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Shifting Cartographies: Ethical Nomadism and the Poetry of Dorothea Grünzweig

Emily Jeremiah

This article explores the work of the Finnish-based German poet Dorothea Grünzweig, identifying it as “nomadic” in Rosi Braidotti’s (1994) sense. But even as Grünzweig’s poems enact and celebrate nomadism, which offers a powerful challenge to the rigidity and perniciousness of nationalism, they also expose its perils: isolation, confusion, and a lack of agency. Can nomadism be a relational, ethical, productive condition? Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s feminist postmodernist ethics and on ideas concerning epistemology and translation, I argue for the ethical potential of nomadism and of poetry in postmodernism. (EJ)

Postmodernism, as it is widely understood, privileges plurality and dissonance over unity and coherence. This is an ethically risky move; if judgment and consensus are viewed as residual signs of an outdated modernity, how do we decide what is good? And if the postmodern subject is “nomadic,” as Rosi Braidotti contends (1994), how can rooted engagements—to communities and to individual others—occur? In this article, I deploy Sara Ahmed’s conception of a postmodernist feminist ethics, as developed in *Differences that Matter* (1998) and *Strange Encounters* (2000), to explore the work of the Finnish-based German poet Dorothea Grünzweig. Grünzweig’s poetry, I will suggest, enacts and promotes such ethically compelling “strange encounters” as Ahmed proposes. As we will see, poetry is able to evoke closeness and commitment even as it acknowledges difference and fluidity; thus, it has a vital role to play in the formation of a postmodernist ethics.

As Ahmed notes, the idea of postmodernism can paradoxically serve a hegemonic function: “it is a way of bringing differential and contradictory phenomena back to a single reference point or meaning” (*Differences* 6). Ahmed argues that feminism is often subordinated or excluded

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by the term. In opposition to this perceived marginalization, she reads canonical postmodernist texts, such as those of Jean-François Lyotard and Emmanuel Levinas, through the lens of feminist theory. She is interested not in how feminism merely relates to or bears such writings out, but, rather, in how it can complement, enrich, or extend them.

Turning to ethics, Ahmed writes critically of “the conflation of postmodernism with the demise of the ethical” (*Differences* 45). Lyotard’s notion of “paralogy,” of ethics as produced by dissension rather than agreement, is problematic: “To privilege difference against totality is to keep the opposition in place” (*Differences* 48). Lyotard assumes that consensus is itself unethical; Ahmed, in contrast, argues that new forms of consensus must be developed. The postmodernist critique of universality should, in her view, motivate not a discarding but a rethinking of procedural issues and regulative structures (*Differences* 49). The values that have traditionally oriented “femininity”—care, connectedness, bodiliness—can assist in this project. Such values help dislodge the universalism of previous moral theories, making “femininity” a site of critical refusal (Ahmed, *Differences* 54; see also Shildrick 122; Jeremiah, *Troubling Maternity* 17).

Ethics, Ahmed speculates, “could become a relation or passage made possible by a (necessarily unequal, but nevertheless surprising) dialogue between different women,” entailing ethical decisions that are “inventive, partial, temporary.” It would not draw on “universal judgment”; instead, judgments would be enabled only through “specific engagements” with others (*Differences* 57; compare Code 85).

This idea is expanded in *Strange Encounters*, in which Ahmed casts doubt on the fetishization of the idea of the stranger in postmodernism. The stranger, she points out, has become a paradigmatic figure, cut off from the histories of its determination. For this reason, Ahmed criticizes Braidotti’s idea of a “nomadic subjectivity”: “The specificity and difference of particular nomadic peoples is alluded to (as an inspiration) [by Braidotti], and then erased” (*Strange Encounters* 82).¹ What Ahmed is calling for, against either universalism or cultural relativism, is a “politics that is premised on closer encounters.” Collectivities, she claims, are formed through “*the very work that we need to do in order to get closer to others*” (*Strange Encounters* 180), through effortful “strange encounters.”

German Studies has increasingly been concerned with ideas of difference and otherness, particularly in regard to gender and nationality. Germanness has been explored as gendered (Herminghouse and Mueller), with “other Germanies” being discovered and investigated (Jankowsky and Love; see also Kosta and Kraft; Bird). Migrants to Germany

like the writers Herta Müller and Libuse Moníková have given rise and contributed to such investigations. Turkish-German culture and writing have been much considered (Horrocks and Kolinsky; Henderson), with, for example, the writer Emine Sevgi Özdamar receiving significant critical attention (e.g., Ghaussy). For as Homi K. Bhabha suggests: “Increasingly, ‘national’ cultures are being produced from the perspective of disenfranchised minorities” (5–6). And as Gisela Brinker-Gabler notes in an article on postunification German identity: “Division, multiplicity, and ambivalence are taking the place of unity and community [in discussions of the nation]” (264; see also Kosta and Kraft 1).

What, then, of contemporary writers who have migrated from Germany?² This promising question has as yet been little explored. This article begins to approach it, with an examination of a German-born poet who lives outside Germany and who thematizes this condition. Dorothea Grünzweig was born in 1952 in Korntal near Stuttgart. She studied German and English in Tübingen and Bangor, Wales, after which she conducted research on the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins in Oxford. After teaching at the University of Dundee, and at a boarding school in South Germany, she moved to Finland, where she taught at the German School in Helsinki from 1989 to 1998. She now lives in Helsinki and in the country. Her collections are *Mittsommerschnitt* (Midsummer Cut; 1997); *Vom Eisgebret* (From the Ice-Field; 2000), and *Glasstimmen lasiäänet* (Glass Voices lasiäänet; 2004),³ for which she won the Christian Wagner Prize. Her first two collections have been translated into English by Derk Wynand;⁴ in British and American German Studies, however, she remains little known. This article, then, is intended in part as an introduction to her work, although it represents, of course, only one, selective view.⁵

Grünzweig’s work may usefully be viewed as “nomadic,” but, as we will see, it avoids the ethical risks of nomadism through a stress on complex encounters with specific, embodied others. In *Nomadic Subjects*, Braidotti describes nomadism as “an epistemological and political imperative for critical thought” in the context of postmodernism (2).⁶ Nomadic subjectivity represents “the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour” (5). Again and again in Grünzweig’s work such a resistance is expressed (Jeremiah, “Review” 154). Already in the first poem of *Mittsommerschnitt*, there is the injunction:

[A]uf Eisschollen durch die Ostsee lümmeln
heimwärts überallhin... (MS 5)

[loll on ice floes through the Baltic sea
homewards every which way].

“Home,” for Grünzweig, is both everywhere and nowhere. While in one poem “Herd und hochgraues Haus” (“hearth and high-grey house”) symbolize a mundane kind of stability, to which the poet opposes her reckless wanderlust (VE 6), in the following poem the house ascends, dragging its occupant to new places (VE 7–8). The illusion of permanence and the myth of origin are not maintained for long. Houses are often unstable or toy-like in the poems (MS 47, 49, 54; VE 11): a roof “flattert fröhlich im Wind” (“flutters gaily in the wind”; MS 55). Such images recall Bhabha’s concern with the condition of “unhomeliness.” They challenge the boundary between inside and outside, so that “private and public [...] the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy” (Bhabha 13). Grünzweig unsettles ideas of the subject as static and enclosed, in a manner reminiscent of Braidotti, for whom nomadism spells “vertiginous progression toward deconstructing identity, molecularisation of the self” (16).

Grünzweig also questions nationalism. In particular, she casts doubt on the nationalist myth of common origin or shared blood (*Volknation*). This myth, according to Nira Yuva-Davies, aids the construction of the most exclusionary visions of the nation, as was the case with Nazi Germany (21, 31). Grünzweig describes shame and horror in the face of Germany’s National-Socialist past. Germany is personified as sweatily puffed up on its history (MS 89), and the poet fears that its dark “second nature,” which it now denies, is still in existence (VE 53–54). This fear is borne out by neo-Nazi crimes in the poet’s homeland, which threaten her vulnerable love for it (MS 45). Elsewhere, the poet’s “quest for snow” is set against the flames and gas that haunted her childhood imagination: metaphors for a disturbing national history and the search for an alternative space (GI 98).

Beyond such explicit allusions to National Socialism, there are more covert critiques of nationalist dogma. As already implied, Grünzweig challenges the ideas of origin on which nationalism rests: the poet lives “ohne Land / ohne Haus” (“without country / without house”), unrooted (MS 23); and the umbilical cord to Germany has been cut (MS 90). In Grünzweig’s work, instability reigns. Slippage and plunging are frequent motifs—“Alles hat einen Hang zum Gleiten” (“Everything is inclined to glide”; MS 10)—as are flight and hovering. The notion of a fixed base, a homeland, is thus troubled (see Henderson 225). Such a gesture has important implications for Germany in particular, where the idea of *Heimat* has long been “at the centre of a German moral—and by

extension political—discourse about place, belonging, and identity” (Celia Applegate, qtd. in Henderson 226). Perhaps more than any other gesture, leaving Germany challenges this central idea.

But Grünzweig does not espouse an “extreme postmodernist construction of contemporary citizens as disembodied ‘free-floating signifiers’” (Yuval-Davies 3), a description reminiscent of critiques of Braidotti. National identity, in this case Germanness, is not simply to be jettisoned, so that one can float free; it is a complex process, a negotiation. Germanness is here both problematized and affirmed; the poet’s relationship to Germany is both ambivalent and powerful. In a poem that reflects on the shame of being from Germany, it is then asserted:

[U]nd ich es bejah
 ja ja
 hier aus der Ferne
 nach allem Verwinden
 sein Nachfahr zu sein denn ich hoffe
 sein Wandel steht fest
 und jenes Wesen das ich
 schätze an ihm in
 verschlüsselter Form
 hier nachzuleben... (VE 54)

[and I say yes
 yes yes
 here from afar
 after all the working through
 to being its descendant for I hope
 its change is guaranteed
 and that I may live out here
 in encoded form
 those qualities about it
 that I value].

Germany, then, is in flux: not unified or constant. Being German involves encodement, or translation—it is not a transparent, stable affair—and conflict. The teasing images of departing, about-to-depart, or arriving ships in *Mittsommerschnitt* confirm this conflict. They suggest the possibility—and sometimes the yearning for—a return to Germany, the “Urland” which is also the “Urumland” (MS 88) (“country of origin,” “surrounding country of origin” would be possible translations). Or they imply a desire to stay in or return to Finland, which is both “Fremdland” and “Trautland” (MS 19) (“foreign land,” “familiar

land”). There is a complex interplay between ideas of strangeness and familiarity, between dreams of departure and arrival.

Nomadism, then, is fraught with tensions, like the related issue of globalization. Globalization is arguably the enabler of Braidotti’s nomadism, for it permits and encourages the crossing of borders. Described by Roland Robertson as “the twofold process of the particularization of the universal and the universalization of the particular” (qtd. in Jameson and Miyoshi x), globalization offers a powerful alternative to the nationalist narratives that Grünzweig exposes and challenges. But it brings with it considerable risks, not least homogenization and commodification:

[U]nd auf dem ganzen Kontinent
flutet über geglättete Grenzen
der Kreislauf des freien Markts... (MS 46)

[and on the whole continent
the circulation of the free market
flows over smoothed-down borders].

This observation echoes Frederic Jameson’s problematization of the idea of market “freedom” (Jameson and Miyoshi 68). In a later poem, the poet fears that the ice over the Baltic sea will allow access to homogenizing external forces; in response, she flees to the forest, but worries remain (VE 84). This concern with the preservation of Finnish culture reflects current media debates in Finland.⁷ Jameson, incidentally, perceives resistance to globalization in traditional, local forms of music (Jameson and Miyoshi 68), an idea also found in Grünzweig, for whom Finnish songs are a cohesive force, and a guarantor of continuity (MS 69–70).

Grünzweig, then, alerts us to the problematic aspects of nomadism, as, indeed, does Braidotti. Describing the polyglot as the prototype of the postmodern speaking subject, Braidotti observes that “[t]he arbitrariness of language, experienced over several languages, is enough to drive one to relativist despair” (14). Grünzweig’s poetry, which delights in words, also casts doubt upon them; they appear foreign, frozen, mutilated, or cumbersome (MS 16, 37; VE 33–34). There are also doubts about the possibility of political commitment as a nomad. Finland is presented as an ethically dubious refuge, as in the poem “Ich im Freizeitpark Finnland” (“I in the Amusement Park of Finland”; MS 14–15). In “Strandortsbestimmung” (“Indefinition of the Position”; MS 29),⁸ paralysis and muteness are the result of being torn between

cultures. In conversation Grünzweig has said she still feels a guest in Finland, and unable to participate meaningfully in its political culture.

At the same time, though, nomadism permits of “strange encounters” of the ethical kind. In Grünzweig’s poems, the boundaries between self and other, and between inner and outer, are frequently and deliberately blurred, as in the poem “Verankerung” (“Anchoring”):

[D]ieser Wunsch
einzugehen in alles
was außer mir ist... (MS 23)

[this wish
to enter into everything
that is outside of me].

Grünzweig has stated in an interview that she feels herself to be a “highly permeable membrane,” intensely absorbing impressions (Jeremiah and Grünzweig 264). “Verankerung” concludes:

Ruhig atme ich das Leben
aus
ein (MS 25)

[Calmly I breathe life
out
in].

In this poem, where the poet negotiates both with the raging desire for mobility and the need for stillness, the poet hangs up her wishes “like fishes,” and settles—temporarily, strategically—for calmness. Breathing is presented as a kind of resolution, one that, for all its tranquility, involves exchange, motion, and mediation between inner and outer.⁹ A comparable resolution is reached at the end of “Selbstportrait am Liegeplatz” (“Self-Portrait at Moorings”; VE 24), translated below, with its closing image similarly suggestive of both containment and movement. Elsewhere, the poet is like an elk, who swims from island to island fortifying herself on fresh grass and living “von Tag zu Tag” (“from day to day”; MS 90). Identity, then, is a process, constantly maintained.

It is also relational. Like many proponents of feminist ethics (see Ahmed, *Differences* 52–53), Grünzweig emphasizes communication and connectedness. The frequent use of the pronoun *wir* (“we”) in the poems, which the poet herself links to a conception of identity as relational, can be read as a productive challenge to Western individualism and a subversively “feminine” gesture, to refer back to

Ahmed. In conversation and in her poetry, Grünzweig also highlights the importance of her work as a teacher, which for her constitutes “contact with the world,” as she has said, and the possibility of engaging in ethical, transformative exchange (*MS* 39). At the same time, the poems often thematize misunderstandings and conflicts, in and between individuals—“Warum bist du so ferne” (“Why are you so far away”; *VE* 41) is the title of one group of poems—thereby reinforcing Ahmed’s stress on “*the very work that we need to do* in order to get closer to others,” on effort as a component of ethical engagement (see also Jeremiah, *Troubling Maternity* 17).

Poetry, too, is relational. When questioned about the nomad’s lack of political engagement, Grünzweig responded that “an inner participation is always possible, though.” This view is reflected in the following poem:

Es schreibt sich nichts
 weil es zu helfen weiß
 es ist nur das Gedicht
 ein Sehschlitz durch den
 Klarheit scheint
 damit wir fest umfühlen können
 was weint
 und Fühlen ist schon handeln (*VE* 14)

[No writing occurs
 because it knows how to help
 the poem is just
 a sight-slit through which
 clarity shines
 so that we can feel out firmly
 what cries
 and to feel is already to act].

Poetry is a means of feeling, and therefore acting. It requires and fosters encounters with others. Grünzweig has indeed described poems as “despatches to others” (Jeremiah and Grünzweig 265), and in one poem, language is crucial as a means of crying for help (*VE* 40), an idea that suggests its communal and performative nature. This notion of poetry as a relational and therefore ethical practice (see Jeremiah, “Troublesome Practices”) can be clarified and enhanced by a consideration of the process of translation.

Ahmed turns to translation in her quest for an ethics of specificity. Claiming that the work of Levinas “generalizes the other *precisely through a discourse on its unknowability*” (*Differences* 61), Ahmed finds

in translation an instructive attentiveness to the particularity of the other. Gayatri Spivak, whom Ahmed cites, similarly views translation as “a simple miming of the responsibility to the trace of the other in the self” (177), as involving transcendence over the confines of identity. Spivak draws on the poststructuralist opposition between the “logical systematicity” of a language and its “rhetorical nature,” and argues that it is the latter that must be conveyed in translation. Rhetoric points to what is around language, to what Grünzweig terms in one poem “[die] Buchstabszwischenräume” (“the gaps between letters”; *Gl* 33), and it effects a blurring or fraying of the self-in-language:

Language is not everything. It is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries. The ways in which rhetoric or figuration disrupt logic themselves point at the possibility of random contingency, beside language, around language. Such a dissemination cannot be under control. Yet in translation, where meaning hops into the spacy emptiness between two named historical languages, we get perilously close to it. By juggling the disruptive rhetoricity that breaks the surface in not necessarily connected ways, we feel the selvages of the language-textile give way, fray into *frayages* or facilitations. (Spivak 178)¹⁰

Translation, then, causes an unravelling of identity, and it involves, as Spivak notes, surrender. She adds: “To surrender in translation is more erotic than ethical” (181).

Grünzweig, who has translated Finnish poetry into German (Eronen; Turkka), herself conceives the relationship between translator and translatee as intimate, even erotic. Referring to her sense of permeability, discussed before, she goes on:

[A]nd so I take the words of others into me, too, and they live not only in my heart and head, but also in my entrails and womb. Working with someone else’s poems triggers off a process of rejection. It’s like having a skin graft, or someone else’s hand attached to you, whereby you have the feeling sometimes that you can hardly bear it. (Jeremiah and Grünzweig 266)¹¹

This intensely physical imagery, in which word becomes flesh, mind, body, also represents a challenge to the self/other opposition, undermining traditional ideas of rationality and individuality.¹² Such a stress on the body is also to be found in Grünzweig’s poems, which abound with images of physicality. Grünzweig indeed experiences creativity itself as a physical process (Jeremiah and Grünzweig 261–63).¹³ In its linkage of embodiment and relationality, Grünzweig’s description of the translation process is reminiscent of Luce Irigaray, to whom Spivak also

refers. Irigaray views eroticism as the site of an ideal mutuality. For her, sensual pleasure can challenge views of the world based on consumption and control, “can return to the evanescence of subject and object. To the lifting of all schemas by which the other is defined” (185).¹⁴ The erotic, then, can lead to a lifting of the hierarchical relations upon which—for one thing—traditional “ways of knowing” are founded.¹⁵ It is also, for Irigaray, a site of “transcendence”; she warns that to ignore corporeal exchange is “to risk the suppression of alterity, both the God’s and the other’s” (217).

Grünzweig herself links the practice of writing poetry to prayer, a form that she internalized during her childhood as the daughter of a minister: an idea hinted at in the claim that “to feel is already to act.” She has expressed her fascination with the thought-spaces (*Denkräume*) to which religious thinking gives rise, and with the capacity of both religion and art to transcend material realities: “I’m interested in art that can think its way out of material givens,” she stated (see also Grünzweig, “Glimpsed once”). Transcendence does not necessarily connote belief in a god, according to Grünzweig. One reviewer, likening Grünzweig’s technique and vision to those of Gerard Manley Hopkins, for whom God was revealed through nature, then goes on: “Dorothea Grünzweig holds on tight to the subject and takes the rainbow with its consoling character into her earth-immanent (*erdimmanente*) vision as a promise of poetry” (Wartusch 2000).

This idea of transformative transcendence can be linked to polyglotism and to translation, which involve a liberating, or giddy, relativization. Grünzweig describes a state of “hovering” caused by two languages counterbalancing each other (Jeremiah and Grünzweig 267)—and, as noted, the motifs of elevation and flight appear frequently in her poems. In Eva Hoffman’s memoir *Lost in Translation*, in which the author describes the effect of encountering another culture, there is a similar idea: “Weightlessness is upon me [...] [;] this is just one arbitrary version of reality” (170). By means of the practice of translation, and by her theorizing about it, Grünzweig, like Braidotti, casts doubt on the idea of an exclusive, comprehensive “mother tongue.” As Braidotti observes: “[...] a person who is in transit between [...] languages, neither here nor there, is capable of some healthy skepticism about steady identities and mother tongues” (12). Such a suspiciousness is reflected in a striking image in Grünzweig: “[E]in Schwall von Mutterzungen / schlängelt hier herein” (“a flood of mother tongues / worms its way in here”; *Gl* 35).

It is also indicated in the slippage of German and Finnish in two poems by Grünzweig, “O unsere Wörter” (“Oh our words”; *VE* 35–36)

and “Nah so Nah” (“Close so Close”; VE 47).¹⁶ In these poems, Grünzweig disrupts “logical systematicity” and deploys “rhetoric,” in what is an erotic/ethical gesture of surrender of the (coherent, stable) self. While this is not translation as such, its dynamics are similar to those described by Spivak with regard to the translation process. The poems, according to this reading, thematize, enact, and encourage “strange encounters.”

The title of the poem “O unsere Wörter” suggests a bemused tolerance for the vagaries of language, with its disparate and playful elements, *Wörter* not *Worte*.¹⁷ In this poem, the Finnish word for moon (*kuu*) is linked to the German word for cow (*Kuh*) so that:

[Z]wei Wesen sind miteinander vereint
das heißt Erhöhung der Sichtqualität... (VE 35)

[two beings are united
that means a heightened quality of vision].

This idea recurs in a later poem, where the Finnish word *syys* (“autumn”) makes autumn seem *süß* (“sweet”; Gl 63). It brings to mind Braidotti, who conceives the nomadic polyglot as “a specialist of the treacherous nature of language, of any language” (8). In Grünzweig, the use of Finnish words in German poems (e.g., Gl 7–8, 22, 36, 70–71) exposes this treachery. In disengaging the signifier from the signified, to transplant it into another historically established linguistic system, Grünzweig challenges the apparent fixity and self-containment of individual “languages.” As Braidotti observes: “The polyglot [...] knows intimately what de Saussure teaches explicitly: that the connection between linguistic signs is arbitrary” (14).

Grünzweig also questions the very nature of signification and imagination, suggesting new *frayages*, or neural pathways, along which the self could just as well be channeled. This is reminiscent of Spivak, for whom the *frayages* effected by translation point beyond language and its logical operations, to where the self’s boundaries blur. The heightened vision granted by awareness of another language exposes the inevitable partiality of one’s perceptions, and suggests possible alternative “ways of knowing.” The knowledge that language produces and maintains is unfixed and open to change. Grünzweig has said that Finnish is for her like air at high altitude; “it refreshes, and allows expansion,” she concludes (Jeremiah and Grünzweig 267). That is, it usefully troubles set modes of expression.

Grünzweig disrupts logical systematicity by playing with grammar. The allative *Lottelle* (“to Lotte”) contains “ein heimatliches -le/chen”

(“a homey -le/chen”¹⁸) and the Finnish verb *hirttää* (“to hang,” “*ein guter Hirte*” [“a good shepherd”]). The plural form of *Kuu* is the jarring and funny *Küüe*. The grammar of one language is relativized by its juxtaposition with the other. *Kuunacht*, *Sichelkuu*, *Voll- Halb- und Neukuu* are also disruptive and pleasing.¹⁹ Grünzweig has stated that knowing and working with other languages sometimes leads one’s “own” language to appear funny, even grotesque (although she also emphasizes that her own language is the ultimate authority to which she is bound, and remains a refuge) (Jeremiah and Grünzweig 267). Here this grotesqueness arises from willful play, but elsewhere in her work, Grünzweig more discreetly employs puns and neologisms to surprise and jolt. Poetry is, after all, a challenge to

alles Strammerklärte
Geheimnisentleerte... (VE 97)

[everything explained up tight
emptied of mystery].

As such, it shakes things up in a way that conventional forms of discourse, which pretend to be objective and sensible, cannot do, as Braidotti reminds us (37). Grünzweig has spoken of her pleasure in using inappropriate words and in tomfoolery as ways of challenging rigidity and dullness (Jeremiah and Grünzweig 264).

“Nah so nah” (“Close so Close”) also challenges the boundaries between apparently discrete linguistic systems and cultures—“*Suomi Saksa Seite an Seite*” (“*Suomi Saksa side by side*”²⁰)—where the deployment of Finnish alongside German enacts the fraying and merging that is being described in the poem. The boundary between cultures is not clearly perceptible:

Den Schlaf nicht abgestottert
auf der heilen Fläche des Traums
Suomi Saksa Seite an Seite
ein einziger Landschaftsraum
aus Obstbaumhügeln Birkenseen
ich sah die Scheidelinie nicht wenn
ich nicht wüßte daß dieser kuhlenkleine
kaum einen Beinschwung fordernde Graben
eine Grenze ist sonst wüßt ich’s nicht
daß ich in zweier Herren
Länder mich vergnüge

Wenn ich die Augen aufschlag
und den Traum beschau falln mir

die Ufer- Küstenlinien ein wo
 Eis und Schnee die schmerzlich sonst
 gespürte Trennung von Erde Wasser
 wegwischen begegnen mir auch Worte wie
hän was er und sie ist Worte wie
ruumis Körper *ruumis* Leichnam
 zwei Dinge Gegenfälle entsprechend so
 Nachttag und druntendroben Lebentod
 in einem weiten Wort in
 Frieden aufgehoben (VE 47)

[Sleep not tottered off
 on the intact surface of the dream
Suomi Saksa side by side
 a single landscape-space
 of fruit-tree-hills birch-lakes
 I wouldn't see the dividing line if
 I didn't know that this hollow-small ditch
 demanding hardly a leg-swing
 were a boundary otherwise I wouldn't know
 that I'm living it up
 in two corners of the world

When I open my eyes
 and view the dream
 I remember the bank- the coastlines
 where ice and snow wipe clean away
 the division of earth water
 otherwise painfully felt
 words like *hän* which is he and she words like
ruumis body *ruumis* corpse encounter me
 two things counterexamples such as
 nightday and underabove lifedeath
 stored up in a wide word
 in peace].

The poem thematizes the blurry nature of self-perception and identity, putting into question the latter. The self is both divided and unified, dreaming and awake, rational and irrational. The Finnish words *hän* (“he” or “she”) and *ruumis* (“body” or “corpse”) offer the poet a comforting fusion of opposites. Words encounter the poet—a notion that suggests surrender to language and the perceptions that it enforces or permits. Again, foreign words expand vision; the Finnish words offer a wider view than their German “equivalents,” dislodging set meanings and creating new facilitations. The neologisms *Nachttag*, *druntendroben*,

Lebentod (“nightday,” “underabove,” “lifedeath”) point to such possible new facilitations.

These poems thematize a process in which Grünzweig is constantly engaging—a disruption of given channels of meaning, of logical systematicity, and a subsequent surrender to rhetoric. They suggest that poetry is a site of shifting identifications, that it may give rise to close and surprising encounters such as those Ahmed wishes for. As Bhaba suggests, there is a need to “think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (1), and Grünzweig contributes to this project. Here, the (German-speaking) reader encounters a German Other encountering Finnish culture and language. The effects of this on Germanness are to destabilize it, but also to articulate and enhance it, in a move that is both “postmodern” (relativizing, playful) and “ethical” (transcending the self, relational). Languages and cultures meet here not to dissolve into mutual incomprehensibility, but to illuminate and enliven each other, suggesting the possibility of fruitful and respectful encounters with others.

As already implied, my knowledge about—actually with and through—Grünzweig is situated, and the map I have offered is, of course, provisional. As Braidotti states: “Nomadic cartographies need to be redrafted constantly; [...] [thus], they are structurally opposed to fixity and, therefore, to rapacious appropriation. The nomad has a sharpened sense of territory but no possessiveness about it” (35–36). Grünzweig, too, warns us against fixed cartographies, and celebrates their disposal:

Drunten am weißen Ufer
kippt Laster um Laster Berge von
Landkarten mit ihrem Wegegewirr
das nur toll macht
ins Meer... (VE 75)

[Down there on the white bank
lorry after lorry tips mountains of
maps with their tangle of paths
which only makes one mad
into the sea].

If postmodernist cartographies are not to be cast off as maddening, they must be shifting, flexible, and humane, pointing the way to possible sites of relationality and care.

SELBSTPORTRAIT AM LIEGEPLATZ

Längst braust in mir kein
 Schwarzrotgoldgeblüt
 kein Mitmischfieber

ich suche tierische Geselligkeit
 trug die Frühlast ab und
 lebe nun der Seekuh nah
 am Wolkenfels dem hellen
 weitab vom Lärm

leb schreckensfrei und nicht
 wie Sinnverwehte
 die an Gepäck geklammert
 von Orten faseln
 wohin sie ausreisen
 aus sich herausreisen können
 wo Entwarnung ist

ich wohne wo ich bin
 in mir so aufgehoben
 fall in mein grünes Wesen

SELF-PORTRAIT AT MOORINGS

For a long time no blackredgoldblood
 has roared in me
 no involvement-mania

I seek animal companionship
 discharged the early burden and
 now live near to the sea cow
 at the cloud-rock the bright one
 far from the din

live free of horror and not
 like mind-drifters
 who clinging to their luggage
 bang on about the places
 to which they travel
 can travel out of themselves
 where the all-clear is sounded

I live where I am
 just stored up in myself
 fall into my green being

Notes

¹ Ahmed is, however, otherwise sympathetic to Braidotti's work (*Strange Encounters* 187).

² For example, Anne Duden lives in London as well as Berlin, and Birgit Vanderbeke lives in France. Antje R. Strubel's novel *Offene Blende* features a German protagonist in the United States.

³ These will be referred to here as *MS*, *VS*, and *GI*, respectively. Note that I focus mainly on the first two collections.

⁴ Wynand's translation of the second collection is to appear shortly. The translations given in this article are my own.

⁵ I write, of course, from a particular subject position. I encountered Dorothea and her work as a British-Finnish Germanist living in Finland; I was based at the University of Helsinki from 2001 to 2003. I was, you might say, predisposed to welcome ideas concerning transnationalism, particularly as these relate to ethics and feminism, both of which had informed my doctoral thesis, completed in 2001.

⁶ Braidotti understands "postmodernism" as "a specific moment in history. It is a moment in which in-depth transformations of the system of economic production are also altering traditional social and symbolic structures. In the West, the shift away from manufacturing toward a service[-] and information-based structure entails a global redistribution of labor, with the rest of the world and especially the developing countries providing most of the underpaid, offshore production. This shift entails the decline of traditional sociosymbolic systems based on the state, the family, and masculine authority" (2).

⁷ See, for example, "Emmekö välitä kulttuuristamme?" ("Don't we care about our culture?"). The author, Aaro Harju, expresses concern about the robustness and durability of Finnish culture.

⁸ *Standortsbestimmung* is "definition of the position" in English, a military term. I have tried to convey the strandedness implied by the punning *Strandortsbestimmung* in "Indefinition of the Position."

⁹ Ahmed quotes Levinas on breathing as "a transcendence in the form of an opening up" (Levinas qtd. in Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 140).

¹⁰ Spivak provides the dictionary definition of *frayage*, the French translation of "facilitation": "Term used by Freud at a time when he was putting forward a neurological model of the functioning of the psychical apparatus (1895): the excitation, in passing from one neurone to another, runs into a certain resistance; where its passage results in a permanent reduction in this resistance, there is said to be facilitation; excitation will opt for a facilitated pathway in preference to one where no facilitation has occurred" (Laplanche and Pontalis 157).

¹¹ Compare Jacques Derrida's metaphor for the translation process as "the breaking of the hymen, the penetration or violation of the source text, which is thereby feminized in a distastefully sexist way"—this according to Susan Bassnett's excellent introduction to translation studies (xv).

¹² Compare Eva Hoffman, who asserts with regard to translation: "A true translation proceeds by the motions of understanding and sympathy" (211). And Braidotti—to take this point further—declares: "Intelligence is sympathy" (109).

¹³ In this, she can be compared to proponents of *écriture féminine* (Jones).

¹⁴ Irigaray continues: "*Eros* can arrive at that innocence which has never taken place with the other as other. At that non-regressive in-finity of empathy with the other" (185–86). This essay is a reading of work by Levinas.

¹⁵ The term "ways of knowing" is taken from Evelyn Fox Keller, who examines the assumptions on which traditional scientific thought has rested. Keller argues for the peculiarly masculine nature of modern scientific objectivity, suggesting that because men originally define themselves in opposition to the mother, they reject experiences of merging that challenge the boundary between subject and object, and cling to the position of master, of knower (see Benjamin 190; see also Code, for a compelling discussion of feminist epistemology).

¹⁶ Other possible directions would be studies of Grünzweig's translations from Finnish into German; my own translations of Grünzweig into English; our translation together of poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins into German (see Grünzweig, "Auf dem Rückflug zur Erde").

¹⁷ The former connotes individual words, not connected, the latter a sequence of words arranged to convey meaning.

¹⁸ *-le* is a dialect form of the diminutive ending *-chen*.

¹⁹ Impossible to translate into English, this wordplay relies on the similarity of the words for "moon" and "cow" in Finnish and German respectively. Hence "moon/cow-night," "crescent-moon/cow," "full-half-new-moon/cow."

²⁰ *Suomi Saksa* is "Finland Germany" in Finnish.

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