

# VISUAL STUDIES RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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SPRING 2025 EVENTS

## Graduate Student Focus



### Capturing the Invisible: Radiation, Community, and Grassroots Media Circulation around the Fukushima Disasters

ANNE FRIEDBERG MEMORIAL LECTURE:  
WAKAE NAKANE

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Cinematic Arts, USC

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27  
12:30-2:00pm PST  
ZOOM

The triple disaster of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, tsunami, and Fukushima nuclear meltdown presented profound social, environmental, and representational challenges. The large-scale and erratic spread of radioactive substances affected people's lives both spatially and temporally, even beyond the legally mandated evacuation orders and relocation. The dangers presented by radiation, long-term and invisible, amplified societal divisions among the impacted communities, exacerbated by the legacies of Japan's nuclear energy policy and the contentious discourse of *tojisha-shugi* ("affected party-ism"). Mainstream media's emphasis on immediate, violently spectacular devastation inadequately captured the complexities of radioactive contamination and the issue of social divisions, compelling independent/non-professional filmmakers to document the crisis through personal and localized lenses. Grassroots image-making and media circulation, in particular, emerged as pivotal phenomena in post-Fukushima society, using first-person documentaries to explore the interplay of private and public spheres. This talk analyzes two such works, *A Lullaby Under the Nuclear Sky* (2016) and *The Road Home* (2017), exploring their cinematic aesthetics and circulation through activist and local networks, including community archives and citizen's group screenings. These films foreground maternal and familial experiences to critique public narratives of nuclear disaster. By disrupting the private/public binary in both representational and physical senses, these films sought to create alternative public spheres, fostering dialogue about individual and collective agency in navigating post-disaster society.

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