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Google Warming: Environmental Panoptical Regimes and the Machinima of the Visible

This paper argues that the computer automation of perspective and rendering in Google Earth has far reaching consequences for the relationship between the representations of the earth, its ecology and cultural responses to climate change. Theorists from Erwin Panofsky and William Ivins to Lev Manovich have argued that the emergence of Renaissance perspective structured a new relationship between the image and the object: contributing to the initiation of industrialisation and science. While Manovich describes the impacts of Renaissance perspective in terms of its effect upon scientific and industrial structures, Jean Louis Comolli has argued that its advent was both a cause and a consequence of a shift to a humanist social regime. This paper argues that Google Earth and its corollaries now complicate the visual and discursive constitution of the cultural and ecological environment. The contemporary computer generated 'visual nominalist' perspective of Google Earth results in a photomapped representation of the planet that can elevate environmental awareness through visualised datasets at the same time as it reduces the earth to a product design engineered object. As Comolli's 'Machines of the Visible' become Machinima of the Visible, this paper asks whether public and scientific calls for a turn toward geo-engineering can be viewed through a product design engineered interface that reconstitutes the social machine as an engineer of the earth object itself.