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**Nomadic Ethics in  
Contemporary Women's  
Writing in German**

**Strange Subjects**

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## Introduction: Developing a Nomadic Ethics

THIS BOOK EXPLORES how literary texts by five German-speaking women writers conceptualize contemporary German and Austrian identities — especially but not only gender identities — in ethically instructive ways. The writers — Birgit Vanderbeke, Dorothea Grützweig, Anja Rávic Strubel, Anna Mirgusich, and Barbara Honigmann — reveal how factors such as sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and disability affect the status and comfort of the subject. They problematize the categories of gender and nation, revealing them to be artificial and restrictive — though still pertinent and influential — and they suggest more inclusive and nuanced ways of framing identities in a postmodern, globalized era. They propose methods of conceiving contemporary subjectivity that account for fluidity and mobility while also acknowledging the material, the everyday, and the relational. I term their various strategies “nomadic” and view their work as ethically significant.

Why ethics? Ethical inquiries are in fact unavoidable, since, as John D. Caputo puts it, “Obligation happens.”<sup>1</sup> Obligation toward others is an inescapable given that requires expression. The current ethical turn in theory both points up and reflects on this given.<sup>2</sup> Arguably, ethics is especially urgent in the German-speaking context. Sander L. Gilman writes of the new Germany’s “self-consciously ethical” confrontations with the past, suggesting that morality is a conscious concern of many recent German debates. This is a logical development if one accepts his contention that twentieth-century German history, more than the history of any other nation, demands the production of ethical accounts of the present and the future.<sup>3</sup> I will return shortly to the key questions of Germanness and Austrianness.

What can feminist ethics contribute to the project of producing new values and visions? Feminist ethicists assume that the subordination of women is morally wrong and that the moral experience of women is as deserving of attention as are male constructions of morality.<sup>4</sup> To foreground writing by women, and especially its ethical implications, is to champion these tenets. It is to insist that an adequate account of contemporary German-language literature and culture pay due attention to women. It is also to demand that any account of ethical behavior encompass feminine models of knowing and being. This project ties in with the feminist insight that moral theory has traditionally privileged male views of ethical behavior. Carol Gilligan’s landmark study of 1982, *In a*

*Different Voice*, notably made this case. Gilligan evokes a feminine ethic of care that revolves around a central insight: "that self and other are interdependent."<sup>5</sup> This ethic stands in opposition to masculine accounts of morality that privilege reason and logic over emotionality and empathy. Feminist ethicists assert "our fundamental relatedness" and take affective responses as a basic fact of human existence.<sup>6</sup> As Margaret Urban Walker stresses, "Morality is fundamentally *interpersonal*."<sup>7</sup>

In the postmodern context, ethical ideals, especially those that appeal to feminine kindness, might feel outdated. First, they may seem essentialist, positing "women" as a group about which one can generalize. If gender is "performative," as Judith Butler famously argued — a matter not of being but of doing — is it meaningful to talk of "women" as a category at all?<sup>8</sup> The theory of performativity does not deny sex, however. As we will shortly see, recent feminist thought has usefully expanded on Butler's notion of performativity, more forcefully introducing materiality as a salient factor in the construction of the subject. I will come back later to the question of materiality and the category of "women."

Second, such writings as Gilligan's may appear to reinscribe women as guardians of morality, angels of the house.<sup>9</sup> Nel Noddings, however, argues that men can practice "feminine" care ethics.<sup>10</sup> One should not conflate sex and gender, then, or view ethical behaviors as a matter of fixity. We need rather to see morality as a question of doing. As Walker argues, "Morality . . . consists in practices" (10). She challenges the way moral philosophers tend to view relationships and behaviors as "timeless, contextless, universal facts about 'human' nature or life" (27). A performative view of ethics frees it up from such universalizing understandings. Furthermore, feminist ethics largely eschews romanticizing views of women or care. Noddings points out the feeling of doom that can accompany responsibility: "The caring person . . . dreads the proximate stranger. . . . She would prefer that the stray cat not appear at the back door — or the stray teenager at the front."<sup>11</sup> Feminist theorists have thus emphasized the difficulty of relationality and the effort it demands. They have also stressed the political implications of ethics. Joan C. Tronto suggests that morality is inherently political.<sup>12</sup> The angel in the house is in fact no angel, nor is she confined to the so-called private sphere.

Third, any discourse about ethics might seem pointless in an era of playful relativism. Postmodernism, as it is widely understood, privileges plurality and dissonance over unity and coherence, an ethically risky move.<sup>13</sup> If judgment and consensus are merely residual signs of an outdated modernity, how do we decide what is good? But such concerns are misplaced, for the postmodernist subject is not, and cannot be, utterly unfixed. For one thing, she is not alone. Her performances are always relational, as Butler establishes in connection with gender: "One does not 'do' one's gender alone. One is always 'doing' with or for another, even if

the other is only imaginary."<sup>14</sup> And as Robert Eaglestone observes, while postmodernism is often associated with playfulness, pastiche, and irony, in fact it involves a "central and consistent commitment to ethics."<sup>15</sup> As I will show further now, a feminist ethics is especially apt for our times.

### Braidottian Nomadism

The work of Rosi Braidotti brings together feminist-ethical ideals of concern and ideas concerning mobility and border crossing, offering a useful framework for an ethically motivated exploration of texts by migrant or mobile women writers, such as those considered here. Braidotti's 1994 *Nomadic Subjects* introduces a conception of subjectivity as embodied, mobile, and in process — this in opposition to previous philosophical understandings, which stress unity and rationality, or "the pervasively monological mental habits of phallogocentrism."<sup>16</sup> In the 2006 book *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*, Braidotti expands on the ethical implications of this theory of subjectivity, as we will see.

*Nomadic Subjects* discusses the so-called crisis of modernity, but takes issue with the notion there is a crisis. Instead, Braidotti views the challenge to the Enlightenment tradition as an opportunity for feminism to develop different understandings of subjectivity (NS, 97).<sup>17</sup> For example, Luce Irigaray's work manifests a "radical novelty," articulating a feminine corporeal reality never before represented (NS, 130).<sup>18</sup> Braidotti also rejects the idea of the death of the (female) subject, pointing out that one cannot deconstruct a subjectivity that one has never achieved (NS, 141).<sup>19</sup>

Braidotti herself presents a figuration, that is, "a politically informed account of an alternative subjectivity" (NS, 1). Nomadism is a style of thought. It does not denote actual moving about, then: a crucial point as far as this study is concerned. It is, rather, "the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour" (NS, 5). Braidotti does however assert the importance of *actual* mobility, noting that it constitutes a real achievement for women (NS, 256). She also avers that "real-life women" need to occupy positions of discursive power (NS, 174). At the same time, though, Braidotti is careful to assert "freedom of the mind" as equally important as literal freedom of movement (NS, 256). One way of putting it is this: You don't have to be nomadic to think nomadically, but it helps.<sup>20</sup>

Nomadism expresses a desire for an identity made of transitions and shifts, one lacking in and opposed to an essential unity. It thereby represents a form of political resistance to "hegemonic and exclusionary" views of subjectivity (NS, 23). Nomadism does not, it should be noted, entail incoherence and unboundedness. Rather, it combines coherence with mobility, possessing a cohesion that is produced by "repetitions, cyclical

moves, rhythmic displacement" (NS, 22). Nomadism does not involve a jettisoning of borders, then, but an acute awareness of the nonfixity of boundaries (NS, 36). Braidotti takes inspiration from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in particular from the Deleuzian notion of "becoming."<sup>21</sup> The Deleuzian image of the rhizome as a figure for nonlinear modes of being and becoming is also key: The rhizome stands in opposition to aborescence, that is, fixed, rooted ways of thinking and living (NS, 23).<sup>22</sup>

However, Braidotti is also critical of Deleuze. She makes clear, for example, that becoming is always sexed, upbraiding Deleuze for failing to see that neutralizing sexual difference can only hamper the project of reclaiming female subjectivity (NS, 122). Deleuze's notion of "becoming woman" actually entails desexualization, she argues, noting that "only a man would idealize sexual neutrality" (PD, 108, 121).<sup>23</sup> Braidotti herself insists on sexual difference and embodiment: For her, feminism is the question, and the affirmation of sexual difference is the answer (NS, 77). Against feminist assertions of constructedness, Braidotti insists on matter and bodiliness:

in order to make sexual difference operative as a political option, feminist theoreticians should reconnect the feminine to the bodily sexed reality of the female, refusing the separation of the empirical from the symbolic, or of the material from the discursive, or of sex from gender. (NS, 177)

Braidotti thus advocates materialism, viewing the body as a point of intersection between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological, and making a case for what she terms "embodied and historically located subjectivities" (NS, 4, 123).

### Materialism

Braidotti's materialism forms part of a broader tendency in recent feminist thought: the new materialism, material feminism, or the material turn in feminist theory. The editors of the 2008 volume *Material Feminisms*, Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, note that materiality has constituted a "volatile site" for feminist theory, which has preferred to take refuge in the domains of culture, discourse, and language.<sup>24</sup> The "linguistic turn" in feminist theory has been productive but has, they claim, led to an impasse. The constructivism that poststructuralist and postmodernist thinkers espouse has led to a dismissal of the real/the material (MF, 2–3). Butler's performativity, for example, has attracted criticism for allegedly overlooking the material.<sup>25</sup> Butler's powerful and productive understanding of gender as performative *is* important since it gets over the sterile sex/gender opposition in feminist theory, or the

"fired social constructivism versus essentialism debates," as Karen Barad puts it.<sup>26</sup> It posits a view of both sex and gender as constructed, or performed, where the subject is implicated in its own constitution and is not simply a blank slate upon which culture inscribes itself.

But as noted, Butler underplays materiality. In contrast, such thinkers as Adriana Cavarero, Braidotti, Christine Battersby, Elizabeth Grosz, Moira Gatens, and Genevieve Lloyd are interested in theorizing embodied subjectivity and in challenging the mind/body, representation/matter divides.<sup>27</sup> Alaimo and Hekman similarly hold the view that we need to talk about the materiality of the body as an active force; "lived experience, corporeal practice, and biological substance" require acknowledgment (MF, 4). Drawing on Barad's understanding of nature as agentic, that is, as practicing agency, they also suggest that we need to reconceptualize nature itself. Barad argues that Butler's conception of materiality is limited by its exclusive focus on human bodies and social factors, and contends that in Butler's work "questions about the material" nature of discursive practices seem to hang in the air like the persistent smile of the Cheshire cat.<sup>28</sup> Butler fails to recognize the dynamism of matter, Barad asserts. Barad herself contends that matter matters, proposing a "posthumanist performativity" that takes account of the nonhuman, as we will see further in chapter 2.

### Nomadism: Critiques and Qualifications

Braidotti's nomadism has encountered skepticism. Gisela Brinker-Gabler, for example, is suspicious of the idea of "happy nomadism."<sup>29</sup> Actual, literal nomadism is not necessarily a privileged or favorable condition. Mobility does not always spell freedom. The question "who can stay at home?" is sometimes more pertinent than the question "who can travel?"<sup>30</sup> Is nomadism even possible? Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Paleyman remind us that "nomads require passports." For the "embodied subject . . . (still) inhabits places," and is implicated in the material and the quotidian.<sup>31</sup> However, Braidotti's nomadism is a figuration and a style of thought that takes account of the local, the bodily, and the material. And for all that these factors have not disappeared, whether we like it or not, displacement is a central feature of the postmodern era. We are operating now in the context of globalization, characterized by advanced capitalism extending beyond the nation-state. This order is headless yet hegemonic, mobile yet fixed, global and local; it aims at self-perpetuation and results in the homogenization of commodity culture and at the same time in huge disparities and structural inequalities. Braidotti's nomadism offers a new conception of the subject and of agency, one that stands in opposition to "the inertia and self-interests of neo-conservatism" (T, 78, 31–33).

Sara Ahmed raises a further objection to Braidotti's concept. In *Strange Encounters*, Ahmed argues that in using nomadism as a metaphor, Braidotti makes them something other than themselves, erasing the specificity and difference of particular nomadic peoples.<sup>32</sup> Ahmed notes that Braidotti proposes a certain kind of subject, one that is free to choose. She suggests that the analogy between nomadic peoples and nomadic thought conceals the privilege inherent in the latter (*SE*, 83–84). Ahmed also problematizes the privileging of transgression on Braidotti's part. She argues that this very gesture serves in fact to shore up conventions and boundaries, and suggests that the desire to go beyond fixity actually serves to fix (*SE*, 84). Ahmed is right to observe that “home” is also a site of strangeness and movement (*SE*, 88), and her warnings influence this study. I have therefore opted for the phrase “strange subjects” as the subtitle of this book, as a way of further defining the nomadic subjectivity that I am investigating. I highlight Braidotti's nomadism in my main title but through the subtitle pay due respect to Ahmed's corrective or warning points, especially as far as the idea of home is concerned.

For while the category of home has been problematic for women, denoting entrapment and passivity, we cannot, and should not, discard it. Iris Marion Young observes that while feminists have good reason to reject home as a value — given that it has meant “the confinement of women for the sake of nourishing male projects”<sup>33</sup> — it is a deeply ambivalent entry. Young explores the Heideggerian notion of dwellings, pointing to its gendered nature. She observes that even today, building houses and other structures remains largely a male activity. Construction (a male domain) is privileged over care and maintenance (female activities). Young also discusses the central position occupied by house and home in the consumer consciousness, noting how the stress on ownership gives rise to a “privatist identity” that can lead women in particular to isolation and anxiety concerning appearances and status (*FB*, 133). However, while such thinkers as Simone de Beauvoir offer an entirely negative view of housework — as fostering male subjectivity while denying that of the women who perform it — Young suggests that giving meaning to individual lives through the arrangement and preservation of things is intrinsically valuable (*FB*, 138). The activities involved in homemaking give “material support” to the home's dwellers. This is not a romantically essentializing view, for:

Home as the materialization of identity does not fix identity but anchors it in physical being that makes a continuity between past and present. . . . There are no fixed identities, events, interactions, and the material changes of age and environment make lives fluid and shifting. (*FB*, 140, 143)

Young suggests that we should revalue and degender the preservation of meaningful things. She notes usefully that the concept of home does not set personal and political in opposition, but instead “describes conditions that make the political possible” (*FB*, 149).

### Sara Ahmed's Ethics of Encounter

If home is a site of care, is nomadism a renunciation of such care, of responsibility toward the other? If the postmodern subject *is* nomadic, how can rooted (or rhizomatic) engagements — to communities and to individual others — occur? I have already challenged the view that postmodernism and ethics are opposed to each other, citing Eaglestone's claim that postmodernism consistently and crucially involves a commitment to ethics. I also suggest that feminist ethics is especially well suited to the postmodern context.<sup>34</sup>

Sara Ahmed develops a postmodernist feminist ethics consistent with this claim. In *Differences That Matter*, she notes that 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.<sup>35</sup> She argues that the term “postmodernism” often subordinates or excludes feminism. 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, in particular by expanding their ethical potential.

Addressing ethics, Ahmed writes critically of the conflation of postmodernism with the demise of the ethical (*DM*, 45). Lyotard's notion of “paralogy” of ethics as produced by dissension rather than agreement, is problematic, since privileging difference over totality means keeping the opposition in place (*DM*, 48). Lyotard assumes that consensus is itself unethical. Ahmed, in contrast, argues that we need to develop new forms of consensus. The postmodernist critique of universality should, in her view, motivate not a discarding but a rethinking of procedural issues and regulative structures (*DM*, 50).<sup>36</sup> The values that have traditionally oriented femininity — care, connectiveness, bodiliness — can assist in this project. Such values help dislodge the universalism of previous moral theories, making femininity a site of critical refusal (*DM*, 54). Ethics, Ahmed speculates, could be a matter of (always unequal, but nonetheless unpredictable) dialogue, entailing ethical decisions that are “inventive, partial, and temporary.” It would not draw on “universal judgement”; instead, judgments would come about through “specific engagement” with others (*DM*, 57). These suggestions echo other work by feminist ethicists, as we have seen, in particular by stressing specificity and encounter as key to ethical behaviors.

Ahmed expands on these ideas in *Strange Encounters*. She asserts relationality when she claims, "Identity . . . is constituted in the 'more than one' of the encounter: the designation of an 'I' or 'we' requires an encounter with others" (SE, 7). Ahmed also casts doubt on the fetishization of the idea of the stranger in postmodernism, criticizing Braidotti in this connection. The stranger, Ahmed points out, has become a paradigmatic figure, cut off from the histories of its determination (SE, 4). Against both universalism and cultural relativism, Ahmed is calling for 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," through effortful "strange encounters" (SE, 180). The idea of the strange encounter will serve as a touchstone in the analyses that follow.

### Knowing Others: Braidotti and Butler

Braidotti's *Transpositions*, which develops the ethical implications of nomadism, provides another key point of reference. Far from leading to relativist despair, Braidotti claims here, a nomadic, nonunitary view of the subject is in fact a necessary precondition for an ethics suitable for our complex times (T, 18). Braidotti also explains:

A sustainable ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of interconnection between self and others, including the non-human or "earth" others, by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism. (T, 35)

I will explore the question of nonhuman and "earth" others further in chapter 2. Here I would like to highlight the importance of interconnectiveness in framing an ethical view of the subject, a move in keeping with feminist ethics more broadly. A relational conception of the subject stands in opposition to "self-centred individualism" and the commodifying tendencies of global capitalism. As Tronto argues, it is especially important to emphasize the importance of human connectedness "in a culture that stresses, as its bottom line, an unlimited concern with productivity and progress."<sup>37</sup>

"Transposition," a term used in music and genetics, furnishes Braidotti with a source of inspiration as she develops an oppositional model of being and knowing:

It indicates an intertextual, cross-boundary or transversal transfer, in the sense of a leap from one code, field or axis into another . . . It is not just a matter of weaving together different strands, variations on a theme (textual or musical), but rather of playing the positivity of difference as a specific theme on its own. (T, 5)

Like nomadism, then, this figuration valorizes difference. It is, Braidotti explains, nonlinear but not chaotic, nomadic yet accountable and committed, creative but cognitively valid, discursive yet materially embedded, and coherent without falling into instrumental rationality (T, 5).

Butler provides a complementary way of conceiving ethical, relational identity formation. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler notes that the self exists only in relation to other selves, and any dyad is also conditioned and mediated by language and by social norms and conventions.<sup>38</sup> Drawing on the work of Adriana Cavarero, Butler asserts our fundamental vulnerability and our essential sociality (GA, 33). Narrating the self involves fabulation, since one can never know what has preceded one (GA, 37). However, even though self-knowledge is limited, "that is not a reason to turn against it as a project" (GA, 46). The foreignness of oneself is, Butler suggests, the source of one's ethical connection to others, for it draws attention to the "other" within (GA, 84). Steven Shkman notes comparably that the term "the other" is widely used but "remarkably unexamined" in critical discourse, and it seems to have "lost its moorings in . . . the intersubjective encounter," as explored especially by Emmanuel Levinas, whose work features in chapter 5.<sup>39</sup> As Butler also implies, while the "other" is widely posited as an entity "out there," it is in fact very close, even within.

### Nomadic Ethics: Summary

Nomadic ethics involves the acknowledgment of difference and specificity. It promotes engagements with others in relationships that are effortful, ongoing, and always mediated. It entails the refusal to be fixed by normative, conservative thinking, and a commitment to open-ended, radical modes of becoming. It presupposes a view of the subject as embodied, and both natural and cultural. A nomadically ethical stance is opposed to rapaciousness and domination, to rigid and exclusionary forms of thought, to the denial of difference, to violence.

Braidotti's nomadic ethics, Ahmed's strange encounters, and Butler's incomplete yet urgent account of the self: these ideas inform the discussions of literary texts that follow. As I have argued, the writers I explore all suggest ways of conceiving subjectivity that allow for the fluidity and mobility inherent in the era of globalization as well as for the risks and uncertainties of postmodernism. At the same time they acknowledge and celebrate materiality, home, and relationality. The texts do not only thematize nomadic ethics, they also practice it, as I will shortly argue. The challenges they pose are especially potent in the German-speaking context, in which notions of home and belonging are highly significant and charged.

## Nation, Germanness, *Heimat*

Nomadism ties in with theories of the nation that stress the latter's contingent and contextual nature, and it stands in opposition to nationalism, an example of the normative, conservative thinking alluded to above. The nation-state is in fact a modern phenomenon.<sup>40</sup> It is neither ahistorical nor fixed. Rather, nations are social, political, and cultural constructions that may be reinforced or challenged. National identity does not exist as an essence to be identified and defined; it is, instead, a construct. Mary Fulbrook describes being German, for example, as “a set of cultural, social and political patterns that are historically malleable and situationally variable.”<sup>41</sup> This set of patterns emerges in and gives rise to what Benedict Anderson famously termed the “imagined community” of the nation. Anderson observes that all communities larger than small villages, in which every relationship involves face-to-face contact, are imagined — and perhaps even those, for all relationships are mediated. The point here is not to distinguish between false and genuine communities, but rather to consider the style in which communities are imagined.<sup>42</sup> Fulbrook and Anderson thus take a constructivist approach to the nation and hold that there is no such thing as an essential national identity. Other prominent theorists of the nation, such as Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm, share this vision.<sup>43</sup> This study adopts a similar view.

What does this construct, “nation,” invoke? Self-professed nations do not have to be homogeneous ethnic groups. Rather, they can rest on shared ideals and goals. The United States is an example of a nation constructed very largely in that way. The nation, in general, depends on a myth of collectivity. Certain narratives reinforce it: the myth of a common past, the idea of a communal destiny, and the notion of shared positive values and of common enemies.<sup>44</sup> The idea of nationality is often very powerful, inspiring extreme feelings and actions, including self-sacrifice.<sup>45</sup> Consciousness of national belonging is a notable modern phenomenon. Nationalism, which arises from and propagates the centrality of nation, is fundamental to collective identity in the modern era.<sup>46</sup> Yet it is founded on a myth and its power rests on shaky grounds. There is a striking dissonance between “the enormity of the influence of the national idea” and “the arbitrariness of national identities themselves.”<sup>47</sup>

The fantasy of nationalism is a worthy and popular object of scorn. As Anderson points out, it has produced no great thinkers (*IC*, 14). At the same time, however, one cannot simply argue it away.<sup>48</sup> The related phenomena of nationalism and the nation exist and need recognition and analysis. The extraordinary power of the nation is not necessarily always destructive, either. Concepts of national identity do not inevitably involve or encourage right-wing extremism. National identity is, as Stephen Brockmann puts it, “a socially constituted fact” that sometimes has

positive and sometimes negative consequences.<sup>49</sup> Julia Kristeva therefore suggests that the time has come to pursue a critique of the national tradition “without selling off its assets.”<sup>50</sup> Rather than rejecting the notion of nation outright, then — assuming that to do otherwise would be to collaborate with pernicious forms of nationalism — we need instead to acknowledge its continuing existence and importance, for all that it may be “past its peak.”<sup>51</sup> As Leslie A. Adelson notes, “Some proclamations of the postnational are simply premature.”<sup>52</sup>

Consciousness of the malleability and variability of nationality in fact defines contemporary Germanness; Germanness now is a questioning, quizzical condition. Attempts to define German national identity have been central to much of postwar German politics and public debate. While the myth of a shared origin might once have been important in constructions of Germanness,<sup>53</sup> it no longer holds weight. Celia Applegate claimed in 1990 that Germans question the sources of their national identity more than any other people in Europe (*NP*, 246). Brockmann echoes this claim; in 1999, he termed Germany a “postnational nation,” that is, a nation in which the very concept of the nation is subject to question (*LG*, 192). Because of this self-consciousness — and its causes — Germany offers a fascinating case study in terms of constructions of national identity. The legacy of National Socialism, the reification of the two Germanies in 1989/1990, European integration, multiculturalism, and globalization are factors that together render Germanness uniquely troubled and tricky.<sup>54</sup>

These challenges have on the one hand forced Germans to confront the elasticity and flux of the nation as a category, as Brockmann implies. On the other, they have in some quarters prompted a return to, or a sustaining of, an idealization of nation or homeland. The idea of a stable or normative *Leitkultur* appeals to some, apparently offering a refuge from global complexity.<sup>55</sup> Such nostalgic conservatism is evident in the phenomenon of *Heimat*. Indeed, no discussion of Germanness can avoid the question of *Heimat*, a trope or fantasy that according to Applegate has long been “at the center of a . . . moral — and by extension political — discourse about place, belonging, and identity [in Germany]” (*NP*, 4). Peter Blickle agrees that *Heimat* is a crucial aspect of German self-perceptions that is all-pervasive and “everywhere.”<sup>56</sup> *Heimat* is a floating signifier in German culture, an imagined site of safety connoting “shelteredness and harmony” according to Blickle and “security and belonging” according to Boa and Palfreyman.<sup>57</sup> Boa and Palfreyman view it as an intrinsically conservative value, resting as it does on nostalgic fantasies of fixity and precluding radical change. For them, *Heimat* comes about through covert or overt exclusion of the different and alien. It involves rejection of the “other,” which it nevertheless, inevitably, contains within itself (*H*, 23, 27, 28).<sup>58</sup>



The term *Heimat* has functioned in different ways at different historical moments, often serving to yoke together what Applegate terms “a nation of provincials.” Applegate observes that the survival and transformation of the idea reveals the struggle to create a national identity out of “the diverse materials” of a provincially defined society (NP, 19). The notion has continuing relevance, as Blicke asserts. For him, it remains a formative element of German culture (H, 151). In postunification East Germany especially, provincialism and consciousness of *Heimat* have been reasserting themselves steadily, as Applegate suggests (NP, 246). The “shock of globalization” to the Berlin Republic as a whole has heightened the need for the security *Heimat* appears to provide.<sup>59</sup>

However, one cannot see *Heimat* as standing for the national as opposed to the global. Blicke usefully points out the complex relationship between *Heimat* and nation, observing that in conceptualizations of *Heimat* “the modern nation-state . . . seems not to exist.” *Heimat* is an antinational construct that paradoxically has always served to support a broad and not clearly defined nationalism (H, 47). And *Heimat* connotes regionalism as much as, or indeed more than, it does nation.<sup>60</sup> It thus demonstrates the difficulty of disentangling the many factors involved in the construction of (German) identity — regional, national, and global. Blicke even claims that *Heimat* is identity, “manifested in a social, imagistic way” (H, 66). Identity, in this view, is a shifting site of discourse — “social, imagistic” — construction and play. National identities are thus founded on “extremely slippery terrain,” as Andreas Huyssen puts it.<sup>61</sup> And as Sander L. Gilman has observed, “We imagine ourselves into the world and are constantly reimagining ourselves. We are the collection not of our experiences, but of our fantasies about those experiences.”<sup>62</sup> I will argue shortly that literary texts represent one method of producing, maintaining, shaping, or challenging imaginings of nation and self.

It is obvious that there is no *answer* to the question of German identity. Brockmann predicts that the problem of Germanness itself will underlie German intellectual and cultural life in the coming years (LG, 191). Anne Fuchs views Germany as a “threshold culture” on the brink of defining its cultural identity.<sup>63</sup> Austria, too, is a nation in transition, and Austrianness is similarly unfixed and troubled, as will emerge more clearly in chapter 4. Like Germany, Austria has undergone painful memory contests.<sup>64</sup> As well as dealing with its difficult post-1945 legacy,<sup>65</sup> Austria, like Germany, is grappling with multiculturalism and globalization. Indeed globalization, which Roland Robertson describes as “the twofold process of the particularization of the universal and the universalization of the particular,”<sup>66</sup> poses serious challenges to the nation as a category.<sup>66</sup> Local/global encounters are key factors in the construction of contemporary identities and cultures,<sup>67</sup> where global and local stand in a relationship of “mutual interconnection and interdependence.”<sup>68</sup> Adelson

consequently urges us to reject both the “nation-centered paradigms of analysis” that have prevailed since 1945 and the “facile . . . transnational and global frameworks” of today, a challenge this study seeks to meet.<sup>69</sup>

### The Female Migrant: Unsettling Nation, Unsettling Gender

Nomadic women writers are well placed to challenge rigid and normative accounts of the subject, especially nationalistic or masculinist narratives. On a literal level, movement between nations challenges the boundaries between them. It is troublesome to those who insist on the purity and fixity of individual national cultures. Migrants undermine, relativize, and indeed generate national cultures.<sup>70</sup> Culture produced by migrants is a valid and appealing object of critical attention precisely because of its potential to challenge or construct forms of nationality. Writing by migrants to Germany, for example, has received much critical attention.<sup>71</sup> In particular, Turkish-German literature and culture have offered, and spawned, fresh treatments of Germanness.<sup>72</sup>

But what about migrants *from* Germany? Writers who move away from Germany, or who thematize such a move in their work, are engaged in a particularly potent challenge. Perhaps more than any other act, leaving Germany holds the potential to question that nation’s status as both a magnanimous host country and a desirable homeland. Departing can grant new perspectives: “We learn what home means . . . when we leave home,” Sara Ahmed notes. Transplantation involves a challenge to the familiar, to the very category of familiarity. Ahmed observes, “The familiar is an effect of inhabitation.”<sup>73</sup> In inhabiting different surroundings, the writers I examine here expose and explore familiarity as a matter of habituation and reveal strangeness to be relative. For as Brinker-Gabler expresses it, people who move about “confront . . . the experience of multiple styles of community, clashes of different cultures and histories.”<sup>74</sup> Such subjects — “strange subjects,” as I term them — can offer new perspectives arising from this multiplicity and hybridity.

Homi K. Bhabha indeed suggests that national cultures are increasingly being produced from the perspective of disenfranchised minorities.<sup>75</sup> The nation arises from outside, then, or from an encounter between inside and outside, terms that are shifting and relative, as Adelson reminds us. Adelson problematizes the idea of migrants, such as Turkish migrants to Germany, occupying two worlds, a rhetorical conceit that falsely implies that cultures are static and homogeneous and posits “originary . . . intact” realms.<sup>76</sup> Ahmed notes similarly that national identity is unstable and emerges through “multiple encounters between those who assume themselves to be natives and those recognised as strangers, as

out of place" (SE, 101)<sup>77</sup> Ahmed is careful here to insist on the instability of nationality, and on the power of perception ("assume"; "recognised") as opposed to apparently unshakable realities. She also emphasizes the *encounter* as crucial in the constitution of national identity. That is to say, identity is not a question of stable, unified individuals defining themselves independently of others. Rather, it is shifting and relational, as a nomadic view makes clear.

The female migrant is especially unsettling to ideals of stability and permanence. If Western culture has traditionally associated women with the private sphere and with passivity, as numerous feminists have shown (for example, Braidotti, NS, 256), then the figure of the mobile female has historically represented an anomaly. "Woman" and "nation" are constructs that connote fixity. Kristeva draws a link between women's capacity for birthing and their confinement to particular spaces: "The biological fate that causes us [women] to be the *site* of the species chains us to *space*: home, native soil, motherland (*matrice*)" ("WT," 33–34). The consequent linkage of nationalism with feminism, or at least with "a certain conformist maternalism," is dangerous, potentially leading to women's collusion with fundamentalism or fascism ("WT," 34). The very term "nation" points up its connection with the idea of birth, or natality, bearing out Kristeva's thesis.

And yet displacement or exile arguably form intrinsic elements of femininity, and migration illustrates appropriately women's historical disenfranchisement, or lack of a place in the nation-state. Women's relationship to the nation is uneasy. As Virginia Woolf puts it, "As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the world."<sup>78</sup> This assertion implies on the one hand disenfranchisement, and on the other an opening up of possibilities: a tension that will surface at several points in this study. Norma Alarcón, Caren Kaplan, and Minoo Moallem also note the contradictoriness of women's position *vis-à-vis* nationhood. They assert that as "excentric subjects," women have had a problematic relationship to the modern nation-state and its construction of subjectivity, and claim that women are both of and not of the nation.<sup>79</sup>

The nation asserts and maintains sexual (as well as racial and other) differences and hierarchies. Nira Yuval-Davis shows that nation and gender are constructs that often overlap and support each other: "Constructions of nationhood usually involve specific notions of both 'manhood' and 'womanhood'."<sup>80</sup> For example, National Socialist discourse emphasized the woman as mother, rendering motherhood a national task.<sup>81</sup> The constructs "nation" and "gender" often work together to legitimize "hegemonic masculinity."<sup>82</sup> Seen in this light, the female border crosser becomes even more disruptive, challenging not only the idea of femininity as passive and domestic, but also the masculinity of the nation, which she disregards or playfully relativizes.

Blickle's study of *Heimat* makes clear the necessity of such an oppositional move. Blickle notes that conceptions of *Heimat* connect to the "class and gender interests" of a male ego (H, 71). Examining the relationship between *Heimat* and the feminine, which he sees as closely related constructions, Blickle asserts that *Heimat* represents and celebrates "the shining bride or shining motherhood" (H, 82). In line with the feminist analyses alluded to above, Blickle claims that *Heimat* is associated with the feminine, with confinement to the home; *Fremde* (the foreign or strange) with the masculine, with going out into the world (H, 86). It offers, then, a refuge to the masculine subject, the promise of escape from self-conscious, alienated adulthood (H, 130). Boa and Paleyman refer to the "womb-like security and warmth" that *Heimat* connotes, and observe that according to such imaginings, women are merely "part of the package of hearth and home" (H, 26).

Such gendered discourses concerning *Heimat* reflect and underpin broader tendencies in thinking about gender. In her 2009 study, *Ferrettes on Gender in Post-1945 German Literature*, Georgina Paul offers a wide-ranging yet nuanced treatment of gender in twentieth-century Germany. In particular, she traces the crisis of Enlightenment and the emergence of the "other" sex — as rational, disembodied, masculine — gave way to investigations of the feminine other, often associated with nature. Paul demonstrates how male writers and thinkers turn repeatedly to the figure of the woman — or at least to qualities traditionally associated with women, such as fluidity, bodiliness, eroticism — in their search for "the redemption of the self or of history" (PG, 35–42, 43). Paul thus points to the deployment of the feminine as a receptacle of male longings and projections, the woman standing for unselfconscious wholeness, restorative maternal love, and nature (PG, 13, 40, 37) — as in *Heimat* narratives. As she notes, however, the feminine is no longer "passively available for male appropriation," for in the post-1945 period women are taking possession of the cultural meanings of femininity themselves (PG, 43–44). As Braidotti suggests, women are "both the effect and the manipulators of linguistic signs" (NS, 190).

The associations and oppositions that Paul traces hold continuing relevance in today's Berlin Republic. Analyzing gender in contemporary Germany, Claudia Breger claims that the socio-symbolic imaginary of both East and West Germany, and that of postunification German society, was and is "marked by the legacy of the bi-polar, naturalized bourgeois gender order of European modernity." In this order, as already implied, masculinity is characterized by rationality and heroic autonomy, and femininity by emotionality and dependence.<sup>83</sup> Against such a backdrop, the German migrant woman is still unsettlingly independent, and if she writes, even more so.

Gender and nation are thus relational, shifting constructs that come about through encounters. They overlap with each other and with other factors, being eternally challenged, always up for reappropriation and renewal. Gender and nation, apparent monoliths, are not in fact fixed, nor are they stable objects of knowledge that one can easily pin down.<sup>84</sup> Their fluidity makes them ripe for contestation.<sup>85</sup> Nomadic texts are up to this task.

### Nomadic Women's Writing

Literature plays a key role in constructing, or deconstructing, both national and gender identities, and in fostering ethical connections with others. Literature and nation are bound up with each other. For Anderson, the development of a technology of communications in the eighteenth century—that is, of the printing press—is crucial to the establishment of the modern nation. In combination with capitalism, this new technology helped produce a sense of simultaneity and community (IC, 46). Literary texts thus affirm notions of national belonging. Indeed, literature has historically played a key role in German self-definitions in particular.<sup>86</sup> Literature can also *oppose* nationalism, however. As Stephanie Bird argues, fiction can trouble dominant, rigid accounts of identity, for example nationalist narratives. By deploying ambiguity, irresolution, and irony, it can revolt against normative or totalizing explanation.<sup>87</sup> Fiction offers visions of possible futures, constituting, as Axel Goodbody puts it, a “reservoir of imagined alternatives.”<sup>88</sup> This description is similar to the Deleuzian view that writing is not a question of representation but of “surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come.”<sup>89</sup> For Braidotti, writing in the nomadic mode involves just such innovative exploration. It is a matter of “disengaging the sedentary nature of words, destabilizing commonsensical meanings, deconstructing established forms of consciousness” (NS, 15). Literature has to do with the proposal of alternatives to established common sense.<sup>90</sup>

Literature is also a medium or activity suited to the challenges and pleasures of a globalized world. Beth Linklater links the “systemic instability” associated with globalization to playful, postmodernist literary forms. She also suggests that “glocalization” is a suitable term to apply to literary production and reception.<sup>91</sup> Writing and reading can enable encounters between the global and the local, where these are shifting, overlapping terms. They can also enable encounters between individual (shifting, overlapping) subjects, promoting and illustrating the strange encounters through which, following Ahmed, identity comes about.

I suggest that nomadic women writers are particularly well placed to pose challenges to normative accounts of nation and self, and to highlight and celebrate strange encounters. If, like Braidotti, one insists on the

importance of sexual difference, one should have no problem in talking about women's writing as a category. However, the term “women's writing” might appear to homogenize women, erasing differences between them. In fact, close attention to female writers actually exposes their specificity, the differences between them, and challenges the idea of women as a stable group, the “opposite sex.”

The term might also lead to ghettoization, one might protest. In their study of contemporary women's writing in German, Brigid Haines and Margaret Lintler declare that the risk of ghettoization threatening *their* project is one worth taking, since the texts they examine “collectively . . . raise important questions of concern to women readers,” such as agency, identity, and power (CW, 6). The reference to “women readers” — as if such a body were homogenous, quantifiable — risks essentialism, but we might view this as “strategic.”<sup>92</sup> Haines and Lintler posit a community of women readers who are potentially able to recognize certain trends or topics pertinent to them. Criticism arguably always posits an *ideal* reader: alert, questioning, ready to be provoked. Haines and Lintler's imagined community of women readers is a powerful figuraton, especially given the importance of literature to feminism historically. It is also especially subversive and necessary now, if one accepts Braidotti's view that “post-feminism” means isolation and hence vulnerability for women (T, 45).

More pressing still is the issue of constructedness. For all her espousal of materialism, Braidotti concedes that “woman” is a shifting signifier (NS, 187), a term that is constantly changing. To argue that femininity is constructed, or, following Butler, “performed” — as I most certainly would — and yet to devote a book to women's writing is a problematic move, or having one's cake and eating it, as Lyn Marven puts it.<sup>93</sup> It suggests that the terms “woman” and “women's writing” are graspable and definable. In fact, I avoid any totalizing claims about the nature of either, but I suggest that certain readings of certain groups of texts are justifiable, if they yield interesting and persuasive conclusions. My own study acts as a kind of testing ground for the materialist feminist ethics outlined in this introduction.

This venture is in keeping with Braidotti's proposal that feminists come to strategic definitions of the term “woman” by drawing on “the stock of cumulated knowledge, the theories and representations of the female subject” (NS, 187). Following this suggestion, I use the word “woman” while fully aware of its baggage, both celebrating and challenging — testing out — its associations. Braidotti refers to this tactic as “metabolic consumption,” explaining:

Metabolic consumption attacks from within the stock of cumulated images and concepts of women as they have been codified by the culture we are in. Women need to re-possess the multilayered structure

of their subjectivity as the site or historical sedimentation of meanings and representations that must be worked through. (NS, 39)

Braidotti thus makes clear that there is no space beyond culture, only the potential to contest it from within. In accordance with her exhortation, I am here engaged in an act of cultural repossession, as, indeed, are the writers under discussion.

### Mapping the Terrain

"If one can talk of fashions in an area as sturdy and unfrivolous as *Germanistik* . . . the present vogue undoubtedly is a focus on multiculturalist concern and specifically 'minority literature' in Germany."<sup>94</sup> Diana Orendi's claim is valid: German studies has been increasingly concerned with ideas of difference and alterity, and with the discovery and investigation of "other Germanies."<sup>95</sup> Migrants to Germany like the writers Herta Müller and Libuše Monková have given rise and contributed to such investigations. Turkish-German culture and writing offer an important focus for scholars in German studies. For example, the writer Emine Sevgi Özdamar has received significant critical attention.<sup>96</sup> The gendered nature of Germanness has also emerged.<sup>97</sup> I hope to contribute usefully to this growing body of work on nationality and gender, to which my project owes its existence.

My approach is informed by theory: that is, by my readings of the theories of Ahmed, Braidotti, and Butler in particular. The relationship between theory and literature is complex and contested. Bird views literary discourse as offering an understanding of identity that is "qualitatively different" from definitions of identity arrived at by means of theoretical and historical analysis. Bird does not wish to argue for one theory of identity, but rather to show the ways in which different theories may elucidate a text. She argues that narrative fiction "in its own terms extends our intellectual and emotional comprehension of what constitutes identity."<sup>98</sup> I agree with this assertion, but the question remains: why do criticism? While criticism can be artificial, even violent, at its best it can illuminate and enhance readings of literary texts. And in order to do criticism, one needs to offer a narrative (with which others can then disagree). Haines and Litterer consequently present readings of texts that they hope are "authoritative," but that do not attempt to "have the last word" (CW, 7). They also remind us that "the study of literature is in fact always in some measure theoretical" (CW, 1). Their study does not seek to foist theory onto texts, but rather to use theory as a way into them and to show how the texts relate to contemporary debates about issues such as gender, subjectivity, and representation (CW, 7). Marven goes further, suggesting that

a reading of literature through theory should be at the same time a reading of theory through literature.<sup>99</sup>

Drawing on the nomadic ethics outlined above, this study will apply theories to literary texts and at points also apply literary texts to theories. This is a comparative enterprise, involving cross-cultural transpositions. Petra Fachinger argues that given the growing diversity of German culture and literature, traditional critical approaches are no longer adequate. She advocates comparative readings while acknowledging the need to focus on particular cultural dynamics.<sup>100</sup> Similarly J. J. Long, noting the mobile character of concepts in the humanities, stresses "concrete engagement with specific texts" as a way of keeping cultural specificity firmly in mind.<sup>101</sup> This study attempts to do justice to specific texts and authors, even as it riskily draws parallels between German-language writing and (mainly) English-language theory. This move is in keeping with the border-crossing "strange subjects" it encounters.

This book explores the work of five women writers who live, have lived, or live partially outside Germany and the German-speaking countries, and whose work thematizes and explores this displacement (though not exclusively). This definition of the writers' positionality ("live, have lived, or live partially") points to the difficulty involved in fixing the notion of migration, which can denote a short- or long-term process and may involve a back-and-forth movement between countries. I began this study aiming to discuss writers who lived outside of Germany, but the waters quickly became muddied and I was usefully instructed in the messy contingency of both life and letters.

I will both have my cake and eat it when I state that I am not necessarily interested in the writers' actual circumstances. Rather, I am interested in what their work suggests (or — allowing for critical violence — *can convincingly be seen to suggest*) about nomadic subjectivity and ethics. This is not to disregard experience as a category: I refer here to Braidotti's stress on locatedness, and to the view expressed earlier that one doesn't have to be a nomad to think nomadically, but that it helps. On a related note: I am not only interested here in work that deals exclusively or explicitly with migration, with actual movement. Rather I am interested in nomadism as a form of critical consciousness, resistant to settling into set codes of thought and behavior. I am not squeamish about experience or biography, however. Haines and Litterer provide a helpful reminder here. They suggest that the close link between lived experience and literary expression (in autobiographical texts) does not involve a narrowing of focus — this because of "the diversity of that experience and the subtleties of its expression" (CW, 5). As we will see (in chapter 5 especially), the author is not dead; she is alive in complex ways. Indeed, it is this acknowledgment of the authors' specificity — my critical "strange encounter" — that leads me to address the work of each writer in turn and attempt to give an adequate account of each.

As regards my selection of authors: it is of course not comprehensive.<sup>102</sup> The five writers I discuss offer a wide and interesting spectrum of experiences of mobility which take varied forms in their work. At least two objections to my selection present themselves: One is that Antje Rávic Strubel (b. 1974), the subject of chapter 3, is significantly younger than the other writers, who were born between 1948 and 1956. Strubel has, however, produced a substantial body of work. The other is that I include a poet, Dorothea Grünzweig. While a critic like Stephen Brockmann focuses on novels in *his* study of recent German literature, I offer here a chapter on poetry. Justifying his focus on narrative fiction, Brockmann cites George Steiner's understanding of the novelist as a social figure and describes the novel as the "primary mode for literary communication with larger social implications and resonances" (*LG*, 19). The novel may indeed be more social than poetry, but as Grünzweig's work suggests, poetry, with its density and suppleness, is uniquely well placed to destabilize and merge identities.

Chapter 1, "Seeing Strangely," focuses on the work of Birgit Vanderbeke (b. 1956), who moved from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to West Germany as a child, and who since 1993 has lived in the south of France. The chapter argues for a view of Vanderbeke as a postmodernist writer par excellence: self-conscious, playful, citational. However, Vanderbeke's works are also concerned with ethical relations with the other. Thus her work illustrates and proposes a postmodernist nomadic ethics. It also thematizes and practices a nomadic way of knowing, challenging the distinctions between knower and known, and subject and object, to present an epistemology of interconnectiveness.

Chapter 2, "Creature Comforts," explores the work of the German poet Dorothea Grünzweig (b. 1952), who has lived in Finland since 1989. The chapter draws links between nomadism and ecocriticism to identify in Grünzweig's poetry what I term "economadism." Drawing on Ahmed's feminist postmodernist ethics and on ideas concerning epistemology and translation, the chapter argues for the ethical potential of nomadism and of poetry in postmodernism. It also traces a shift in Grünzweig's work toward a greater interest in animality, one that accompanies a corresponding trend in Braiddorian ethics.

Chapter 3, "Disorientations," explores the work of Antje Rávic Strubel, who was born in the GDR in 1974. Strubel has lived in the United States but is now based in Potsdam. However, she spends significant amounts of time in Sweden. The chapter sets Strubel's work in the context of recent debates concerning postunification East German identity. It defines Strubel's work as "nomadic" and "queer," and suggests that its combined challenge to nationalism and heterosexism is productive and important.

Chapter 4, "Uncanny Returns," deploys Marianne Hirsch's 1997 term "postmemory" to explore the work of the Jewish Austrian writer,

Anna Mitgusch (b. 1948). Mitgusch lives in Austria but has spent much time in other countries, especially the United States. The chapter identifies in Mitgusch's work a nomadic postmemory, one that is pertinent and potent in the Austrian context. It also traces Mitgusch's concern with disabled, female, and Jewish others, a concern that heightens the ethical force of her work.

Chapter 5, "Facing the Other," investigates the work of Barbara Honigmann, who was born in 1949 in the GDR, leaving that state for West Germany in 1984. She now lives in Strasbourg, France. The chapter explores the idea of Honigmann as a representative writer, exposing the dangers of such a view. Drawing on Honigmann's own understanding of literature as a site of (self-)recognition — itself inspired by Levinasian ethics — I explore how her work practices a Jewish nomadic ethics, a vital gesture in the German-speaking context.

The conclusion draws together the findings of the five chapters, summing up the diverse strategies employed by these writers as they develop their nomadic visions. It considers the very nature of contemporary German studies. If "Germanness" and "nation" are no longer viewed as stable or valid categories, what are the implications for the discipline? Finally it links the question of nomadism to contemporary attempts to highlight the value of the arts and humanities, arguing that these are potential sites of ethical "strange encounters."

## Notes

- 1 John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993), 6.
- 2 See Karalim Orban, *Ethical Diversions: The Post-Holocaust Narratives of Pynchon, Abish, DeLillo, and Spiegelman* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1.
- 3 Sander L. Gilman, "Introduction: Two Hundred and Fifty Years after Goethe's Birth, Fifty Years after the Aspen Conference, Ten Years after Reunification," in *A New Germany in a New Europe*, ed. Todd Herzog and Sander L. Gilman (New York: Routledge, 2001), 10, 9.
- 4 Alison M. Jaggard, "Feminist Ethics: Projects, Problems, Prospects," in *Feminist Ethics*, ed. Chandra Card (Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1991), 97.
- 5 Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982), 74. For a good introduction to Gilligan's writings, and responses to them, see Rosemarie Tong, *Feminine and Feminist Ethics* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1993), chap. 5.
- 6 Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2003), 49, 4.
- 7 Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 10 (hereafter cited in text). For a useful overview of feminist ethics, see Michelle Matson, *Making Morality in Postwar Germany*

- Women's Writing: *Christa Wolf, Ingeborg Drewitz, and Grete Weil* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010).
- 8 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
- 9 See Emily Jeremah, *Troubling Maternity: Mothering, Agency, and Ethics in Women's Writing in Germany of the 1970s and 1980s* (Leeds: Maney/MHRA, 2003), 14.
- 10 Noddings, *Caring*, 8.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 47.
- 12 Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 6–7.
- 13 A full discussion of the term “postmodernism” is beyond the scope of this study; I understand it here as connoting the death of grand narratives, that is to say, of totalizing accounts of the world; a stress on discursive competition or play; and a conception of the subject as constructed, shifting, and in process. For a discussion of the possible death of postmodernism and the successors in line to replace it, see Alan Kirby, “Successor States to an Empire in Free Fall,” *Times Higher Education* no. 1949 (2010): 42–45.
- 14 Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.
- 15 Robert Eaglestone, *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 3.
- 16 Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 2 (hereafter cited in text as *NS*).
- 17 See also Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy*, trans. Elizabeth Gould (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 5 (hereafter cited in text as *PD*).
- 18 See Luce Irigaray, “When Our Lips Speak Together,” trans. Carolyn Burke, in *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985).
- 19 See also Clare Colebrook, Introduction to *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000), 10.
- 20 Or as Braidotti puts it: “You do not have to be an empirical minority to become minoritarian” — a reference to Deleuze — but that position is a “great starting point,” offering a “privileged epistemological and political vantage point.” Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 133 (hereafter cited in text as *T*).
- 21 Claire Colebrook explains that for Deleuze: “He is dynamic and open becoming.” *Understanding Deleuze* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2002), 33. Braidotti asserts: “The Deleuzian becoming is the affirmation of the positivity of difference, meant as a multiple and constant process of transformation” (*NS*, 111). See also Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance*, 109.
- 22 See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizoanalysis*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), 7. Deleuze and Guattari note, for example: “Thought is not aborescent, and the brain is not a rooted or ramified matter” (17).
- 23 Braidotti adds: “One must be identified with a masculine position in order not to see that a form of sexual neutrality which does not allow for the fundamental lack of symmetry between the sexes will only damage women and the specificity claimed by feminists” (*PD*, 122).
- 24 See Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, “Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory,” in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2008), 1, on terminology, see 17–18, n. 3 (hereafter cited in text as *ME*).
- 25 See also Brigid Haines and Margaret Lirtler, *Contemporary Women's Writing in Germany: Changing the Subject* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 11 (hereafter cited in text as *CW*), and Butler, *Gender Trouble*.
- 26 Karen Barad, *Mattering the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 64.
- 27 As Haines and Lirtler explain: “Drawing more on Spinoza than on the Kantian tradition informing much post-structuralist thought, and more influenced by Deleuze than by Lacan, these theorists challenge the absolute boundary between representation and the real, and posit meaning as emerging at the level of the body, not just retrospectively through discourse” (*CW*, 11).
- 28 Barad, *Mattering the Universe Halfway*, 64.
- 29 Gisela Brinker-Gabler, “Exile, Immigrant, Re/Unified: Writing (East) Postunification Identity in Germany,” in *Writing New Identities: Gender, Nation, and Immigration in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler and Sidonie Smith (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997), 265.
- 30 Sara Ahmed, Claudia Casaneda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller, “Introduction: Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration,” in *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, ed. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Casaneda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 7.
- 31 Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfeyman, *Heimat — A German Dream: Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture 1890–1990* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 205 (hereafter cited in text as *H*).
- 32 Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 82 (hereafter cited in text as *SE*). Braidotti herself claims she is not engaged in metaphorization, being in fact concerned with singularity, specificity (T, 78).
- 33 Iris Marion Young, “House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme,” in *On Female Body Experience: “Throwing Like a Girl” and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 123 (hereafter cited in text as *FB*).
- 34 Selma Sevenhuijsen argues, in this connection: “a feminist ethics of care grafted on to postmodernism . . . has the capacity to deal with diversity and alterity, with the fact that subjects are different and in this sense both ‘strange’ and ‘knowable’ to each other.” *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care: Feminist Considerations on Justice, Morality, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1998), 60.

- 35 Sara Ahmed, *Differences That Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 6 (hereafter cited in the text as *DM*).
- 36 Compare with Braidotti: "The point is to radicalize the universal, not to get rid of it" (*NS*, 204).
- 37 Toronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 2.
- 38 Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham UP, 2005), 28 (hereafter cited in text as *GA*).
- 39 Steven Shirkman, *Other Others: Lemmas, Literature, Transcultural Studies* (New York: State U of New York P, 2010), 15.
- 40 See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 14 (hereafter cited in text as *IC*). See also Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 5.
- 41 Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 203.
- 42 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 15.
- 43 See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 6; and Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 8.
- 44 Fulbrook, *German National Identity*, 17.
- 45 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 16.
- 46 Craig Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Buckingham: Open UP, 1997), 2. Compare with Anderson, *Imagined Communities*: "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (12). On the relationship between nationalism and nation, see Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*: "It is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way around" (54).
- 47 Ceia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990), ix (hereafter cited in text as *NP*). Hobsbawm explains that national movements harnessed preexisting variants of feelings of collective belonging to generate their power (*Nations and Nationalism*, 46).
- 48 Compare with Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 55.
- 49 Stephen Brockmann, *Literature and German Renunciation* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 19 (hereafter cited in text as *LG*).
- 50 Julia Kristeva, "What of Tomorrow's Nation?" in *Nations without Nationalism*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), 46 (hereafter cited in text as "WT").
- 51 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 192.
- 52 Leslie A. Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 11.
- 53 Fulbrook, *German National Identity*, 7.
- 54 On the legacy of national socialism, see Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Film and Discourse: The Politics of Memory* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); and Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove,

- "Introduction: Germany's Memory Contests and the Management of the Past," in *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990*, ed. Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and George Grote (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006). On reunification and its effects, see Paul Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia* (Oxford: Berg, 2005). On multiculturalism, see Tom Cheesman, *Novels of Turkish German Settlement: Cosmopolitan Fictions* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007); and Barbara John, "German Immigration Policy — Past, Present, and Future," in *A New Germany in a New Europe*, ed. Todd Herzog and Sander L. Gilman (New York: Routledge, 2001). On globalization, see Stuart Taberner, "Introduction: German Literature in the Age of Globalisation," in *German Literature in the Age of Globalisation*, ed. Stuart Taberner (Birmingham: Birmingham UP, 2004); and Karoline von Oppen, Introduction to *Local/Global Narratives: German Monitor 68*, ed. Renate Reichen and Karoline von Oppen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007). On the Berlin Republic, see also Stephen Brockmann, "'Normalization': Has Helmut Kohl's Vision Been Realized?" in *German Culture, Politics, and Literature into the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Normalization*, ed. Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006); Olaf Kuhle, *Representing German Identity in the New Berlin Republic: Body, Nation, and Place* (Lewis-ton, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004); Stuart Taberner, Introduction to *Reassessing German Identity: Culture, Politics, and Literature in the Berlin Republic*, ed. Stuart Taberner and Frank Finlay (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002); and Peter Monteath and Reinhard Alter, Introduction to *Rewriting the German Past: History and Identity in the New Germany*, ed. Reinhard Alter and Peter Monteath (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997).
- 55 See here Fuchs and Cosgrove, "Introduction," 5.
- 56 Peter Blicke, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002), 1, 4 (hereafter cited in text as *H*).
- 57 Blicke, *Heimat*, 17; Boa and Paleyeyman, *Heimat*, 23.
- 58 For as Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston observe, the other is "the matrix against which the self is made to appear and from which it can never be extricated." "Introduction: Posthuman Bodies," in *Posthuman Bodies*, ed. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995), 5.
- 59 Andrew Pivoman uses the term the "shock of globalization." In "Was will ich denn als Westdeutscher erzählen?": The 'Old' West and Globalisation in Recent German Prose," in Taberner, *German Literature in the Age of Globalisation*, 48. See here Boa and Paleyeyman, *Heimat*, 194; see also Kuhle, *Representing German Identity*, 10–11.
- 60 See David Clarke, "Introduction: Place in Literature," in *The Politics of Place in Post-War Germany: Essays in Literary Criticism*, ed. David Clarke and Renate Reichen (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 18.
- 61 Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 71.
- 62 Sander L. Gilman, Introduction to *America in the Eyes of the Germans: An Essay on Anti-Americanism*, by Dan Diner (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1996), xviii.

- 63 Fuchs, *Plumions of War*, 204. Petra Fachinger also views Germany as a "society in transition" in *Rewriting Germany from the Margins: "Ober" German Literature of the 1980s and 1990s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2001), 116.
- 64 On the term "memory contests," see Fuchs and Cosgrove, "Introduction."
- 65 Peter Ugeard, *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism: Education, National Identity and the Victim Myth in Postwar Austria* (New York: Berghahn, 2003), 1–2.
- 66 Roland Robertson quoted in Frederic Jameson, Preface to *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham: Duke UP, 1998), xi.
- 67 von Oppen, Introduction to *Local/Global Narratives*, 2.
- 68 Alexandra Kogl, *Strange Places: The Political Potentials and Perils of Everyday Spaces* (Lanham, MI: Lexington Books, 2008), 8.
- 69 Adelson, *Turkish Turn*, 172.
- 70 The term "migrant" needs careful handling. Migration can denote short- or long-term experiences, or involve a back-and-forth movement between two places, and is always defined by such factors as age, class, gender, disability or ability, sexuality, and so on.
- 71 See, for example, Mary Howard, ed., *Interkulturelle Konfigurationen. Zur deutschsprachigen Exilliteratur von Autoren nichtdeutscher Herkunft* (Munich: iudicum, 1997).
- 72 See here Cheesman, *Novels*.
- 73 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006), 9, 7.
- 74 Brinker-Gabler, "Exile, Immigrant, Re/Unified," 266.
- 75 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2. See also Brinker-Gabler, "Exile, Immigrant, Re/Unified," 264.
- 76 Adelson, *Turkish Turn*, 3–4.
- 77 See also Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*: "Two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation" (7). The same presumably goes for two women.
- 78 Virginia Woolf, "Three Guineas," in "A Room of One's Own" and "Three Guineas" (London: Penguin, 1993), 234.
- 79 Norma Alarcón, Caron Kaplan, and Minoo Moallem, "Introduction: Between Woman and Nation," in *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, ed. Norma Alarcón, Caron Kaplan, and Minoo Moallem (Durham: Duke UP, 1999), 1, 12.
- 80 Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: SAGE, 1997), 1.
- 81 See Georgina Paul, *Perceptions on Gender in Post-1945 German Literature* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), 27 (hereafter cited in text as PG).
- 82 R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 77. See here Emily Jeremiah, "Touching Distance: Gender, Germanness, and the Gaze in

- Angelina Maccaroni's *Freunde Haut* (2005)," *German Life and Letters* 64, no. 4 (2011): 590.
- 83 Claudia Breger, "Hegemony, Marginalization, and Feminine Masculinity: Antje Rávic Strubel's *Unter Schnee*," *Seminar* 44, no. 1 (February 2008): 160.
- 84 Compare with Connell on masculinity (*Masculinities*, 33).
- 85 Compare with Alarcón, Kaplan, and Moallem, "Introduction": "Between woman and nation is, perhaps, the space or zone where we can deconstruct these monoliths and render them more historically nuanced and accountable to politics" (12).
- 86 Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification*, 1. See also Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, "Beyond Goethe: Perspectives on Postunification German Literature," in *A New Germany in a New Europe*, ed. Todd Herzog and Sander L. Gilman (New York: Routledge, 2001), 106. Also Elizabeth Boa, "Sprachenverkehr: Hybrides Schreiben in Werken von Özdamar, Özakin und Demirkan," trans. Ditle Stach and Mary Howard, in *Interkulturelle Konfigurationen. Zur deutschsprachigen Exilliteratur von Autoren nichtdeutscher Herkunft*, ed. Mary Howard (Munich: iudicum, 1997), 116: "War die Sprache das Material, aus dem die deutsche Identität geformt wurde, so war die Literatur der Geist und die Seele" ("If language was the material from which the German identity was formed, then literature was its mind or spirit (Geist) and soul).
- 87 Stephanie Bird, *Women Writers and National Identity: Bachmann, Duden, Gatzmann* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 2.
- 88 Axel Goodbody, *Nature, Technology and Cultural Change in Twentieth-Century German Literature: The Challenge of Esotericism* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 40.
- 89 Delenze and Guarani, *A Thousand Platons*, 5.
- 90 Compare with Goodbody: "[Literature's] ambiguity, irony and metaphorical language free concepts and ideas from their discursive simplification and instrumentalisation, destabilise ideologies and subvert one-dimensional identities" (*Nature, Technology and Cultural Change*, 40).
- 91 Beth Linklater, "Germany as Background: Global Concerns in Recent Women's Writing in German," in Taberner, *German Literature in the Age of Globalization*, 71, 73.
- 92 See here Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," in *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, ed. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 176.
- 93 Lyn Marven, "German Literature in the Berlin Republic — Writing by Women," in *Contemporary German Fiction: Writing in the Berlin Republic*, ed. Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 160.
- 94 Diana Orendi, "The New Expatriates: Three American-Jewish Writers in Germany Today," in *Embodying Jewish Identities in German Culture: Borders and Crossings*, ed. Linda E. Feldman and Diana Orendi (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 179.



<sup>95</sup> Karen Jankowsky and Carla Love, ed., *Other Germanies: Questioning Identity in Women's Literature and Art* (New York: State U of New York P, 1997). See also Barbara Kosta and Helga Kraft, ed., *Writing against Boundaries: Nationality, Ethnicity and Gender in the German-Speaking Context* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003).

<sup>96</sup> See Soheila Chaussy, "Das Vaterland verlassen: Nomadic Language and 'Feminine Writing' in Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei*," *German Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1999): 1-16. See also Heike Handerson, "Re-Thinking and Re-Writing Heimat: Turkish Women Writers in German," in *Women in German Yearbook* 13 (1997): 225-43.

<sup>97</sup> Patricia Herminghouse and Magda Mueller, ed., *Gender and Germanness: Cultural Productions of a Nation* (Providence: Bergahn, 1997).

<sup>98</sup> Bird, *Women Writers and National Identity*, 4, 8.

<sup>99</sup> Lyn Marven, *Body and Narrative in Contemporary Literatures in German: Herta Müller, Ljubie Moniková, and Kerstin Henkel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>100</sup> Fachinger, *Rewriting Germany*, xii.

<sup>101</sup> J. J. Long, "Monika Maron's *Parasol Brigade*: Photography, Narrative, and the Claims of Postmemory," in Fuchs, Cosgrove, and Grote, *German Memory Contexts*, 161.

<sup>102</sup> Other possible subjects would have been Sibylle Berg and Larissa Boehning, whose work I discuss elsewhere: Emily Jeremiah, "Sibylle Berg, *Die Fahrt*: Literature, Germanness, and Globalization," in *Emerging German-Language Novelists of the Twentieth-First Century*, ed. Lyn Marven and Stuart Taberner (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), 153-47; and Emily Jeremiah, "Sewing an Account of Oneself: Materiality, Femininity, and Germanness in Larissa Boehning's *Lichte Stoffe*," in *Transitions: Emerging Women Writers in German-Language Literature* (*German Monitor*), ed. Valerie Heffernan and Gillian Pye (forthcoming, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), 83-101.

## I: Seeing Strangely: Birgit Vanderbeke's Ways of Knowing

*What can she know?*

—Lorraine Code

*Being is not only itself, it escapes itself.*

—Emmanuel Levinas,  
"Reality and Its Shadow"

### Nomadic Knowing

POSTMODERNISM IS WIDELY UNDERSTOOD to privilege disunity over coherence, leaving morality an uncertain business. If the subject is joyously free and nomadic, how can attachments to others emerge and persist? The "strange subjects" this study explores all in fact assert ethical behaviors alongside, or within, mobility. As the work of Sara Ahmed and Rosi Brudorn implies, a refusal to be fixed and bounded is indeed a prerequisite for an openness to engage with others. The subject's performances are in any case always relational. This insight comes to the fore in the work of Birgit Vanderbeke, a writer who also challenges Germanness and gender. As we will see, her work practices and encourages a strange way of knowing.

Vanderbeke was born in 1956 in Dahme/Mark in the GDR, and moved with her family to West Germany in 1961. She was brought up in Frankfurt am Main, where she later studied law and French. Her first novella, *Das Muschelessen* (1990; *The Mussel Feast*, 2013) received the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize. In 1993, Vanderbeke moved to the south of France. She is the author of eleven subsequent novellas, a cookbook, and a travel guide. A volume of essays, interviews, and reviews concerned with Vanderbeke appeared in Germany in 2001.<sup>1</sup> In Anglo-American German studies, however, her work has received little attention.<sup>2</sup> This work is challenging and unsettling, as exemplified by the following assertion, from Vanderbeke's *Geld oder Leben* (Your money or your life, 2003): "Wenn alle daran glauben, heißt es, es funktioniert?" (If everyone believes it, it means it's working).<sup>3</sup> This wry statement illuminates the writer's skepticism with regard to dominant discourses, and her awareness of the operations of power. Her works deal caustically with consumerism and