

**Project Dissonance: Altered Iconography**

Integrative Project Thesis

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*Statement: Through a series of silk-screened t-shirts, I have chosen to explore the positive and negative movements or conflicts of different places by altering iconography to reflect each place and the movement of focus. Iconography is a visual reference that draws the viewer's attention to a specific location. Through altering iconography to reflect the cultural, social, and political conflicts or movements within place, I use the t-shirt as way of relating to the masses invoking conversation.*

Before delving in to the technical execution of my project, I spent a drastic amount of time carefully examining a variety of research topics involving place theory and studies. Initially, place identity was the primary focus of research and the conceptual meaning behind the project. As time progressed, I looked in to my personal interpretation of place, the drive behind the project, and what place means to me as an individual inhabitant, then began to form of solid idea conceptual focus. To me, place is an intimate connection or attachment within a person. It requires nothing, but the individual's own feeling within their self while inhabiting or using a specific place. There are no other external feelings or judgments from others that can affect your attachment to place. Personally, I prefer place rather than people, because I am free to move beyond that place and carry it with me, without the expectation of remaining close to another being. I believe one holds no responsibility to place other than to respect it. I do not need its approval, because place accepts me as just a physical being present within its space. This explanation is a personal reflection and my reason for choosing to focus on place in my series of t-shirts, but place theory has been prevalent in history for hundreds of years.

There has been a long fascination with the exploration of both physical and virtual

place. In 17th and 18th century France, Parisians had an outward infatuation with Ancient Roman and Greek culture.<sup>1</sup> This fascination with Greek or Roman appearance can be seen in the works of various French artists, such as Jacques-Louis David and Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres. For example, *The Oath of the Horatii* by David, depicts the Horatii men taking an oath of loyalty as they wage war against the opposing family. The figures in the painting

are all clothed in draping fabrics detailed with prominent, dark lines and stark shadows and highlights.<sup>2</sup> Such drapery and architectural elements can be seen in other French paintings of



the time including

Ingre's *Jupiter and*

The Oath of the Horatii by Jacques-Louis David [online image] [19. April. 2009]  
[http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/cas/his/CoreArt/art/neocl\\_dav\\_oath.html](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/his/CoreArt/art/neocl_dav_oath.html)

Antoine-Jean Gros' *Thetis and Napoleon Bonaparte Visiting the Plague-Victims of Jaffa*.

This infatuation with Ancient Greece and Rome, examined in *A History of Costume* by Carl Kohler, is further exemplified by the emergence of the "Empire" dress in late 17th

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<sup>1</sup> Neoclassicism evolved during this time as a period in which the pursuit of purity or ideal perception, the perception being of Ancient Greek or Roman Culture, dominated the visual arts. Ancient Greece and Rome and their achievements in the arts were admired as the ultimate perfection, thus pushing artists and architects alike to pursue such idealized or transcendental techniques and visions.

<sup>2</sup> Loose, draping clothing is indicative of Ancient Greek and Roman dress while the subdued archways behind the Horatii held by two broad columns carry a resemblance to that of Ancient Greek architecture as, for example, the robust columns of the Parthenon.

and early 18th century fashion where the dress was fitted beneath the bust and flowed loosely on the bottom. Over time, fashion and the visual arts have continuously adopted techniques and trends that reflect the investigation of place similar to the Parisians' fascination with Greece. The historical influence of place in fashion as well as, my own fascination with place furthered my interest in an investigative study of place while simultaneously using textile and fashion design as my medium of choice.

An underlying question of what constitutes a place is frequently asked when examining the theory of place. Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome are two definitive places where people coexisted or inhabited within their physical coordinates, but place can also be viewed as the space surrounding a person or being. John Malpas' *Place and Experience* addresses how place is more than a simple location that is based on the physical extension of space. Malpas also states that "Place is thus distinguished from mere location through being understood as a matter of the human response to physical surroundings" (p. 30). Places are both differentiated and interconnected in that people frequently create a set of physical characteristics or mental associations based off them. These characteristics and associations could be the interpretation of a connection that indicates political, social, geographical, or cultural references that aid in a person's ability to relate to a given location in other words, the mind's ability to understand a place through its similarities to another location. This can include the physical places visited or the virtual or mental places concocted by the mind, such as spatial proximity or distance between people in a social setting. In a more specific summary, it is the socially acceptable space between two strangers in an elevator that becomes a mental space or place.

When conceptualizing my work in conjunction with my research, I decided to focus on specific geographic places rather than fictitious places like the ones in our dreams. This decision was made based on what I felt it could relate more to a greater number of people, especially for those less likely to easily read or understand conceptual art. Having actual places depicted in my work can be more readable than depicting whimsical fantasy or imaginary lands that people may not read as place. I began listing places that I personally have lived in or visited, as well as places that I would like to investigate. I picked from this list places that varied geographically, as well as culturally, such as Birmingham, Alabama and San Francisco, California. These two places are both geographically separated within the United States, and have very different cultural, social, and political histories. Alabama embodies southern conservative ideas while California embodies western liberal ideas. Some other places that I analyzed based on my own experiences and through conversations with others include: the Rocky Mountains; Moscow, Russia; Hong Kong; Detroit, MI; and Cairo, Egypt.

After constructing a list of places to focus on, place promotion and how to advertise place became another important topic of research. In the chapter “Locating the Message: Place Promotion as Image Communication” in *Place Promotion: The Use of Publicity and Marketing to Sell Towns and Regions*, John R. Gold and Stephen V. Ward address how place promotion is culturally defined and dissected in different ways by its audience. Stereotypes are both used to communicate with its audience and countered in place promotion, but often occur when the audience has little knowledge about the place. I wanted to avoid making blatant, uninformed comments about these places and implying the wrong meaning behind each of the place especially since not every member of my

audience would necessarily be well informed about each place or idea. Iconography is considered an image meant to represent something other than what it physically is.

Worship Worthy, which started as a fashion and lifestyle blog and later launched their



RockersNYC x WWt Hail Frida Tee  
[online image] [19. April. 2009]  
<http://worshipworthyshop.bigcartel.com/product/rockersnyc-x-wwt-hail-frida-tee>

own women's fashion label, uses text and imagery that references or uses religious undertones. Their *Hail Frida* t-shirt depicts a well-known image of Frida Kahlo with a crown of thorns and red blocks wrapping around the sides of her head. This image and the altered or added areas give Kahlo a saint-like appearance, one that refers to Jesus' crown of thorns thus making her image an iconographic representation for a

martyr. I found that using stereotypes more specifically, stereotypes combined with iconography, like the Golden Gate Bridge or St. Basil's Cathedral, would increase appeal and make the aforementioned places more visually readable. Even a t-shirt in itself is an iconographic tool, especially when imagining James Dean in a white undershirt or Navy Seals in striped shirts. Using a re-imagining process and allowing myself to alter these icons would allow for a change in both the conceptual meaning of the place, as well as the physical design of the icon. I then decided to alter main icons, whether they are globally, regionally, or locally known icons, with images of conflict to invoke discussions regarding the political, social, or cultural issues within the place. An example

of this was when I turned the turrets of St. Basil's Cathedral into weapons of warfare with the text "To Georgia, with love" in Russian to address the current air raids that Russia has launched on its neighbor Georgia. My project then took on the position of artwork or designs based on conflicts in a place rather than promotional work from an advertising standpoint.

In order to create work that was not misinformed or biased, I engaged in conversations with individuals who had first-hand experience in places such as Moscow, Hong Kong and Cairo, as these are three places of which I have not had personal experience. Other places that I picked to discuss in my work were places in which I have had personal experience. I began each investigation in to place by listing public landmarks or national imagery that represented each place or are easily identifiable with the location.

From this point, I started to create lists of the different historical movements or cultural aspects that have defined these locations moving in to present-day conflicts or movements. The first designs completed out of the series were *Mail Order Brides and Sex Slaves*, *To Georgia With Love*, and *Deconstruction of the Confederate South*. *Mail Order Brides and Sex Slaves* depicts St. Basil's Cathedral printed in several layers of discharge and reactive dyes in white and two



Mail Order Brides and Sex Slaves  
[personal image]

shades of blue, pastel and navy. On the turrets are two deep purple women clad in their underwear and restrained with neon green ties that bind them to the top of the cathedral on a mid-tone, fuchsia shirt. I was moved to create this shirt in response to a conversation I had with a man who worked in intelligence for several European countries and had been a guest at a hotel in Moscow when the manager was shot dead by the Russian mafia after kicking young prostitutes out of the hotel lobby. Behind the women is an image of classified ads printed with white discharge paste where the text was altered



To Georgia, With Love [personal image]

in different locations to read "SEXY GIRLS AVAILABLE MAIL ORDER" and "SEX".

Originally the design consisted of three women, but one was removed as her positioning on the turret gave her an illusion of sexual deviance rather than referencing the vulnerability of the thousands of women that are forced in to sexual slavery and prostitution that still exist in Russia today.

As stated earlier, *To Georgia With Love*, addresses the current air raids that

Russia has launched on its neighbor Georgia and its involvement in earlier wars including

the Cold War and WWII. In this piece, the turrets of St. Basil's Cathedral are shaped in to nuclear warheads on a dark purple t-shirt. The Cathedral is double-printed, first with grey discharge paste then with grey textile paint, with several turrets printed a third time



with turquoise reactive paste. The warheads are printed with neon peach textile paint and light, neon green text reading "К Джорджии С Любовью" which translates to "To Georgia With Love" at the bottom. Although the audience for my work consists of predominantly native English-speakers, I felt it unnecessary to blatantly place these words in English and that the audience could visually read the characters as references to Russian warfare.

Birmingham, Alabama was and has been a focal point in the civil rights movement as it was the home of the historical Sixteenth Street Church Bombing that took the lives for four little, innocent African-American girls. This city has also been considered an industrial town, which is indicated by the large Vulcan statue that overlooks the city and can be seen on the Birmingham seal. The actual Vulcan statue is cast with an anvil in his right hand resting to his side

and an arrow in his left hand with his arm outstretched in front of him above his head.

Instead of wielding an arrow in *Deconstruction of the Confederate South*, Vulcan is printed in two tones of purple reactive dyes waving a pair of scissors in his outstretched



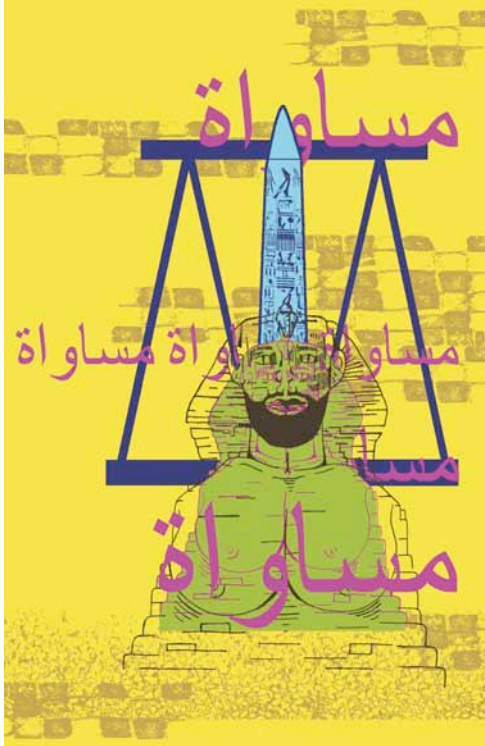
Deconstruction of the Confederate South [personal image]

hand on a light blue t-shirt. Behind him is the Confederate flag, tattered and torn apart, in white textile paint, and fuchsia and turquoise reactive dyes with a peach outline, slightly misaligned to further emphasize deconstruction. Below the image the text "PROGRESSION YA'LL" is seen in a Southern-style font similar to Rosewood, as seen on most of Lynyrd Skynyrd's memorabilia. The original design contained no text, however, upon revision it was discovered that the iconographic image of Birmingham's Vulcan statue is not well-known outside of the local geographic area of Birmingham, Alabama<sup>3</sup> so it was necessary to include something that indicated "Southern" to help the viewer narrow down or locate the place in discussion. "PROGRESSION YA'LL" was decided upon as a slightly humorous take on the Southern lingo, but also indicates forward movement and thought. I visited Birmingham less than forty-eight hours after the 2008 Presidential Election and watched many of my relatives and their friends graciously accept the defeat of the Republican party that many residents in Birmingham support; I saw that they had already begun to accept the idea of Obama as a symbol of progress for the United States. This shirt is meant to change the way in which people view Southern thoughts much in the same manner as the Cairo, Egypt shirt seeks to change the way in which people view the Middle East in its entirety.

*Equality: The Balance of Gender Rights*, is a multi-layer shirt with different components printed on a bright, sun-yellow shirt. In an interview, Kyle Anderson, a friend who studied in Cairo, Egypt, said one of the main points or stereotypes that he wanted to address about the eastern world and defeat was that women were treated as inferior to men or as second-class citizens in every Islamic or Middle Eastern country.

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<sup>3</sup> Vulcan is considered the Greek god of fire and is used to represent metalworking or industrialization.



Equality: The Balance of Gender Rights [personal image]

Women often hold the same professions and positions as many men in Cairo, which indicates a more definite sign of balance than what is often perceived by outsiders. The background of the shirt contains deeper, goldenrod areas of small bricks and tiles to give a textural balance to the shirt. In the proceeding layer, a line drawing of a balance with two triangles is printed in deep turquoise reactive dye with the center consisting of a lighter blue obelisk that has hieroglyphics of the same deep turquoise as the other part of the balance. A sphinx with a beard and large breasts

is printed twice in two different scales. The smaller sphinx is printed with deep pink-purple textile paint on top with a lime green background while the large-scale version of the sphinx is printed in a brown on top of the smaller sphinx. The text "مساواة" which is Arabic for "equality" is printed on multiple layers in different scales around the sphinx and balance in the same color as the smaller sphinx. The altering of the sphinx to have a man's face and a woman's body is meant to portray a hermaphrodite and the mixing of genders to create gender equality.

Defeating stereotypes or redefining how we view place, as I did with Cairo, became a mission as I looked at a few of my own personal experiences with place. For four months I worked at Butzel Elementary School every Friday afternoon as part of the University of Michigan's Detroit Connections class, which brings college students to

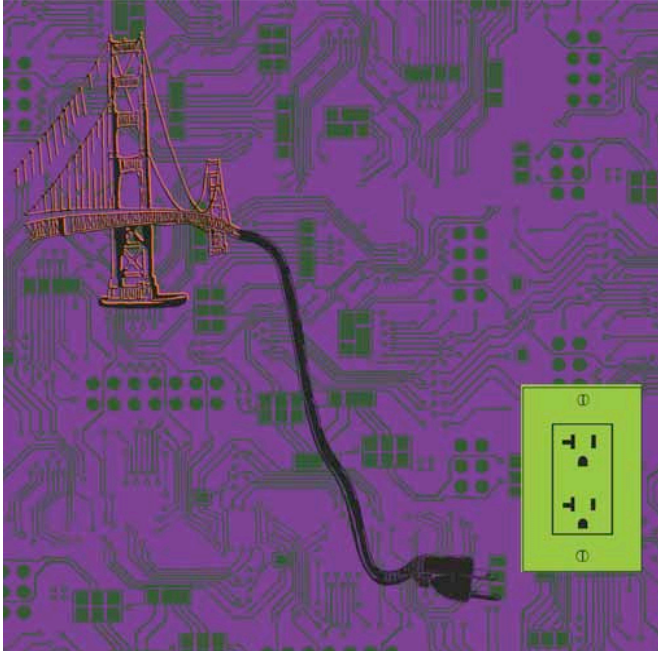
teach art to fourth and fifth grade children in inner city Detroit schools that lack the proper funding for an art program. During this time, I was exposed to a variety of activist groups and leaders and was introduced to Earthworks Urban Farm, a program that promotes sustainable agriculture in urban Detroit. As do many other individuals with little exposure to the Detroit city, I viewed



Epicenter of Urban Agriculture [personal image]

Detroit as an unsafe, financially unstable, and problematic city. After my encounter with Earthworks, however, I quickly learned that Detroit is actually one of the leading centers for urban agriculture because of its infrastructure. I was moved by the city of Detroit and found a lot more hope and beauty than what the average person sees in a city with a failing automobile industry. In *Epicenter of Urban Agriculture*, the GM World Headquarters Building, which is a tall, cylindrical tower, is reshaped in to a graduated vase with other GM buildings surrounding it. The buildings are double-printed first with fuchsia, turquoise and purple reactive dyes with a second layer of navy blue reactive dye printed on top. Coming out of the vase and other buildings are different plants including tomatoes and flowers printed in dark green and lime green reactive dyes, red, and peach textile paints. Below the buildings are roots printed twice in two tones of tan and brown reactive dyes. The new life that is sprouting out of the GM Building, a failing industry, and the roots that are burying themselves in to the bottom indicate a new path for a city

that was once rapidly expanding with tremendous potential. Hopefully, it is a path that can create a new industry and bring economic revenue in to a city that has lost a lot as a



Unplugged [personal image]

result of both the failing automobile industry and the racial tension that occurred during the civil rights movement.

Another city that faces a potential economic problem as the result of a moving industry is San Francisco, CA. San Francisco is known as a major leader of the technology movement and is the

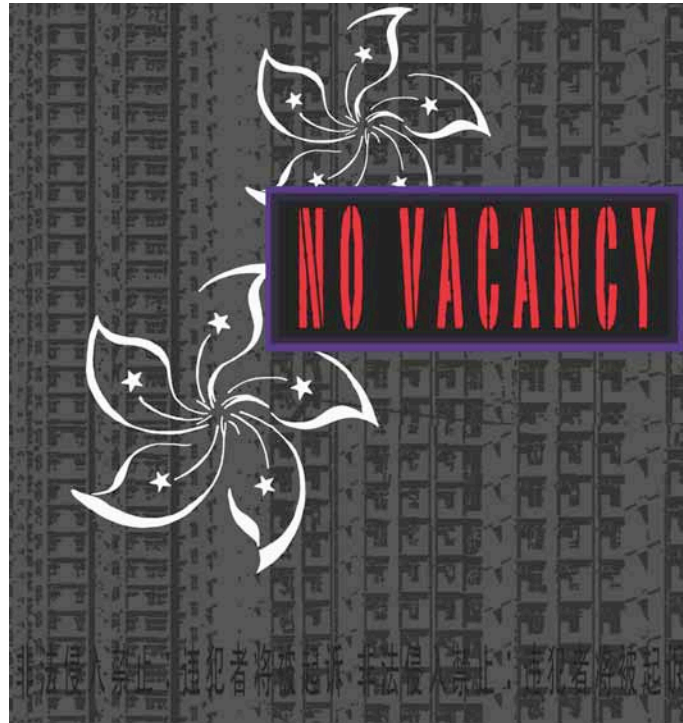
home of Silicon Valley, an area of the

bay where high-tech business is generated. During Professional Practice for Integrative Projects, Luke Raymond, who founded LUKE a custom design furniture company, held a web chat session from his office in New York and briefly touched base on the technology movement and his own decision to move his business from San Francisco to New York City. Over the past decade, technological companies have been moving out of the Bay Area and to New York City, which could pose a potential problem for the economy in San Francisco and the risk of lost revenue. *Unplugged* depicts the Golden Gate Bridge double-printed, first in orange then black textile paint with a black computer cord emerging from and falling down the shirt. The cord appears to be lying on the ground next to a bright green electrical outlet printed with neon green discharge paste and a black

outline done with textile paint. This is meant to represent technology moving away from or unplugging itself from its base, as Silicon Valley slowly removes itself from the Bay Area and moves to New York. To place a further emphasis on the technology aspect of the shirt, a repetitive circuit board pattern is printed with mid-tone green reactive dye behind the imagery.

While the previous two shirts addressed industry moving away from each city, Hong Kong has had a booming economic increase as immigrants move in to the city rather than away. As a grade

school student in Hong Kong, my friend, Emma Chan, recalled looking through books and seeing photographs of various living conditions in Hong Kong. Because of overcrowding and lack of housing, multiple families were forced to share one-bedroom apartments. One image that Emma described to



No Vacancy [personal image]

me, was where a person, who lived in a single bedroom with around a dozen people had to cage themselves and their belongings in to their bunk bed to preserve their privacy.

Upon imagining this picture, I immediately thought of a person caged in the same manner as an animal. I began to associate Hong Kong's overcrowding problem as a direct result



of its rapidly expanding population. Due to the handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China, there area growing number of immigrants moving from mainland China to the harbor. After the handover, immigration policy changed immensely and all Chinese citizens from that point on had equal access to Hong Kong. When describing her home in Hong Kong, Emma placed emphasis on the bright neon signs found in walkways and the way in which apartments are constructed: close in proximity, creating a repetitive pattern of windows. Using the repetitive pattern of windows as an icon, I silkscreened this pattern in dark grey-green reactive dye on a grey shirt. On top of the pattern, offset across the chest and wrapping underneath the arm, is a black, dark purple and lavender sign that reads "NO VACANCY" in red textile paint. Beneath the sign are two flowers, of different scale, from the Hong Kong flag, double printed one in white first, then red textile paint and the other printed first in red, then white on top. Along the bottom of the shirt, wrapping all the way around the shirt, are Chinese characters that translate into English as "TRESPASSING IS ILLEGAL" in mid-green textile paint. I played more on the United States' stance on illegal immigration and restricting entrance in to the country rather than the more open or equal access border that stands between Hong Kong and China. The main message, however, is that of overcrowding and no vacancy left in Hong Kong for new immigrants and the rising population count; space is rapidly becoming eliminated.

One of the main focuses of this entire project was to progressively rethink the way in which we view different conflicts or movements and possibly change the vocabulary with which we discuss these issues. The final shirt of my collection is *Open to Fuzzy Animals*. This shirt was based on my short experience in Colorado Springs, Colorado and



Open to Fuzzy Animals [personal image]

hiking in the Rocky Mountains. While spending time in the mountains, I noticed a lot of signs that were meant to protect and preserve both the park and its natural inhabitants. Most of these signs, however, used words like “do not”, “closed to”, or “forbidden”. There are negative ways in which to exert a conflict and positive ways as well. For

example, *Deconstruction of the*

*Confederate South* could have easily taken on a negative connotation by rendering Vulcan in to a Nazi-like figure, however, doing so would have been counter-productive to the positive changes that have occurred in the South. *Open to Fuzzy Animals* is a mint-green shirt with an olive green detail of a rock repetitively printed on the shirt creating a camouflage appeal. On the front of the shirt, I altered the Colorado Rockies', the professional baseball team's logo, printing it in fuchsia and marine blue reactive dyes. Within the logo, I printed the text "OPEN TO FUZZY ANIMALS" first with the fuchsia reactive dye then with peach textile paint. On the top arch of the Rockies' logo is a set of elk antlers printed in two tones, tan textile paint and a mid-tone brown. Originally, the text was going to read "Closed to Motor Vehicles" based on a sign I saw in Pike's Peak park in the Rocky Mountains however, I felt it was more playful to take the statement in a positive context using the word “open” instead of limiting it with the word “closed”. The message remains intact with environmental and animal rights and preserving the



Rocky Mountains, but takes it in a different direction than every day signage. Rather than using vocabulary that consists of restrictive words that are typically seen, it uses non-restrictive vocabulary indicating that the park is a safe environment for its natural inhabitants.

As a capstone to my thesis project, I found it pertinent to create an interactive forum in a website format for viewers to discuss issues that they find relevant to today's generation and those to come. Ultimately this project focuses on place promotion and

altering iconography to reflect conflicts or movements within individual locations. After

reflecting on my work and the

work of other marketing

campaigns launched towards

certain topics, specifically

environmental movements like

Go Green, this project became a

response to the lack of information

or accessibility to other important issues the world and humanity face today and it is my

desire to carry this project beyond Integrative Project. I decided to brand a company,

Singleton Cove, and a label, *dissonance*, for this project and begin a marketing campaign.

British last names such as my mother's, Singleton, often derived from the town in which a

person or family was born: in this case, the village of Singleton. Cove is a sheltered bay

that opens up in to the vast, expansive ocean. Together Singleton Cove stands for the



Project Dissonance Website:

[www.singletoncove.com/dissonance](http://www.singletoncove.com/dissonance) [personal image]

place where we find our hidden character, while the label *dissonance* reflects the conflict that is often associated with place.

By altering iconography, it is my hope I will create a conversation that educates and informs individuals about various issues, both historical and current, surrounding each place; it has not been meant to discourage an individual from traveling to any one of these places or to serve as a counter-active attack. Over time, the t-shirt has become a vital tool for communicating messages. Using the t-shirt as a method of relating to and spreading the message to the public, similar to mass poster reproduction during WWII, and iconographic imagery, this project can hopefully spark curiosity within my viewers much to the same extent that my fascination with place started this project.





(Top) Final Installation of Project Dissonance at Work: Detroit [personal image]  
(Bottom) Mail Order Brides and Sex Slaves T-Shirt as installed [personal image]

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