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"Anger's Cultural Adversity," "The Reciprocal Relationship between Art and Identity," and "The Sexual Antimony"

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Anger's Cultural Adversity

Nina Simone was a quintessential force representative of the 20th century female jazz vocalist. She in turn served as a driving force behind Black liberation through her musical power. Simone's sultry voice and blunt lyricism echoed along the infinite concert halls in which she performed into the hearts and minds of Americans desirous of aesthetic change within the music industry. As the civil rights movement gained a national platform rooted in political and social fury, Simone's artistry followed this same path. One song in particular, "Four Women", embodies the generational oppression faced by the African-American population through a matriarchal family tree. The song's transition from the physical confinement of slavery to the vocal freedom of the civil rights movement produces an unwavering stance on equality when regarding the social context leading up to the 1960s. Nina's lyricism and performance of "Four Women" incorporate Youngman's concept of "an angry nigger exterior" to encompass an ethnic plea for change deriving from prolonged maltreatment, further contextualized by Rankine's analysis of a white audience's interpretation.

As the title suggests, "Four Women" traces the lives of four women of the same bloodline: Aunt Sarah, Saffronia, Sweet Thing, and Peaches. Simone primarily depicted their identity through a simple, melodic tone of voice. She balanced this simplicity with her effortless ability to carry her voice into an emotional accordance necessary to not only unite these women's battles, but also separate their individual struggles.

Aunt Sarah is the matriarch of this family tree. She is described as having gawky features stereotypical of a "natural" Black woman. Aunt Sarah's strength is displayed through her mental vigor overpowering the physical abuse she encounters as a slave. Saffronia is a child of mixed ethnicities, hence her yellow skin. She signifies her oppression through her very existence, for it

is solely reliant upon the sexual brutality of the white man. It is this existence that equally symbolizes her strength through the adversity that has been dealt to her physicality. Sweet Thing is a prostitute lacking a father figure. She is depicted as possessing a luscious, sensual body with inviting hips and a "mouth like wine". Sweet Thing further carries out this act of sexual exploitation as a means of making ends meet, displaying her strength through her pride in the trade she partakes in. Peaches is the final descendant of these women. She is the most aggressive out of all the women, being described by Simone as having a tough manner and a rough life. It is this demeanor that allows Peaches to vocalize her strength through the generations of oppression she has inherited and will no longer stand for.

"Four Women" exudes a stiffness uncommon in music's roots of expressive freedom. Rankine's introduction of Youngman's YouTube video defines this stiffness as an "angry nigger exterior" (23), a double-edged concept consisting of a satirical persona embodying African-Americans' inability to express real rage and racially charged performance of authentic Blackness. This satirical persona is found within the strength possessed by Aunt Sarah, Saffronia, and Sweet Thing and the irony of this strength being exercised through outlets of individual weakness, such as slavery and prostitution. It further spreads through the family tree and blossoms within Peaches' freedom of speech as Simone exclaims her name in a dramatic finale, signifying a change in African-Americans' expression of their fury. The racially charged performance Simone gave is also ironically utilized to reveal the clash between societal nostalgia of Black performance and Simone's message of equality. Failure to recognize this in an era that condoned Black nostalgia still draws modern-day parallels to white outrage against the backlash of prominent Black figures, one such example being Serena Williams's competitive anger on the tennis court, as mentioned by Rankine. However, Nina's raw and composed rage nonetheless

brought life to the women she sang of. Their emotional state is brought to the forefront of a discussion that proves the African-American experience worthy of being heard.

Music is special in that its power can resonate through an entire society of cultural difference. This unification may come at a cost of assimilation to the masses, as displayed by Nina Simone, but it is what she reminds us of that remains constant: truth. Truth may be hidden by a cultural façade, but its message shines through the historical oppression that keeps it hidden.

Works Cited

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The Reciprocal Relationship Between Art and Identity

A Religious and Artistic Transition

When examining the evolution of social processes through artistic expression, Jessica Richardson points to a 14th century cloth gonfaloni banner. Richardson reveals a century-spanning transition in religious devotion and geographical location through the expansion of a procession banner of the Assisi confraternity. I propose that the Assisi banner projects a form of Harvey's 'impact on-of past' and 'impact on-of future' concepts through its creation and display. I will further prove how the confraternity's establishment of their identity and community is linked to the thematic transitions within their commissioned artwork. I will first discuss the banner's origins and role within Assisi through the perspectives of Harvey and Leach. I will then examine the confraternal impact on their commissioned artwork outside of Assisi with help from Pearce.

A Banner's Creation

The banner of the Assisi confraternity cannot be analyzed without first understanding its roots within the founding of the confraternity. Richardson first finds documentation detailing a purchase of land in part by Franceschino di Meratuccio. Meratuccio was a procurator of the Assisi confraternity that met within the church of Saint Leonard.[1] Richardson then comes across a will from 1335 that declares twenty-five men to the confraternity of Saint Francis and Saint Leonard.[2] This expansive religious devotion explains the confraternity's transition to San Francesco. It also foreshadows the depiction of Saint Leonard and Saint Francis upon their

banner. The clashing of religious artistry upon the banner in the present time was a direct impact of the confraternity's past ideology devoted to both Saint Leonard and Saint Francis.

The Assisi banner's imagery can be further understood through Harvey's stance on the functionality of social processes. The banner created a cemented expression as a result of the social processes associated with the confraternity's origins.[3] The resulting palimpsest displayed by both saints on the reverse side defined this complex devotion through its existence over time.[4] The banner's establishment of confraternal identity instilled a desire within the confraternity to reveal their prominence for social and divine purposes.

Prominent Public Display

The Assisi banner was thus displayed throughout the community. Richardson acknowledges that the banner was predominantly used in public ceremonial processions.[5] She further offers an outside perspective from Michael Bury. Bury and Richardson agree that the banner asserted a sense of confraternal identity to the community. Bury additionally claims that these processions in which the banner was used were an equal affirmation to the confraternity members.[6] The parading of the confraternity within a present time attempted to solidify future perceptions of the confraternal role within Assisi. The community's acknowledgment of the religious palimpsest on the reverse side of the banner confirmed in the confraternity's minds their infinite religious loyalties.

Our apprehension of this imagery's role is enhanced by Neil Leach's interpretation of simulation. Leach first states that images of any form act as a source of identification. This identification allows us to understand the confraternity's reassurance of their divine purpose as

they observed the obverse side of the banner.[7] Leach also explains how these simulations are understood as a social interaction. The citizens' comprehension of the Assisi confraternity's practices as they interpreted the reverse side of the banner further correlates with this idea of social interaction.[8] As these motives of the Assisi confraternity expanded through their devotion and practice, their efforts took them outside of their origins.

Identity Abroad

The Assisi confraternity soon brought their message outside of their regional residency. This migration is evident based on the transition of the confraternity's meeting place from San Leonardo to San Francesco. However, Richardson further utilizes San Francesco to display a transition of subject matter. A specific fresco entitled *Saint Francis in Glory* depicts a stronger persona of Saint Francis. This representation contrasts with the banner's predominance of Saint Leonard. The artwork's narrative swayed in accordance to the surmounting pressures of the Franciscan community. Tensions within the confraternity itself also arose as confraternal members considered their religious identity.[9]

The confraternity's artwork amidst this relocation can be analyzed in light of Pearce's theory of rehistoricization. Pearce connects this process to the architectural creation of Disneyland. She defines how Disneyland's presence fills a vacuum previously non-existent within a specific region.[10] In retrospect, the Assisi confraternity depicted within non-existent spaces of confraternal identity a representation of their devotion mixed with social influence. These representations were furthermore unique to each region in which they are installed. The artwork's individuality advanced an identity specifically for the communities in which they

resided throughout the confraternity's existence. We will soon see how this individuality within the artwork delved into realms of functionality.

Functionality Abroad

Just as the Assisi confraternity flaunted their social practices within their established community, they continued this process outside of their origins. One of the first established practices of the confraternity was to pray for the dead. This obligation is not only suggested by Saint Francis on the reverse side of the Assisi banner, but also by the burial practices in which the banner was utilized.[11] Richardson introduces another church, San Francescuccio, to explore the more private charitable deeds performed by the confraternity. Five of the Seven Works of Mercy illustrate these deeds within San Francescuccio's frescoes.[12] The frescoes' representation of functionality paralleled the overall practice of the confraternity's identity. The practices exuding from these frescoes further reflected the confraternity's persistence in performing their role outside of their community.

San Francescuccio's frescoes give further insight to this functionality when interpreted in the context of Pearce's perspective on scripted spaces. While Pearce acknowledges the fact that scripted spaces often originate from the ideas of the powerful, such as the confraternal leaders, she also alludes to an inability of the power holder to control the social processes that establish this expression.[13] It is assumed that the leaders within the Assisi confraternity played a direct role in the depiction of their identity throughout all of their commissioned artwork. Yet, it is possible that the communities outside of Assisi also implemented their contributions in the confraternity's artwork. The social processes coexisting in the same time as the confraternity possessed an equal

opportunity in directing the course of the confraternal narrative through art. While the Assisi confraternity predominantly enforced their identity and community, that is not to say that the communities in which they traveled directly influenced their artistic representation.

Infinite Identity

And thus, the Assisi confraternity instilled within themselves and their communities a sense of devout and social identity by projecting past ideologies and future practices. Their migration further developed their identity and community as it evolved with the artwork they commissioned. The practice of selfless charity through spiritual ideology and its presence through the documentation and art of the Assisi confraternity provides an interpretation able to withstand opposition from the past, present, and future generations.

Notes

1. Jessica N. Richardson, "The Brotherhood of Saint Leonard and Saint Francis: Banners, Sacred Topography and Confraternal Identity in Assisi" (Association of Art Historians, 2011), 892.

2. Ibid.

3. David Harvey, "Contested Cities: Social Process and Spatial Form" (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 230.

4. Ibid.

5. Richardson, "The Brotherhood", 886.

6. Ibid., 886, 889.

7. Neil Leach, "C<amo>uflage" (NAi Publishers: Rotterdam, 2003), 94.

8. Ibid.

9. Richardson, "The Brotherhood", 900.

10. Celia Pearce, "Narrative Environments: From Disneyland to World of Warcraft (Space Time Play), 201.

11. Richardson, "The Brotherhood", 886.

12. Ibid., 902.

13. Pearce, "Narrative Environments", 200.

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The Sexual Antimony

Homosexuality presents a different experience of individual evolution for those who fall under this category of sexual identification. Its arguable origins in both natural creation and social experience present a process of establishing a sense of identity, varying in length and severity. Patricia Highsmith entails this variation of self-discovery through her protagonists, Therese Belivet and Carol Aird, in her novel, *The Price of Salt*. Therese and Carol's love affair stems from a small chance encounter, blossoming into a profound connection withstanding patriarchal backlash and societal normativity. Highsmith is keen to incorporate elements of gravitational boundaries that explicitly allude to Therese's sexuality, particularly through the words and actions of Carol and Richard, Therese's long-term love interest. It is through this discourse of gravity that Therese is successful in enduring Marx's process of antinomy as a means of assuming her social identity as a lesbian.

Gravity first comes into play when depicting Therese's indecisiveness of her preferred sexual partner. Carol notes upon her first lunch with Therese how she is an odd girl, "flung out of space" (39). Richard also acknowledges this fact later on when regarding Therese's attitude, stating how she is "miles away" (46). The recognition of Therese's inability to identify herself is clearly established from members of both spheres of sexuality. This introduces the contradiction of ideology, paralleled by Marx's distinction between idealism and materialism, that the process of antinomy embodies. As Richard and Therese go to a park to fly a kite following a family celebration of her birthday, Therese plays a direct role in establishing this contradiction herself. Just as the kite descends into invisibility, into a realm between Earth and space, Therese identifies her joy in, as Marx would identify, the false consciousness of her lack of existence

within a social sphere. She finds her identity in the lack thereof. Therese will soon decide upon her sexuality, yet it will be further challenged through elements outside of her control.

Therese and Carol's road trip across America lights a fire of sexual passion between them. Proceeding their first sexual encounter, Carol is still persistent in addressing Therese's lack of earthly identity, floating in an unknown space of mindless passion. Marx's observation of the aforementioned false consciousness and its arising from imagining one's self outside of the social constructs that create them perfectly connects to Therese's lack of entering a social sphere and affirmatively obtaining a social identity. There is also the totality of the contradictions producing an antinomy that must be considered. This totality consists of Therese's long-term commitment to Richard and the heteronormativity he embodies. Carol is soon to encounter contradictions of her own, however, as she is called back to New York to deal with the remnants of her divorce from her husband, Harge, and the custody of their child, Rindy. Carol's absence resulting from her familial obligations further hinders Therese from assuming her identity, and thus there returns a "sense of empty space all around her" (208). The totality revolving around Therese's and Carol's love for one another will dissolve through a single proposal.

Just as antinomies create resolutions, Therese and Carol's circumstances present the possibility of a happy ending regarding their relationship. As Carol is forced from her child's life as a result of her affairs with Therese, she asks Therese to live with her upon their last meeting within the novel. It is evident that the spheres of contradictive influence embodied through Richard and Harge have been completely removed. With this in mind, Therese realizes that it is now up to her to fulfill the resolution as she remains "suspended in the air" (242). She must complete the antinomy by realizing, as Marx would describe, the assumption of her social identity as a lesbian to be founded in the dissolving of ideologies constructed by the

contradiction between their totalities. There is "nothing on either side to push her or pull her" (242). Therese's identity lies within her hands at last.

There is an irony in that the social constructs revolving around Therese's life were completely absent in order for her to accept an identity formed by these same constructs. However, it is necessary for the social heteronormativity presented through the patriarchal figures in both Therese and Carol's lives to transcend beyond their direct involvement in order for Therese to transcend beyond her own indifference. The gravitational balance between inevitable constructs and affirmative essentialism unite to establish Therese's sexuality and, furthermore, her social identity.

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