

UNSOUND COMPOSITIONS: WOMEN AND COMPOSITIONAL AGENCY

By

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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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This thesis considers the reception of two avant-garde women artists, Gertrude Stein and Yoko Ono, with attention to the reception of Stein's opera (in collaboration with Virgil Thompson) *Four Saints in Three Acts* and Ono's album (in collaboration with John Lennon) *Plastic Ono Band*. By focusing down on the most radical moment or era that marks a significant epiphany for each artist, this paper explores the cultural practices, aesthetics, and ways of engendering and conceptualizing sound, "noise," lyricism, music, and compositional agency in relation to their reception. The idea is to unlink the avant-garde from the masculine and to separate the meaning constructed in sound from the connotations of the avant-garde.

One objective will be to examine ways in which the insights and methods of structuralism, post-structuralism, semiotics, critical theory, and feminist criticism have been applied to the problem of understanding how meanings are gendered, negotiated, and celebrated in popular music.

By contrasting the representation by the popular media and by the artists themselves, a composite representation emerges of the women and their work as androgynous, crazy, non-sensical, unsound (versus “sound”), and discordant. The labeling of women artists as possessed, errant geniuses or incapable “tourists” of the art form is a consistent effort to discredit women of their impact and innovations in composition and the avant-garde.

DISCUSSION

Once in a while and where and where around around is a sound and around is a sound and around is a sound and around. Around is a sound around is a sound around is a sound and around. Around differing from anointed now. Now differing from anointed now. Now differing differing. Now differing from anointed now. Now when there is left and with it integrally with it integrally with it integrally withstood within without with out with drawn and in as much as if it could be withstanding what in might might be so.

—*Four Saints and Three Acts*, Gertrude Stein

Upon recently viewing the film remake of *The Manchurian Candidate* (2004), I noticed that the character of Eleanor Prentiss Shaw, the power-hungry U.S. Senator and icy, masterminding mother of the leading male protagonist, Raymond Shaw, resonated with many public characterizations of powerful women. Portrayed as shrewd, calculating and “hysterical,” Shaw emasculated her son and usurped the patriarchal right-of-passage in politics, ending tragically in her conspiracy and assassination. I also began to notice these images surfacing in other remake films such as *The Stepford Wives*; in this version, powerful women are “reprogrammed” as robots so they would support patriarchal traditions in domesticity and sexuality. These images of women serve as a warning to what can happen to women in all fields and arenas of gender if patriarchal formulas for success are challenged. And it was powerful images of women such as these that began to directly influence my analysis of gender and experimental composition in music. Namely, two under appreciated, yet highly publicized women in the arts: Gertrude Stein and Yoko Ono.

I am going to look at the various camps of reception on Gertrude Stein and Yoko Ono; focusing on the popular discourse surrounding the ways they made sound. Through non-traditional use of rhythm, sound and syntax, Stein and Ono created an open space for women in music by experimentally approaching composition in a very public platform. This made it easier for contemporary women composers to experiment outside the roles that consistently defined women in music. In contrasting the literary and musical camps of reception to Stein and Ono's self-presentation, a composite representation of the "hysterical" woman composer emerges and their work is characterized as crazy, non-sensical and unsound (versus "sound"). The labeling of women artists as possessed, errant geniuses or incapable "tourists" of the art form is a consistent effort to discredit women of their impact and innovations in changing that art form.

Women composers such as Stein and Ono began to appear in scholarship by the end of the 1980s when the construction of gender and sexuality became a focal point of feminist music criticism. Feminist music scholarship offered new ways of looking at the mainstream and the avant-garde works of music in the canon. Avant-garde texts received gendered readings and scholars began to analyze the gendered reception of women composers in the media. Influenced by other fields such as literary criticism, feminist music scholars applied their concepts of gender theory to women working in sound.

In addition, the existing body of feminist theory surrounding traditional music discourse outlines the binary of masculine/feminine, normal/abnormal and strong/weak in many ways. "Julia Kristeva, for example discussed masculine patriarchal writing as a style incorporating linear development and feminine writing as counter-hegemonic in its non-linearity" (Dusman 132). Here, the idea of music and composition is positioned

apart from the idea of “woman” composer unless it is positioned specifically as feminine music, deviant by nature.

By examining Stein and Thompson’s *Four Saints* and Yoko Ono’s 1970 *Plastic Ono Band/Yoko Ono*, this paper explores the meaning (or intended lack of meaning) constructed through the cultural practices, aesthetics, and ways of gendering and conceptualizing sound or “noise.” The popular reception surrounding “meaning” in these two works reveals how the works themselves question the fixed nature of language and sound and how they relate to conventional interpretations of music. The idea is to uncouple the avant-garde from its traditionally masculine connotations and to separate the meaning constructed in sound from the meaning constructed in traditional composition or songwriting and the connotations of the avant-garde.

The reception Stein experienced as she ventured into the new artistic territory of the opera in Four Saints is indicative of a widespread pattern in the way contemporary women working in sound are discussed; that is, as masculine vs. feminine and good vs. bad. Stein’s reputation was already one of non-sensical literature, and because this was a musical text to be sung, the “hysteria” of Stein indirectly connected her to “hysterical” composition. One successor to Stein who received a parallel reception was Yoko Ono. Looking at the reception surrounding Ono’s record, *Yoko Ono/ Plastic Ono Band* (1970), the companion record to the double album released by John Lennon’s *Plastic Ono Band*, the similarities in establishment press and the avant-garde sustained the image of the “hysterical” woman composer.

I am arguing, as do many other critics, that the avant-garde art has been both practiced and received as masculine. Susan Suleiman explains:

...The place of women, and of avant-garde movements, has traditionally been situated away from the center, ‘on the fringe,’ in the margins. One difference is that avant-garde movements have willfully chosen their avant-garde position, the better to launch attacks at the center, whereas women have more often than not been relegated to the margins: far from the altar as from the marketplace, those centers where cultural subjects invent and enact their symbolic and material rites (Suleiman 14).

Stein and Ono were both infamous characters in their individual spheres of the avant-garde. Stein, known as a difficult, yet innovative member of the elite literati and Ono, known mainly as a conceptual visual artist and infamous partner to John Lennon, used their contributions and infamy as a transfigurative vehicle for their own avant-garde concepts. Stein and Ono’s unapologetic presence in the avant-garde challenged the comfortable categories of composition and ownership.¹

The avant-garde as a masculine tradition has been coupled with the co-optation of the avant-garde by the media. “The ‘minimum reading’ of avant-garde art today, Donald Kuspit argues, is ‘to refuse to serve the media—though it may be hard to find ways to do so as the media become increasingly sophisticated, fully realizing their insatiable appetite.’ The aim of avant-garde art is ‘to make the audience self-reflexive—to make it discover its own discontent.’” (Wiener 2) Stein and Ono both realized their exclusion from the center of the avant-garde and how compositional agency² is problematic for

¹For the purposes of this paper, composition will mean the result or product of composing or arranging parts, whether it be a literary, artistic or musical work, into a unified whole.

²The idea of compositional agency for the purposes of this paper means a woman’s ability and power to create, influence, mediate, communicate, distribute, negotiate, transform, and compose her art as she wishes. Thus, gendering women’s compositional agency within the hegemonic confines of the avant-garde is one objective of feminist music scholars. However, the use of the term “avant-garde” is troubling. Primarily used to define work that is experimental and unorthodox in nature, *avant-garde* as a term has been tossed around so frequently by scholars, writers and critics to describe any work of art or movement that falls in opposition to what is commercially popular in the last century that it has lost much of its significance. For the purposes of this reception study,

women. However, they used their marginalization to their advantage as they embarked on new compositional, conceptual territory.

Stein's use of language in *Four Saints* demanded audiences construct their own meaning from a non-traditional text, which puts Stein's libretto into unknown, unwelcome corners of the avant-garde. Susan McClary explains that "music has often been identified as the most 'feminine' of the arts, because of its relative vagueness, its fluidity, its apparent 'handmaiden' relationship to lyrics, its ability to arouse, its connections with dance, and even its resonance with memories of coextension with the mother." From this we can infer that women carry a significant connection to finding meaning in music, but are positioned as insignificant "subjects," relegating women to feminine roles such as muse or performance-based participation (*Reshaping a Discipline* 6).

Four Saints, a collaborative opera Stein wrote for the composer Virgil Thomson, (libretto, 1929; music by Virgil Thomson, 1934), shook American opera at its base through the use of a non-traditional libretto, Americana folk-based hymns and the first all African-American opera cast. Because Thomson was already an established composer, Stein's contribution was seen as supplementary to the traditional process of opera. Within the tradition of "composer," Stein's libretto and the reception surrounding this collaboration is illustrative of how the term "composer" marginalizes women from particular rites of passage in musical composition. Thus, the discourse of marginality

avant-garde is used in two ways: as a work that employs new concepts and techniques in an effort to radically innovate the art form and secondly as a group or community active in employing these concepts and techniques.

surrounding “woman” is doubly categorized within the margins of music as “woman composer.”

Contemporary feminist discourse in musicology suggests that the roles given to women in music are being redefined. One of the first critical anthologies that concentrated on gendered performance and composition, Jane Bernstein’s *Women’s Voices across Musical Worlds*, uses feminist theory to generate ideas about the voice and the transference of authority of a musical work from composer to singer, giving women further compositional agency within their confined musical roles. In the third tableau of Act One of *Four Saints*, St. Teresa I and II, Stein writes, “Can she sing...Can women have wishes?” (Stein, *Four Saints*) In this excerpt, I feel that Stein saw the use of language as liberatory and prophetic of the dismantling of a patriarchal style of writing and composition within the theater.

Already a seasoned writer, Stein used her command of language and syntax to reinvent the libretto while simultaneously using the libretto to illustrate how many kinds of “Saints” it takes to make up a community of Saints. In Act One, Scene VII [*Dance of the Angels*], Stein uses a humorous dialogue between the Saints to illustrate the politics of community and inclusion. Stein uses repetition and “non-sensical” language to create the effect of a room full of people talking. The dialogue overlaps similar arguments so that a rhythmic pattern emerges, illuminating operative words and phrases Stein wanted to emphasize:

Saint Therese. There are there are there are saints saints in it.
 Saint Therese Saint Settlement Saint Ignatius Saint Lawrence Saint Pilar
 Saint Plan and Saint Cecilia.

Saint Cecilia. How many saints are there in it.

Saint Cecilia. There are as many saints as there are saints in it.

Saint Cecilia. How many saints are there in it.
Saint Lawrence Saint Celestine. There are saints in it Saint Celestine
 Saint Lawrence there are as many saints there are as many saints as there
 are as there are in it.
 ...
Saint Ignatius. More needily of which more anon.
Saint Ignatius. Of more which more which more.
Saint Ignatius Loyola. A saint to be met by and by by and by continue
 reading reading read read readily.
 Never to be lost again to-day.
 To-day to stay.
 ...
Saint Therese. Let it have a place
 ...
Saint Chavez. Select. Saints. All Saints. (Stein 597)

Here, Stein uses a cast of “saints” to expose questions of authority and inclusion within a community. The opera is a community portrait of 16th-century Spanish saints, some based on historical figures (Teresa of Avila and Ignatius of Loyola) but most of them fictitious (Oestreich 1.16). The saints ask questions concerning the inclusive/exclusive nature of who belongs to the community, and then there is a listing of the Saints. And finally, the excerpt suggests a contribution that has been lost and then regained.

Perhaps Stein’s contribution was to be “met by and by by and by continue reading read read...” and thus given meaning over a period of time, wherein it will require a “place” as a “Saint” among “Saints.” Stein used *Four Saints* to trouble the categories of opera by conceptualizing an inclusionary opera. Staged in 1934, there were no stars, no characters, and the lines made “no ordinary sense” (Watson, *Prepare for Saints: The Making of a Modern Opera*). However, as the first staged African-American opera, the art-community did not base the success of *Four Saints* on the music or the libretto, but rather on the infamous reputation of Stein who would bring an elitist avant-gardism and

“Cubism” to the American stage; Cubism, a French artistic movement from the early 20th century, went against natural structures in favor of the abstract.

Stein’s desire to innovate the libretto form resulted in a meditation on the act of experimental writing itself. Stein’s libretto is best illustrated in her essay, “Composition as Explanation.” In this essay, Stein attempts to explain her use of language and the label of difficulty that readers and critics attach to her work:

There is singularly nothing that makes a difference a difference in beginning and in the middle and in ending except that each generation has something different at which they are all looking. By this I mean so simply that anybody knows it that composition is the difference which makes each and all of them then different from other generations and this is what makes everything different otherwise they are all alike and everybody knows it because everybody says it (Stein 513).

The consideration of a work of art is contingent upon the cultural contexts and social norms of the time surrounding the work of art and its creator; as the philosopher Arthur Danto has argued, "what distinguishes an artwork from an ordinary object is the institutions that confer that status" (Rothstein 1). The institutions conferring Stein’s text inflated the reception because of her previous literary fame, but not always in a lasting and credible way as a woman involved in the composition of an opera.

This is relevant to the reception of both Stein and Ono because institutional reception presupposes that art generated outside the existing paradigm of art and authority is not credible art. Across generations of avant-garde artists, one thing remains consistent in their reception; the status quo within the avant-garde determines how a work is reviewed and whether or not it is readily accepted:

The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything. This makes the thing we are looking at very different and this makes what those who describe it make of it, it makes a composition, it confuses, it shows, it is, it looks, it likes it as it is, and this makes what is seen as it is seen (Stein 513).

Here, I understand Stein to be saying that patterns of meaning emerge from different styles and eras of composition. How "everybody" is seeing "the thing" in each generation is not the thing itself but the social context in which it is viewed. Because Stein was connected with the visual art world and Cubism for some years, it is understandable that some Cubist influence would surface in her writings to come.

Stein's intention to apply the concepts of Cubism to her writing resulted in a narrative departure from the way traditional opera and the libretto was composed. Stein's few devotees defended her renewal of American language, "while her detractors considered her work quoted verbatim a ready-made parody" (Watson 14). Consequently, the first public caricatures of Stein's work appeared in newspaper columns and in such books as *The Cubies' ABC* (1913). Her critics used this connection with Cubism to ridicule her: "I called the canvas Cow with Cud/And hunt it on the line/Altho'to me 'twas vague as mud/'Twas clear to Gertrude Stein." This suggests that Stein somehow possesses the ability to decode the avant-garde unnaturally and use it to further the obscurity of "meaning." Moreover, Stein biographer Brenda Wineapple, noted early on "critics enjoyed making fun of her since the armory show of 1913," adding that they were "ambivalent if not hostile." Subsequently, the scandalous chatter surrounding Stein's participation in *Four Saints* tinted the publicity with hysteria (Watson, *Prepare for Saints: The Making of a Modern Opera*). Stein herself became in some ways conflated with the non-sensical reception of the opera.

The initial reception of *Four Saints* focused on the reputation of Stein and her relationship with Thomson as a scandalous society event on the cutting edge of modernism rather than an innovation in opera. In a review of Steven Watson's Prepare

for *Saints*, Patrick Smith wrote of the energetic buzz surrounding the premiere of *Four Saints*:

World premieres of operas are remembered more for their fiascos than for their triumphs, and world premieres of operas that rarely have been performed since are even less remembered. Yet the exception to this rule -- probably the most important exception in American operatic history -- is the world premiere, in Hartford, Conn., on Feb. 8, 1934, of Virgil Thomson's "Four Saints in Three Acts," to an abstract libretto of Gertrude Stein. The event, at the Hartford Art Museum -- the Athenaeum -- brought forth the illuminati and cafe society (most of whom who had never been to Hartford, and some of whom who arrived on special trains), but the importance of the evening lay rather in the confluence of talented people involved in the opera... (Smith, C.02)

Likewise, the notion that this opera was not a "serious" opera carried over from this initial camp of reception to the only other opera Stein and Thomson would compose together, *The Mother of Us All*. It is possible that the reception surrounding *Four Saints* was influential to the reception surrounding *The Mother of Us All* and that Thomson began to feel the impact of Stein's reputation on the work itself. James R. Oestreich wrote in the New York Times that after a young critic writing a feature on *The Mother of Us All* asked Thomson about this characterization, Thomson replied:

'I am not too happy at seeing my score called whimsical,' ...'Also, I think the idea that Miss Stein and I are primarily wits is, if you will permit me, both antiquated and inaccurate. I should appreciate it if you could refer to 'The Mother of Us All' -- both the words and the music -- as a serious work on a serious theme.' (Oestreich 1.16)

The criticism that Thomson characterizes above is indicative of the stressful nature of the working relationship.

One of the most notable critics of the time, Leonard Bernstein, was also a composer, pianist and conductor. In 1949, he wrote a broad review of Stein's contribution to music while he was completing a new piece for the theater:

In the vast sea of critical material that has been written about Miss Stein in the last decades there are discernible two general currents of thought, both of which I feel

have carried our attitude toward her extraordinary work somewhat off the course of direct appraisal. Critics have usually divided themselves into the pious, who revere her every detached syllable, and the cynical, who write patronizing pieces in mock Steinese and consequently feel exempt from further analytical responsibility. (Bernstein BR4)

As Bernstein noted, there was a split in reception surrounding Stein. However, the reviews during Stein's lifetime predominantly marginalize her and praise her only sporadically. Bernstein admits that she was funny; however, the subtext reads that Stein was underappreciated as a visionary:

... She was very funny. Her random distribution of labels...has become a classic literary joke...And it takes a Stein to be able to musicalize words as successfully as she has...In all these degrees of meaning and non-meaning, of useful and useless repetition, of jokes and maxims, there runs the connecting stylistics quality that is Stein's: the childlike debarassment of words of their associations, the astonishing simplicity of her phraseology and the *musical* value of any succession of sounds that may occur to her. In the end, ...we return to our original feeling that their ultimate value lies in their influence upon other writers. (Bernstein BR4)

Bernstein's 1949 acceptance of Stein's libretto and overall contribution explains the kind of reception Stein encountered in her career. And because of Bernstein's career and reputation, this offers a certain amount of validation to Stein's ability to "musicalize" words.

In Stein's defense, feminist music scholar, Linda Dusman says, "[there is] value in speaking, and there is great value in remaining speechless. Likewise, the meaningfulness of some music may reside in the potency of its meaninglessness." (Dusman 144)

Dusman's "meaninglessness" in music is not exactly Stein's goal, but the syntactical techniques Stein used to dismantle the linear narrative were received as non-sensical rather than conceptual. The "meaninglessness" of Stein's text gave the audience the opportunity to create meaning from the composite of text, music and cast because there was no literal story that an opera audience could easily interpret. Consequently, there has

not been a significant amount of feminist reception history on *Four Saints* as a work by Stein.

Despite Stein's immense notoriety as a literary figure for 25 years before she met Virgil Thomson, her lack of experience in music framed her reception. In "Composition as Explanation," Stein establishes herself as a prophet to her own troublesome reception and as precursor to contemporary women artists denied agency. Here, Stein predicts the reception of her own work as "modern":

In the case of the arts it is very definite. Those who are creating the modern composition authentically are naturally only of importance when they are dead because by that time the modern composition having become past is classified and the description of it is classical. That is the reason why the creator of the new composition in the arts is an outlaw until he is a classic...Of course it is wonderfully beautiful, only when it is still a thing irritating annoying stimulating then all quality of beauty is denied to it... If every one were not so indolent they would realize that beauty is beauty even when it is irritating and stimulating not only when it is accepted and classic . . . (Stein 514)

Here, I read Stein as maintaining that any artist experimenting with unconventional methods of composition will encounter a certain amount of resistance and neglect before their work is legitimized; in fact, they only move from legitimized to important when they are dead. Stein's self-reflexive awareness here seems to indicate that she might not enter a "classic" status. Stein's initial reception was not only going to be considered "classic" art, but it would begin to paint Stein's image as frightening and "other."

Opera attendees and critics both created a composite of awe and fear in (specific) regards to Stein. Mabel Dodge Luhan, a wealthy salon hostess, thought Stein was creating something genius, but attached the label of fear to the masculine prototype of "genius" because Stein was a woman. Luhan stated, "It is almost frightening to come against reality in language in this way." A few other attendees were quoted, "But what is going to happen if we acquire a new species of opera in which the words of the poet do

not convey any thought?" (Tommasini 198) This composite of awe and fear can be read that Stein was to be feared in all realms; she could be feared as deviation from "woman" and from "composer." Women musicians have been rarely characterized as genius even if the language of "genius" is an undercurrent in the language of the criticism.

Stein's literary peers were no different in marginalizing her work and reputation. For example, T.S. Eliot did not characterize Stein as frighteningly abnormal, but rather primitively abnormal and thus we should be frightened. Eliot recognized the power of her writing and it frightened him:

It is not improving, it is not amusing, it is not interesting, it is not good for one's mind. But its rhythms have a peculiar hypnotic power not met with before. It has a kinship with the saxophone. If this is the future, then the future is, as it very likely is, of the barbarians. But this is the future in which we ought not to be interested. (Watson 20)

Eliot speaks to the ways in which conservative critics characterized Stein as primitive and barbaric. Stein's modern contemporaries did not have stake in her ideas and at times the only negotiator for Stein besides the publicity around her name was Virgil Thomson. Furthermore, the reference to the "saxophone" connects Stein to the rhythms of jazz, another "modern" art form invented in American by African-based rhythms from the folk and blues communities of African-Americans. Jazz was considered primitive, barbaric and frightening. And even though the modernist exoticizing of race was part of Stein's community, *Four Saints* is lumped in with the racially tinted rhetoric of "the future is of the barbarians" that Eliot espoused.

Even Virgil Thomson, her collaborator, wrote a letter that explained the troubling negotiation that went into producing *Four Saints* and how Stein's self-evaluation was an obstacle. Thomson wrote to Stein on June 9, 1933:

And dear Gertrude, if you knew the resistance I have encountered in connection with that text and overcome, the amount of reading it and singing it and praising it and commenting it I have done, the articles, the lectures, the private propaganda that has been necessary in Hartford and in New York to silence the opposition that thought it wasn't having any Gertrude Stein, you wouldn't talk to me about the commercial advantages of your name . . . (Watson 214)

Watson notes that “Stein’s literary reputation was jarringly out of scale with her self-evaluation: she believed, quite simply, that she possessed the most creative literary mind of the century” (Watson 14). It is possible then that Stein’s imprudent belief in her vision resulted in a negative backlash amongst her peers. Undeniably, there is a certain amount of ego involved in making any art. But in the case of women artists, ego can be a form of survival in the arts. Male artists receive institutional validation; women have to validate their own existence and right to make art on a continual basis.

Stein’s reception by Virgil Thomson and others was painted with the language of infantile nonsense and inadequacy. Thomson observed that for Stein “. . . an opera was a different story . . . She was not by nature what we would call musical” (Watson 41). Thomson added in Watson’s documentary on *Four Saints*, “For the most part you didn’t know what the words meant.” The consistent label of “obscure” language by Stein was felt by the cast more intimately, yet seemed to reflect the language of the critics. For example, Eva Justice a member of the cast said, “I enjoyed singing those crazy lyrics” while the rest of the cast simply described that the words “didn’t have to make sense—they were just beautiful words” (Watson, *Prepare for Saints: The Making of a Modern Opera*). Stein’s words were rhythmic, but not *musical*; beautiful, but without sound “sense.”

And this treatment by the initial camp of reception still resonates in contemporary characterizations of Stein. For example, Cheryl Faver, artistic director of the 11-year old

Gertrude Stein Repertory Theater states, “Gertrude Stein is still a name to know, even if you wouldn’t touch Tender Buttons with a 10-foot buttonhook . . . She’s one of those Hollywood Squares types of personalities . . .”(Wren 1). Again, Stein’s legacy of obscurity finds its way into tokenized ambiguity for the sake of fame rather than artistic legitimacy. Cynthia Wren summarizes the permanence of Stein’s image amongst her peers. “Whether one has actually read much, or even any of the writings tends to be irrelevant—a forbidding aura hovers around Stein’s very name.” Stein’s writing became overshadowed by the weight of her reputation. Richard Foreman, whose early career was heavily influenced by the Stein, said she was “Ruthless. Her heart had a kind of ruthlessness that usually is not paid homage to”(Wren 3). Characterized as deliberately obscure and ruthless, Stein’s initial reception of “hysteria” still shapes her ongoing reception.

Unlike the 19th century version of “hysteria,” the composite of ruthless, calculating and cold forges “crazy” and “out of control” into a new composite of “hysterical woman.” These women are simultaneously controlling, powerfully manipulative, “troubled” (in terms of their sexuality) and “hysterically” insane in the end. When men make brave innovations in art they are seen as courageous or “genius,” but when women make bold, experimental gestures in art they are seen as “unsound,” crazy or troubled. In addition to the many similar portrayals of powerful women, Stein and Ono contend to be this contemporary archetype. However, in contrast to fictional characters like Eleanor Prentiss Shaw or The Stepford Wives, Stein and Ono cannot literally be transformed or killed in the end; they must be discredited.

But even within the antagonistic portrait that critics, peers, and receptors painted of her, Stein had fans that defended her contributions within the avant-garde. Recent contributions to the revision of Stein's reception, such as Watson's *Prepare For Saints* documentary created a positive representation of Stein by bringing together all the critics of *Four Saints*, not just the "true critics" reception. Members of the cast affirmed that *Four Saints* "had the lyrics of liberation." It liberated the stereotype of the black performer and "took them off their knees and out of their overalls" (*Watson, Prepare for Saints: The Making of An Opera*). Carl Van Vechten, a novelist, critic and informal supporter of Stein, said in 1928 that "she is like yeast, the yeast that makes the bread." (Watson 14) For her fans, Stein's innovations in writing represented freedom and modernity for its liberatory nature.

Stein and Thomson's all African-American cast remains troublesome because it was born into a framework that exoticized race from the start. Even though it was Thomson's "own striking idea . . . roles not specifically meant for blacks," Stein had her own opinions on race and modern expression ("When . . ." C.02). Originally, Thomson wanted the "black voice," and before ever collaborating with Stein wrote, "The extraordinary thing to me, however, was their aptness to the language." In the 1920s, critics believed that broader cheekbones and a different facial structure gave birth to different vocal qualities. Thomson considered a "black voice" to be "notably articulate." (Watson 200) Thomson and Stein unconsciously participated in the institutionalized racism that patronizes race by tokenizing and fragmenting the talents of African-Americans as "exceptional," because they are "black" talents.

Even Carl Van Vechten was quoted as saying to Thomson in regards to the cast of *Four Saints*, “Think how many opera stars have blacked up to sing Amonasro and Aida. Why can’t my colored singers white up for *Four Saints*?” Thomson was quoted divided black actors into “objects” and “subjects” when he said, “Negroes objectify themselves very easily . . . They live on the surface of their consciousness” (Watson 202). The confining of African-American actors and singers compartmentalized race into the casting practices of the day. Stein and Thomson certainly inherited the institutionalized treatment of race from the era, objectifying and exoticizing the cast of *Four Saints*; they simultaneously presumed that the all African-American cast would lend a more spiritual, musical, and modernistic edge to the production.

Yet, Stein possessed a more “detached” attitude toward the depiction of black characters than Thomson. Stein wrote in 1927, “It is not because they are primitive but because they have a narrow but a very long civilization behind them...their sophistication is complete and so beautifully finished and it is the only one that can resist.” (Watson 202) And years later, in mid-production conversation with Thomson, Stein racialized the bodies of African-Americans:

I suppose they have good reasons for using Negro singers instead of white, there are certain obvious ones, but I do not care for the idea of showing the Negro bodies, it is too much what the English ‘modernistic’ novels call futuristic and do not accord with the words and music to my mind. (Watson 207)

Although Thomson and Stein used an all African-American cast, the controversial reception of *Four Saints* did not solely focus around race. Thomson and Stein’s sexuality were not absent from the reception and in fact played a key role in how Stein’s work was received by critics, peers and the press alike. The reception and this libretto are bound within the critical framework of race and Stein’s sexuality. Ono was not literally

“queered” in terms of her sexuality; however, she was figuratively queered in her reception by challenging the boundaries of women in popular music.

Although Thomson respected her work as an artist, he openly linked the “obscurity” of her words to the “obscurity” of a being a lesbian at the time. Thomson wrote, “The two things you never asked Gertrude, ever, were about her being a lesbian and what her writing meant.” (Watson 47) This is not to say that Thomson judged or rejected Stein’s sexuality, but rather respected and understood Stein’s privacy in regards to her work and her life.

The gendered labels assigned to women composers are often not based on their actual work, but rather on the prescribed roles and cultural images of “woman” that they continue to reform in their work. Through the use of repetition, rhythm and sound, Stein and Ono use ‘noise’ and experimental composition to create a space for music that is difficult to label ‘women’s music’. To this day, labels that support the strict binaries of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual continue to create and maintain barriers to interpreting and preserving the artistic contributions of those who challenge gender.

However, Stein was troubled by the focus of attention on her life rather than her work. Stein wrote “There is no sense in it because if it were not for my work they would not be interested in me so why should they not be more interested in my work than in me. That is one of the things one has to worry about in America” (Wren 4). Stein was pointing out that women have to be accounted for as women making art, rather than artists making art. For Ono and Stein, the artist-self is shaped through composition, through performance, on their own terms, and as women.

Stein's libretto negotiated compositional agency by dismantling the modernist and the post-modernist canon. And this is also what ties her to the avant-garde composers that succeeded her. There are many women composers that endured a similar reception. Yoko Ono is one of the successors to Stein's infamous legacy of being ill received in the avant-garde. Both women were consistently characterized as "frightening," but Ono was considered manipulative because her avant-gardism robbed Lennon of his pop-genius status.

Yet, despite a long list of contributions to conceptual art, film and music, Ono experienced the same marginalized treatment of her work by the same contemporary framework of criticism that is beginning to re-examine Stein. McClary positions Stein and Ono as similar in their reception as "other":

The much-loathed Yoko Ono is now coming into her own as an avant-garde artist rather than just the dragon lady who broke up the Beatles; and that weird opera project by Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, can finally be grasped as the fundamentally queer text it always was, long before we had words to label its deconstructive mischief ("Woman and Music . . ." 1285).

McClary positions Stein and Ono in their contemporary reception, suggesting that their receptions are not so different. Additionally, how images of Stein and Ono circulate and how they are articulated is crucial to how they were, and in Ono's case still are, received.

Conditionally Ono

Lennon benefited from Beatles' fame; however, that fame simultaneously positioned Ono as a secondary personality that served to disrupt Lennon's career, rather than "compliment" it. Musically, women have been historically expected to "perform" in ways that compliment others harmoniously. Between Ono's repetitions, violations of melody and cacophonous vocal delivery, she challenged conventional interpretations of women's composition. Ono encountered a significantly more odious reception because

she challenged the assumption that music is supposed to be an emotional and performative expression for a woman, rather than an artistic one.

How we interpret women composers and their work contributes to how these binaries and ultimatums are reinforced: sensual vs. tough, confessional vs. strong, sound vs. unsound. The same binaries that constrain women sexually constrain women musically. Over time, Ono's initiation into composition involved unlinking herself from the cultural celebrity of John Lennon. And despite her lifelong history in musical composition, professional piano and vocal training, she never received musical legitimacy or agency when she began composing popular music.

Ono and Stein's tenacity upon breaking into art and literature on their own shaped their subjectivity in regards to their transition to the world of music. Ono's artist-self was shaped largely by her early success in conceptual art. And Stein wrote, "the theater made me real outside of me" (Wren 6). This statement lends itself to all women in the arts who are forced to negotiate themselves as "women artists," before being "artists," especially in the prime of the creative progress. It gave women an identity outside of the identity that was given to them by simply being born women. Moreover, the connective tissue that links Ono to Stein is the labeling of their work as non-sensical and their syntactical usage of repetition and sound. Those who are looking at the image frame the reception; it is received as a personal affront to the comfortable definitions and clean categories of gender in relation to music and composition.

If anything, Ono's treatment was significantly harsher due to her association with the Beatles. A woman without a country, Ono straddled the unforgiving "high art" world of the avant-garde and fielded the witch hunt carried out by the pop-music masses who

made up Lennon's fan base. Her treatment by the men of the avant-garde was not much different, however her marriage to Lennon brought a wider-reaching aggression. Painted as a black widow, a "child of Hiroshima" the task of challenging these institutions would rest in applying the imaginative techniques of the avant-garde to her newfound celebrity within a pop audience (Ryan 1). Ono's reception was doubly aggressive because of her two-pronged celebrity; she was discredited in two worlds by trying to bridge them.

In an effort to separate himself from the constraint of the Beatles, Lennon drew from Ono's background in the avant-garde. Ono's various biographies prove that Ono was making a name for herself as a visual artist and experimental musician before her marriage to Lennon:

In 1967 she moved to the center of public controversy with her Film No. 4, Bottoms, in which 200 notable people appeared one at a time for ten seconds. Their bare bottoms filled the frame...In London, she played a concert with Ornette Coleman at the Royal Albert Hall—before she ever met John Lennon. (Wiener 4)

Contrary to popular belief, Ono's art suffered in some ways because of her association with Lennon. The first moment that put Ono directly in the spotlight as equal partners with Lennon was the beginning of Ono's negative reception. Upon her marriage to Lennon in March 1969, the couple spent their honeymoon in the Amsterdam Hilton to stage a bed-in for peace.

The newlyweds were eager to conduct interviews and give the media an alternative to the anti-war demonstrations that were characterizing Vietnam protesters as anti-patriotic terrorists. The anti-Ono image began gestating within the context of this protest with Lennon and the establishment press picked Ono apart, imprinting her as a negative influence on Lennon. During the bed-in for peace, one right-wing cartoonist, Al Capp, conducted an inflammatory interview in which he coined the insult, "Madame Nu." Capp

was trying to paint her as the Oriental witch of elitism so that Lennon would be provoked to break his peaceful demonstration on camera (McGrath, *John and Yoko's Year of Peace*).

From the beginning, Ono's negative reception as an artist was defined by the establishment press. And by this I mean the popular music media received as Ono as dangerous and "other"—the primary scapegoat for the transformation of Lennon. And Ono's contemporary reception still resonates with this scapegoating. "She has had a lifetime of upset and disputes, some venomous. The criticisms sting, such as Mick Jagger's recent accusation that she "cut him off from his friend . . ." (Ryan 3). Despite the time she put in as an artist and a composer, she still struggles with her infamy received as a vehicle for her art.

Ono's upbringing in Japan suggests she was interested in music from an early age. Her early desire to compose was met with her father's derision, "I don't want you to struggle in vain... Women may not be good creators of music, but they're good at interpreting music." (AIU: *A Yoko Ono Biography/intro*) As a trained pianist and vocalist, Ono studied the various techniques of composition in Eastern and Western classical music. Upon arrival in New York as a young woman, she studied music at Sarah Lawrence College and often held loft concerts in New York City as a young artist. After being blamed for breaking up the Beatles, Ono's musical endeavors made no attempt to conceal her avant-gardism. The various labels attached to her future endeavors would be a catalyst to further separate herself from the traditional Beatles' audience.

Even though Ono was active in the avant-garde music scene, the popular music scene knew nothing of her work, outside of negative referential comments in Lennon's

press. Yet the elements that led to the “hysterical” characterization in her reception carried over from the avant-garde. Early in her days she was dubbed as the “High Priestess of the Happening,’ throwing dried peas at the audience while whirling her long hair to provide ‘musical accompaniment” (AIU: *A Yoko Ono Biography*/3) Clearly, this would not qualify to the establishment press as Lennon-worthy musicianship.

However, interviews with Ono suggest that she and Lennon were early collaborators, although they did not write that many songs together (AIU: *Jody Denberg series: Yoko in 1992*). When Ono and Lennon would record together, Ono would initially experienced the sexism of the industry in regards to her own contributions:

Lennon would finish laying down his tracks and it was her turn . But the engineers would all suddenly have to go to the bathroom. Even Apple producer Phil Spector treated her this way. ‘He was the worst,’ Yoko said, ‘He would come back from the men’s room and say, like, ‘I just threw up,’ to let me know how he felt.’ (AIU: *Yoko Ono in the Soho News*).

Yoko’s three-fold reception as a woman, an Asian in the time of Vietnam and an experimental artist alienated her from the avant-garde and pop-music. Ono recalled how her reception changed tones from disdain of an experimental artist to international infamy:

. . . in those days I was an easy target and a scapegoat; they just wrote about me in a very unflattering way...but I think that the press carved the image. I’m sure all the DJs were saying, ‘Oh dear, that woman again’, but you get used to that and people get to think, ‘She’s just a punch bag’. I was the safest bet. And also it’s very interesting to make a woman into a kind of evil person who has strong evil powers, or something. It’s a dichotomy in a way in their minds—strength even. It’s a very interesting twist, and that’s what they loved about it.’ (AIU: *A Yoko Ono Biography*/6)

Women artists clearly receive a different perception on their careers as musicians.

In light of the “hysterical” label attached to women composers and compositional agency, Ono was being intimidated by the establishment press; she was, by this time, aware of her

own alienation and marginalized reception. Although, Ono had been involved in music and composition for sometime now, the height of critical attention fell on the double album *Plastic Ono Band* put out by Lennon and Ono, each contributing their own version.

Jody Denberg, a supportive and consistent interviewer of Ono, asked Ono in 1997, “What do people talk to you about in terms of your albums?” She replied, “Plastic Ono Band, surprisingly enough (AIU: *Jody Denberg series: Yoko in 1997*). A great departure from the “Give Peace A Chance” bed-in, Ono’s version of the record was a collage of sounds, screams, repetitions and vocal experimentations:

. . . it was very interesting because that area I felt was not explored at all, in a way. . . And when I was screaming and all that kind of thing I think that they—in fact, somebody commented that, this is too theatrical or dramatic. You know, that’s how it was perceived. Too animalistic. But we make those noises when we give birth to children. And so I was more interested in the kind of—the sound of turmoil, inner turmoil kind of thing. (AIU: *Jody Denberg series: Yoko in 1997*)

Lennon’s companion record was still primarily pop-oriented and somewhat reminiscent of his signature sound. The rhetoric surrounding Ono’s reception was dismissive and alarmist at the same time. But Ono’s use of feminist humor to accentuate this rhetoric was misinterpreted.

It is no wonder that Ono received a backlash toward her feminist stance; she was unapologetic about her ownership of these songs, their titles and their feminist impact. “With songs titled, “What A Bastard the World Is,” “She Gets Down On Her Knees,” “I Felt Like Smashing My Face in a Clear Glass Window,” “I’m a Witch,” or “Women like Catman,” Ono clearly knew she was going to be received with an “extreme” label and did this to illustrate the absence of a feminist voice and make a parody of her reception.” To this Ono says, “That’s something that women laugh at but I don’t think men would laugh,

you know (laughter). It's a funny thing." (AIU: *Jody Denberg Series: Yoko in 1992*) Ono clearly wanted to strike a chord with women and use her humor in the way that Stein used humor syntactically in her work.

Ono's recollection of the *Plastic Ono Band/Yoko Ono* reception is summed up this way: "The whole world hated me and my music" (AIU: *Yoko Ono Biography/intro*). Ono knew that she was triply marginalized from what was successful at the time; she was an experimental composer and an Asian woman that symbolized an invasion of popular music. Furthermore, Michael Bracewell wrote that Ono became, "a kind of psychic lightning-conductor for other people's hostility" (Grant 1). Once Lennon was assassinated, Ono's reception took a particularly hostile turn and everything she made became characterized as an act to capitalize on Lennon's death or a tasteless act of exploitation for her own self-promotion.

The combination of the music industry's commodification of artists and its infrastructure of masculinity painted Ono as a "corruptor" of true music, rather than a composer of music. Lennon's reception in regards to their collaborations was considered "John's Yoko problem" and the works themselves were "unlistenable mistakes." Lennon became tainted with Ono's infectious experimentalism. She caused his "true art," his "natural sound to be pitted against his "unnatural" sound as the product of "disordered minds." (Hasted 1) Avant-Garde in its purity aims to negate the commodification of artists, but in the past fifty years since Stein's era the media has learned to co-opt the rebelliousness of the avant-garde.

The reception of Ono's Plastic Ono Band record is one perspective from which to gauge her "hysterical reception." However, given the energetic fan base that surrounds

Ono's reception over the decades, within the culture of blogs and consumer websites, the everyday consumer holds as much cultural weight in shaping the image of "hysteria" as the "true critic." One of the largest consumer websites on which to evaluate and purchase music today, Amazon.com, offers an open forum for fans to critically review albums and artists. One reviewer wrote of Ono's first solo album:

Universally, Yoko's P.O.B. album was seen as an extreme affront against propriety and possibly civilization! Something so revolutionary should have been applauded by the free-thinking radicals, but they were not as free as they pretended to be...Originally released to almost universal disdain in 1970, critics now declare this album as laying the groundwork for the punk revolution of 1976." (*Yoko Ono/Plastic Ono Band*, June 24, 2000)

Positive in its tone, the "extreme" weight the reviewer puts into the review is not so much a critique of the text as it is of the cultural context surrounding the text. Using this forum to contextualize Ono to Lennon, one reviewer compared Lennon's version of *Plastic Ono Band* to its companion record by Ono:

But compare it to Yoko's masterful companion: nothing on Earth can possibly date this life-affirming torrent of mad eyed, bare toothed crying rage...She unfurls her voice like it was a great creature rising from the throat, so organic that it swamps the entire album in its presence and threatens to dissolve the music itself." (*Yoko Ono/Plastic Ono Band*, July 20, 2004)

The reviewer intends a positive reception, yet seems to reaffirm the "hysterical" image through an inherited script used to describe Ono for decades.

One might think that this reviewer is describing a horror film itself: "mad eyed, bare toothed crying rage," "a great creature," "it swamps" and "dissolves." Ono becomes so horrifically, relentlessly hysterical, she devours her own creation; she becomes a monster capable of eating her young.

And then of course, there are those who staunchly believe that Ono ripped Lennon from the bosom of greatness. Moreover, where Stein's "hysteria" was linked to the "non-

sensical,” Ono’s hysteria was rooted in the racist characterizations of the native, “primal” Dragon Lady image. Yoko wrote of her reception, “There’s relentlessness in my music which is precisely what people used to dislike—now, when a lot of energy has been lacking in recent music, maybe that relentlessness is welcome” (AIU, Gurney).

As a result of this relentlessness, Ono became a corruptor, a co-optation, a capitalist, linking Asian women, communism and patriotism to the racist images of the Vietnam war. Without even addressing the text critically, the intention is to create an image of inadequacy and disdain.

And in juxtaposing Ono’s modern reception against her initial receptors, a continual re-evaluation of Ono appears. Mainly this is because she is still alive and making art, which puts her in the headlines and forces critics and the media to draw upon thirty years of reception. The modern re-evaluation reinforces the stigma even if the article is intended as pro-Ono. The critic has to address the stigma in order to establish a context from which to review the new work. A journalist for *Soho News* opens his article:

I always hated Yoko Ono. I didn’t hate her for breaking up the Beatles. If indeed she did, because by that time I didn’t care anymore the 60s were finished and I was already a jazz snob. Besides, anyone who had the power to undermine the most popular band of all time must have had something going for her...Now in 1980, here was an even more palpable reason to distrust her. After having gotten John to trade in his guitar for an apron . . .” (AIU: *The Soho News*)

Ono must have had a lot going for her if the tension in her early work still resonates in the tension of her reception. Lennon trading in his “genius” for an apron clearly projects how Ono emasculated him, thus continues to emasculate his legacy by making art.

Another example from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* explains, “When it comes to Yoko Ono’s recorded music, a listener has to take the good with the bad. Ono’s songs

tend to be either high art or pure garbage.” Ono’s work continues to be categorized by extremity, polarized between the avant-garde and popular music which translates into “high art” (avant-gardism) and “pure garbage” (art by a woman). However, similar to Stein’s reception, Ono’s ego informed her this particular reception “Ono is once again saved by her best asset, an endless self-confidence that permits art so daring that even the missteps make for captivating listening.” (“Get Out . . .” 14) Equally, no matter what arena Ono is evaluated in, the image of inadequacy, illegitimacy and “other” is solidified in the tone of the reception. The question of legitimacy over time remains questionable in the ongoing reception of Stein and Ono, even in our desire to sanctify their rights as women composers.

How does the language of reception position “hysterical” woman as the central metaphor for Ono? Jody Denberg, a consistent interviewer of Ono over the years, inquires in his 2000 interview of the motivation behind the technique in Plastic Ono Band, “How did the primal scream therapy that you and John did with Dr. Janov affect John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band?” She replied, “Very much so. It is true and right to be called Primal Therapy or Primal Scream Album. Most of the songs were either written or inspired . . . when we were in L.A. going to the sessions, primal therapy sessions.” A woman composer open to exploring her psyche to find a new sound might be the single most obvious link to Ono’s “hysteria.” There were compositional and contextual reasons for the album’s use of ‘noise’ aside from the “hysterical” reading the press gives Ono.

Less obvious are the stories and characterizations of “hysteria” that surface in between the lines of her reception. A writer for the Independent London characterized Ono in 1998 as someone who is “not likely to model or host society parties—but she

might steal your children and exhibit them in a glass case.” (Ryan 2) And when John Lennon died, she spent some time at their Dakota property, which was characterized in the language of Grimm’s Ono-Tale:

Understandably, she was locked away in the towering Dakota mansion block while crowds below chanted ‘Woman’ until they were hoarse. ‘Woman’ was the song Lennon had written especially for her, and which was re-released posthumously by public demand and went to No. 1 on both sides of the Atlantic. It was destined to be part of the soundtrack for any Lennon mention of soundbite for evermore. Whether Yoko could bear it or not.” (Ryan 1)

Framed in this context, she is no longer the confident artist that is ill received; She is the embodiment of the “hysterically” doomed widow who is haunted and painted with morbidity (Lennon’s death). However, Ono transcended Lennon’s death with whom her art was forever linked by continuing to make music regardless of her reception.

Stein and Ono challenged the ritual ceremony of composition and created meaning by distorting the traditional distinctions of male/female and by confronting linear narratives with new approaches. Stein and Ono’s compositions provided a liberating opportunity for the transformation of assigned gender roles by going outside of the expected contributions of women in music. This transformation of options opened avenues for women to experiment with sound. And no one benefits more in this transformation than those who have been historically excluded from making art and receiving legitimized credit for their contributions.

Principally portrayed as women that have either lost their sense or their other half, Ono and Stein endured a similar reception as women writing in a time of war and as women making art. Chiefly, the institutions of war and art do not want “hysterical” women artists troubling the categories and forgetting their roles, inside or outside of music. The discourse of marginality surrounding “woman” is doubly categorized within

the margins of music as “woman composer.” By focusing on the popular discourse surrounding the ways Stein and Ono approached sound, this paper explores the gendering and conceptualizing of sound or “noise.” By examining Stein’s *Four Saints* and Ono’s *Ono/Plastic Ono Band*, the popular reception surrounding “meaning” in both works reinforces a consistent pattern of gendering two women working in music from two different eras. It poses questions of how the works themselves question language, sound and conventional interpretations of music by disunifying the avant-garde from the masculine.

Historically, women’s significance in music has been relegated to the roles of muse and performer; as central focal points in great works of musical composition, however, insignificant to the compositional process. Only recently have women’s voices in music become more subjective and less objective to the paradigm. Correspondingly, the representation of the “hysterical” woman composer emerges in this comparison because Stein and Ono’s reception reveals a pattern of consistent effort by the establishment press to label women composers as crazy, non-sensical and unsound. Hence, the divergence of sound versus unsound transforms artists back into women; the patterns in reception removes the contributions altogether and gauges the work of women artists as a gimmick.

Aligned in their “novice” as women composers, Stein and Ono were characterized as engaging in artifice and deceit, somehow “tricking” the music world into letting them in. Women’s compositional agency is a term I use to illustrate how women in music must contend with these obstacles before their art is considered valid; without it, women’s art is presumed as counterfeit, trickery, or enterprising for the sake of attention.

The press relayed the idea that somewhere underneath the fixture of their womanhood, lies stratagem that Stein and Ono used to deceive or surprise the music world.

The limited set of options given to women in music is possibly the source of Stein and Ono's original compositional style. The confidence that infuriated critics is simultaneously responsible for the widespread fascination with Stein and Ono's personalities; it allowed them to trouble categories and straddle multiple disciplines. Characterized as primal and naïve, Stein and Ono created compositions that were stripped free from narrative constraint; they used experimental approaches to text and sound to separate from what we expect words and music to mean. Behind each sound, rhythm and syllable is meaningful and mindful composition that was created by women artists on their own terms; the concept of discontinuing from the masculine in the avant-garde created a cultural impact upon women composers and feminist scholarship.

Music is neither language nor opposed to language; it can easily be dismissed as an unsound, invalid form of communication, a threat to any established order. Stein used the same poetic techniques in her libretto as she used in her other works. She used syntax as her instrument, using the natural rhythms of the words as music on the page. Like Stein, Ono's unexplained "noise" was never received as serious, successful composition because there was no element of submission in her work. Critics put Stein and Ono in the hysterical box because as women they were suspect for deviating from the status quo. Stein and Ono were self-contained muses within a limited set of options.

What linked these two artists together in my own research is the consistent question of legitimacy and artistry and how using the rhetoric of Stein and Ono's reception resonates with women artists on all levels, including myself. I found myself using the

rhetoric of their defense in everyday conversations about women artists and how the media treats them. At the root of this paper is what every woman artist wants, validation of her contributions and ideas.

It is a confusing time for women and a transformative time for women artists. More aware than ever of a lack of consciousness, increase in guilt, and internalization absorption of the masculine artist rhetoric, women artists are watching their contributions get elevated, distorted and co-opted by the media. Women musicians' contributions are negated because their media presentation fragments their work.

For example, if Britney Spears wanted to become an experimental composer in the coming years, she would have to spend twice the time it took to get famous as a sexual pop icon negating this image and legitimizing her work to "make up" for her previous image; which then would consistently reinforce the cycle of women's guilt in artistic elitism. What links Ono to Stein is the forced awareness of their legitimacy before it is even in question. In the prime of creative progress, Stein and Ono are forced to evaluate themselves and expend energy and time in negotiating their future as "women artists" versus simply being accepted as "artists."

It is not surprising then, that an emerging history of women composers and feminist music scholarship has proved an invaluable and empowering inspiration to contemporary women composers, as they see their struggles for compositional agency in the struggles of their predecessors.

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