



HUMANITIES RESEARCH CENTRE
in the RESEARCH SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

WORK-IN-PROGRESS SEMINAR SERIES

Aerial Photography and the Unmapping of the World

MR WILLIAM FOX

Independent Scholar, HRC Visiting Fellow

**Tuesday, 1 May, 2007
at 4.00pm**

Theatrette, Old Canberra House, ANU

It has been the working assumption of geographers and others that the rise of the aerial as an increasingly normative view of the world arose primarily during the twentieth century, in particular after the reconnaissance photography of World War Two and with the increasing availability of commercial air travel. In fact, the mapping ability and imagination are universally present in humans at an early age, and displayed in visual art from at least the late Neolithic onward. As aerial images have become ubiquitous with the advent of Google Earth and the publication of such books as Yann Arthus-Bertrand's *The World from Above*, many curators and critics have continued to trivialize them as being more topographical in nature than aesthetic, more mapping than art practice. This is an argument about landscape representations that has been familiar since at least the seventeenth century, and has been carried over whenever new imaging technology has been deployed. In fact, photographers using aerial imagery have been countering this argument in their work for more than a century, using elevated vantage points not to enhance our navigation through the world, but to make it more ambiguous and tentative.

William L. Fox is an independent scholar who has published numerous books on cognition and landscape, most of which are set in extreme environments such as deserts and the polar regions. He has been a visiting scholar at the Getty Research Institute, and been awarded grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, and National Science Foundation. He is a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and Explorer's Club, and has also published fifteen collections of poetry and several monographs on photography.

All Welcome

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