A Pop Parade of American Fantasy: Staging National Identity in *The Mother of Us All*

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In her seminal study of the dramatic works of Gertrude Stein, *They Watch Me As They Watch This*, Jane Palatini Bowers argues that in her final libretto, *The Mother of Us All,* Stein:

> dramatizes the conflict between a female's desire for power and authority and her sexual and emotional need to merge with a male other. Susan B. Anthony, the heroine of the play, resisted her biological destiny—never marrying, never having children—much like Gertrude Stein herself. Instead of becoming a natural mother, Susan B. Anthony is the metaphorical mother of us all.[1]

Bowers' text-based support for these assertions is extremely compelling, and, if one were not studying the work from the perspective of performance, it might seem superfluous to attempt to augment Bowers' analysis in any way. But, as I began investigating the way that *The Mother of Us All* was staged by the Santa Fe Opera in 1976, I found that the performance text can be driven by issues very different from those that Bowers suggests fuel the written text.

While all written dramatic texts are affected at some level by the interpretation they receive from various artists and by the socio-cultural context in which they are produced as they metamorphose into performance texts, Stein's texts, I believe, are more radically altered by these forces than most. This is due, in large part, to the loose structures of the plays and librettos. Though *The Mother of Us All* is one of Stein's most conventional texts, containing named characters with well-known historical counterparts and a discernible historical setting, it is not driven by plot. It is instead a kaleidoscopic accumulation of verbal imagery—some lifted directly from actual speeches made by Anthony and her opponent in the text, Daniel Webster, and some of Stein's own poetic imagining. Such a structure is marked by gaps and inconsistencies; it is the task of the director and designer to fill some of these gaps (and occasionally produce others) so that the play or libretto can stand imaginatively incarnate on the stage.

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The filled textual gaps in *The Mother of Us All* provide ethnographic miniatures of culture at the time of production, simultaneously structured by current social and political concerns and structuring the ways audience members will engage with these issues when they reconfront them outside the theatre. In the Santa Fe Opera production the filled textual gaps are structured by, and simultaneously structure, perceptions of patriotic national identity.

***The Mother of Us All* on the page**

Before turning to the Santa Fe Opera's transformation of *The Mother of Us All* into a performance text, it is first necessary to review the distinguishing features of *The Mother of Us All* as a written text. Critics, like Jane Palatini Bowers, often note that this work, and the 1938 libretto *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights,* are much more formally conventional than Stein's earlier writings, those composed before she gained a large public following to whom she wanted to continue to appeal. I will discuss the ways that this last dramatic work of Stein's is a radical departure from her earlier work, but I will also demonstrate that several of Stein's earlier dramatic strategies reappear in the late libretto in modified form.

Stein began the process of writing *The Mother of Us All* in 1945 when she and Thomson received one of Columbia University's annual Ditson Fund commissions to create a new opera to be performed at the University's theatre. She would receive five hundred dollars for the work; he would receive a thousand—a sizable commission for 1945. Stein and Thomson agreed that the opera should have a nineteenth century setting, and then it was up to Stein to settle upon the precise subject, so long, Thomson said, as she did not attempt to write an opera about Abraham Lincoln. Stein contemplated treating the impeachment trial of Andrew Johnson, as seen through the eyes of journalist Georges Clemenceau, before she decided to write an opera about Susan B. Anthony and her struggle to win the vote for women.

Anthony was not the only historical figure that Stein chose to write into her opera. As Anthony's nemesis, Stein selected Daniel Webster, a senator from Massachusetts who spoke out against women's rights and who also opposed the Abolitionist cause. Other historical figures that Stein chose as characters were President Andrew Johnson; Anthony Comstock, a Christian moralist who attempted to censor literature; Thaddeus Stevens, an Abolitionist; President John Quincy Adams; President Ulysses S. Grant; actress Lillian Russell; and various friends of Stein's including Constance Fletcher, Donald Gallup, Joseph Barry (Jo the Loiterer) and Virgil Thomson (V.T.). There is also a character called G.S., but she is an invention of Thomson's and not Stein's. Stein died of cancer in 1946 before Thomson finished his score. Thomson took the liberty of adding the G.S. character as a companion for the V.T. character Stein had created (and at one time deleted when she had had a disagreement with Thomson) as a kind of master of ceremonies.

Critics are quite right in asserting that a cast of characters with well-known (or at least knowable, in the case of Stein's friends) historical counterparts is distinctly more conventional than Stein's early plays, such as *What Happened* and *A Circular Play, A Play in Circles*, in which there are absolutely no characters designated at all. At the same time, however, one must also note that these are hardly intimately rendered psychological portraits. Instead, these characters are more like bright, vivid flashes of quirky historical color. Further, the historical figures that these characters represent did not all live at the same time. For example, even though the lifetimes of Anthony and Webster overlap, their years in the public sphere were parts of different generations. Stein takes quite generous liberties with chronology in bringing her diverse cast of characters together. In this sense, the characters function like the words in Stein's earlier plays: torn from grammatical contexts and conventional usage, they take on new and different meanings. Ulysses S. Grant announces that "He knew that his name was not Eisenhower."[2] Meanwhile John Adams, the second U.S. president spends the entire opera trying to woo Stein's contemporary, Constance Fletcher. In bringing all the characters into a singular dramatic time, Stein crumples the trajectory of linear chronological time in a manner akin to her Cubist counterparts in the visual arts. Pieces of history, seen from unfamiliar angles, are juxtaposed with other decontextualized bits of historical color in order to call into question standard patriarchal notions of historical development. Such a strategy, in its clear parallels with collage, necessarily involves gaps and fissures rather than seamless linear organization. Stein leaves spaces in her text into which the reader can paste herself and her own historical moment as points of further comparison.

The fact that these characters have lines directly assigned to them is also a departure from Stein's early work where there is no division of lines since there are no characters. Stein even took some of the lines that she assigns to her characters from the pages of history. Portions of Anthony's lines come directly from her address to The Daughters of Temperance, her first public speech, given in 1849, while others allude to a speech she made to the Washington Convention of the National American Women's Suffrage Association, given in 1896.[3] Likewise, portions of Webster's speeches are taken directly from an 1830 debate with Senator Hayne from South Carolina.[4] Though line divisions are absent in her early compositions, Stein's appropriation of pre-existing material is a strategy that she used in these more abstract works. In the early plays, Stein inserted snippets of nursery rhymes, bits of jingles, clichéd phrases or other familiar sayings into her punning abstractions in order to play with the reader's ear, making the familiar unfamiliar and vice versa. This linguistic play was a way of encouraging the reader to abandon familiar modes of perception, inadequate to Stein's peculiar dramatic situations, and seek more adventurous ones. In the context of *The Mother of Us All* this technique seems to have become directed toward a more specific goal.

Stein uses Webster's actual political rhetoric to show the nonsense of his message. When the Webster character delivers a fragment of the historical Webster's actual speech lifted from the original context, "Mr. President I shall enter no encomium upon Massachusetts she need none. There she is behold and judge her for yourselves,"[5] his words seem only slightly more logical than the increasingly blind Constance Fletcher's musings, "I do and I do not declare that roses and wreaths, wreaths and roses around and around, blind as a bat, curled as a hat and a plume, be mine when I die."[6]

Anthony's lines, some of which also come directly from the words of the historical Anthony, seem to have a different purpose. In the crazy quilt that is the libretto, Anthony's words seem to be the most logical and are the center around which the themes of the work cohere. In a speech delivered in Act 2, Anthony says, "Ladies there is no neutral position for us to assume. If we say we love the cause and then sit down at our ease, surely does our action speak the lie."[7] Webster responds to Anthony with the completely nonsensical, "Coming and coming alone, no man is alone when he come, when comes when he is coming he is not alone and now ladies and gentlemen I have done, remember that remember me remember each one."[8] The lines surrounding her speech are little more than a jumble of sounds, but Anthony's words make profound sense. By placing Anthony's words and their attendant message in the midst of linguistic confusion, they stand out all the more strongly as the voice of reason.

The Mother of Us All also contains something verging on a plot: Anthony struggles and eventually fails during the course of her own lifetime to enfranchise women. After her death, the Anthony memorialized in statue form learns that women eventually attained her dream. The way Stein has Anthony get to know the obstacles in her path towards securing the vote for women is, however, much like the way she had her reader make acquaintance with a highly experimental play like *What Happened.* The reader knows the text only in pieces, as verbal and aural images float before her. It is then the reader's task to sift through these pieces, arriving at her own perceptions, rather than aimlessly following the trail of an author's predetermined and flowing narrative. Likewise, Anthony knows her predicament in flashes, as she watches what women sacrifice to marriage in the wedding of Indiana Elliot, as she sees John Adams doggedly court Constance Fletcher, as she observes the beautiful Lillian Russell parade around the stage, and as she talks to an African-American man, for whose rights Anthony once campaigned, about why he is willing to deny his wife the right to vote and keep it only for himself.

Though the play has characters, lines drawn from the pages of history, and even a semblance of plot, there are still many forms of provocative absence into which the reader must place her own experiences and perceptions if she wants to construct a coherent image of the text. The spaces Stein left her reader are more

sculpted, and with this shaping comes more direction from Stein about what to be thinking in regard to the issues of marriage, equality, and power. The reader is invited to imagine her own struggle for the right to create her life as she wants, to cast the deciding vote in her own destiny, political or theatrical, and to remember the people who both stood in her way and who supported her and sacrificed for her in her revolutionary campaign for self-determination.

***The Mother of Us All* at the Santa Fe Opera in 1976**

In his biography of Virgil Thomson, Anthony Tommasini notes that "the year of Thomson's eightieth birthday, 1976, also the American bicentennial, saw a flurry of productions of that most American of operas, *The Mother of Us All*."[9] Beyond simply feting Thomson, the 1976 productions, and the Santa Fe staging in particular, which Tommasini designated "the most prominent,"[10] were considered part of the celebration of the nation's 200th birthday. This choice of operas is not surprising if one focuses on Thomson's music, but if one concentrates on the words of Gertrude Stein's libretto, especially if one has been influenced by Bowers' interpretation of the text, these enterprises begin to look riddled with contradictions. One might hope that the Santa Fe Opera was in fact attempting to stage the complexities that imbued bicentennial celebrations—that a nation still reeling from the disasters of Watergate and Vietnam was at the very least cynical about what it could and ought to be celebrating in 1976—and discovered an opera that metaphorically embodied the cynical contradiction in the dissonance between its hyper-patriotic score and its feminist libretto. The visual portions of the performance text, however, force one to rethink this proposition. The Santa Fe Opera production, due in large measure to the visual elements of set and costume created by pop artist Robert Indiana, worked in tandem with Thomson's music to conceal the subversive potential of Stein's words.

In an analysis of the "invented traditions" described by historian Eric Hobsbawm, Loren Kruger states that they can be

> "mass produced" to generate public consent to the display of prestige, where prestige is the public face of social and political domination that effectively excludes mass representation, or they can be "mass-producing," offering a lightning rod for mass opposition to the state, by which social and political groups struggling for hegemony might garner prestige as a prelude to economic and political power.[11]

I will argue that the invented tradition of *The Mother of Us All* as a celebratory bicentennial text is an analog of the mass-produced event, aiming to bind viewers into patriotic compliance and acceptance of national fictions that seek to maintain

the status quo, while Stein's libretto itself has, if one views it in the vein suggested by Bowers, the potential to be mass-producing in its depiction of Susan B. Anthony and its meditations on gender differences and the worth of marriage. The feminist revolutionary potential in *The Mother of Us All* was, however, largely subsumed by the patriotic marches and ditties that composed the score and the pop iconography that peopled and set the stage in Santa Fe in 1976.

Before looking at the aural and visual details that constructed the invented tradition on the Santa Fe stage, I would first like to explore the tensions that colored bicentennial celebrations in general. Bicentennial celebrations were, quite simply, an occasion for constructing cultural memory. Marita Sturken explains that cultural memory "is a means through which definitions of the nation and Americanness are simultaneously established, questioned, and refigured"[12] and that

> All memories are created in tandem with forgetting; to remember everything would amount to being overwhelmed by memory. Forgetting is a necessary component in the construction of memory. Yet the forgetting of the past in a culture is often highly organized and strategic.[13]

According to cultural historian John Bodnar, the key issue that organizers of bicentennial celebrations were trying to help the nation forget was the very possibility of revolutionary activity:

> Basically and implicitly ARBA [American Revolution Bicentennial Administration] treated the American Revolution as the end of history. That is to say that it was not celebrated because it had demonstrated that people could engage in radical social and political change whenever they so desired, but it was commemorated because it had produced a nation and a political system that deserved citizen support in the past, present, and future. John Warner [the president of the ARBA] said as much in a letter to the *New York Times* in 1976 when he asserted that America would "honor the great men who forged and then steered a nation so strong and so flexible that one revolution has proved enough."[14]

Bodnar goes on to suggest that John Warner's ARBA had a precise strategy for facilitating this large-scale process of forgetting: it sought to deflate the revolutionary zeal buoying ethnic, racial, or gender-based factions by actively seeking out the participation of members of these groups in controlled forms.

Lyn Spillman reads the actions of the ARBA in a similar fashion. She found

that the ARBA encouraged diverse participation and that ultimately "many groups were active in the celebrations: they created rituals and reflections on national identity which responded to or were attached to the framework created by central groups."[15]

The Santa Fe Opera's effort to celebrate the bicentennial with *The Mother of Us All* fits the model described by Spillman. The Santa Fe Opera joined in the national celebration by staging the "most American of operas." They jubilantly proclaimed in a press release, "Happy Birthday, America! The Santa Fe Opera's Bi-Centennial salute will be the production of *The Mother of Us All*." The press release goes on to promise a "star-spangled production" and boasted the production's "all American cast." British conductor Raymond Leppard had, at the time of the production, recently emigrated to the United States. He was quoted in another press release as saying, "I like America enough to come and live here. . . . My decision to emigrate was a contributory reason for doing *The Mother of Us All*," suggesting that the opera has the power to reinforce feelings of natural(ized) Americanness. The only major contributor to the construction of the performance text who did not join in the flag waving was British director Peter Wood. In his "Autochronology," Robert Indiana quotes Wood as saying, "Were it not for us you wouldn't be celebrating anything."[16] Not surprisingly, Wood's quip was left out of the Santa Fe Opera's promotional materials.

The themes and ideas in Stein's libretto both are and are not ideologically congruent with the ideals of the bicentennial celebration. The nineteenth century setting is one of the aspects that blends easily within the parameters of the event. In his program notes for the Santa Fe Opera production, Thomson explains why he was taken with the period and why, when he was approached by Douglas Moore of Columbia University to write an opera, he was drawn to the nineteenth century and felt compelled to persuade Stein of the value of the undertaking. He said the nineteenth century was

> a time rare in history, when great issues were debated in great language. . . . Historical changes of the utmost gravity were argued in noble prose by Webster, Clay, and Calhoun in the Senate, by Beecher and by Emerson in the pulpit, by Douglas and Lincoln on the political platform. These issues, burning issues after the Missouri Compromise of 1820, dealt with political, economic, racial and sexual equality. And the changes advocated were embodied in the Constitution, all except woman suffrage, by 1870. In fifty years the United States ceased to be an eighteenth-century country and became a twentieth-century one.[17]

Thomson's comments suggest that the nineteenth century was the period in which ideas of civic enfranchisement were expanded significantly in the United States—that the freedoms that century afforded were something to celebrate in conjunction with the colonists' freedom from Great Britain.

As an advocate of voting freedom for both women and African Americans, Susan B. Anthony, the opera's central character, might seem to be the perfect figure on whose shoulders to place the burden of representing America patriotism as the defender of individual liberty. In fact Anthony seems to bear great resemblance to the notion of effigy as described by Joseph Roach. In *Cities of the Dead*, he writes that effigy, when used as a verb, "means to evoke an absence, to body something forth, especially something from a distant past. . . . It fills by surrogation a vacancy created by the absence of an original."[18] Though there is no single "authentic" American patriot on whom to pin the psychological needs of a country damaged by war and scandal in 1976, Anthony, as depicted in the opera, was nevertheless drafted for the task. But as Roach notes of such surrogations, "The fit cannot be exact. The intended substitute either cannot fulfill expectations, creating a deficit, or actually exceeds them, creating a surplus."[19] An interesting historical fact not mentioned in the libretto, and a way that Anthony exceeds the ideological needs of the kind of patriotism promoted by celebration organizers in 1976, is the fact that she and four other women disrupted the centennial celebration in Philadelphia. After the *Declaration of Independence* was read, the women delivered a copy of a *Declaration of Rights for Women* to the vice-president, scattered copies of the *Declaration* in the aisles, and then read it aloud to the crowd.[20] Ironically this was the very sort of citizen participation the ARBA was hoping to avoid in 1976. This obscure bit of history may well have been something remembered by audience members as Karen De Crow, President of NOW, reread this same speech only a month earlier at a protest/celebration in Philadelphia.

Another way that the Anthony of Stein's text exceeds the nation's (as defined by the more conservative element of the ARBA) needs for patriotism in 1976 is in her position on marriage. In her analysis of *Mother*, Bowers notes that Stein's Anthony was much more radically opposed to men and marriage than the historical Anthony. The historical Anthony believed that the answer to women's freedom could be found in the vote; Stein believed that the vote was not a sufficient guarantee of women's civic and social liberties and put this sentiment into the mouth of her character.

The duty of the effigy, the role it is intended to fill in the social fabric in the context of the 1976 production, is very different from the conflation Bowers makes between Stein and Anthony in her reading of the play's central theme. Instead of seeing Anthony as a surrogate for patriotism, Bowers positioned her as a kind of double or dramatic surrogate of Stein, as both women forsook biological motherhood for the expanded "productivity" of civil and artistic liberties. Yet again one sees

how differently the issues in the play read in the context of a specific sociocultural moment attached to production than they do in the artificially historically neutral space of most literary criticism.

Thomson's music, written after Stein's libretto and ostensibly for the purpose of supporting the libretto, actually serves to widen the breach between what Stein's words seem to mean on the page and what they come to represent in the context of performance. Thomson says of his score:

> The music of *The Mother Of Us All* is an evocation of nineteenth-century America, its gospel hymns and cocky marches, its sentimental ballads, waltzes, darnfool ditties, and intoned sermons. . . . It is a memory book, a souvenir of all those sounds and kinds of tunes that were once the music of rural America and that are still the basic idiom of our country, the oldest vernacular that is still remembered and used.[21]

Though the found quality of popular songs and hymns aligns nicely with Stein's borrowing of actual historical speeches of Anthony and Webster, Thomson's invocation of the vernacular and his claim that the nostalgic tunes he used in composing the score are "the basic idiom of the country" and therefore are the basic idiom of the people, calls to mind Homi Bhabha's comments in *Nation and Narration.* He says that "the people" are

> a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference where the claim to be representative provokes a crisis within the process of signification and discursive address. We then have a contested cultural territory where the people must be thought in a double-time; the people are the historical "objects" of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or the constituted historical origin or event; the people are also the "subjects" of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious living principle of the people as that continual process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process. The scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into signs of a national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects. In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative.[22]

In Bhabha's account, the people and their stories exist in the complicated time of a static moment shored up by past historical events and an ever-unfolding present being re-invented through the constant gathering of stories. In this formulation the people both come into being through the nation and its stories and pre-date the nation and its stories. The daily artifacts of life, including the aural artifacts of life such as song, rhythm and sound that are appropriated by Thomson, are implicated in this temporal duplicity. Thomson attempts to use vernacular sound that he deems emblematic of the nation to mark out the space of the already existing ideal nation and then create, through the performance of these sounds, the nation in the shape of the bucolic, patriotic fantasy. The sounds and their cumbersome symbolic baggage both pre-exist the people, luring them into the promises of the nation, and are a product of the people, created by them to forge the promise of the nation.

The coerciveness of folk music and patriotic tunes in drawing people into a circle of identification of national unity is, I think, running contrary to what seems to be the agenda of the libretto as discernible on the page. Returning once again to Bowers' explication of its central theme, she suggested that Stein "dramatizes the conflict between a female's desire for power and authority and her sexual and emotional need to merge with a male other."[23] Thomson's music, on the other hand, resolves any conflict the individual might feel about merging with the needs of the nation by suggesting he was always already part of that nation through his identification with and production of vernacular sound.

The strategy described by Bhabha and translated into a musical context by Thomson is then converted into the visual context by Indiana and his pop-art designs. The gaps created by the tensions between Stein's text and Thomson's were largely filled by Indiana's painting style, with which Thomson's music is more ideologically aligned. Indiana said, "I've known Virgil's work most of my life . . . but it was in 1964 that I realized that every one of my paintings dealt with a theme that was related to Virgil Thomson's music."[24]

The theme that Indiana and Thomson share is a kind of folk-inspired Americanness. Like Thomson, and Pop artists in general, Indiana appropriates the "scraps, patches, and rags" of everyday American consumer life. His early "herms," reminiscent of the ancient Greek burial totems called *hermes*, were made from discarded rafters and painted with the Gothic and Roman stencils he found left behind outside and inside his loft on Coenties Slip. The signs that he saw in the neighborhood as well as those seen during a childhood spent traveling the highways of the Midwest also were a major influence. Indiana, in fact, refers to himself "an American Painter of Signs" and has aspired to be "A People's Painter." His flat, bright colors, sharp geometric forms, and reliance on numbers and words of no more than five letters attest to the appropriateness of his self-proclamations.

A key argument in the criticism of Pop is whether, in borrowing images from

consumer culture and techniques from billboard and sign painting as well as other forms of advertising, Pop is critiquing American consumer values or applauding them.[25] In June 1976 and January 1977 when he was interviewed by Donald Goodall, Indiana charted a progression in his work and attitude related to Pop's critical stance in his famous *American Dream* series (1960-3):

> The first two or three dreams I would say were cynical. I was really being very critical of certain aspects of the American experience. "Dream" was used in an ironic sense. Then, as they progressed, they lost that irony. . . . As the dreams continue via the autobiographical series, negative aspects have pretty well disappeared. They really are all celebrations.[26]

Later in the course of this same interview, Indiana seemed to grow even less ambivalent about the America represented in his work. He said that his "mature output" could be predicted from a childhood crayon sketch of 1936 because it embodied the "Three C's,": "commemorative, celebratory, and colorful."[27]

These same "Three C's" also characterize Indiana's vibrant set and costume designs for the Santa Fe Opera. The designs were highly commemorative, but not of revolutionary zeal. Instead the flat cartoon-like set pieces relied heavily on ultra-American symbology such as eagles, stars and stripes, and architecture reminiscent of the nation's capital or on images of rural bliss like horse-drawn wagons and honeysuckle-covered gazebos. Indiana seemed set on helping the nation remember both its pageantry and simplicity, but not its revolutionary beginnings.

One aspect of American culture that, like pop art in general, Indiana seemed to be celebrating, was consumerism. An aspect of Indiana's design that made this clear was the highlighting of the automobile. As fireworks burst open the New Mexico night sky at the top of the show, a vintage Model T pulled onto the stage, driven by the G. S. character. The mode of Gertrude's grand entrance was added by Indiana to the scenario and references a major motif in Pop art and in American consumer culture.

Indiana's designs were also extremely colorful. Red, white and blue drenched the set and costumes, punctuated by searing oranges, screaming yellows, and saccharine pinks. Stars, stripes, and plaids broke up the fields of matte color. These bright, highly saturated colors are typical of Pop art—a movement that borrowed its hues both from street signs and cartoon strips. The flatness and lack of gradation in the colors helped remove the designs, and with them the characters, from the realm of the realistic. Rather than being imaged as verisimilar historical portraits, the figures gained the iconic quality of comic book heroes. This quality both raised the figures to the status of the mythic, a great aid in creating a national narrative, and made the more mundane sociological issues like marriage, gender

equality, and civil rights that Stein was foregrounding seem out of place in the stage picture.

In the end, it was the concept of director Peter Wood that unified Thomson's music with Indiana's visual images in a way that thoroughly overwhelmed what seemed to be the concerns of the libretto on the page. A press release issued by the Santa Fe Opera said of Wood, "His staging concept of the opera which he feels is a stream of consciousness process is a dramatized parade."[28] The concept was not lost on *New York Times* reviewer Peter G. Davis who referred to Indiana's set pieces as pageant "floats" and also noted that "Peter Wood's direction kept the stage pictures in constant motion" a comment suggestive of a parade as Joseph Roach describes it. He writes that in a parade

> participants literally succeed themselves before the eyes of the spectators. As the sound of one band dies, another arrives to lift the spirits of the auditors. Generations of marchers seem to arise and pass away. Because it is an additive form, passing by a point of review in succession, its ending is always an anti-climax, a provocation, and an opening.[29]

The concept of the parade, characterized by Roach as a form that suggests the perpetual regeneration of its participants, recalls Bhabha's comments about the performative, repetitive component of the people and the nation as constituted by narration. I would also suggest the parade's marriage of Indiana's pop imagery with Thomson's patriotic music embodies the other half of Bhabha's equation. This particular version of the parade was also "continuist" and "accumulative" in its invocation and perpetuation of highly nostalgic (yet carefully selected) cultural forms to celebrate the birth of the nation.

Conclusion

Stein's loosely structured libretto, *The Mother of Us All*, left room for her reader to fill the gaps in the text with the stuff of her own choosing—she offered her reader the opportunity to construct a plan of resistance to the social domination of women in tandem with Susan B. Anthony's battle. In the case of the 1976 Santa Fe Opera production however, Stein's plan was thoroughly subverted by the relentless parade of the patriotic score and scenography that celebrated instead the perpetuation of the fiction of a unified nation. The American Bicentennial celebration and its attendant issues were not discrete from the production, but instead seemed to shape what was on the stage, filling the spaces in Stein's text. And since the production became a part of the national celebration, the production's visual and aural imagery shaped the nature and message of the larger celebration as well. Further, this production clearly demonstrates that even the richest critical reading

of the written work of Gertrude Stein cannot anticipate the wildly different range of meanings that become available to audience members given the opportunity to experience her work in the context of a specific theatrical and socio-cultural performance.

Notes

1. Jane Palatini Bowers, *They Watch Me as They Watch This: Gertrude Stein's Metadrama*, (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 1991) 109.

2. Gertrude Stein, *The Mother of Us All, Last Operas and Plays* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1993) 56.

3. Bowers 108,110.

4. 114.

5. Stein 58.

6. 56.

7. 70.

8. 70.

9. Anthony Tommasini, *Virgil Thomson: Composer on the Aisle* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1997) 518.

10. 518.

11. Loren Kruger, *The National Stage: Theatre and Cultural Legitimation in England, France, and America* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1992) 4.

12. Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic,and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: California UP, 1997) 13.

13. 7.

14. John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration,and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton UP. 1991) 234.

15. Lyn Spillman, *Nation and Commemoration: Creating National Identities in the United States and Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 95-6.

16. Robert Indiana, *Robert Indiana* (Austin: Texas UP, 1977) 54.

17. Program 47.

18. Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead* (New York: Columbia UP, 1996) 18.

19. 2.

20. Spillman 46, Bodnar 237.

21. Program 47.

22. Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation,"in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990) 297.

23. Bowers 109.

24. Press release, 8/3/76 4.

25. For details of this argument, see Christin J. Mamiya's *Pop Art and Consumer Culture:*

American Supermarket (Austin: Texas UP, 1992).

26. Donald B. Goodall, *Robert Indiana* (Austin: Texas UP, 1977) 27.
27. 33.
28. Press release, 8/3/76 3.
29. Peter G. Davis, "Opera: Mother of the Mesas." *NYT* 8/13/76 285.