Small Places, Operatic Issues: Opera and Its Peripheral Worlds

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By

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To Marija Kotnik (1931–2017),
an exceptional woman,
who lived her invisible life
with consistent dignity.

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PREFACE

The idea for this book was born from an instant inspiration but all the same put me on a longer track to complete and elevate the following five case studies to this final monographic stage.

For the first case study presenting the Bayreuth example (from 1748), I have to express my gratitude to those who helped me, whether in researching the relevant literature, directing me to adequate sources, or in transcribing and translating the original paragraphs that enrich the selected examples: Dr. Josef Focht, Professor of Musical Instruments at the University of Leipzig; Dr. Ruth Müller Lindenberg, Professor of Music at the University of Music, Drama, and Media in Hannover; Prof. Dragana Antonijević from the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, who invited me to publish the first version of the text in their anthropological journal; and Ms. Lucija Lorger Hriberšek and Mr. Graham Clarke for editing and proofreading.

For the second case study exploring the Ljubljana example (from 1887), the major part of the sources and ideas is based on the analysis developed in the chapter entitled "Straticifirano občinstvo" ["Stratified Audience"] of my recent monograph *Operno občinstvo v Ljubljani* [*Opera Audiences in Ljubljana*] (2012) published by the Annales University Press, but due to certain shortcomings in collecting and interpreting some ambiguous archival materials are significantly corrected and improved here. I especially thank Mr. Niko Hudelja, a specialist in historical German from the Department of German Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, who helped me in translating and transcribing some archival documents; Ms. Maša Gustinčič for the translation of some parts of the text from Slovenian into English; and Mr. Graham Clarke for final editing and proofreading.

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For the fourth case study investigating the Mantua example (from 1999), I owe much to the positive energies of Italian colleagues who helped me to collect interesting literature and materials: Ms. Alessandra Moreschi, the author of the book *Il Teatro Sociale di Mantova*; Ms. Francesca Malucelli from the *Ufficio stampa del Teatro Sociale di Mantova*; and Ms. Karolyn Close for editing and proofreading.

For the fifth case study discussing the Belgrade example (from 2005) I am grateful to Prof. Dragana Antonijević for her reading of one of the earlier versions of the text; Ms. Aleksandra Delić and Prof. Danijela Velimirović for our pleasant exchanges about the contemporary Belgrade opera and theatre scene; Prof. Tadej Praprotnik from the Department of Media Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska, for many interesting discussions on the useful theory contributing to explaining Madlena Zepter's unique opera patronage; and Ms. Karolyn Close and Ms. Tiina Randviir for editing and proofreading.

Three case studies from this book were published earlier in three peer-reviewed, open-access scholarly journals, and I thank their editors and publishers for both the previous publication and permission to include them here: *Etnoantropološki problemi* [*Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology*], published by the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology at the University of Belgrade, for the revised use of the first case study which appeared there as a scientific article under the title "Opera as Social Showcase: Rituals of 'Magic Mirrors' at the Margravial Opera House in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Bayreuth" (2016, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 19–45); *Italian Sociological Review,* published by the University of Verona, for the article published under the title "Opera as Social Status: The Private *Teatro Sociale* as a Reproduced Disposition to Mantua's Cultural Habitus" (2017, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 21–62), re-appearing here as the fourth case study; and *Trames—Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, published by the Estonian Academy of Sciences and the University of Tartu, for publication of the edited article under the title "Opera as Social Manifest: Madlena Zepter's Private Opera House and Theatre as a Corporate Gift to the Serbian Nation" (2016, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 229–71), republished here as the fifth case study. The case studies nos. two (bearing the working title "Opera as Social Distinction: Creating and Communicating Differences through

Possessing and Fighting for Theatre Boxes in Nineteenth-Century Ljubljana") and three (with the working title "Opera as Social Conflict: Imagining Czech Nationhood and Negotiating Ethnic Boundaries through Slavic Escamillo at the Post-German Opera House of Brno") are here first published in this form.

Nevertheless, I take full responsibility for all errors, misunderstandings, and shortcomings.

INTRODUCTION

The inspiration for writing this book stems from reading the well-known anthropological monograph *Small Places, Large Issues* by Norwegian social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, who used the title of his work to introduce anthropology as a discipline, which "asks large questions, while at the same time it draws its most important insights from small places" (2001, 2). This meaningful and enlightening statement led me to ask myself what useful lesson a self-made opera researcher can draw from such a definition or standpoint. This account, written merely from an outsider position, is the result of that lesson. It is a lesson that helps support the view that one isn't forced to resort to the hegemonic opera capitals of the world just to better understand the social dimensions of the opera world. The opera periphery has in fact produced and is still producing extremely powerful meanings and messages, as we show in this monograph, to facilitate the understanding of different social worlds where the opera takes place. Opera is still too often perceived as a social phenomenon endemically bound to the "premier capital city," "cultural centre," "grand social milieu," "metropolitan locality," "cosmopolitan site," "urban mecca" or "big place." However, this work is largely based on the idea suggesting that peripheral opera worlds, inferior opera destinations, less established or non-dominant opera traditions, less prestigious opera practices, and academically less situated opera topics can provide a fruitful operatic terrain with regards to how it is possible to think about opera on the periphery. This is done with a five-stop academic tour to five different operatic places. Let us see what kind of challenges we face in these places:

- First stop: imagine that you are living during the middle of the eighteenth century in the small Franconian town of Bayreuth, where the lifestyle is closely related to the activities of the reigning couple, Margrave Frederick and his wife Wilhelmina, the older sister of the mighty king of Prussia, Frederick the Great. If you think that your princely ruler is a mere ornament of the monarchy, pragmatically installed in Franconia by the Prussian court and the Hohenzollern dynasty in order to strengthen their territorial pretensions and political affiliations, you would, even as a subject to your ruler, probably do her wrong. The Prussian

princess in the Franconian Margravial court in fact proved to be a remarkable woman. She was a talented musician, composer, and librettist, and an avid patron of art and Enlightenment ideas, a political visionary who wanted to turn the provincial Bayreuth into a cultural and intellectual centre of Europe. How did she manage to achieve this? She built a magnificent opera house which was open to monarchical adherents of the old regime as well as their critical societal antipodes, who were incisive enlightenment thinkers with Voltaire at the helm. The Bayreuth Margravine made certain that her opera house was not only a place of unforgettable aristocratic parties to make future generations wish they'd lived in her time and near her court, but also a powerful political instrument that portrayed enlightened humanism to the entire European courtly nobility as both necessary and harmless. This was the woman who forced her brother and king to reflect upon his society as his regime was in dire need of change. She used opera in the remote Franconian town in an effort to achieve far-reaching political objectives and social change in the entire European continent.

- Second stop: you find yourself in late nineteenth-century Ljubljana and you yearn for social success and recognition in the local community. Although you quickly discover that you are dealing with the completely provincial mentality of the distant Duchy of Carniola, located in the southwest of the Habsburg monarchy, you would, while attempting to enter high society, also quickly see that this peripheral town has its own elite protocols and ground rules. So where would you look for such a promising social podium that would help you enter the Carniolan society? Since you are a cultured middle-class parvenu, you are well aware that the right place to show off your newly-found bourgeois formation is the *Ständisches Theater* opera house [Slov. *Stanovsko gledališče*] or the *Estates Theatre*, later known as *Landestheater* [Slov. *Deželno gledališče*] or the *Provincial Theatre*, situated to the southeast of Congress Square [Slov. Kongresni trg, Ger. Kongressplatz]. In your laudable ambition to become someone, or publicly show that you already are someone, you stumble upon a rather complicated problem. As you are a representative of the new industrious social forces, and above all of Slovenian descent in a city where German culture has ruled for centuries, it is more or less clear to you that your economic successes and newly-found material assets will reach their full

value in Carniola only after you appear on the common social podium with the rest of the players. Their ancestors had their influence, power, and success, and experienced their social ascent not only decades but centuries ahead of you. The opera box is an example of such a podium where you can most efficiently transform your economic and material capital into cultural, social, and most importantly symbolic capital, which is why you strive to own such a box and be seen in one. In your quest to obtain this consecrated place of specific social distinction, you have to not only use your numerous diplomatic skills, publicly risk your political position, or even marry into a proper family, but also perfect the protocols and rituals of the social differentiation imposed by the existence of the highly codified box system in the Estates/Provincial Theatre.

- Third stop: It is 1920 and you visit the capital of Moravia where cultural life is governed by the strict rules of ethnic segregation between Germans and Czechs. Both have separate institutions and separate places of socialisation in the city. Despite the cautious self-differentiation and self-classification, the two have something essential in common: the cultural needs they want to express in the central temple of musical muses in Brno. Because you are a curious traveller you would be very interested to see one of the opera performances in the former German city opera theatre, renamed *Divadlo na Hradbách* or the *Theatre on the Wall.* During your stay in Brno a famous opera is performed which had sealed the fate of French composer Bizet less than 50 years ago as the immortal icon of French and global opera. You also have to admit that *Carmen* is most certainly a piece that helped you decide which opera performance you should visit in Brno. Even though you aren't exactly a connoisseur of opera, even you have heard that there would be a guest appearance by a Russian baritone called Georges Baklanoff. You are lucky you live in a time when opera news appears on the front pages and serves as fodder for gossip among the people in the streets and squares. News that you could hear a live performance of a famous singer inevitably makes you feel as if you were taken to Brno by some angel or fairy. What you actually witness at the performance, or rather what happens to the performance, gives you something of a shock, despite your knowledge of the situation in post-war Europe. As a lover of culture, theatre, and especially the opera, you are still unwilling to understand why

the Czechs so angrily interrupt the performance which the famous Russian Escamillo of Latvian descent is touring. Now, almost one hundred years after those stirring events, is it the right time to finally understand why?

- Fourth stop: try to picture yourself as the heir to a famous aristocratic family in Mantua on a late evening in the twentieth century. This city has indeed changed more than you could possibly imagine, but you know full well that despite many social, political, and economic changes it has retained some of that old patina. You have consistently tried to be a descendant of that patina, even in a time when the city was allegedly dominated by the republic of Rome, and when the rules of the game were determined by the Mantua regional government and the city administration, who pretended that they were the guardians of public interest even where they didn't have complete proprietary powers. Nonetheless, you rarely wander into the *Teatro Sociale*, a historic temple of musical *delizie* in the city, because classical music and opera are not of real interest to you, despite the fact that your famous ancestors helped, by virtue of their own resources, to construct the building almost two hundred years ago. This is strongly rooted in your consciousness and you are also fully aware that there is a box waiting for you at the theatre. The opera house, admittedly old and in need of renovation, is still in part your private property. Even though the city authorities have tried to convince you to share your inherited opera privilege with them, for which you expect that the state, province, and city would pitch in their fair share to thoroughly renovate the building, you can't help feeling that such arguments are forcing you to finally feel like a parasite whose old social privileges are no longer in accordance with the standards of modern society. What would you do? Would you fight for your inherited privileges in the city or would you rather withdraw and give the space and time to the people who devalued and tarnished them?

- Fifth stop: try to envision a situation where you live in the twenty-first century and you are really very wealthy. What would you do with your resources? Where would you invest? How would you spend your money? What would you try to make of yourself so you wouldn't have the greedy and heartless aftertaste of a neoliberal capitalist? If you don't have any ideas at this point then you should absolutely go to the Serbian capital, where you can familiarise yourself with the unusual operatic project of the

rich philanthropist and a great sponsor of arts and sciences Madlena Zepter. She founded her private opera house in 1997 in Zemun, near Belgrade, and in 2005 ceremoniously opened the Madlenianum Opera and Theatre. Many would be baffled by this idea, and even if you are an opera enthusiast you have to admit that such a plan sounds fairly anachronistic. Apparently not to Madlena Zepter, however, whose reputation seriously challenges our idea of an opera patroness *par excellence* in the twenty-first century. Can an opera house be perceived as a gift to the people? You shouldn't be surprised if the analysis of the reasons why someone would build their own opera and support it financially completely on their own, and this at a time when it seems that opera patronage, at least in Europe, is more or less a distant echo of past centuries, if not an almost extinct cultural ambition, led to the point where you yourself need to realise that, in spite of the social antagonism surrounding the life and work of Zepter, this Serbian patroness set up her sovereign place of opera on the outskirts of Belgrade and elevated it on a pedestal of a very personalised cosmopolitan cultural manifest.

The complex historical play of relationships between a metropolis and its province, periphery, hinterland, or outskirts, tips in favour of the latter only on rare occasions. Our case studies are an eloquent example of this: in the middle of the eighteenth century, Bayreuth was diplomatically torn between two disputed reigns—Berlin and Vienna. Ljubljana in the nineteenth century showed visible cultural influences from the two previous centuries when the city was more or less divided between the cosmopolitan Venice and authoritarian Vienna; Brno at the end of the First World War became something of a buffer zone between Prague and the German Vienna and Munich; Mantua at the end of the twentieth century struggled to find a balance between the political program of neighbouring Rome and the bureaucratic agendas of distant Brussels; and Belgrade at the beginning of the twenty-first century seemed to still be fatally torn between West and East Europe. Considering the mediatory, or rather pseudo-mediatory, structural ambivalence of these five places is key to understanding the mechanics of producing the social purpose and social meaning of the relationship between the metropolis and the province, where the cultural rhythms are in accordance with the intense political, economic, and social dynamics of centrifugal and centripetal forces. The former, as a rule, portray small towns as provinces, and the latter can bring them closer to the metropolis.

Dictionary definitions most often connect the expression "metropolis" to the concept of a capital, but this does not mean that a metropolis is necessarily a capital. The metropolis in this context represents a coefficient that makes a metropolis a capital in relation to other cities in the region or the country according to certain cultural, economic, demographic, etc. functions. Etymologically speaking, the word "metropolis" is derived from the ancient Greek expression *metropolis*, literally meaning "mother of city," and pertains to the relationship between cities and their colonies. Residents of the *polis* that moved to the colonies of city states were called *en apoikia*, meaning "far from home town," which in turn led to a characterisation of their home as "mother of city," i.e. metropolis. The first instructive etymological preposition is that the expression itself carries a strong connotation of a maximum spatial dislocation and political inequality, which in turn defines the relationship between cities, the country, and its territories. The other preposition, however, points to an urban production of the city, which is determined in regards to its social purpose, social meaning, and social value by the great concentration of political, economic, and cultural power. In today's common usage the expression *metropolis* is mostly used in the counterpoint relationship towards the province in the context of the peripheral. The idea of the capital city therefore appeals to the central and referential status as opposed to the province, which is supposedly "marginal," "less developed," "dependent," etc. Additionally, a recent volume on the capital city and its hinterlands has broadly demonstrated that the idea that a city could be perceived as a true metropolis basically evolved during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Peter Clark and Bernard Lepetit (1996a, 1–25) suggest that there was "no single metropolitan *genus*" for the capital city. While cities such as Paris and London, both dynamic and influential from ancient times, had existed in such a capacity since the Middle Ages, a number of other capital cities, such as Madrid, Vienna, and Berlin, were new expressions of royal power and therefore somewhat new creations or played such roles in a discontinuous fashion, and others like Budapest, Edinburgh, Dublin, or Naples served as "colonial capitals" or offshoots of state empires in the early eighteenth century. Almost all shared rapid population growth and heavy immigration. Economically, they were boosted by the growth of the court and state bureaucracies, the influx of great landowners, and the multiplication of luxury industries and service trades. They became powerful transmitters of international cultural values and fashions, whether in dress, speech, architecture, material goods, leisure, or cultural practice. They played a vital role in the transformation of early modern society, and their impact on regional, national, and overseas hinterlands was immense, influencing

demographic, economic, and social structures and development (Clark and Lepetit 1996a). William Weber adds that, arguably, "the capital city did not take on its modern authority as a cosmopolitan center until the eighteenth century. In 1700, neither London nor Paris was a cultural center anything the like of what it had become by 1800" (2007, 164). However, one city that earlier could compete for the status of a metropolis was probably Venice. Yet, from the rise of the Venetian Republic the notion of the metropolis is associated with cultural authority of this lagoon city along the northwest-Adriatic Sea which is able to define the social organisation of the world "as a whole." Historians Asa Briggs and Peter Burke write that in the fifteenth century more books were printed in Venice than in any other capital city in Europe. The Venetian book industry had an entirely capitalist organisation with merchants and printers whose economic interests were greater than their interest in actual books. They looked beyond Europe, as the city of Venice did more generally. The production of books in sixteenth-century Venice might be described as multicultural as well as polyglot. The distinctive Venetian contribution to the development of intellectual culture was associated with the city's tradition of tolerance for other cultures and religions, the practical live-and-let-live attitude of its citizens, the sophisticated differentiation of culture, and the steadily built political system (2002, 56–8). If the status of a metropolis, as the cultural authority in the domain of the intellectual culture of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries belonged to Venice, it was then overtaken by Paris towards the middle of the sixteenth century. In short, the metropolis serves as a reference point that sets the social standard, which is the example to be followed by other cities and its peripheries. In its sociological and historical sense it is a specific lifeform with a differentiated habitus of culture and society specifically determined by the high level of autonomy, sovereignty, and openness in producing social purposes, meanings, and concepts. Nonetheless, just as every periphery has its unique elite and non-elite character, the metropolis is desired by everybody. These regional and local "metropolises," that were basically cultural centres functioning as the hinterlands of real metropolises, became the engines of social development in their respective regional or local environments. Yet such a status consequently brought primacy over production and control of social purposes, meanings, and concepts in a given narrow or more general environment.

An opera culture of peripheries and small places was and still is often related, perceived, organised, and imagined through the categories of provincialism or peripheral cultural deficit. Compared to the great, superior cultural places and territories, the small places are usually described as provincial with a specifically intensive inclination to marginalism,

mediocritism, under-developmentalism, localism, obscurantism, and the like. As the province can be described as having a specific "lifestyle" and *esprit* that strongly influences the political, cultural, and social life of a small place (Amery 1966, 1), the peripheral provincialism was and remains mostly about the social transformation of mental paradigms through the glass of local-minded optics. Ezra Pound, in his 1917 essay "Provincialism the Enemy" (first published in *The New Age*, July 12, 1917), defines provincialism as a phenomenon consisting of two components: first, an ignorance of the manners, customs, and nature of other peoples, that is people living outside one's own village, parish, or nation; and second, a desire to control the acts of other people and coerce others into uniformity (Pound 1973, 159, 163). He goes even further by claiming that "provincialism is more than an ignorance, it is ignorance plus a lust after uniformity" (160). A few decades later, James Potts, similar to Pound, defines provincialism as, "a lack of knowledge concerning affairs outside our immediate circle." According to him, provincialism can best be described as a synonymous term of ignorance conserved in space and time: "There are two kinds of provincialism. First, there is physical or material provincialism which is ignorance of the physical world. Second, and far more important, there is spiritual provincialism. This category of ignorance includes many things, but it is primarily a lack of knowledge concerning intangible things. It is ignorance or narrowmindedness concerning the ultimate scheme of things … It is also ignorance of things which no longer exist, an ignorance of the past, a provincialism in time" (Potts 1953, 334). The term "provincialism" thus describes a sort of ideological matrix or mental framework in which the social life, social space, and time of a particular community are imagined entirely and fundamentally through the local optics and the local-minded *forma mentis* (Kotnik 2016a, 272).

Opera has established the various types of relationship between itself and the social worlds, the metropolitan as well as the peripheral, in which and for which it has been created. Throughout history, opera has in a way measured the geographical, social, cultural, and symbolic distances, proximities, and interrelationships between cosmopolitan metropolises and their peripheries, between the centralism of dominant cultural centres and the localism of a local life in a particular provincial society. Opera's institutions, agendas, programs, repertoires, and ideologies therefore came to be perceived as a reliable barometer of the social development, intellectual standards, cultural sensibility, refinement, sophistication, cultural authority, and urbanity of a particular place, city, region, or country.

In the seventeenth century, opera communicated the grandeur of certain powerful places by taking the form of court entertainment, which

legitimised the prestige of private noble palaces of north Italian cities, duchies, kingdoms, republics, and states. These "opera-defined cities" such as Florence, Milan, Bologna, Venice, and Rome, which mainly belonged to the old metropolitan city-states, were about to take on a regional role between the capital cities and their hinterlands rather than a real cosmopolitan role embracing the larger international community. In 1700, opera life was diffused widely among a large number of courts and cities. Even though opera quickly spread across the European continent and was introduced to many towns, it remained closed within princely residences and court theatres with the exception of Venice. Even when the opera productions of small companies toured different larger and smaller cities, opera remained an episodic and occasional affair with isolated performances at the periphery, usually not freely accessible to the local population. In terms of opera's geographical extension, peripheral places owed much to what was in the interest of their metropolitan capitals. For instance, Lucca was acquainted early with opera through its public theatre built in the mid-seventeenth century when the Florentine and other court theatres of the great Tuscan noble palaces were operating in the city; Ljubljana was likely introduced to opera in the 1660s due to the single stop of a Venetian touring opera troupe on their way to Vienna; the Borromean Islands, with the palace-installed *sala di musica* at Isola Bella on Lake Maggiore in 1660s and 1670s due to the close connection of the Borromeo family with Milan's Lombard aristocracy; Innsbruck from the early 1650s until 1665 with quite regular seasons, likely due to the fact that it was located on the "Tyrolean line" in which Italian opera troupes and musical theatre companies travelled to Germany and other Northern cultural centres; smaller German courts in Weissenfels, Brunswick, Wolfenbüttel, Nuremberg, Stuttgart, Durlach, Torgau, and Halle and many others experienced opera between the 1620s and 1650s. Opera performances in this period, however, were private, and one could be admitted only as a guest of a princely patron, a member of the court, or by special invitation.

In the eighteenth century, by taking an image of princely ceremonies and royal spectacles, opera legitimised the absolutist courts of, for example, Paris, London, Milan, Naples, Turin, Vienna, Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Prague, Dresden, and Saint Petersburg. At the same time, opera culture successfully spread to the periphery. As Franco Piperno's research demonstrates, this was not always or everywhere due to the supposedly free-market character of the eighteenth-century opera industry, but because the diffusion of musical theatre and opera culture to the provinces was often stimulated by the state governments as well. For instance, in the Italian peninsula the spread of eighteenth-century Italian

opera from major metropolises and political centres to very peripheral cities and small places of their states was just another way to keep their subjects at the periphery more easily under control from the distant capital city. In order to lend the allure of a wealthy and advanced urban centre to a peripheral commercial town, an opera house and regular opera seasons needed to be established. The first pattern by which the periphery became "operatically" marked was based on fair opera seasons. Namely, from smaller commercial cities their administrative, political, and cultural metropolises benefited through connection with local trade fairs, which included fair opera seasons designed to increase the town's importance in the eyes of the resident population, to stimulate commerce for the metropolis' political and economic benefit, and to attract visitors from "abroad." Such a pattern fits the cases of Livorno, a commercial harbour of increasing importance in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany for the benefit of Florence, Reggio Emilia, the commercial city of the Duchy of Modena, and Senigallia, a flourishing commercial centre on the Adriatic coast belonging to the Papal States, with the nearby theatre in Fano. The second, less commercial pattern through which metropolises encouraged and supported operatic activities in the periphery was connected with holiday towns which included summer opera seasons. Holiday towns were usually small localities in the country or by the sea, near the villas where the urban aristocracy spent their summer holidays. In this case, small places like San Giovanni in Persiceto near Bologna, Piazzola near Padua, Carpi near Modena, Casalmaggiore near Milan, Lugo near Ravenna, and Fojanno in Valdichiana near Florence were culturally elevated by almost regular operatic seasons during the second half of the eighteenth century (2007, 140–3). Historian William Weber takes as his starting point the cosmopolitan character of the operatic enterprise at the end of the eighteenth century, a perspective which reveals the competition among leading world cities for the status of cultural capital city. In the decades around 1800, as Weber demonstrates, the presence of a flourishing opera season was the marker of a truly cosmopolitan metropolis, identified as such a season was with world cities like Venice, Vienna, Paris, and London. Weber indicates that London and Paris took on a high cultural authority that they had not previously held in the seventeenth century. Opera in these two cities became a strong cultural symbol displaying a new kind of cosmopolitanism and consequently a new authority for the capital cities of Europe. The competition between different capital cities for cultural pre-eminence over placement in a newly arising hierarchy of cosmopolitan influence put opera production in the foreground, particularly in London and Paris which had taken on a cultural authority that no cities had possessed before. In the late

eighteenth century these two places become the arbiters of culture, taste, and social practice for the West as a whole (2007, 160–80). In comparison to these two premier operatic capital cities, even Vienna, Berlin, Madrid, or St. Petersburg looked like the metropolises taking on a more regional or national, rather than a true cosmopolitan, operatic role. The powerful European metropolises and their states exported opera to the New World as well. There, in this vast new southern hemispheric periphery, opera began to dominate the colonies' cultural and musical lives. The Spanish colonisers imported opera to Lima as early as 1701, which was the earliest New World opera experience, followed in the 1710s by opera events in Mexico City. Even the oceanic island of Mauritius got its first opera performance in 1790, which was the beginning of cultural efforts that led to the opening of the opera house in 1822 in the capital of Port-Louis under British rule. On this occasion, however, since there was no company from a far distant European capital like Paris or London, a local amateur company presented the first operas to the island's audience.

While Paris and London as pre-eminent capital cities have remained the focal points of cosmopolitan European operatic life to the present day, in the middle of the nineteenth century there occurred some fundamental changes that made other cultural metropolises and capital cities such as Vienna, Berlin, and others follow the path on which opera stood at the centre of the leading cultural authority. Thus, in the nineteenth century, by taking the shape of national opera houses along the Danube, the Rhine, the Elbe, the Seine, the Po, and the Sava rivers, opera began not only to legitimise the decay of previous empires (the Austro-Hungarian and Prussian in particular) and the rise of the new nation-states, but to lend a new cultural credibility to smaller places. National or regional opera houses built in these new nation-states were something that brought their capital cities closer to previous imperial metropolises. During the half century before the First World War, Paris remained the single most influential node within the world opera network and *une vraie capitale du monde*.[1] As a rule, composers and librettists succeeded when their works penetrated the stages of top metropolitan opera theatres. Accordingly, there is no need to stress that the works first produced in the leading operatic metropolises, like Venice, Vienna, London, Berlin, Milan, Munich, Dresden, and Paris in particular, had a rather high probability of being performed elsewhere in the periphery, while the opposite was not true. Such a pattern of the relationship

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[1] Paris had the longest history of being a major centre of population and political authority, and significantly longer than other major European capital cities like London, Madrid, or even papal Rome. See Jacquart (1996, 105–18) and Charle and Roche (2002).

between artists and centres was already fully recognised in the previous century. For instance, the operas of Haydn, mostly composed for the princely opera house at the Eszterháza court in Eisenstadt, were only rarely given in larger centres, and consequently were little known in his own time or indeed for long thereafter, and they have exerted no influence. Because of their wealth, Paris and, almost equally, London and New York were in the last decades of the nineteenth century great magnets for composers, singers, and other kinds of opera professions. That is probably why many artists working in less-metropolitan places often had to be content with second-rate working conditions.

In the twentieth century, by taking the corporative magnificence of the Metropolitan Opera in New York,[2] the Vienna State Opera, the Milanese *La Scala*, the Covent Garden in London, the Parisian *Opéras* Garnier and Bastille, the Berlin opera theatres, the Sydney Opera House, and the *Teatro Colón* in Buenos Aires, opera legitimated the power of up-to-date, superior opera scenes where singers and conductors are waiting in line to step on these operatic stages as this is probably the most certain or the best possible way they can become successful and renowned. One could indeed speak of how the top opera houses today not only lead the opera industry and challenge postmodern trends in the opera business, but more or less also indirectly "control" the opera periphery or the rest.

Value dichotomies were, for the last century and a half at least, known and heavily ingrained in our imaginations and representations. When it comes to deciding from which position we intend to judge such sets of antagonistic social phenomena and cultural practices we need to keep in mind that while the middle creates, the hinterland mimics; the capital dictates the pace, the province responds; the centre comes to the fore, the periphery tries to follow; cultural goods and practices from large places are more often treated as "representative," "high," "elite," "well-established," "elevated," "credible," "referential," "canonical," "national," "sophisticated," "cosmopolitan," "prestige," "professional," "serious," "developed," "original," "progressive," "differentiated," "plural," "aesthetic," "good," "high-brow," and "open-minded," while culture from small places is more likely than not labelled as "non-representative," "low," "trivial," "mimetic," "lascivious," "dilettante," "amateurish," "marginal," "provincial," "non-referential," "monolithic," "uniform," "trashy," "less-developed," "local," "remote," "regressive," "low-brow," "less-situated," "problematic," "frivolous,"

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[2] On the operatic authority of the Met Opera through the Big Apple's metropolis, which became in the twentieth century the leading arbiter of culture, taste, and trend, see Peter Conrad's chapter "The Met and the Metropolis" in *A Song of Love and Death: The Meaning of Opera* (1996, 246–58).

"bad," "isolated," "closed," and "narrow-minded." These dichotomies have likely been rooted in wider social constellations established in early modern Europe and further reproduced and upgraded in the European society of the late eighteenth century and particularly the nineteenth century, and many have remained in their entirely rudimentary and barely modified form ever since. Some of these distinctions were never static, historically constant, and clear, but discontinued, historically variable and, above all, often contested and negotiated. Most ideas and imaginings about these antagonistically nourished distinctions were and are a result of complex political, economic, and cultural confrontations about their social values that are not only deeply imprinted in our current metropolitan as well as peripheral cultures, and also go far back to the period before the conceptual creation of the clear delimitation between metropolitan places and their peripheries.

In many scholarly branches of opera studies, the social authority of the "metropolis" or "cultural centre" functioned and still functions as an academic standard in defining the scope of opera's enterprise. The opera scenes from metropolitan cities project a referential point of view, command deep respect, and form the core of insights perpetuated in opera studies. Larger cultural places and their stronger operatic traditions are usually the central source or material for explaining the opera world, and its past and present. In this manner, smaller operatic places have almost no chance to compete equally or pertinently with the great opera scenes of the past and today. Even if composers or librettists created or collected crucial inspiration for their works in their originating geographical and cultural peripheries, it was usually the centre which made their works successful, important, referential, and truly visible. Cultural meccas are still the primary focus of the majority of opera research. Many books on opera are written in a hegemonic manner that exaggeratedly centre on particular metropolitan opera scenes and predominating cultural milieus as arbiters bringing the entire opera world reasonably together. The academic focus on metropolis-oriented opera research has not only had a prominent position in opera scholarship but has also excluded, marginalised, and, as a matter of fact, provincialized some aspects, problems, traditions, places, or entire territories. The Western, particularly Euro-centric, perspective, combined with academic imperialism and the concept of the cultural authority of large cultural, intellectual, musical, and operatic communities, relegated the study of some European or other cultural and opera peripheries to the rank of regional or local operatic issues with little or even no relevance to the global picture. Thus, opera studies of the centre(s) that disregarded and still disregard the peripheries even today remain in a way truncated or incomplete. This situation is obviously related to the fact that in many

places, such as Eastern European post-socialist societies, the investigation of opera is far from being at the same level as the contemporary cosmopolitan Western efforts, despite the fact that the East and West in Europe were never so strictly isolated and separated from each other as to make the transfer of influences and intellectual interaction between the two impossible. It has only been recently that some peripheral opera scenes have entered the picture. The reasons for this academic arrear and subsequent intellectual imbalance are related to the political and socioeconomic variety and difference between the Eastern and Western part of the European continent, and to different levels of the development of cultural, mental, and symbolic worlds between metropolises and provinces. If some cultural, intellectual, musical, and operatic places were, in view of their international fame and transnational importance, recognised by the global academic canon, the culture, including music and opera of certain smaller places, is barely mentioned. Another reason for the inferior position of small opera scenes in the global academic canon must be sought in the concept of the writing of opera practised in those peripheral areas. Positivistic epistemology and a provincial mentality, both very often inspired by other ideological impulses, such as nationalism, organicism, autochthonism, and essentialism, constituted the motor of reflection on opera. In smaller places in which able scholars were few and far between, and in which the systematic and analytical foundations of opera research were lacking so that everything has mostly depended on individual reflexive efforts, the results were and are expectedly modest.[3] The cultural and academic turns that took place most influentially in leading intellectual milieus and highly developed cultural capital cities unfortunately had and have a perhaps less crucial impact on the intellectual situation in provincial worlds and peripheral societies.

Opera's ability to be taken as a highly valued social phenomenon in every society in which it was presented, be it small or great, metropolitan or peripheral, cosmopolitan or provincial, and culturally superior or inferior, enabled opera to communicate or maintain a relationship with the elites and the masses, the courts and the crowds, the rulers and the citizens, and the public and the audiences. Opera often served all these antagonistic social agents at the same time. Throughout its history, opera has brought together individuals and interest groups that were drawn from different social fields, cultural backgrounds, ethnic origins, and national identifications, and has represented a place for enacting the individual's attachment to the collective, and even more has provided the fantasy of the "imagined

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[3] On the kind of impact the intellectual periphery can have on opera scholarship see Kotnik's *Opera as Anthropology* (2016a, particularly 41–3).

community" (Anderson 1991). Opera's universally recognised form of sociality has, throughout the centuries, enjoyed the privileged status it still enjoys today. Opera was and remains best nourished in cosmopolitan urban metropolises and big cultural centres, where numerous examples from the past showing opera's cultural prominence in being taken as a showcase of social interest and conflict, a place of various social agents, or a symbol of multiple identifications and social positionings. Such examples can easily be found in cultural meccas and operatic centres around the globe. But it is also possible to observe "opera's social powers" (Kotnik 2015, 185–201) at work from less-centralistic, non-centralistic, or even less-metropolitan perspectives. This work therefore challenges a specific academic deficit in the field of interdisciplinary opera studies by demonstrating five selected examples, otherwise taken from various places and time periods that have something meaningful in common; namely, they represent an "opera periphery," revealing it quite concomitantly at its best and worse forms, and at its highest and lowest values.

The book thus delivers five original case studies, each revealing a specific example of the social life of opera in a peripheral world. The Bayreuth example (with the date of 1748 as its milestone, which is when the opera house was opened), for instance, reveals the opera world of one of the most important female princely intellectuals of the eighteenth century through an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach, by which the insights of cultural history, anthropology of ritual, and opera studies come together in an analytical narrative showing the extraordinary efforts of a wise woman worth reflecting on in our time. Further, the Ljubljana example (with the orientating year 1887, which is when the opera house was destroyed by fire) enters the social world of the theatre box system by employing the conceptual framework from the sociology of culture, the history of the opera box, and communication studies in order to discover how theatre box holders contributed to creating social distinctions, cultivating cultural differences, and communicating symbolic boundaries in provincial society. The Brno example (with the concretised year 1920, which is when nationalistic operatic conflicts between the Germans and the Czechs reached a peak) explicates the social delicacies of the political use of the municipal opera house through which the two dominant ethnic groups negotiated cultural differences, ethnic boundaries, and social conflicts, and the theoretical inspection is delivered mostly by the use of the anthropological perspectives of nation, nationalism, ethnicity, and boundary. The Mantua example (with the problematised events in 1999, when disputes between private owners of the theatre and public municipal bodies culminated in the Italian media) reflects the idiosyncrasies and positioning of collectivised

social actors who try, paradoxically, to legitimise the anachronistic private status of the city opera theatre on the one hand, but are inclined to mask it by the discourses of public purpose and public interest on the other. The analysis is carried out on the basis of crucial findings from the sociology of status, habitus, disposition, distinction, and reproduction. Finally, the Belgrade example (with the establishing year 2005, when the Madlenianum Opera and Theatre was opened) demonstrates the social and cultural facets of postmodern opera patronage through a very special lifetime story of a particular Serbian female entrepreneur by incorporating the fields of patronage studies, gift theory, the anthropology of gastarbeiters, and the sociology of the elite.

The first case study proposes a ritualistic approach to opera in the historical case of the mid-eighteenth-century Margravial Opera House in Franconian Bayreuth to argue that court opera can be understood as a social showcase variety. In this view, court opera is a specific form of communication through which opera established the various types of relationships between itself and the social worlds in which and for which it was created. By referring to the operatic rituals under the leadership and sponsorship of Wilhelmina of Bayreuth and her husband Frederick, it is established how Bayreuth's ruling couple used opera for several social and political purposes. As both genre and institution, the Margravial opera production is interpreted by the analytical models of anthropologists of ritual and theatre, such as Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, Maurice Bloch, Stanley Tambiah, and Catherine Bell, employing their ritual theory, in particular Turner's concept of a "hall of magic mirrors."

The second case study explores the Ljubljana theatre box holders and their part in creating social distinctions, cultivating cultural differences, and communicating symbolic boundaries through the box system of the nineteenth-century opera house of the Duchy of Carniola, the historical region of the Habsburg monarchy and the constituent part of the later Republic of Slovenia. Their distinctions, differences, and boundaries went through several changes and experienced some major transformations throughout the century. Four of them are discussed in particular through a kind of sociological analysis: social standing (class), financial source (economy), national belonging (ethnicity), and the promotional potential (communication). All these aspects—which well served the ways that the box system had been accelerating social relationships, challenging class identities, provoking ethnic conflicts, striking business-like bargains, and promoting certain groups and individuals in the Carniolan society—are examined with the help of the theory of goods (Douglas and Isherwood), the theory of symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Fournier), the theory of

nobility (Preinfalk), the theory of bourgeois society (Adorno, Habermas), and the theory of communication and advertising (Barnard).

The third case study shows how opera in Moravian Brno was virulently imagined through the categories of nationalism, national identity, cultural difference, and ethnic boundaries in the post-war year 1920, and was consequently established as an eminent place of social conflict between two ethnic groups in the city: the Czechs and the Germans. From the mid-nineteenth century on, Brno's entire municipal cultural life became organised, institutionalised, and represented by the micro-ethnic division of musical places between these two populations. Accordingly, this chapter explores one particular example of opera's turbulent social life there when a performance of Bizet's *Carmen* by a German ensemble was transformed into a political arena for Czech nationalists who protested against the Russian singer appearing as Escamillo. This tiny historical incident has been examined from the theoretical perspectives of nation, nationhood, and nationalism (following Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Ernest Gellner), as well as on the basis of crucial findings about ethnicity and boundary (considering the work of Fredrik Barth, Thomas Hylland Eriksen, and Irena Šumi).

That opera was and can still be a great source of social status, prestige, and cultural and symbolic capital is well known. That it can play such a role successfully in an utterly specific and intricate manner, which today seems entirely anachronistic and obsolete, is harder to find, as suggested in the fourth case study. One such example, notorious for being in a class unto itself, is connected to the Mantua opera house called the *Teatro Sociale*, which is privately owned by the heirs of the original box holders who built the theatre in 1822, thus in a quite different *zeitgeist* than today. Since then, there have been many political and social changes for the city of Mantua, which have resulted in a noticeable transformation of just one province of a much larger foreign-domineering monarchy over the patriotic unification with other Italian lands to the democratic membership within the Republic of Italy. The renowned opera house of Mantua, a private institution with a public purpose, has managed through all those years of massive social change to remain untouched by one single element; its box holders have never surrendered their boxes to the municipality or the state. It is semi-privately managed by the heirs who have until recently administered it as if it were still the 1800s. With this chapter, we attempt to reveal the historical context and social particularities that help explain that social world of a specific cultural tradition that has produced and reproduced such endurable box-holding practices over time in a city where possessing the opera house was and remains more important than actual

attendance. This analysis is done on the basis of the social status theories of Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, and Pierre Bourdieu, but particularly on the basis of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, disposition, distinction, and reproduction. Hopefully, through analysis, it is easier to understand the "anachronistic" story of the tenacious and self-willed Mantuan box holders, including a complex and historically conditioned situation showing that attending the opera house is one thing, but owning it is something else entirely.

The fifth case study investigates the social and cultural facets of a very unusual operatic project from Belgrade, Serbia, related to the constitution of the Opera and Theatre Madlenianum, a private opera house officially founded in 1997 and opened in 2005 by Madlena Zepter as its single patron and donor. Here we discuss the reasons why a rich individual would build, hold, and run their own opera house and theatre in these times when the tradition of such acts of giving by wealthy and powerful people seems to be more or less a distant echo of previous centuries, if not an almost entirely extinct cultural practice. To better understand this contemporary operatic endowment, a rough historical outline of opera patronage throughout the centuries is offered. Besides patronage studies, incorporated with the significant definitional contributions of some sociologists, historians, economists, and musicologists, this interpretation brings into discussion certain interesting academic outputs, initially from anthropology regarding gastarbeiters and elites, and later the vast interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary field of gift theory, represented here through its two fundamental conceptual aporias: reciprocity and generosity. The conclusion is that Madlena Zepter's Madlenianum is a parasitical gift which paradoxically generates her person of interests (reciprocity) through her philanthropic performances of disinterestedness for the Serbian nation (generosity), and by mixing these two contrasting identities successfully transforming economic capital into social, cultural, and symbolic capital. More concretely, opera is used here as a personalised social manifest and as an ultimately visible seal on one's philanthropy, lifestyle, and money.

It is my firm belief and hope that these five historically grounded case studies of "operatic issues," i.e. of opera's social life, illustratively and convincingly establish a very good insight into the manner in which opera and society are interrelated, how opera gives cultural, political, and social expression to society, and how attitudes toward society have shaped opera in "small places."