

Call for papers – 2007 Association of American Geographers Annual Conference.
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<http://www.aag.org/annualmeetings/SF2007/>

Google Earth as the ‘view from nowhere’: the spatial politics of high-resolution satellite imagery

Session organisers:

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Context:

Google Earth, and various internet portals, offer ubiquitous high-resolution satellite imagery at unprecedented detail to a global audience through simple interfaces. The capabilities and technical beauty of Google Earth, in particular, has garnered wide spread praise and a rapidly growing fan-base. Given this impact, now is an apposite time for considered reflection on exactly what can be seen with satellite imagery and thinking through the spatial politics of newly accessible images of the world.

Pictures taken from satellites orbiting high above the Earth offer people a seductively objective view of the world below, termed by Thomas Nagel the ‘view from nowhere’. This mirror-like viewpoint over territory, has until recently, been for the most part the preserve of military forces and states have jealously guarded their visual power in the interest of national security. But recent technological and social change has led to increasing spatial and temporal data resolution becoming much more widely available, in large part because the ‘mirror’ is being commercialised, and significantly access through the internet portals seems to be offering a means of challenging the power of the formerly elite discourse.

We invite theoretically informed analysis that questions the ontological surety of satellite imagery.

Suggested themes:

Explore the tensions between transparency and secrecy that percolate debates about access to high-resolution satellite imagery.

Reflect on the potential for progressive use of imagery by non-state actors to challenge established power relations.

Examine the politics of socio-technical infrastructures and corporate practices that underpin image dissemination, censorship and manipulation.

Critique the naturalizing power of the interfaces to systems like Google Earth, particularly in relation to the military origins of these systems.

Question the uneven spatial provision of imagery and the commercial logics of points of interest databases.

Analyse growing mass media use of high-resolution satellite imagery.

Evaluate alternative visualities from artists who employ the 'view from nowhere' to problematize relations between subject and object.

Interrogate notions of satellite ethics, particularly relating to individual privacy and community rights.

Situate the potential of progressive pedagogy employing high-resolution satellite imagery.

Assess the cultural meanings attached the imagery and the nature of the new community of practices emerging (such as 'black helicopter' spotters).

Proposed papers in the form of a title and short abstract (250 words maximum) should be submitted to Martin Dodge (m.dodge@manchester.ac.uk) by 15th September 2006. Further details on the paper requirements and registration for the AAG meeting are at <http://www.aag.org/annualmeetings/SF2007/call4papers.cfm>