 2018).
 5. Following Annette Gilbert's definition of erasure as an appropriative procedure of selection: "Book Pirates: On a New Art Making Books," in *Reprint*, 49–77, 68.

cultural, social, political, temporal, and spatial liminality. The long poem entitled “Alien II: Liquid Life” incorporates a series of deletions from official websites, industry manuals, government documents, and magazine and newspaper articles¹ to investigate how biometric data constitutes the translational—in the double meaning of the German word *übersetzen*, referencing both “translation” (*über-setzen*) and “transportation” (*über-setzen*, with stress on the first syllable)—psycho-geography of airports in the post 9/11² world:

Durch Piktogramme [] wird der Teilnehmer []
 gültig []
 frei [] und gleich []
 Im inneren []
 erzeugt []
 der lokale []
 Andere []
 manuelle [] Grenz []
 Spuren [] im [] Bereich B
 des []
 Teilnehmer] s [³

As with many of her experimental works, the treatment of the selected material is executed with reference to an array of theoretical frameworks. In this case, Wolf makes reference to Brian Massumi’s reflections on the gateways and thresholds of present societies of control (Deleuze),⁴ where (disembodied) subjects are classified and judged by algorithms (e.g., as either a citizen of a country or a foreigner) into liquid entities. More generally, Wolf references Zygmunt Bauman’s examinations of the vicissitudes, precariousness, and uncertainties of contemporary, “liquid” modern societies, to whom the poem owes its title (“Liquid life”).⁵ Thus, the erasure piece sets out to render visible—here, through clinically parsing (reducing) the Website of the ABG pilot program for automated border control of Germany’s Federal Police—how biometric scanners are copying and hence

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1. All source material is transparently marked and listed in the “written-with” appendices at the end of the book.
 2. In contrast, the first poem in the section, “Alien I: eine Insel”, deals with the spatiality and linguistic violence of crossing borders from a historical perspective by re-transcribing medical examination checklists of immigrants at the inspection station on Ellis Island.
 3. Uljana Wolf, *falsche freunde*. Idstein: kookbooks, 2009, 78–79. This is a simplified schematization of the erasure: square brackets indicate the space before and between the lines.
 4. In contrast to the “disciplinary societies” (Foucault) of the eighteenth and nineteenth century: Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” in *October* 59 (1992), 3–7.
 5. Two quotes, one from an interview by Mary Zournazi with Brian Massumi—“Navigating movements,” in Mary Zournazi (ed.), *Hope: new philosophies for change*. Annandale: Pluto, 2002, 210–244—and one from Zygmunt Bauman’s *Liquid Life*, Cambridge: Polity, 2005, precede the poem.

othering aliens (“Im inneren [/] erzeugt [/ der lokale [/] Andere [/] manuelle Grenz [/] Spuren [”] into ghostly (liquid) data-doubles that circulate detached from their original body.

In doing so, the poem demonstrates that the interplay between linguistic material and non-linguistic visual aspects (here, e.g., the position of the text on the paper, the white space of the page) is always a crucial factor in erasure poetry. By rhythmically scattering fragmented, yet plain, recognizable syntactic and morphological clusters of deletion over the page, Wolf discloses the source text’s ideology of control: “Durch Piktogramme [/] wird der Teilnehmer [/] gültig [.” At the same time, a shapeless, nebulous body precipitates from the white space of the page through acting and reacting to the extracted words and jumbled lines.

There is a conflicted ambivalence to this; what one recognizes, in the first place, is precisely that liquid entity achieving its individual status (class, ethnicity, gender, social status, economic status) on the basis of reductive biological data (iris recognition scanners, fingerprint readers, whole-body scanners). Liquid, then, is a discursive totality that needs to be understood in terms of a top-down border hegemony that determines if someone is eligible to enter and remain (or to migrate) in a (developed) country or not, as exposed by the long poem’s first lines: “[] hochwertige [/ einwand- [/] er [/] er [/] sind zu entneh- / men [.”¹ More generally, it can be interpreted through the lens of an all-encompassing doctrine of surveillance. The poem pessimistically concludes in erasing parts of the ESTA² program of the U.S. Department of Security: “[] There is no [/ privacy [.”³

On the other hand, Wolf’s processual cascade of lettering, spacing, and recombining reclaims the very bodily grammar of the alien in the sense that the linguistic and non-linguistic material as such can never be entirely circumscribed or controlled, producing new forms of tactile, aural, visual, spatial, and temporal “maneuverability.”⁴ In other words, she overturns the discriminatory (symbolic and discursive) practice of data appropriation with the material vigor of appropriative erasurism, short-circuiting the capitalist “data imperative”⁵ of identity. The erasurist dialectics of collecting and deleting, therefore, proves to be an effective interventionist strategy against the biometric border conditions that characterize global uncertainties and shifting realities (“Liquid Life”).

There is also a biographical aspect to be considered: Wolf is married to Christian Hawkey, himself an American poet, and they are both living in transit

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1. Wolf, *falsche freunde*, 74.
 2. Electronic System for Travel Authorization.
 3. Wolf, *falsche freunde*, 82.
 4. Zournazi and Massumi, “Navigating movements,” 212.
 5. Marion Fourcade and Kieran Healy, “Seeing like a market,” in *Socio-Economic Review* 15 (2017), 9–29, 13.

between Berlin and New York.¹ Selecting Rilke's translation of Barrett Browning's Victorian *Sonnets from the Portuguese* as source material for their collaborative erasure, then, negotiates a wide range of contextual reference points: Firstly, and most generally, it marks another compelling and complex variation on the way in which the sonnet continually explores genre-based boundaries between tradition and renewal.² Secondly, it ties in with the self-referential and metapoetic dimension of the love sonnet, operating in line with Petrarchan tradition. Thirdly, the Petrarchan secrecy of the hidden dialogue between Elizabeth, the *poetess*, and Robert Browning, the *poet* (and her husband), through the disguise of a "pseudo-translation"³ is structurally mirrored in the relationship between Wolf and Hawkey, which, again, is overall framed by Rilke's particular affection for the Sapphic tradition⁴ of the loving poets.⁵

It is within this logic of relation that Wolf and Hawkey create a new poetic text that results from a multiplicity of textual constellations intertwined in a constrained practice of erasure. In contrast to "Alien II: Liquid Life," *SONNE FROM ORT* should be considered as appropriation literature in the very strict sense of Gilbert's definition, as it is "the appropriation of an entire work in its materiality as such."⁶ Joshua Weiner aptly describes the totality of the dialogical pairings of authors, texts, and languages as islands facing each other—"as a metaphor for the *enface* erasure book itself"⁷—spanning an archipelago, with *SONNE FROM ORT* facing the translation by Rilke, which faces Barrett Browning's sonnets, which faces a book of Portuguese originals that never existed.

Although not mentioned by Weiner, the notion of the archipelago points to some foundational aspects of both Hawkey's and Wolf's writing. In *Ventrakl*, Hawkey uses a variety of experimental methods (e.g., cut-up, homophonic translation, online translation engines, relay translations) to translate and engage with

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1. Wolf teaches German at New York University.
 2. Yet there still exists a prevailing notion among readers, critics, and sonneteers alike that it should be governed by an extremely rigid and restrictive set of formal conventions.
 3. Following Gideon Toury's seminal definition as "texts which have been presented as translations with no corresponding source texts in other languages ever having existed" (*Descriptive Translation Studies – and Beyond*, Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1995, 40).
 4. See, for example, Rainer Maria Rilke, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 6, Frankfurt a. M.: 1966, 924–931.
 5. Also, in relation to his translation of the Sonnets of Lousie Labé, see Andreas Wittbrodt, "Rainer M. Rilkes Übersetzung der Sonette Elizabeth Barrett Brownings sowie Louise Labés und ihr Bezug zum Petrarkismus," in *Rilke und die Weltliteratur*, edited by Manfred Engel and Dieter Lamping, Düsseldorf; Zürich, Artemis & Winkler, 1999, 168–187.
 6. Gilbert, "Book Pirates: On a New Art Making Books," 51.
 7. Joshua Weiner, "Friday Pick: SONNE FORM ORT by Uljana Wolf and Christian Hawkey," in *Body*, April 2014, n.pag. <http://bodyliterature.com/friday-pick-sonne-from-ort-by-uljana-wolf-christian-hawkey/> (accessed 27 January 2018).

the poetry of Georg Trakl. Furthermore, he conceptualizes his procedure as a ghostly “collaboration” (with Trakl) captured in a chapter long meditation on transformation and translation, entitled “an argument for archipelagos.”¹ In Wolf’s third collection of poetry, *meine schönste lengevitch*, which was published shortly after *SONNE FROM ORT*, her writings on Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and, most recently, in her translation of Erin Mouré, it becomes clear that she, and surely Hawkey, too, make use of Édouard Glissant’s figure of the de-centered, constantly reforming and reshaping archipelago from his treatise *Poétique de la Relation*, and in particular Glissant’s poetics of translation; finally, it is Uljana Wolf’s work that can be described as this: a poetics of relation.

It is not surprising, then, that it is Wolf who writes an illuminating essay (“Whiting Out, Writing In, or”)² on the collaboration with her husband that in fact would have made an excellent afterword (and should be read precisely as such) to *SONNE FROM ORT*, which of course includes the fully erased afterword by Elisabeth Kinderlen to the Insel edition of Rilke’s translation, in order to remain faithful to the overall concept. Wolf explains the poetics and constraints of the collaborative work process of her “double erasureship” with Hawkey, involving both poets reworking every part of the selected material with correction fluid, in alternating order,³ with the pages of the current bilingual Insel edition of Rilke’s translation as their working surface.

In a way it all starts with Rilke, who once famously called the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* one of the “großen Vogelrufe des Herzens in der Landschaft der Liebe”⁴ (“one of the great bird calls of the heart in the landscape of love”⁵). Wolf takes this up and uses the metaphor of *Zugunruhe*, meaning the migratory drive in birds (literally “migratory restlessness”), to conceptualize the whiting-out of the “starting texts” as “a technique for recording the migratory orientation of captive texts”⁶—this most obviously reads as an intertextual variation of Stephen T. and John T. Emlen’s paper “A Technique for Recording Migratory Orientation of Captive Birds”—by comparing it to an Emlen funnel experiment, where ink colors the bird’s (the poet’s) claws and marks its (the text’s) directorial orientation⁷:

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1. See Christian Hawkey, *Ventrakl*, New York: Ugly Duckling, 2010. Cf. 2nd edition 2013, 27–41.
 2. One has to acknowledge that often it is impossible to write about Wolf because everything you might want to say, illuminate, or criticize about her work, is very likely to have been said already by her, better.
 3. E.g., Rilke-Wolf, Rilke-Hawkey, Wolf-Hawkey-Rilke, Hawkey-Rilke-Wolf, et cetera.
 4. Ingeborg Schnack, Rainer Maria Rilke. *Chronik seines Lebens und seines Werkes*, Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1996, 718.
 5. See Weiner’s translation in “Friday Pick: SONNE FORM ORT,” n.pag.
 6. Wolf, “Whiting Out, Writing In, or,” n.pag. and Stephen T. and John T. Emlen’s, “A Technique for Recording Migratory Orientation of Captive Birds,” in *The Auk* 83 (1966), 361–367.
 7. Cf. Wolf, “Whiting Out, Writing In, or,” n.pag.



In Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Sonnet IV," the voice of the *poetess* is compared to that of another *poet*: "my cricket chirps against thy mandolin,"¹ with the "cricket" presumably referring to Elizabeth and the "mandolin" to Robert Browning. In Hawkey's and Wolf's above-quoted erasure, however, the *poetess* chirps not "against" the *poet*, but, as it were, constitutively from "]" within [" the lines, removed from any self-doubt.

As Kinderlen writes in her afterword, Rilke reads *Sonnets from the Portuguese* as reverberations of a broken, invalid, and insecure, yet passionately and passible Elizabeth, (over-)highlighting feminine devotion and self-abandonment in his translation.² While acknowledging his aesthetic virtuosity, Joanna M. Catling points to these shortcomings of Rilke's version that appear to be in line with a then as now common reading, but overall hastily generalization of the original.³

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1. Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, *Sonette aus dem Portugiesischen. Übertragen von Rainer Maria Rilke. Englisch und Deutsch*, Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1999, 12.
 2. See Elizabeth Kinderlen, "Nachwort," in Elizabeth Barret Browning, *Sonette aus dem Portugiesischen. Übertragen von Rainer Maria Rilke. Englisch und Deutsch*, Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1999, 94–100, 100.
 3. This applies especially to Barrett-Browning's use of death metaphors. See Joanna M. Catling, "Rilke als Übersetzer: Elizabeth Barrett-Brownings Sonnets from the Portuguese," in *Rilke – ein europäischer Dichter aus Prag*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1998, 85–103, 96.

Hence, Wolf and Hawkey write underneath this narrative, and literally undercut and elude Rilke's reductive sentiment by amplifying the voice of the *poetess*.

Moreover, the German "Grille" directs away from Rilke (i.e., another erased "mandolin")—who, as many poet-translators, had an ambivalent relationship to the source language—to the female voice of his essential co-translator, Alice Faehndrich. Wolf asserts that the acknowledgement of her contribution is lost in changing the former dedication to the work they shared ("in Erinnerung an gemeinsame Arbeit") to an in-memoriam note in later editions ("In memoriam / Alice Faehndrich").¹ The reworking of the translation becomes an act of metatranslative recovery, through which Faehndrich's concealed authorial presence is inversely made visible by erasing Rilke's version. The above quoted segments read as a self-referential conversation between two artisans/translators about the right choice of parts/movements/words—""] gefällt dir dieser [/ Griff [] ? [Ist [/ da [/] ein [] arm dafür? ["—which eventually indicates that it is the chirping voice of the female co-translator that lays the foundation of the text and guides the process as it constitutes the house/the translation to be build: ""] meine Grille [/] macht [] das Haus [/] auß [."

Although not designed to be a history of erasure, Wolf weaves into her essay pieces about the genre's various mutations, beginning with juxtaposing a short prose portrait of the first Emlen funnel experiment and a translated fragment from Sappho: ""] don't you remember [/ we, too, did such things in our youth."² MacDonald reads the square brackets that indicate gaps in the text (e.g., where the papyrus scroll is torn or the citation breaks off), as early material signifiers of erasure that virtually complete the "stanza insofar as it manages to resonate with our modern sensibilities."³ It is within the extension of space before and between the two lines that Wolf stylistically connects Sappho to the footprint technique of the Emlen funnel—i.e., her foundational notion of the migratory text and, accordingly, the notion of erasure as an innovative and constitutive disability of language that was always operative, as, too, conveyed in the form of the essay: ""] these [/ movements, in radial pattern, facing South, [/] don't you remember [/ we, too, did such things in our youth."⁴

In disclosing the hidden layers of the unexplored collaborative interaction between Rilke and Faehndrich, the German poet points to what in particular lies at the core of her and Hawkey's erasure piece, and the poetics of erasure in general, that is, questioning singular authorship and the concept of the original by radically unwrapping the unity of the selected material. The formal and semantic

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1. Faehndrich died shortly after the first edition of Rilke's translations was published in 1908.
 2. Cf. Wolf, "Whiting Out, Writing In, or," n.pag.
 3. Macdonald, "A Brief History of Erasure-as-Form," n.pag.
 4. Jim Powell (trans.), *The Poetry of Sappho*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, [Voigt 24.2–4], 9.

features metamorphose in the whited-out surface spaces between and beyond words; broken up and reconnected lines, stanzas, and languages set “a slumbering text”¹ in motion, migrating off the page (*Zugunruhe*).

The outcome belongs neither to the author, nor the translator, nor the erasurist, but—and here Wolf is alluding to William Burroughs and Brion Gysin²—to the “*Third mind* [of collaboration]”³ that, as Macdonald puts it, “arises [...] from the creative friction between two inherently different sets of aesthetic tendencies.”⁴ However, what distinguishes *SONNE FROM ORT* from, for example, recent erasure projects—such as Jen Bervin’s widely received *Nets*⁵—is that, here, translation adds another aesthetic tendency that is not inherently different from erasure.

Much has been said and written about the return to form in recent poetry, with Oulipian constraints, polyglossia, and theory-bound writing being a large part of that discussion. In this context, I propose, as a first step, to read Wolf’s collaborative erasure as a kind of conceptual translation strategy⁶ that emerges from a planned and thought-through *idea* that is carried out to completion, the realization process through which translation becomes able to describe itself.

The process of transforming the original poem and the translation challenges the categories underlying the text—i.e., the simplified schemes of translation theory: original and translation, author and translator, source language and target language. For example, the white-out redactions bring into focus the fact that translation always already activates the language being translated from and the one translated to. This is most obvious in the bilingual title *SONNE FROM ORT*⁷ that shows, as poignantly summed up by Gilbert, “the inextricable interlacing of voices across eras, generations, languages.”⁸

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1. Uljana Wolf, “Whiting Out,” n.pag.
 2. See William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind*, New York: The Viking Press, 1978.
 3. Uljana Wolf, “Whiting Out,” n.pag.
 4. Travis Macdonald, “A Brief History of Erasure-as-Form,” in *Jacket* 2 38 (2009), n.pag. <http://jacketmagazine.com/38/macdonald-erasure.shtml>. Accessed 3 February 2018.
 5. Again, a take on Shakespeare’s sonnets. Hawkey and Wolf seem to be greatly inspired by Bervin’s erasure work, notably her poetic and conceptual investigation of material and page design in her books *The Desert* and *The Niagara Book*.
 6. Parts of this text are based on an article entitled “Displaced Writing: Surface Translation as Post-Conceptual Rewriting in Contemporary German Poetry,” currently under review for a book chapter in *Sound/Writing: traduire-écrire entre le son et le sens, Homophonic translation – traducson – Oberflächenübersetzung*, edited by Vincent Broqua and Dirk Weissmann. Paris: Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2019.
 7. According to Wolf, the title refers to Rilke, the Villa Discopoli on Capri (“sun”), where he began to translate Browning’s *Sonnets*, and the interplay of English and German, “even retaining an echo of Elizabeth’s London in the Os” (Wolf, “Whiting Out,” n.pag.).
 8. Gilbert, *Reprint*, 530.

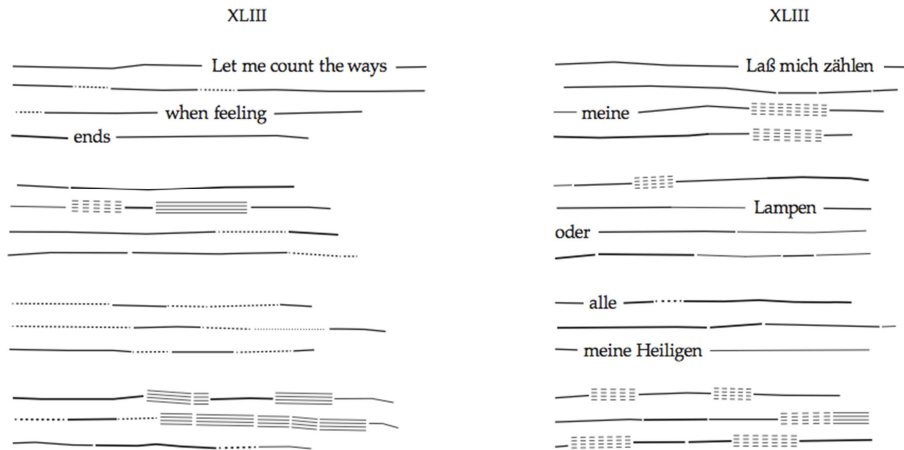
Further parallels could be drawn with the works of founding conceptual artists, such as Sol LeWitt (“The idea becomes a machine that makes the art”¹) or Joseph Kosuth (*Art as Ideas*). In conceptual poetry, then, in Kenneth Goldsmith’s words, the idea often appears to be “much more interesting than the resultant text.”² But even though conceptual art practices can provide a key to understanding the contemporaneity of poetry in the digital age, Craig Dworkin acknowledges that conceptual art and conceptual writing (as translation) cannot simply be equated for various reasons—one being that in poetry, “the relation of the idea to the word is necessary but not privileged: these are still poems made of words.”³

With regard to this crucial difference, it should be noted that Wolf and Hawkey create an intuitive balance between concept and execution rather than an intellectual “supremacy of concept over execution.”⁴ It is especially in this sense that I may, as a second step, consider their translational poetics of erasure as post-conceptual. Wolf conceptually reflects and refracts the processes and categories that bring into being and frame language, translation, and poetry but never fetishizes the use of decontextualized appropriations as refined manifestations of ideas. Her works are neither “detailless” nor “empty,”⁵ nor do they follow Goldsmith’s Dadaist reconfiguration of (non-)reading.

One of the basic conditions of erasure is, as we have already seen, making the materiality of every letter apparent through disappearance. Here, Wolf clearly distinguishes erasure from translation, for erasure contributes to “not only what was there”—for example, separating form from content—“but also what wasn’t there.”⁶ This includes, in addition to the tangible space on the page, the necessary tools and techniques; in this case, whiting out with correction fluid. Her essay features a nerdish portrait of both Bettie Nesmith (“the godmother of all erasure artists”⁷), inventor and founder of the *Liquid Paper* brand (marketing correction fluid, correction pens, correction tape), as well as the transgressive morphing properties of white-out itself. For the print publication of *SONNE FROM ORT*,

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1. Sol LeWitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999, 12–16, 12.
 2. Kenneth Goldsmith, “Conceptual Poetics,” *Poetry Foundation* (June 2008), n.pag. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2008/06/conceptual-poetics-kenneth-goldsmith> (accessed 3 February 2018).
 3. Craig Dworkin, “The Fate of Echo,” in *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, edited by Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011, xxiii–liv, xxxvii.
 4. Gilbert, “Book Pirates,” 60.
 5. Referring to Lucy Lippard’s post-aesthetic premises of the “dematerialization of the art object,” in Lucy Lippard, *Six years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*, New York: Praeger, 1973.
 6. Uljana Wolf, “Whiting Out,” n.pag.
 7. *Ibid.*

the erasures are visually translated by graphic designer Andreas Töpfer into typographical sequences that encode the surface of the correction fluid. For example, dotted, double, or single lines signify the different forms of brush stroke. These also resemble the scratches and tracks of birds; in other words, the migratory orientation of the found texts¹:



It stands to reason that both Gilbert and Weiner choose this iconic first line of Sonnet XLIII (“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways”²) to, firstly, illustrate the dialogic complexity of the erasure piece; secondly, to encapsulate how Hawkey inverts the love-theme in the original (undying love becomes dying love³) and Wolf undoes the pathos of Rilke’s translation,⁴ engaging the reader in an overt and substantial rereading of the original and the translation. “Making paper liquid,” then, means disrupting the conventional modes one typically associates with writing and reading poetry in translation, while at the same time stimulating the intrinsic value of the migratory text in its materiality as such, aesthetically and ethically. By exploring the collaborative logic of production, one can detect how Wolf’s and Hawkey’s erasurist rendering transfers the artistic subjectivity of Barrett Browning and Rilke to the process of refabricating materiality.⁵ In doing so, they forge a highly unique and self-referential, yet non-authen-

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1. Christian Hawkey and Uljana Wolf, *SONNE FROM ORT*, Berlin: kookbooks, 2012, 90–91. Cf. Weiner, “Friday Pick: SONNE FORM ORT,” n.pag.
 2. Barrett-Browning, *Sonette*, 90.
 3. See Weiner, “Friday Pick,” n.pag.
 4. See Gilbert, *Reprint*, 530.
 5. Carlos Spoerhase wrote an insightful article that particularly addresses the metamediality of Hawkey’s and Wolf’s erasure, referring to Starre’s definition whereby “a literary work becomes a metamedium once it uses specific devices to reflexively engage with the specific

tic and incomplete version—one could just take another copy of the book and start erasing—of Rilke’s canonical translation.

It is true that the digital networks that constitute the fabric of globalization call for a new understanding of the general process of poetry and the individual product of the poem. However, as Hito Steyerl has shown for the visual arts, the decontextualizing machines displacing people, objects, and language that neo-conceptualism celebrates “turn out to be perfectly adapted to the semioticization of capital, and thus to the conceptual turn of capitalism.”¹ In this light, it has been my interest to further a post-conceptual understanding of Wolf’s translational poetics in the conflicted context of aesthetic particularity and the deaesthetizing strategies of outright quantitative appropriation. Interestingly, on a final note, Uljana Wolf relates erasure to Walter Benjamin’s materialist theology, or, more precisely, to his term *Entstellung*.² In Benjamin’s writings, both the concept and form of *Entstellung* (distortion) and the concept and form of translation³ are linked to the central category of the messianic that permeates language and the order of the profane—and both are defamiliarizing and foreignizing techniques that Wolf uses to extend and complicate the conceptuality and contemporaneity of language and the literary work.

material medium to which it is affixed or in which it is displayed,” in Alexander Starre, *Metamedia: American Book Fictions and Literary Print Culture after Digitization*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015, 8. See Carlos Spoerhase, “Refabrikationen Rilkes: Uljana Wolfs materielle Poetik der Übertragung,” in *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* (December 2017), Volume 91, Issue 4, 455–477.

1. Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*. Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2012, 42.
2. Uljana Wolf, “Whiting Out,” n.pag.
3. See, for example, Benjamin’s famous essay “The Task of the Translator” which is also central to Wolf’s essay on erasure. I will elaborate on this in another paper, the working draft of which is currently entitled “The Ethics of Experimental Translation in Contemporary German Poetry.”