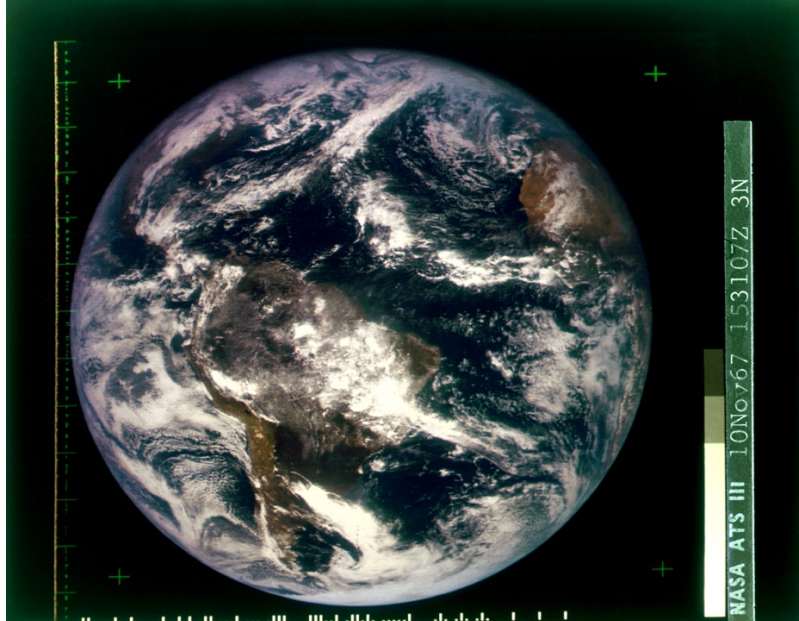


VISS 599: Environmental Media, Technological Surrounds

Spring 2024
Wednesday, 2-4:50pm
Classroom TBD

Professor Kimia Shahi
kshahi@usc.edu
Office hours: Thurs. 3:30-5pm (or by appointment)



Photograph of the Earth by Applications Technology Satellite 3 (ATS-3), November 10, 1967. Image credit: NASA.

Course Description

The scope, severity, and uneven impacts of climate crisis and its attendant injustices have precipitated new challenges of visibility, visualization, knowledge, and communication, but also of scale, measurement, and quantification. Yet, as a growing body of scholarship demonstrates, conceptions of and encounters with the environment have always been mediated, whether by technologies like photographs, boats, museums, and databases, or by the body itself.

Environment, which entered English usage in the early 1800s, can be defined as that which surrounds an organism or collection of life-forms, though the term now carries broader associations with nature or earth systems. The environment can also be understood as a medium itself, capable of generating or impeding perception, transmitting information, and structuring forms of social, biological, and technological interrelation; indeed, in technical and regulatory parlance concerning pollution and contamination, soil, air, and water all constitute forms of “environmental media.”

Spanning a selection of different periods, places, and environs, this seminar assembles a multidisciplinary collection of readings to explore and historicize the following methodological questions: How do different media and technologies shape the ways the environment, or environments, are seen and known? In turn, how do environments mediate? Finally, how can approaches aligned with fields like media studies, history of science and technology, art history, and visual studies foreground decolonial, anti-racist, queer, and feminist accounts of environments, their histories, and our possible futures?

Objectives

- Build historical, historiographical, and critical understanding of the intersections of environmental thought and theories/definitions of media.
- Study key contributions and analyze the implications of various environmental “turns” in media scholarship, broadly construed.
- Develop and present original research.

Texts suggested for purchase (subject to revisions)*

*Note: everything *not* on this list is available online through USC Library or digitized on our course Blackboard site

Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Harvard UP 1993)

Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (Harper 1980)

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Orig. 1964; MIT Press Ed., 1994)

Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (Penguin Random House, 2020)

Mackenzie Wark, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene* (Verso 2015)

Requirements

- **Attendance and participation:** Students are required to attend class and participate fully in our collaborative discussions. Completing the readings and required blog posts are essential to participation, as is coming to class prepared to share ideas and questions.
- **Blackboard discussion posts:** Each week, students are asked to respond to the readings on our Blackboard discussion board. Posts should raise 1-2 questions and explain their relevance to the readings. **These are due by 11pm every Tuesday.**
- **In-class presentations:** Each week, one student will introduce a reading and present an object/image/artifact relevant to their own work or interests, exploring its relevance to key ideas presented in the reading, and offering questions for discussion with the class (15 min).
- **Final paper and conference:** This seminar will culminate with conference-style presentations, in which each student will share a presentation (10 min; ~2000 words) based on original research developed over the course of the semester. Abstracts will be due to me midway through the semester, and I will organize panels based on thematic or topical relevance. The final paper, an expanded and polished version of the presentation (4-5000 words), will be due **May 7, 2024 by 5pm.**

Grading

Participation: 25%

Discussion board posts: 20%

In-class presentation: 20%

Final paper: 35%

Accessibility: If you need accommodation, please let me know as soon as you can. In order to best facilitate all students' participation and progress, I may modify aspects of this course. For more information, please visit [USC Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS), call (213) 740-0776, or email osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Content, Conduct, and Respect for Diversity: As scholars, we will work together to encourage respectful discussion and debate, critical thinking, and the exchange of diverse perspectives and ideas in this class. This means maintaining an inclusive, collaborative, and respectful environment that supports and honors differences in gender, sexuality, age, race, nationality, ability, religion, and socioeconomic status. The materials we engage with in this class will reflect historical opinions, events, and omissions that we no longer agree with today. Our goal will be to contextualize, analyze, and think critically about these histories with respect for the reactions they may elicit and the challenging questions they might provoke. In this class, we recognize USC's presence on the traditional lands and waters of the [Tongva People](#). USC also occupies past and present lands and waters of the Chumash, Tataviam, Serrano, Cahuilla, Juaneno, and Luiseno People. We acknowledge the significant work still needed to overcome past and ongoing colonialism and dispossession and to honor the continued participation of Indigenous people in this community. If you have any concerns, questions, or ideas, please reach out to me. Additional USC resources, support, and information can be found [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

Course Schedule

Week 1: Environment/Umwelt/Surround

January 10

Read

- Etienne Benson, *Surroundings: A History of Environments and Environmentalisms* (Chicago, 2020)
- Jacob von Uexkull, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (1934) [selections]

Week 2: Nature Trouble

January 17

- William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1:1 (1996): 7-28.
- Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Harvard, 1993) [selections]
- Nathan Hare, "Black Ecology," *The Black Scholar* (April 1970), p. 2.
- Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (Harper 1980) [selections]

Week 3: Anthropocenes

January 24

- Mackenzie Wark, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene* (Verso 2015) [selections]
- Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (University of Minnesota 2018) [selections]
- Zoe Todd, "Indigenizing the Anthropocene" in Turpin and Davis, eds. *Art in the Anthropocene* (Open Humanities Press 2015): 241-255.

Week 4: Media, Old and New

January 31

- Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964) [selections]
- Nichole Starosielski, *Media Hot and Cold* (Duke 2021) [selections]
- Lisa Gitelman, "Introduction: Media as Historical Subjects," "The Case of Phonographs," and "Epilogue: Doing Media History," in *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (MIT 2006)

Week 5: Machine and Mind

February 7

- Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (MIT 1948) [selections]
- Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," in *Manifestly Haraway* (Minnesota 2016): 3-90.
- Orit Halpern, *Beautiful Data: A History of Vision and Reason since 1945* (Duke 2014) [selections]
- Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (Penguin Random House, 2020) [selections]

Week 6: Landscape

February 14

- J.B. Jackson, "The Word Itself," in *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America* (Yale 1997), 299-306.
- John Ruskin, "The Novelty of Landscape," in *Modern Painters* (1847)
- W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power* (Chicago 2002), 5-34.
- Jill Casid, "Countercolonial Landscapes" *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minnesota 2005), 191-236.

Week 7: Elemental Media

February 21

- John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago, 2015)

Week 8: Media Underwater

February 28

- Melody Jue, *Wild Blue Media* (Duke 2019) [selections]
- Margaret Cohen, *The Underwater Eye* (Princeton 2022)

- Nicole Starosielski, *The Undersea Network* (Duke 2015) [selections]

Week 9: Air/Atmosphere

March 6

- Ingrid Christian, *Objects in Air: Artworks and Their Outside around 1900* (Chicago 2021) [selections]
- Giuliana Bruno, *Atmospheres of Projection: Environmentality in Art and Screen Media* (Chicago 2022) [selections]
- Amy K. Powell, "If a Painting Is Like a Window, Is It a Means of Ventilation?" *Grey Room* 83 (2021): 24-55.
- Weihong Bao, "Hermeneutics of Doubt: Atmospheric Knowing and an Ecology of the Mind," *Representations* 175: 1 (Winter 2022): 142-172.

March 10-14 – *Spring Break, no class*

Week 10: Environmentalist Media

March 20

- Mark Wasiuta, *Environmental Communications: Contact High* (Columbia SoA, 2015)
- Fred Turner, "Stewart Brand Meets the Cybernetic Counterculture" and "The Whole Earth Catalog as Information Technology," in *Counterculture to Cyberculture* (Chicago 2006)
- Finis Dunaway, *Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of Environmental Images* (2015) [selections]

Week 11: Ark/Archipelago

March 27

- Malcom Ferdinand, *A Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World* (Wiley 2019) [selections]
- Bernard Siegert, "Medusas of the Western Pacific" (68-81) and "Waterlines" (147-163) in *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors and other Articulations of the Real* (Fordham 2015)
- Monique Alleweart, "Introduction: Tempest in the Plantation Zone," *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minnesota 2013), 1-26.
- Katherine McKittrick, "(Zong) Bad Made Measure," in *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Duke 2021), 125-150.

Week 12: Infrastructure

April 3

Hold: Possible visit to Metabolic Studio

- Shannon Mattern, *Code and Clay, Data and Dirt: Five Thousand Years of Urban Media* (Minnesota, 2017).

- Matthew Gandy, *The Fabric of Space: Water, Modernity, and the Urban Imagination* (MIT 2017)

Week 13: Plants

April 10

- Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (California 2013) [selections]
- Michael Marder, "Introduction: To Encounter the Plants," in *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (Columbia 2013), 1-14.
- Natania Meeker and Antónia Szabari, "Becoming Plant Nonetheless," in *Radical Botany: Plants and Speculative Fiction* (Fordham 2019), 171-201.

Week 14: Final Presentations

April 17

Week 15: Final Presentations

April 24

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to genderbased harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421 studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776 dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

studentaffairs.usc.edu/sssa

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.