

**International Conference**  
**The Environment and Human Migration: Rethinking the Politics**  
**of Poetry**

University of Bamberg, November 25-26, 2016

**Abstracts**

---

**“The race that plagued us”: Humanity as Migrant in the Poetry of Robinson Jeffers**

*Stefan Benz, Universität Mannheim*

Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962) stands as a poetic outsider amongst (post)modernist poets. Instead of following a strict policy of ‘making it new’, many of Jeffers’ numerous works cling to traditional elements of style while their imagery draws heavily on Greek and Roman mythology. What identifies Jeffers’ poems as unmistakably (post)modern is the central philosophy they develop, i.e. ‘inhumanism’. This inhumanist philosophy is shaped by ideas that thwart the basic premises of the long tradition of humanist thinkers, emphasizing not only the superfluousness of human existence within the global ecosystem but also humans’ severe harmfulness towards each other and their natural environment.

Building on Nietzschean philosophy and against the historical background of the First and Second World War, Jeffers contemplates humanity’s ‘unnecessary’ existence on earth. Tracing humanity’s historical spread around the globe up to its endpoint at the Californian coast, his poetry presents humans as migrants that invade the natural environment(s) they settle in. Jeffers’ characteristic style of “*geopoesis*” (James Karman, *Robinson Jeffers. Poet and Prophet* 221), a literary writing that is consequently bound to a particular natural environment, allows for a microcosmic reassessment of this clash of humans and nature.

The paper at hand thus explores humanity’s migratory existence in some of Jeffers’ shorter work, such as “Continent’s End” and “The Broken Balance”, as well as in passages from his narrative poems, e.g. “Tamar”, combining the findings of previous ecocritical studies on Jeffers that have focused closely on his concept of humanity’s parasitic existence (often criticizing him for being both too nihilistic and didactic, at other times trying to acquit Jeffers of these very same accusations) with an emphasis on the political aspect of humanity as a migrant consistently out of place.

---

## Negotiating Ecological Nativism: Nature and National Belonging in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Immigrant Poetry

*Kellen Bolt, Northwestern University*

In the July 1851 edition of *The Republic* magazine, the anti-immigration activist Thomas R. Whitney published “The West,” a poem about a lyrical subject’s affection for the American environment. Within four stanzas of alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter, the poem exalts America’s cliffs, its bays, its rivers, its hills, its plains, its forests, its caves, and its soils. “The West” may seem like an inconsequential, quasi-Romantic poem, but it also shines a spotlight on the political function of the environment within mid-nineteenth century xenophobic ideologies in the United States. Throughout the two-year run of *The Republic*, Whitney advocates for a defensive nationalism that racializes immigrant people, plants, and animals as non-white threats to national security—a strategy that Peter Coates calls “ecological nativism.” American nativists insisted that immigrants remained attached to their native climates and could never assume the kind of patriotic sensibility needed to Americanize oneself and one’s environment. In other words, environmental affections always already disqualify immigrants’ for U.S. citizenship.

This paper explores how mid-century poems written by or about immigrants negotiate this ecologically mediated conception of U.S. nationality. While these poems contest the idea that immigrants cannot cultivate an attachment to their adoptive country’s climate, they still subscribe to the idea that the environment is a barometer for measuring a person’s national belonging. Unlike nativist poetry, however, these poems use nature to highlight the possibility for the simultaneous attachment to multiple national communities—the possibility of dual citizenship. By juxtaposing these two mobilizations of the natural environment, I argue that pro- and anti-immigration poetry draws and redraws the borders of the community—the literal and figurative boundaries of what belongs and what does not—within and across human and nonhuman populations and spaces.

---

## Tasting Exile: The Political Elegies of Li-Young Lee

Jessica Bundschuh, Universität Stuttgart

From Claude McKay's "The Tropics in New York" (1922)—of a speaker weeping over the glassed-in bananas and alligator pears of his homeland—to Charles Simic's "The Soup" (1974)—of an "immigrant in the middle of the Atlantic" remembering blood sausage and "scallions grown on our mothers' graves"—the poet in exile has often resorted to elegies on taste to examine the state of rootlessness. After all, an individual's relationship to the environment, and changing environments, begins with what he/she *eats*. In this paper, I will read a series of pastoral elegies of taste—"Persimmons," "The Weight of Sweetness," "From Blossoms," "Eating Alone" and "Eating Together"—from Li-Young Lee's volume *Rose* (1986) against poems that more explicitly thematize migration—"Self-Help for Fellow Refugees," "Immigrant Blues," and "Station"—from Lee's most recent volume, *Behind My Eyes* (2008). American poet Li-Young Lee—born in Indonesia to Chinese parents and forced to flee after political upheaval and imprisonment—has devoted his oeuvre to the loss of his father and, thereby, his original homeland. In his poems of shared meals, taste becomes both a sensory *and* a social experience, bringing to life a lost culture through the recreation of the meal, be it a persimmon, or a trout eaten with the fingers as they did in the old country. In this immigrant context, one of perpetual fragmentation, the exile is caught, as Edward Said argues, in a "median state." As a result, the sensory experience of eating becomes a marked cultural site for re-imagining "worlds" displaced. If we celebrate the defining feature of the migrant—movement and transition—in terms of what history and social force it bequeaths rather than demolishes, we can approach both strands of Li-Young Lee's work—the elegiac pastorals, as well as political calls to action—as productive hybrids of public *and* private utterance ideally situated to grapple with the challenges of exile. Further, such a cosmopolitan approach can take up Ursula K. Heise's critique in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008) of American ecocritical thought in its failure to recognize how identity—both local and national—is shaped by a diversity of "hybrid mixtures with other places and cultures." That is, Lee's eco-cosmopolitanism attests to the interconnectedness of societies, in both the local and the global spheres of influence.

---

## **Amagoduka: The Human Ecology of South African Migrant Labor**

*Jonathan Crewe, Dartmouth College*

I have chosen as the title of my paper a word also chosen by the “Soweto poet,” Oswald Mtshali, as the title of one of his poems. It is a term applied by speakers of South African Bantu languages, notably isiZulu, to migrant workers, recruited from the southern African hinterland as far north as Tanzania, to work on the diamond and gold mines. In principle, these workers would return “home” when their contracts were completed. This large-scale migrant system originated in 1870, with the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley, and it continued on an ever-expanding scale, notably in Johannesburg, up to and beyond the ending of apartheid. Secondary industrialization increased the flow of labor to the cities, resulting in large, permanent “townships” inhabited by people who might never have set eyes on their official homelands. The tribal and familial disruption, and the ecological devastation, wrought by the migrant system, which included the temporary housing of large numbers of single men in mine hostels, have been graphically described in works of fiction and sociology. On one hand, these descriptions encompass the hardship, crime, and squalor, but also the improvised vitality, of urban life for black people in the cities. On the other hand, descriptions encompass the overcrowding and degradation of rural “homelands” left to be tended by old women and children. While briefly sketching the migrant system in this paper, I shall primarily focus on the system’s human ecology as represented in fiction and especially in some poems by the “Soweto poets” Oswald Mtshali and Mongane Wally Serote. Rather than just being activist “protest” poems, these represent broken connections to real or imagined natural habitats and life forms (sometimes troped as maternal deficiency), diminished or impaired forms of human connection, impoverished or absent “identity.” These poems—written in English by non-native speakers—nevertheless explore the reparative possibilities of reclaimed agency and poetic initiative on the part of “displaced people.”

---

## Ecopoetics and Ecopolitics: Queering Climate Change and Migration in Transdisciplinary Relation/s

Sonja Frenzel, *Universität Düsseldorf*  
(in collaboration with Andrew Baldwin, *Durham University*)

In the social sciences, the multiple relations between climate change and migration have ordinarily been conceived as demanding political interventions, which, in consequence, have posited migrant difference as a threat to an otherwise stable and normative political order. Against this trajectory, our paper repositions the relation between migration and climate change as a generative space for non-normative thought and queer theorisation that brings together ecopolitical and ecopoetical thought. We start from the premise that ecopoetics constitutes “a making (Greek *poiesis*) of the dwelling-place” (Bate 2000, 75) and argue that current processes of migration, particularly as these pertain to climate change, significantly affect – and are affected by – the ecopolitical dynamics of such place-making.

It would seem that migrant difference/s materialise in racialised and gendered ecopolitical configurations of being, knowing, and doing, which run counter to and, in fact, exceed, hegemonic cultural and political ecologies of contemporary urban dwelling-places. Along these lines, it is the figurative presence of climate migrants/refugees that comes to (literally) embody – for the time being – an excess of heteronormative tendencies in these cityscapes. And yet, simultaneously, migrant difference/s re-invigorate the very ecologies they undermine by stressing their dynamic and ephemeral relationalities. We contend that this perpetual making of contemporary urban dwelling-places may be theorised most productively when ecopolitics and ecopoetry become enmeshed into a shared trajectory. In fact, urban ecopoetry (e.g. Mary Coghill's *Designed to Fade* (2006) and *Shades of Light* (2012) as well as Ed Roberson's *City Eclogues* (2006)) plays a pivotal role in articulating the excessive materialisations of non-normative (migrant) difference/s. As such, aesthetic agencies come to constitute ecopoetic un-/forces (cf. McLaughlin 2014) in the making of (urban) dwelling-places, and in doing so they challenge us into confronting the infinite potentialities of radical alterity (cf. Barad 2012).

Ultimately, this ecopoetic queering of climate change and migration may bring forth a new kind of ecopolitical sensibility in the entangled makings of (urban) dwelling-places. Our paper charts this alternative trajectory of thought, seeking to re-enchant ecopoetic relationality in its infinite potentialities – a trajectory, perhaps, that thrives on how multiple and multiply enmeshed relations may be brought to bear upon the ecopoetic making of our dwelling-place in ever-new and unexpected ways.

---

## Reparative Reading “& and” Conjunctive Poetics

*Marius Henderson, Universität Hamburg*

In “thinking-feeling” (Manning, Massumi) in conjunction with approaches from the enmeshed fields of (queer-feminist) affect theory and queer of color critique, I wish to encounter and interact with selected poetic works by Bhanu Kapil, Melissa Buzzeo and Amy Sara Carroll. Several of these writers’ poetic works seem to emerge from scenarios and experiences of migration as border crossing “boundary events” (Trinh), and they attest to forged boundaries between bodies that are rendered as grievable and others which are rendered as “ungrievable,” as not being worth of care and affective investment. These writers’ poetic practice and poetological reflections investigate affective registers which abjected, border crossing bodies harbor. In *Schizophrene* by Bhanu Kapil for instance trans-generational traumata that have resulted out of histories of migration in diasporic communities, are being explored through diffractive entanglements of insights from cross-cultural psychiatry and experiments in somatic poetry.

My talk wishes to discuss the “borderlinking” (Ettinger) writing of said poets by presenting attempts at “reparative readings” (Sedgwick) of their works. Sedgwick sharply distinguishes the mode of “reparative reading” from “paranoid reading,” which she describes as *the* predominant mode of critical (even seemingly progressive) intellectual inquiry. Whereas “paranoid reading” aims for the epistemological mastery and rapacious appropriation of an othered “object” of inquiry, “reparative reading” opts for an accretive, caring, and “heteropathic” encounter with the other. However, the adjective “reparative” seems to suggest the possibility of closure or finalized “repair.” Yet, some traumata resulting out of “boundary events” may perhaps not be “reparable.” Therefore, I would like to invoke the notion of a “conjunctive reading,” and a “conjunctive poetics,” in addition to “reparative reading.” Furthermore, the notion of the “& and,” as invoked by Ngai and Spahr, seems to be promising in this respect. The notion of the “& and” as a relational starting point for a “conjunctive poetics” could then be understood as a mode of critical “thinking-feeling,” which does not aim for the erasure of difference and the accomplishment of closure. I would like to propose “conjunctive reading/poetics” as a form of “thinking-feeling” which does not strive for the full sublation of ostensible conceptual borders, which the poets mentioned above critically address and transgress – like between “the human” and the “non-human,” “humanitarian” and “environmental concerns,” “the verbal” and the “non-verbal,” “the mental” and “the corporeal,” “silence” and “noise” – but invites us to dwell in convivial contradictions. Poetic writing which is grounded in conjunctive poetics strives to reach out beyond the verbicovisual realm of the printed volume of poetry, towards a somatic, visceral and proprioceptive writing. In the works by the authors mentioned above, this gesture of reaching out beyond writing from within writing necessarily seems to encompass conjunctive notions of relationality, as a concern for the other, in instances of border crossing, e.g. between species, or between nation states.

These works are written from a heightened awareness towards the Anthropocene condition under which we are currently living. The conjunctive relationality between the mainly humanoid poetic voices, animal others, and the “non-human” environment is conceptualized as intensely “intra-active” (Karen Barad). On a thematic level experiences of migration are situated spatially in particular environmental settings, in which different agents, human, non-human, living, and non-living, intra-act performatively and dynamically. A question which my talk wants to address in this context as well is whether the conjunctive poetics, which these texts seem to adhere to, have already abandoned an ideal of sustainability, as the presupposition of an ecological and political equilibrium or homeostasis, and, via their mappings of diffractive differences, rather seem to purport a notion of “resilience,” which acknowledges the ostensible radical contingency of “natural” and “biopolitical” disasters. In a final step, my talk wishes to tentatively propose that the conjunctive poetics inherent in the works by the authors mentioned above somewhat expands the feminist slogan that “the personal is political” and claims that (under the impression of the Anthropocene) the personal is not only geopolitical but also ecological or even geological (cf. Claire Colebrook).

---

## Landing/Capitalizing: The Displacement Poetics of Dionne Brand and Jeff Derksen

Cheryl Lousley, Lakehead University

The figure of the refugee furtively runs across time and space in Dionne Brand's long poem *Land to Light On* (1997), unable/unwilling to "land"—underscored in the recurring line "I'm giving up on land to light on" (45, 47, 48)—while continually "landing" (69) in racialized and ecologically specific sites: "blown / into bays and lakes and fissures you have yet to see" (43). Much discussed for its lyrical meditations on diaspora, nationalism, and racialization, *Land to Light On* offers a migrant perspective that refuses to participate in territorial claims to nature as resource and property or to cast the living world as an empty space through which human subjects move, and yet is also resolutely suspicious of any politics or poetics of place. The poem instead refracts the planet—"your planet is your hands" (44), "what if we left the earth / ajar like this?" (94)—through an impossible refugee subjectivity. The poem's long lines conjoin the seemingly disparate in time, space, and scale—Sri Lankan maids hiding in the embassy in Kuwait, a British ornithologist weeping in India (22)—to make *intimate* the socio-ecological violence in the world, thus pushing lyrical expression to its limit.

I read Brand's long poem in conjunction with the furtive movements of global capital that hollow out the city of Vancouver in Jeff Derksen's poetry collections *Dwell* (1993) and *The Vestiges* (2013), an example of what Rob Nixon terms "displacement in place" (*Slow Violence* 17), when "Linear tankers lie / on the harbour's horizon" and "Cleaners also clean the lobbies on temporary visas" (*Vestiges* 1, 11). The lyrical subject and inhabited places are made present through their marked absence in these poems composed of finance and real estate language, exposing through comic juxtaposition the role of abstraction and decontextualization in obscuring the property and labour relations of re-making physical places to be "developed," bought, and sold. Both skeptical of place-based lyricism, Brand's and Derksen's poetic works craft what I call a *displacement poetics* to track and catalogue the violent disruptions, property claims, and socio-ecological ruptures that frame loss and migration, whether recognized as crisis or naturalized as progress.



---

## **“A Stranger, Crossing Their Land”: Restricted Movements in Black American Ecopoetics**

*Katherine R. Lynes, Union College*

In the American tradition, nature poetry generally brings us into a place, into a moment in that place, so that we can locate ourselves in it, as well. Nature poetry, like other forms of nature writing, is literature of place — usually. Black American Ecopoetry participates in this poetry of place, as well, but it participates by sometimes calling into question this place-assurance, especially when it comes to the restrictions placed onto the lives of Black citizens.

In this paper, I will argue that gestures of dislocation and displacement offer a critique of continuing restrictions on the mobility of the black body in the United States. I argue that the sense of being displaced and dislocated when reading these poems is akin to the sense of being displaced and dislocated as a Black citizen. Mendi Obadike’s “A Far Cry” serves as an exemplar of fear and limited mobility as the speaker tells us she drives through the “backwoods of Tennessee / with nothing to protect my African body / but a Japanese car” (Finney 254). This poem represents a typical assumption about the United States, perhaps, of endangered black bodies: popular notions might be that most of the danger is in the South. However, headlines tell a different story, and so does the poetry. Rather than depicting an idyllic pastoral scene, the poem locates us in the middle of fear, fear of lynching, fear of violence toward her because of her race. Kamilah Aisha Moon’s “What a Snakehead Discovered in a Maryland Pond and a Poet in Corporate America Have in Common” takes a different path, by raising the question of invasive species and whether they should be dislocated from place. But this poem is really about the power of poetry to engage with the political structures that try to keep the political Other from “transforming the habitat forever.”

---

## Poetry, Mobility, and the American Road

*Timo Müller, Universität Augsburg*

Since the establishment of the highway system at the latest, the American imagination of the road has primarily been shaped by narratives. The road novel, and later the road movie, celebrated the speed of car travel, the wide distances it could bridge, and its promise of freedom and adventure. Road poetry provided a counterweight to this narrative template in more ways than one. From Whitman and Dickinson to the twenty-first century, poets of the road have tended toward a contemplative stance and depicted the road as a physical space embedded in its natural environment. The paper will open with a survey of American road poetry with a view to this environmental emphasis and the conception of mobility it implies. In a second step, the paper will discuss the political implications of this difference between narrative and poetry in the context of recent debates about migration and race. While the freedom-and-adventure narrative is traditionally white and has tended to occlude racial discrimination on the road, the paper argues, poetry has traditionally allowed for a more inclusive vision of the road that challenges mainstream notions of mobility and race. Drawing on work by poets from different racial backgrounds, the paper shows how this vision helped direct the focus on the human cost, the power differentials, and the racially conditioned impulses of migration on the road.

---

## Exotics on Earth in Allen Ginsberg's "Poem in the Form of a Snake That Bites Its Tail"

*Sascha Pöhlmann, LMU München*

I would like to discuss a single poem by Allen Ginsberg, "Poem in the Form of a Snake That Bites Its Tail" from 1990, for its combined and conflicted imagination of biodiversity and human migration. I argue that Ginsberg's poem sets up a highly problematic dichotomy between the indigenous and the exotic as it explores and condemns the destructive effects of Western civilization on the global environment. In its explicitly ethical and future-oriented agenda, the poem deliberately applies notions of autochthony and intrusion to the habitats of plants, animals, and humans alike, positing an authentic 'nature' against corrupting 'cultural' forces. It both romanticizes indigenous peoples and at the same time implies that there is such a thing as an autochthonous connection between humans and their territory, and its critique of ecological destruction draws on the notion of biological and geographical essentialism that also fuels right-wing politics on migration and multiculturalism. At the same time, the poem transcends its own implied essentialism in redefining the exotic not in terms of territory but of behavior, and it moves beyond a focus on the local—Florida and the Oleta River—to the global to ponder what it means to be exotic in the irreducible condition of planetary immanence. I will explore these tensions constructed by the poem in order to show how it confronts an aesthetics and politics of simplification—illustrated in the poem's curt, imperative style and its disregard for place—with an aesthetics and politics of complexity that spans centuries and draws global connections.

---

## Oceanic Relations: The Eco-poetics of Olive Senior's Hurricane Stories

*Antonia Purk, Universität Erfurt*

The four "Hurricane Stories" in Olive Senior's collection of poems *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994) all speak to the effects of the recurring natural disasters on land and people on the Caribbean: Although hurricanes may create community as on Noah's Ark ("1903"), they also undo relationships ("1944" and "1951") when livelihoods are destroyed by the environmental crises. Moreover, they both incite and inhibit migrations, as in "Hurricane Story, 1951" and "Hurricane Story, 1988," respectively. While the natural world here foremost affects human lives as a destructive force, it notably also connects lives. With W.J.T. Mitchell's notion of landscape as a medium, I seek to demonstrate that in Senior's eco-poetics, the nonhuman world may contribute to restoring severed human connections. Mitchell maintains that landscape "is a material „means [...] like language or paint, [...] a body of symbolic forms capable of being invoked and reshaped to express meanings and values." In "Hurricane Story, 1951," the ocean becomes such a medium when it reconnects an abandoned son and his mother. The family members were forced into migration by the devastation caused by the hurricane of 1951 in Jamaica, the son was sent to live with his father's new family in the US after his mother had moved to England. However, the natural world not only isolates the family members, but the ocean also serves to mend their severed relation. Although the son has become introverted and unable to make human connections, he is able to relate his pain to the nonhuman ocean, which carries his voice across the Atlantic to reach his mother. The poem portrays this travelling of sound through the disruption of direct speech by dashes, line breaks, and lines in between, which nevertheless finally connects both speakers. I contend that the ocean here not only establishes contact between mother and son, but ultimately its mediality also creates a relationship between the poem's characters and nature, highlighting the connectedness of human and nonhuman world.

---

## Conflicted Territorialities and Archipelagic Environments in the Poetry of Craig Santos Perez

Judith Rauscher, Universität Bamberg

Born on the western Pacific island of Guåhan (Guam), and having since moved first to California and then to Hawaii, the Chamorro poet, scholar and activist Craig Santos Perez writes about his native island from a perspective of migration. He also writes under the simultaneous pressures of U.S. imperialism, a rapidly expanding global economy and the ongoing disenfranchisement of indigenous peoples. Evoking the legacies of Spanish colonization, Japanese occupation, as well as Guåhan's precarious status as an unincorporated, organized territory of the United States, Perez's poetry denounces hyper-militarization, mass-tourism and cultural dispossession. In particular, his collections address the disastrous consequences of environmental degradation on the Chamorro and the catastrophic effects of the loss of indigenous knowledges about the natural world in the context of varying frames of mobility and immobility.

Perez's experimental and stylistically varied poems put forward an environmental poetics that depends in crucial ways on a critical investigation of those histories and experiences of displacement that continue to inform Chamorro identity and culture. At the same time, his environmental poetics bespeaks a desire for meaningful engagement with the natural world that cannot be reduced to simple emplacement. As I will argue by reading excerpts from his three-part series *from unincorporated territory* (2008, 2010, 2014), Perez's texts test both the possibilities and the limits of indigenous knowledge production in conflict and conversation with the centrifugal forces of globalization, U.S. imperialism and environmental crisis. In his collections, Perez proposes a poetry of the "oceanic préterrain" (cf. Hau'ofa), an archipelagic sense of place that encompasses the land, the sky and the sea and is invested in exploring the "deeper geography and mythology" (Perez [*saina*] 63) of his native island. In the process, Perez invokes not only alternative environmental epistemologies, but also alternative genealogies for the transmission of these knowledges. Poetry as a means of record keeping and as a means of developing a counter-hegemonic vocabulary of resistance against the exploitation of people and the environment plays a crucial role in this endeavor. Although Perez emphasizes the particular perspective on human-nature relationships in Guåhan afforded to a Chamorro migrant in the U.S., his poetry moves beyond traditional identity politics and conventional modes of nature poetry. Instead, Perez's series from unincorporated territory can be read as an experiment in ecopoetics that tries to reconfigure how we perceive small island ecologies and as an experiment in environmental pedagogics that engages readers in their own ongoing project of knowledge production and consciousness-raising.

---

## **Religious Dimensions of Refugee Environmentalism: The Structural Presence of Genesis in Contemporary Anglo-American Poetry**

*Philipp Reisner, Universität Düsseldorf*

Recent research on environmentalism and poetry has attempted to trace connections between religious denominations, environmental engagement, and poetic expression. As poets migrate between cultures, the environment becomes a proxy site where cultural difference is mediated. Imagery of nature and symbolism of diverse backgrounds conflate in an attempt to come to terms with exile and a life between cultures. Images of the natural world are embedded in different sacred traditions and lead to new dimensions of complex, hybrid symbolism.

The destabilizing act of transcultural imagery of nature makes frequent use of the peculiar function of zoological and botanical terminology in the Bible, where names of plants and animals are among the words which have seen the greatest variety of translations. Contemporary poets from families with a refugee background like Suji Kwock Kim and Li-Young Lee associate personal experiences of forced migration with exile. Biblical exile is associated primarily with the first human exile in Genesis, the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The focus on Genesis in contemporary Anglo-American poetry is structural, thematic, and symbolic. Kim and Lee intersperse autobiographical experience with references to the natural world. They have transformed the environmental spirit of ecopoetry, as it was known since the 1960s, into a new refugee environmentalism characterized by a spiritualization of language that borders on sacralization. A more politicized, activist concern for the environment in the older tradition yields to an eclectic use of single objects like fruits or special atmospheres of light (Lee) or the depiction of symbolic places like refugee gardens (Kim). The work of these two poets exemplifies a movement in contemporary poetry in which refugee environmentalism plays an ever more prominent role in conveying the faith of poetry.

---

## **“Figures Moving in Space: (Re-)Politicizing Marianne Moore’s ‘The Paper Nautilus’”**

*Sabine Sielke, Universität Bonn*

Re-addressing Marianne Moore’s “The Paper Nautilus“ (1940) – a poem once crucial for my own feminist revision of Marianne Moore’s work – with a focus on issues of environmentalism and human migration, my talk interrogates the politics of engaging in such revisionary work. How do poems invite, how do they resist our serial appropriations? Presenting us with figures on the move, as all poetry does, Moore’s “The Paper Nautilus,” on the one hand, bespeaks a conservative and conservational agenda that responds to environmental challenges and forces of relocation. On the other, her text draws a clear line between the biological life form it subtly explores and its paper version that performs the possibilities and limits of poetry. How then does this politics – or poet(h)ics – of poetry change in the new light we shed?

---

## **The *Transborder Immigrant Tool* and the Poetics of Survival**

*Melissa Zeiger, Dartmouth College*

The *Transborder Immigrant Tool* (TBT) is a GPS device developed by the civil disobedience group *Electronic Disturbance Theater*; repurposing cheap used phones, the group invented the program in order both to guide Mexican migrants in the Southern California desert to water sources and to publicize the high mortality rate of these migrants on the journey. The project also responds to the use of locative technologies by US government agencies seeking to prevent immigration. A politically resonant object, it has been shown in exhibitions around the country.

Perhaps surprisingly, the project also includes a series of twenty-four poems. By one of the group, Amy Carroll, these are intended to provide both solace and important information along the way. Very little has been written about them as poems, though they are generally mentioned in descriptions of the project. Carroll herself describes the thinking behind her development of the poems in a short essay, “Of Eco-poetics and Dislocative Media,” comparing the desert to other natural sites that have received the dead, often the murdered, bodies of unwanted people. “Ecology holds trauma and promise simultaneously, is neither beautiful nor sublime per se, but becomes part of a larger built environment that regulates the policing and disciplining of ungrammatical bodies” (Carroll 3), she writes. The poems, both naming and seeking to prevent the deadliness of migrants’ journeys, needed to “engage or expand upon our collective vision of the tool as sustenance” (5), and to avoid writing “that functioned best in museum, gallery, and university contexts” (5). They had to mediate between the digital and the verbal, between Spanish and English. How could the poems engage the natural world without appropriating or idealizing it, and how could they make a dangerous physical and human environment part of an ethics of reparation and welcome? My paper will discuss how Carroll confronted these demands by drawing a poetry from “texts about desert survival: handbooks, military manuals, a guide for border-crossers briefly distributed by the Mexican government” (5) that also call on the resources of ongoing poetic traditions and counter-traditions.