Larose Video Transcript

Step 1 establishing your object. In our case study of Larose Louisiana we are looking at in iteration of the Obama Hope Image as it circulates in the world.

Locating the site. The Obama What Now? Mural garnered media attention so it was possible for us to gather clues as to its exact location. Local and national news sources proved useful and geo tagged images on Instagram that provided an overlay of information that rendered the place discoverable.

By exploring this online archive of photographic and cartographic material we started to exercise our judgment in perceiveing indexical relations that give the Obama What Now? Mural emplaced meaning. One observation we had concerned the concentrated nature of semiotic and political matter on the tattoo shop itself. It was possible that murals on the tattoo shop constituted a political space in Larose that was otherwise was lacking in the visual scene of the town. This space, at literal and figurative distance from the nation’s capital, on a road that leads only to the Gulf of Mexico offers a compressed experience of politics on the periphery. The Larose case study is distinct from the Orgosolo Sardinia example because the clues we take from the landscape are not neatly arranged in a host of murals. Instead we are looking at absences and contrasts to build an impression of the ecology of signification. Where the visual messages are few and far between, those that are visible are sure to gain attention from the locals.

Scollon and Scollon name two distinct processes that arise from semiotic emplacement. 1) the semiotic aggregate: the place has developed an aggregate effect that is mostly local in character. 2) a centrifugal force, where semiotic effect is imported from a different locale, and has broadly retained its meaning. Larose offers an example of semiotic aggregate effect that enables us to consider the localized meaning of Obama What Now? The absence of Hope linked to the creeping death of environmental degradation of the Gulf and the contamination of the water supply. These messages are fairly straightforward in terms of their content but what is of note is the political space they create simply by being visible.

This insight led us back to images created by geotagged searches. Instagram offered a treasure trove of images that spoke to the significance of the visual in Bobby Pitré’s tattoo shop. The visual continually provokes, contradicts itself, and offers up plenty of fodder for discussion and reflection. This political space includes the urban architecture, the bodies of tattoo artists and customers, and iconography in the form of iron crosses, Pitbull terriers, gym workouts, surfing, fishing trips, and skulls of various stylistic origin. These often clashing elements offer up visual provocations that seriously challenge a coherent reading of the Southern Sting Tattoo Shop from on high. A semiotician might be forgiven for thinking that there are some troubling images that align quite closely with authoritarianism in the 20th century, either German or Confederate. But we warn against attempting to nail down a stable reading of this nature, the status of the image is too anarchic in this space. The contradictions are not necessarily productive of conclusions, but offer up more potential points of analysis. What we can say with some confidence is that the tattoo shop is a space where iconography is mobilized to stylistic and political effect. Those rhetorics are not always as savory as a message that is simply pro environment and anti metropolitan.