

Prof. Dr. Christine Gerhardt
University of Bamberg, Germany

“‘A fluid movement in time Underground’: The Ecology of Border Crossing in Transnational Women’s Poetry”

In U.S. environmental literary and cultural criticism, and in Western environmentalism at large, there has been a strong tradition of idealizing geographical stability and rootedness in place. Although the notion of “naturally” harmonious, steady state ecosystems has been challenged by new ecologists for several decades, many environmentalist concepts and practices, such as bioregionalism and rehabilitation, still revolve around people’s steady lives in well-known, local places as a remedy against the excesses of nature’s degradation and destruction. Women’s lives and literatures, if they figure in these discourses at all, are often seen as epitome of such environmentalist ideals, in ways that reinforce conventional notions of female domesticity—after all, the root of ecology, *oikos*, means home and house.

In such a context, transnational women’s poetry that talks about the nonhuman environment from the perspective of mobility holds a special, double-edged position. Challenging various tenets of a place-based environmentalism and of essentialist (eco)feminisms alike, such poems re-imagine geographical mobility as an ambivalent yet crucial basis for environmental and sociopolitical interventions. This paper takes recent developments in transnational ecocriticism and in ecofeminism as starting points to explore the ways in which transnational feminist poetry negotiates traditional notions of roots and rootedness, as well as the politics of land-reclamation and a feminized ethics of care, through a reluctant embrace of geographical movement. In particular, the paper discusses how poems by Gloria Anzaldúa, Lorna Dee Cervantes, and Teresa Palomo Acosta reimagine mobility—in spite of the various experiences of disruption, loss, and violence it often entails—as a strategy of political resistance, female subjectivity, and environmental imagination.

Christine Gerhardt is professor of American Studies at Bamberg University, Germany. She is the author of *A Place for Humility: Whitman, Dickinson, and the Natural World* (University of Iowa Press, 2014; Choice Award 2015), and of a monograph on the Reconstruction period in American novels (2002); her essays have appeared in *Profession*, *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, *The Mississippi Quarterly*, *Poroi*, and *Forum for Modern Language Studies*. She has coedited the collection *Religion in the United States* (Winter, 2011) and a special issue of *American Studies/Amerikastudien* on the environmental imagination of migration (2016), and is currently editing *The Handbook on Nineteenth-Century American Novels* (De Gruyter, 2017). Her research interests include ecocriticism, migration and mobility studies, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and contemporary American poetry.