

# SENSE OF PLACE – MATTERS OF RESOLUTION AND AUGMENTED REALITY



Phil and Peter have come across the California coastline site. High resolution aerial images, overlapped so you can travel the length of California's coast. Tied to a map too. They were commenting on the effect of *presence* the site and images achieve. [Not an effect of "being there" – but being able to see so much.](#) In one shot. They speculate about the "macroscopic sensory", with high definition sound added to such high res images.

Andreas Gursky's photos work like this.





Andreas Gursky – 99 Cent 1999. This is 7 x 11 feet!

Enormous and epic shots that show so much detail.

Manovich has pointed out that the detail of computer graphics gets in the way of their naturalism – they have to be softened or degraded to look “real”.

This has got me thinking (yet again) about my gripe with all this VR in archaeology (reconstructing the past “the way it was”). For me, Phil and Peter’s point about these high resolution (and they are not that high) experiences is that they kind of [augment](#) reality. For a long while I have experimented with projected medium format transparencies in lectures. Most of us are used to 35mm slides. They can carry a lot of detail, but nothing like a 6x6cm slide. There seems almost no end to the detail – I have shown them on a 20 foot screen and they still look sharp close up. More than the detail we get in everyday vision. Hence they seem to augment, to add to what we feel we see. Cubic VR is like this too, I think.

This is epic in a Brechtian sense too, of making the viewer very aware of the effect of the medium – interrupting the illusion with, here, focus on resolution.

It happens too in big screen cinema – I always sit in about the third row – so that there is just too much to take in.

Note though what Manovich misses – this wonder is not *inherent* in the image, but in the [history of our engagement](#) with such images. It all depends on what we have become familiar with. It is rooted in everyday experience.

In the Three Landscapes Project a couple of years ago Cliff McLucas, Dorian Llywelyn and I worked on that instinct that Phil and Peter had – to add more. We took up a notion of **deep mapping** that Mike Pearson and I shaped for Theatre/Archaeology. Basically layer anything and everything in a hybrid representation of a place – sound, performance, text (of whatever genre), still and moving imagery, diagrams, maps and installations.

One result was a deep map of California's San Andreas Fault – 42 feet long and 8 feet high. We used Zoomify's Flash application to deal with screen resolution – [Link]

We had a company (Brith Gof) project to deep map an island in the Netherlands (Terschelling – Oerol festival 2000 and after) – using aerial photography (video), satellite imagery, and all tagged with recordings of people, still photography, ambient sounds. Cliff mounted an installation at the festival and people loved it. It continues.

I think the notion of deep mapping as this kind of augmentation of our everyday experience is fascinating and powerful. People do love maps. It crucially also gets us away from notions of photographic reality into a realization that **many images work like diagrams – adding to, commenting upon, reconfiguring what they represent.**

An aside. A standard line of critique is that cartography is part of an imperialist project. That the encompassing aerial view is one of a male dominating gaze. Ian Hodder said this to me and Cliff when we talked to him about our project. I think this view is simplistic.

I do like to think of Michel Serres's notion of the folded topology of time – all sorts of temporality percolating in our experiences of place – all sorts of dates and times, experiences and documents present, layered, in the sense of place.

An anecdote. We tried to sell the idea to the BBC (fly around in a helicopter, take aerial shots, look at detailed maps and photographs of neighbourhoods, stop to talk to people). It went to a senior level, but they told us the idea was too expensive to implement. Then they went ahead and used the idea anyway, without us. But they blew the concept and turned it into travelogue/local community TV. They called it "sense of place" – [Link]