

VISS 599: Environmental Media, Technological Surrounds

Spring 2024

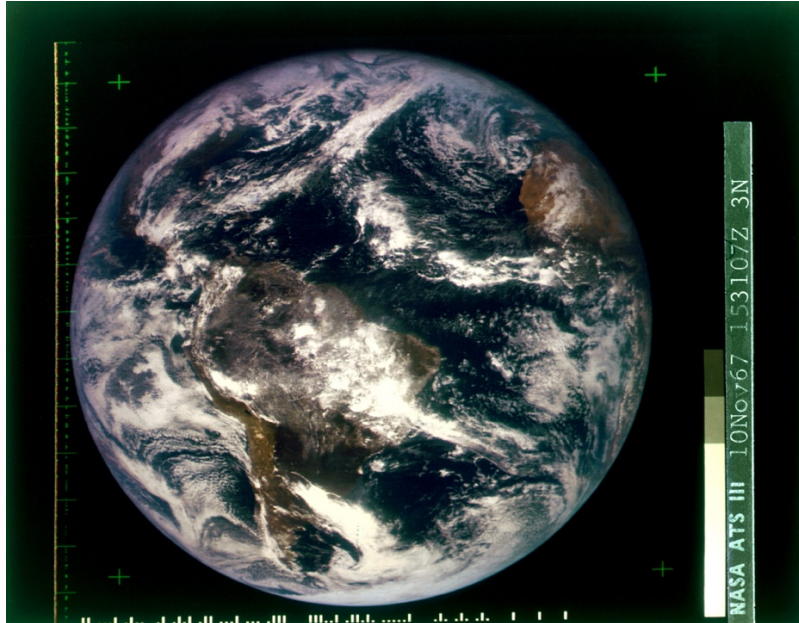
Wednesday, 2-4:40pm

Classroom: THH 308

Professor Kimia Shahi

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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 at USC Bookstore

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 Blackboard 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. A post can offer a question, comment, and/or propose an object or image in dialogue with the readings. **These are due by 11pm every Tuesday.**
- **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. **300-word Abstracts will be due in Week 8**, 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

In-class participation: 15%

Discussion board posts: 15%

Abstract: 10%

Final Presentation: 25%

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](#).

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/ssa

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.