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"Beyond Whole Earth: Planetary Mediation and the Anthropocene"

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This article examines the hermeneutic and poetic operations by which we as human beings turn our very planet into a signifier for our collective existence as a species, a process which I refer to as "planetary mediation." I identify the so-called Whole Earth images first generated by the Apollo Space missions as the characteristic form of planetary mediation during the late twentieth century, and argue that our current emergence into a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene, calls for radically different representational strategies. Whole Earth images draw their strength from their iconographic and indexical qualities—in other words, their seeming ability to ground symbolic discourse in something that is undeniably and materially real. In the Anthropocene, however, physical nature itself has become a medium for the inscription of human messages, and effective planetary mediation can now take place only in virtual environments such as those of Google Earth and advanced climate modeling systems. I analyze the work of Soviet biologist Evgeni Shepelev as a starting point for this form of planetary mediation and discuss the multimedia installation *The Place Where You Go to Listen* by American composer John Luther Adams in order to show the challenges that contemporary environmental art will still have to overcome if it wants to illuminate our current planetary condition. (Text from author's abstract)

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