Opera as Anthropology

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Anthropologists in Lyrical Settings

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2016

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-9757-4
ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9757-0

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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The aim of this book is to contemplate, in an introductory and revisionist way, the relationship between opera and anthropology. The book rests on the following central arguments: on the one hand, opera is quite a new and "exotic" topic for anthropologists, while on the other anthropology is still perceived as an unusual approach to opera. Both initial arguments are indicative of the current situation of the relationship between anthropological discipline and opera research. Opera's urban glamour, whether it be represented through the splendour of court spectacle, the pomp of national myths and sentimental melodramas, a political party, or a bourgeois festive occasion, had seemed hundreds of miles away from the traditional activities or priorities of anthropologists. For four-hundred years, opera's aim was to fascinate and create phantasms, focusing principally on the culture of Europe, the Americas, and the Western world, while anthropology's task was rather different: the deconstruction of such fascinations by focusing mainly on non-European, non-American, or non-Western culture. This publication therefore intends to bring together reasoning and endeavours to suggest that opera and anthropology no longer need be alien to one another.

Recently, numerous studies that examine opera have appeared within the contemporary trend of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research, as opera is not only one of the liveliest and most polemical areas in musical scholarship and musicology today, but it also enjoys an increasingly high profile in other social sciences and in the humanities. However, little is still known and written about opera from an anthropological angle. If social or cultural anthropologists did not go to the opera very often in the past, this has changed. The primary aim of this book is to introduce the work of anthropologists and ethnographers whose personal and professional affinity for opera has been explicated in their academic and biographical accounts. Anthropological, ethnological, ethnographic, and semiotic accounts of opera by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel Leiris, William O. Beeman, Denis Laborde, Paul Atkinson, and Philippe-Joseph Salazar convince one that social or cultural anthropologists do not need to travel to distant places, primeval forests, or islands to find relics of social rituals and experience the "exotic." We, as anthropologists, merely need to go to the opera, where our own weird rites

are, to use the words of Slovenian philosopher Mladen Dolar, performed in both their highest and most trivial forms (Žižek and Dolar 2002, 4). By touching on opera not merely as a musical, aesthetic, or artistic category, but as a social, cultural, historical, and transnational phenomenon that, over the last four centuries, has significantly influenced and reflected the identity of Western culture, this book will provide a colourful contribution to the existing academic literature about opera. Also, it establishes that opera can be a pertinent object of anthropological interest, ethnographic investigation, cultural analysis, and historical reflection. This book is designed to be an introductory reading by presenting and reviewing what anthropologists have done in the field of the "anthropology of opera." Thus, the book is neither a celebratory record of a particular operatic setting nor a comprehensive portrait of its sectors, agencies or members, but a highly selective compilation aiming to place opera closer to anthropology. More precisely, this book is not about music but about a specific historical promenade, cultural world, and social phenomenon.

The book is supported by and has consulted a wide range of sources, articles, and books from social sciences and the humanities: from anthropology, sociology, musicology, musical scholarship, history, philosophy, cultural studies, media studies, and opera studies to gay and lesbian studies. I have thus received a great deal of help, inspiration, and encouragement from various sources and texts in preparing this book.

Furthermore, many individuals and collectives from academic, operatic, and related environments have directly or indirectly contributed to my academic interest in opera. First, I am indebted to Philippe-Joseph Salazar, a Distinguished Professor in Humane Letters at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. His early *Idéologies de l'opéra* (1984 [1980]) is a reference work in opera studies. For myself, I would say that two books—Philippe-Joseph Salazar's previously mentioned authoritatively argued semiotic study and Ulrich Weisstein's anthology *The Essence of Opera* (1964), offering an immediacy and validity unmatched by standard histories – particularly inspired me at the start of my own anthropological commitment[*] to opera, and indirectly shaped some of my epistemological

[*] Between 2000 and 2015 I conducted five different projects on opera: the first was the target research project entitled *A Model of Ensuring of Operatic Art System in Slovenia* (2000–2), funded by the Slovenian Ministry of Culture; within the same period, from 2000 to 2003, I earned my PhD with a project entitled *From the Archaeology of Discourses about Opera to an Anthropology of Opera: The Significance of Ideas about Opera for the Understanding of the Opera Phenomenon and its Imagery*, funded by the Slovenian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport; in the 2004–5 academic year I was a postdoctoral fellow at the

stances towards it. I am honoured that Professor Salazar also contributed one of his articles about anthropology of voice (Salazar 2006, 1–14) to the anthology *Reflections on Opera* / *Réflexions sur l'opéra*, which I edited in 2006. At that time he suggested entitling this anthology "opera as anthropology," but we finally decided, after a discussion with the publisher and due to a certain disciplinary diversity, to choose a broader title that also covered the articles not been based on anthropological orientation. Thus, the title of this book is his idea, and for this I would like to thank him. Furthermore, I must mention at this point some other

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Maison des sciences de l'homme (MSH) and also a visiting researcher at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* (EHESS-CRAL: Centre de recherches sur les arts et le langage) in Paris, where I conducted my French postdoctoral project from December 2004 to June 2005, *L'anthropologie de l'opéra et les idéologies nationales: les exemples de la construction de l'opéra national dans la culture slovène et française*, funded by Ville de Paris; in the period 2007–8, with the project *Opera Audience in Slovenia: An Anthropological Research of the Nation's Cultural Capital* carried out at the University of Primorska and funded by the Slovenian Research Agency, my research focus has more intensively turned to the social reception of opera; and the last project engagement under the title *Societies and Opera Audiences in a Cross-Cultural Perspective* was conducted at the Institute for Anthropological Research in Ljubljana. The results of these research activities are given in five books. The first, *Reprezentacije opere* [The Representations of Opera], published in 2003, brings an extensive ethnographic research of the recent problems in the opera system in Slovenia, including the analysis of national cultural policy and representations of opera in the Slovenian media. The second book from 2005 entitled *Antropologija opere* [The Anthropology of Opera] is a historico-anthropological and socio-anthropological study of the academic discourses and intellectual traditions that dealt with opera. The third work, an essay written in French, *Opéra dans l'arène du provincialisme et du nationalisme* [Opera in the Arena of Provincialism and Nationalism], and published in February 2006 by Parisian publisher *Éditions le Manuscrit*, briefly introduces Slovenian opera culture to Francophone readers. The fourth study, *Opera, Power and Ideology: Anthropological Study of a National Art in Slovenia* from 2010, tries to bring together all the previous findings in a fresh and analytically elevated way to a globally-spread Anglophone public. My last operatic monograph *Operno občinstvo v Ljubljani: Vzpon in padec neke urbane socializacije v letih 1660–2010* [Opera Audiences in Ljubljana: The Rise and Fall of an Urban Socialisation in the Years 1660–2010], published in December 2012 by Annales University Press in Koper-Capodistria, Slovenia, represents a historical, sociological, and anthropological study of social life connected with opera in Ljubljana, with an emphasis on an outline of the fundamental social and cultural characteristics relating to the formation of opera audiences and the rituals of their attendance of performances and events from the middle of the seventeenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first.

contributors from the abovementioned anthology (Bereson 2006, 15–29; Delić 2006, 143–55; Evans 2006, 31–55; Laborde 2006, 121–41; Lamantia 2006, 179–208; Tahan 2006, 157–67), to whom I am connected by pleasant social events and interesting exchanges of opinion. Among them I am indebted in particular to: Ruth Bereson, the former director of Arts Management Program at the New York State University at Buffalo, the author of the book *The Operatic State* (2002) and now dean of the Faculty for the Creative Industries at LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore; David T. Evans, senior lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Applied Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow and the author of the book *Phantasmagoria: A Sociology of Opera* (1999); Lina G. Tahan, senior research fellow at Leeds Metropolitan University; Aleksandra Delić, assistant producer of Multimedia Opera at the Serbian National Opera and Theatre, the Belef Festival, and the Bitef Festival in Belgrade; Denis Laborde, ethnologist, musical anthropologist and researcher at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and lecturer at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris; and Frédéric Lamantia, cultural geographer at University Jean Moulin in Lyon.

Furthermore, I also have to thank other colleagues who have helped me shape some of my ideas on opera as anthropology. Among them I am indebted in particular to: Martin Žužek Kres, anthropologist and psychologist at the Institute for Anthropological Research in Ljubljana and member of the orchestra of the Ljubljana Opera, Slovenia; Emmanuel Pedler, professor of sociology at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Marseille; Dragana Antonijević, professor of anthropology at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Belgrade University; Patrick J. Hughes, juris doctoral candidate at the George Washington University Law School; Annibale Centrangolo, professor of musicology at the Universities of Venice and Padua; and Marcello Mariani, lecturer of cultural management at the University of Bologna. I am grateful to all of them for our common experiences, their collegial support, their critical and direct approaches, as well as the fact that they have always favoured open discussion.

I am much obliged to my colleagues and friends beyond academia as well. First of all, I would like to thank my dear friend Bill Staab from New York, a true connoisseur of the lives of opera singers, who generously offered me his hospitality and accompanied me to the Metropolitan Opera. Many thanks also go to David Gerbec for his remarkable support in preparing this work. Numerous efforts in my life would have come to nothing without his colleagueship and companionship. I would also like to thank Ana Kirn for her translation of several parts of the book from

Slovenian and French into English, and Heather Owen, Karolyn Close and Graham Clarke for their proofreading and editing of the text. However, all responsibilities for the writing are mine.

Last but not least, I would also like to thank many others not named individually but who have, in one way or another, contributed to the elaboration of this book.[**] I hope that this will be a pleasant and informative read that will move opera closer to anthropology, and vice versa.

[**] The preparation of this work was a long and quite exhausting process of self-questioning and self-reflection. This is probably why it took so much time to finally see the light after spending several years of study and research between 2008 and 2012 when its first version was carried out.

INTRODUCTION

Going to the opera[1] was and remains a marker of social distinction, and is a complex and vivid social ritual crucial to the maintenance of the urban class and cultural luxury. The initiation into the field of opera as music, art, institution, or simply a social occasion is, therefore, never neutral and meaningless. On the contrary, it is a place to see and be seen, a place of taste and emotion, but above all a place of great significance, creation, and the enactment of "imagined communities," to use Benedict Anderson's (1991 [1983]) famous term. Whether ridiculed and denounced[2] or praised and defended,[3] opera has always expressed certain meaning, value, taste, and symbolic and cultural capital. When a historian, sociologist, or occasional anthropologist writes a book on opera, their writing usually

[1] For different interpretations and a contextualisation of the cultural act of "going to the opera," see, Adorno (1962); Bereson (2002); Levine (1988); Mitchell (1970); Murray (2005); Pedler (2003); Rosselli (1996, 304–21); Salter (1955).

[2] Dr. Samuel Johnson's famous dictum that opera was "an exotic and irrational entertainment;" the claim of German philosopher Friedrich W. J. Scheling that the opera was the lowest caricature of the highest form of art, namely the Greek theatre (Žižek and Dolar 2002, 1); the definition of opera as, "a bizarre mixture of poetry and music where the writer and the composer, equally embarrassed by each other, go to a lot of trouble to create an execrable work" given by French writer and moralist of the seventeenth century Charles de Saint-Évremond (Weisstein 1964, 31; also Weiss 2002, 52); or the great Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, who labelled opera as, "a complete nonsense and regrettable waste of time and money." From the historical aspect, tendencies to abolish or denounce opera are not something new and are actually a regular part of the standard antitheatrical repertoire and stereotypical images of opera (see Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice,* 1981).

[3] See Forst (1987) and Swanston (1978). Opera is often a phenomenon that delves into the issue of "extravagant art." There is much defence of opera as "extravagance," as explained in Philip Hart's *Orpheus in the New World* (1973), although his book is more about symphony orchestras as American cultural institutions than specifically about operas. Although within the chapter "In Defense of Elitism" it describes a symphony orchestra performance, it could describe an opera when Hart describes "a spectacle of well-dressed affluence and social exclusivity that lends itself far more vividly to coverage by the media than does the artistic program of the orchestra" (479).

begins with a description of their first visit to the opera, mentioning the place it happened and the title of the operatic work seen on this occasion. British social anthropologist Paul Atkinson, in his recent ethnographic monograph *Everyday Arias: An Operatic Ethnography*, for instance, lets the reader know that his relationship to opera includes, "a number of personal and intellectual commitments … a long-standing personal engagement with opera" (2006a, ix). In most cases, the family context is decisive, although some other factors from—using somewhat dated vocabulary—secondary (school, friends) and tertiary socialisation (job, co-workers, media, etc.) can also contribute. In Atkinson's case, we notice a rich selection of the elements of his social capital: opportunities of the "Youth and Music" program, opportunities at an early age to attend the English National Opera, opportunities to be introduced to the standard repertoire, family support, personal engagement, etc.

Groundbreaking French autobiographer, pioneering ethnographer, and noted anthropologist Michel Leiris, who turned his mind to opera as one of his major loves, explains in his fine and frank autobiographical confession *L'Âge d'Homme* [*Manhood*] that, from 1939, at a very early age, opera fascinated him:

> A large part of my childhood was under the sign of plays, operas, or lyric dramas that I was taken to by my parents, both passionately fond of the theater, particularly when it was combined with music. They frequently had a box at the opera lent them by my father's chief client, a wealthy woman whose funds he managed for her. From this box—the second from the stage on the right side of the hall—I watched, from my tenth year on (leaning far over the edge, for even from the first row of the box, it was difficult to see more than the left half of the stage) many productions in the repertory … (Leiris 1992b, 16)

Leiris luxuriates in his fantasies and ideas about art, opera, and literature. For him, autobiography is an open wound: his fascination with Wagnerian Amforta's wound is therefore very allusive. Also, his writings reveal his fascination with sexually-aggressive opera heroines, whom he imagines will attack, victimise, and debase him. Through his autobiography, he produces a kind of criticism of art, opera, and literature that acts as a key commentary on twentieth-century intellectual and cultural movements and vividly demonstrates not only the constant reformulation of contemporary ideas and aesthetics but also the social and symbolic capital necessary to consume these ideas. Also explicated throughout *Manhood* (1992b[1939]) and *Journal 1922–1989* (1992a), his love for opera is undoubtedly the most significant part of the cultural capital "inherited" from his parents

and family friends. Leiris rated the opera above all other theatre and performing arts, and his reference to the operatic world, and culture in general, in his texts was mostly framed by his experience of living in Paris, the city that was for centuries the driving force of Western culture and the true European cultural mecca, maintaining its status of "cultural authority"[4] today. The reference to a strong cosmopolitan cultural background—such as the possibility of regular attendance at the prestigious, historical, and internationally renowned Opéra Garnier, or a chance to experience the richness of intellectual and cultural life of the *capitale du monde*—informs Leiris's views.

However, it is not only academic figures but also ordinary opera fans who give interesting testimonies, comments, or insights into their attachment to the operatic world. The opera audience and its peculiarities—with the whole range, from the lack of taste and boorishness of the average opera crowd to the eccentricity of connoisseurs and critics—address opera not only as a performing art but as an object of consumption. It seems that, in Europe and the Americas, social status and privilege still define opera-going. Some ethnographic comments that I have collected in recent years (see Kotnik 2010, and especially 2003) strongly support the idea of opera as a social venue through which people not only consume the art of music and spectacle but also show their lifestyle, social status, and cultural-mindedness.

Opera is perceived as a high culture. However, this etiquette of luxury is usually taken as a naturally-given fact and not a historically well-situated[5] ideological construction. Opera is a social venue through which

[4] On the cultural authority of the capital cities, such as New York, London, Paris, or Vienna, which had become the arbiters of taste and cultural capital, see William Weber, "Opera and the Cultural Authority of the Capital City" (2007) and Christophe Charle and Daniel Roche, *Capitales culturelles, capitales symboliques: Paris et les experiences européennes XVIIIe–XXe siècles* (2002).

[5] According to many studies, dichotomies between "serious" and "frivolous," "high" and "low," "elite" and "popular" culture have been rooted in wider social constellations established in the European society of the eighteenth century and particularly nineteenth century, and many of them have remained in their entirely rudimentary and barely modified form ever since. Many theorists (Burke 1978; Collins 2002a; Crane 1992; DiMaggio 1992; Frith 1996; Gans 1999 [1975]; Van Der Merwe 1989) think that, before the nineteenth century, there was only a small difference between high and popular culture. Besides, some of them, including Strinati (1995, 45–6), have pointed out that distinctions between mass and high culture were never static, historically constant, and clear, but discontinued, historically variable, and, above all, often contested. We can therefore conclude that most ideas about opera as an elite thing are also a result of complex

people not only consume the art or simply enjoy music but also express their social, economic, and cultural determination. Of course, many of the tens of thousands of operagoers who flock to opera houses all over the world each season, paying large sums for their tickets, might actually deny that such cultural extravagance and eccentricity are two types of behaviour that often accompany oral and written performances of the operatic self. However, I would like to stress that by mentioning these, possibly quite marginal, testimonies as examples, they might have something significant in common: they all perform the operatic self. We could say that they are, in a way, representations of selfhood and subjectivity in how opera fans and scholars express their personal, emotional, or intimate relationship with opera.

The first thing that can be noticed about these personal operatic references is that their "owners" signal through them a certain social purpose and meaning, i.e. a certain value and capital. This leads us to our first ethnographic conclusion: the social significance of operatic engagements and itineraries—which are given sense by opera lovers—seems to be surprisingly important for these amateurs' biographies. Not only the initiation into the opera world and the experience of musical art but also the performance of the operatic self are, for everyone initiated, necessarily conditioned by a certain level of assured specific symbolic capital, which is the social credit or prestige that marks and particularly constitutes the status of a social actor, and can, in principle, be exchanged for goods, services, or social recognition. Secondly, it can be observed that even talking about one's personal operatic references functions as something prestigious and exclusive. The second ethnographic conclusion, therefore, could be as follows: the operatic identity card contains a codified specific social distinction legitimised by a series of collectively and individually conditioned determinations, from a certain cultivation and urbanity to family background, educational potential, and opportunity for self-actualisation. The cultural sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, the leading French sociologist of the second half of the twentieth century, making a significant input in anthropology as well, provides valuable insights here (Bourdieu 1990, 71–89). Bourdieu points out that there are various forms of capital: in addition to the capital represented by wealth and material goods, there is also cultural and social capital. Cultural capital resides not in material but in symbolic goods. Cultural capital is vested, as Atkinson (2006a, 149–50) points out, in one's capacity to use the symbolic systems

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confrontations about its social value that are not only deeply imprinted in our current culture but also go far back to the period before the conceptual creation of the delimitation between high and low culture.

that encode such things as "good taste." Cultural capital reflects the implicit orderings of cultural legitimacy that define the differential values of "high" culture, "fine" art, "classical" music, and the like. In a similar vein, social capital is manifested in phenomena such as one's social reputation, prestige, or standing. For instance, the *nouveaux riches* may invest in "art" not just as a display of conspicuous consumption but in order to translate material capital into the symbolic goods of cultural capital. McDonogh's (1986) account of how the "good families" of Barcelona have used the opera house as a setting for social performance and collective self-presentation – including "bringing out" their daughters – is a parallel example of how the opera may provide a site for the circulation of material and symbolic goods. Maybe even more illustrative examples may be found in Italian opera houses, or in the annual operatic ball at the Vienna State Opera. In Naples, the first-night at the Teatro di San Carlo is, even today, a highly distinguished meeting place, reserved almost exclusively for the local Neapolitan nobility in order to exchange and valorise their cultural capital with each other. For tourists, or those uninitiated "satellites," the first-night remains difficult to access. The operatic ball at the Vienna State Opera is an even more screaming example of the economy of the "bringing out" of sons and daughters of wealthy Viennese families in order to socialise them into the circle, and capitalise their social performance for business and for more private benefits such as marriages and similar ties.

These examples serve to illustrate how opera theorists, devotees, and fans perform their operatic selves. However, for an anthropologist, opera is not perhaps a perfect example of a field site that could overwhelm the researcher, as represented by Paul Atkinson and Denis Laborde, with any special peacefulness or enchantment. As I try to briefly explain the purpose and meaning of such symbolic acts here, it is perhaps pertinent to cite Pierre Bourdieu, who stresses the fact that researchers and scientists often forget not only that the world around them is a construction and not a natural fact but also that researchers who construct this world are themselves socially constructed, and that their constructed character depends on their position in the globally and—even more—nationally conceived social space, on their belonging and attachment to their local milieu, on their position in the field of specialists or discipline (taking into account that every discipline has its own national traditions and particularities), on obligations to publish their results, on specific forms of censorship, and, last but not least, on the distances they are capable of maintaining in relation to different ideologies and essentialised categorisations (Bourdieu 2001, 182–83). Thus, *à la* Bourdieu, a researcher

can fight his own social construction only by accepting their own objectivation, i.e. by reflecting not only the given and self-evident facts of their own life but also their actions undertaken in the academic enterprise. Accordingly, our "operatic insight" into the biographies and ethnographies of some well-known Western anthropologists and ethnographers should be taken in this Bourdieusque sense too—that is, that anthropologists and their professional work are also part of a social construction that can always be differently observed and discussed. This book is therefore only one possible reading of some "operatic ethnographies" that have been written and lived by some distinguished scholars in the past decades.

The central focus of the book rests on how opera can be considered through an anthropological perspective and how anthropologists as ethnographers and cultural semioticians can approach operatic settings. The section "Opera as an Epistemological Challenge for Anthropologies" tries to be a broader theoretical outline of anthropological studies of music and art, but is grounded on a two-fold entrance into the debate by combining two different orientations of anthropological discipline—the one based on the tradition of Western social or cultural anthropology, and the other based on historical anthropology, a much less widespread and less-recognised branch of anthropological thinking that mostly owes its existence to certain cultural and intellectual movements that took place in France in the second half of the twentieth century. Due to this, opera is, at the same time, introduced as a site of socio-cultural anthropology as well as a source of historical anthropology. It is argued that such a two-fold entrance into the debate about theoretical, epistemological, methodological, conceptual, historical, and ideological challenges for anthropologies in the field of opera studies can significantly strengthen the concept of the book by combining historical sources and ethnographic evidence in equal amounts.

The central part of the book, entitled "Anthropologists in Operatic Settings," consists of five chapters in which it is revealed how anthropologists as ethnographers or as cultural semioticians have approached opera, including their private inclinations and professional engagement. In fact, each chapter brings us into the specific "anthropological" conception of opera.

The chapter "Opera as Myth, Opera as Metaphor" is centred on Claude Lévi-Strauss and his structural reading of opera as the metaphorical "composing" of an anthropological grand opera, materialised in the four-volume study of *Mythologiques*, which refers to Wagner's tetralogy of *The Ring.* Although the famous French anthropologist has written no operatic ethnography, he was one of the first anthropologists who introduced his

personal inclination towards opera and European classical music into his professional anthropological research of Amerindian myths. He created a type of comparative view of the function and structure of myth schemes in Amerindian culture and the orchestral scores of Wagner's operas, and implicitly signalled that European music, with its pre-eminent representation—opera—has had the same value or similar symbolic position in the mind and life of a contemporary European that myth has had in "the savage mind." Through this, he can lead us to understand opera as myth and metaphor. However, the chapter extends the discussion on Lévi-Strauss to a broader historical picture of the relationship between opera and mythology as two symbolic systems of European and Western culture.

Another outstanding French writer, ethnographer, and anthropologist Michel Leiris, presented in the chapter "Opera as Ritual, Opera as Spectacle," expressed his penchant for opera in the form of a diary-like documentation of his private operatic itineraries in different opera houses and locations all over the world. His operatic diary reveals opera's more passionate and ceremonial aspects. Because of this, his conception of opera offers the possibility of revealing, in a broader sense, some social and ritual dimensions of opera, which are taken from historical sources as well as from recent ethnographic evidence.

The chapter "Opera as Singing, Opera as Artism" is derived from the work of the American cultural anthropologist William O. Beeman, an anthropologist with a dual career, being both a professional opera singer and an academic, whose operatic ethnography from the "native" point of view was carried out at Chemnitz Opera where Beeman worked and used the German stage for research. Not surprisingly, his conception of opera is mostly from an on-stage perspective in terms of how singers should deal with the principles and demands of the opera house today. Beeman indicates that the opera singer should be seen as a culturally- and socio-historically-constructed figure who has inherited certain techniques, skills, traditions, and modes, and not just as a definite and instant product of adoration. As Beeman's ethnographic investigation is mostly focused on the life, work, and training of singers, this chapter tries to enrich Beeman's contribution with the historical and ethnographic analysis of a specific but rarely analysed aspect of the profession of singer, e.g. the "artism." Artism is about how artists perform their professional selves.

The chapter "Opera as Cultural Production, Opera as Performance" follows Denis Laborde's ethnographic work with the Frankfurt Modern Ensemble and Paul Atkinson's fieldwork at the Welsh National Opera in Cardiff. The French ethnologist and musical anthropologist and British

social anthropologist and ethnographer each point out that the production of an opera within an opera company is the result of the complex cultural machinery of individual labour and collective practice. Both Laborde's and Atkinson's ethnographies on making an opera are about performance as a culturally-negotiated and thoroughly-rehearsed production in which the operatic extraordinariness is achieved through ordinary actions and everyday work. Both ethnographic endeavours show that the production of an opera is not only about performing a musical work as a product, but also as social work as process. They both also stress the processual nature of producing opera as music and art. However, if Laborde's focus is on opera as social process, Atkinson's contribution leads us to perceive opera as the performance of a complex cultural production of a particular kind.

The chapter "Opera as Historiography, Opera as Ideology" is there to convince us that opera is not only a field site of the "ethnographic present"[6] but also, as the study of French rhetorician and anthropologist Philippe-Joseph Salazar *Idéologies de l'opéra* (1980) shows, represents a historical record and an ideological tool. This is why the book moves, with this chapter, from opera as ethnographic site to opera as historiographical setting. Among many approaches and systems of knowledge about opera, opera historiography and histories of opera take the central part in constructing and representing opera culture as a distinctive socio-historical phenomenon. Because this is so, the main directions, theories, and approaches to the historiographical study of opera are introduced and commented upon. The theoretical, conceptual, and epistemological

[6] The ethnographic present is a standard anthropological concept meant to represent the ethnographic "moment" of field experience and today under critical scrutiny, see: George W. Stocking Jr., ed., *Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," *Representations I.,* 2 (1983): 118–146; Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Objects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Martin Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practise* (London: Routledge, 1992); John Van Maanen, ed., *Representation in Ethnography* (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995); Barry P. Michrina and Cheryl Anne Richards, *Person to Person: Fieldwork, Dialogue, and the Hermeneutic Method* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Vered Amit, ed., *Constructing the Field: Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Stephen Gilbert Brown and Sidney I. Dobrin, *Ethnography Unbound: From Theory Shock to Critical Praxis* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004).

endeavours of historical anthropology are of great help in pursuing the wide field of writing about and interpreting opera's history.

Each of these differently-oriented anthropological or semi-anthropological approaches reveals different aspects of the operatic phenomenon as well, but it is argued, in "Afterword: Opera as Professional Site of Anthropologists," that what all the contributions set forth in this book seem to have in common is that they demystify, in different ways, the image and characterisation of opera as phantasmagorical phenomenon, as mundane excess, as the lunatic house, as an irrational entertainment, as extravagant art, as unnatural singing, as lyrical ecstasy, or even as the monstrous. Indeed, while opera as a performing art as well as music-theatre is able to offer phantasmagorical worlds and enchanting performance sites in which people create and experience imagined worlds, behind this picture we find a real social organisation embraced by reality, which makes opera's world and its history accessible for ethnographic enquiry, cultural analysis, and historical reflection.

OPERA AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CHALLENGE FOR ANTHROPOLOGIES[1]

In Western social and cultural taxonomies, opera enjoys the status of both music and art. However, there is a marked absence of an anthropological treatment of opera, whether as music, art, theatrical setting, spectacle, performance, ritual, commodity, or, simply, as cultural form and social phenomenon. Even though the lyrical worlds of opera have provided a series of metaphors, analogies, situations, characters, or simply mirrors of a particular culture for the anthropological understanding of everyday life in a particular society, in anthropology we find a kind of collective failure to address the accomplishment of opera in ethnographic and other settings. The noticeable lack of anthropological research of opera reflects, to paraphrase Paul Atkinson (2004, 94), a recurrent imbalance in the anthropological examination of culture. Despite the fact that twentieth-century socio-cultural anthropology is saturated by probably the single most central concept in the discipline (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1973; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952) and its remarkable surge of interest in culture, the treatment of "culture" has been, considering Western urban cultural forms, doubly asymmetrical.

The first asymmetry is, according to Atkinson, related to anthropology's traditional focus on non-Western cultures and societies. When we look at how classical Western anthropology perceived art or music, it will be, I think, easier to understand why opera is quite a new, unusual, and "exotic" topic for anthropology, and, further, why anthropology is still perceived as a very strange, unusual, and "exotic" approach to the world of opera. This book is probably not the first to pose the question of what opera has to do with the anthropological program, and perhaps it is no coincidence that opera still produces something between embarrassment and disdain among anthropologists. Nevertheless, I hope that this book will manage, in this chapter at least, to reveal some reasons for this and what could be done to change it.

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[1] Some ideas and views that are presented in this chapter have been partly developed in my recent monograph *Opera, Power and Ideology: Anthropological Study of a National Art in Slovenia* (2010, 19–40).

Although art and music are to be found in every culture, small-scale as well as complex anthropological studies of art and music have not often been at the centre of theoretical developments within the discipline, although they have frequently illustrated its changing intellectual fashions. The development of the anthropology of music (Lortat-Jacob and Rovsing Olsen 2004, 7–26; Merriam 1964; Nettl 2004, 333–52; Suppan 1984) and the anthropology of art (Layton 1991; Morphy 1994; Schneider and Wright 2006; 2010; 2013), which in the past met with opposing observations and arguments from disapproval to approval, can be seen in this light. Traditional as well as modern anthropological studies of art—for instance, Franz Boas' analysis (1927) of non-Western art, Raymond Firth's investigation (1936) of art in New Guinea, Anthony Forge's volume on primitive art (1973), Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1982) structuralist examination of masks and art on the northwest coast of Canada, the volumes on anthropology of art edited by Layton (1991 [1981]), and Coote and Shelton (1992)—have something epistemologically in common: an assumption that the anthropology of art is about non-Western cultural forms. However, the questions have been changed and the answers reformulated over the course of these several generations of the anthropological study of art. Many recent approaches, importantly informed by new theoretical and conceptual concerns with issues such as colonialism, autochthonism, indigenism, folklorism, artism, etc., have broadened the discussion about art. It is meaningful that sometimes the questions about "primitive" art—in modern orientations introduced as ethno-art—have been similar to those asked about European art on the nature of human creativity, the social position of the artist in a particular culture, or the role of patronage, but have rarely broadened the discussion in the direction of Western rural and urban cultural forms. Another characteristic of most such studies is the focus, inspired by a teleology of material culture as exegesis and evidence, on objects rather than on the performances and sociability of artefacts. Yet all these studies are very informative and instructive in many ways. First, we learned from them that every community or society has its own distinctive art style in terms of indigenous production, presentation, and dissemination. Lévi-Strauss in *The Way of the Masks* (1982) showed us that the meaning of art, of an element, an object or musical practice, is revealed when it is shown to be only an element within a structure of relationship. In his work *The Savage Mind* (1966), Lévi-Strauss also indicated that art provides an entry into culture's system of classification. Second, Edmund Leach showed that the function of art is to illustrate moral principles by transgressing the boundaries of the community or society. Art crosses ambiguous cultural

boundaries and says "what may not be said" in real life—that which is taboo (Leach 1973, 221–34). However, the last ten or twenty years have seen a proliferation of literature about art and anthropology proposing different ways of thinking, conventional as well as alternative, and convergences between art and anthropology (see Fillitz 2015; Grimshaw and Ravetz 2015; Ingold 2013; Kelly 2007; MacClancy 1997; Marcus and Myers 1995; Morphy and Perkins 2006; Onians 2003; Sansi 2015; Schneider and Wright 2006; 2010; 2013; Strohm 2012).

The deficiencies faced by an anthropology of art are similar to those faced by anthropological studies of music. The question of how music should be understood in the context of anthropological analysis has been addressed systematically in the discipline of ethnomusicology. Ethnomusicology strengthened its academic legitimacy according to the study of non-Western European musics. The invention of the phonograph and establishment of sound archives ignited a storm of "scientific" fascination with other musics. However, anthropological models did not enter ethnomusicology before the publication in 1964 of *Anthropology of Music* by Alan Merriam, who later spoke of his regret in one of his articles that ethnomusicologists, "do not seem to have been able to create a true discipline of ethnomusicology, as opposed to a musicology of music and an anthropology of music living rather uneasily together under an artificial rubric" (Merriam 1975, 59). In Merriam's field-setting contention, music is seen as an integral and inseparable aspect of cultural life that could be understood in terms of a three-part model, in which concepts relating to music, behaviour in relation to music, and the structural aspects of musical sound all impinge upon one another. Merriam himself accurately forecast the Boasian trajectory of ethnomusicology in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s as a progression, "from a focus on music sound structure, through a concern with music as a socio-cultural phenomenon, and now to a preoccupation with musical emotion, feeling and meaning" (1975, 64). Since the mid-1970s, ethnomusicology has been predominantly driven by Merriamian anthropological methods and fashions, although his three-part model has been criticised as too functionalist, reductive, and non-dynamic. Outside this Boasian trajectory and Merriamian three-part model we find a number of models in ethnomusicology as well as in the anthropology of music. On the one hand, village/tribe based ethnographies have shaped a number of significant ethnomusicological studies (Koskoff 1989; Nettl 1978; Peña 1985). On the other hand, the ethnomusicological concern with performance perhaps predated its rise to prominence in anthropology. Anthony Seeger's study of the Suya of Northern Brazil (1987), describing his approach as a "musical anthropology," outlined the significance of

understanding music in the context of the anthropology of performance. Additionally, musicology, which over the course of its academic existence from the nineteenth century has been "deemed exclusively historical almost by default" (Burckhardt Qureshi 1995, 332), began to interrogate its previous practice and challenge the frontiers of historical scholarship in music with an ethnomusicological and anthropologised amalgam of theories. Ethnomusicology has from the outset been considered a marginalised specialty until a very recent opening up of the musicological and anthropological conversations, "Its relative isolation from musicology possibly facilitated a pragmatic search that led ethnomusicologists toward the tools of anthropology and a paradigm of relativity, holism, and cultural reflexivity … Despite profound epistemological differences, however, musicologists—not anthropologists—have gradually proceeded to accommodate ethnomusicologists and their ahistorical ways; this academic coexistence is leading ethnomusicologists to an increasing engagement with musicological orientation" (Ibid., 332). From the 1980s, the anthropology of music in the United States turned its focus towards the ethnography of performance, while in Europe it remained divided between those with anthropological inclinations and musicological training, and folklorists. Folklorist approaches still seem to dominate much of the study of art and music in Southern and Eastern Europe. The recent anthropology of music, absorbed by issues of reflexivity and developments in the music industry and the market, has essentially broadened the understanding of music, incorporating urban forms that were rather neglected in the past within the discipline's agenda, such as jazz (Ostendorf 1988; Tsioulakis 2011) pop music (Manuel 1992; Baker 2010) or rock music (Mahon 2004). Anthropological studies of urban forms of music continue to investigate the role of specific music in shaping identity and experience in a rapidly changing world in confronting or assisting established or newly emerging patterns of power, domination, ethnicity, and social grouping.

With this rough literature overview, based on the encyclopaedically-acclaimed information on an anthropological view of music and art,[2] we are better equipped to approach the dilemma of why, until recently, opera was far from an anthropological vocation. Once the anthropological research of music and art was put into the classical conceptual box, conserving colonial imaginings of the missionary function of anthropology as a principle for disentangling musical and art folklorisms practiced by

[2] Particularly informative here were the contributions on art in Thomas Barfield's *The Dictionary of Anthropology* (1977, 29–30) and Jeanne Cannizzo's and Martin Stokes's articles within Alan Barnard's and Jonathan Spencer's *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (2002 [1996], 54, 383–6).

primitivised and exoticised tribes, some others, on the contrary, saw in them a kind of reaction against such a colonial program of activities and agendas in socio-cultural anthropology that, first, did not devote its attention to tribal music and art as constitutive objects of anthropological research as much as it could and should. Second, in the very traditional anthropological epistemology, the indigenous art practices were usually not perceived as art in the Western sense. However, those who believed that the research excursion into "anthropological exotics" has some sense for the discipline and for society in general built their positive arguments mainly on the basis of two premises. First, the people who took the first important steps in the field of indigenous music and art were also researchers, for example Morphy,[3] who several decades ago had to reflect on their own relation towards anthropology as a colonial project and distance themselves from it. Second, traditional socio-cultural anthropology tended to reduce the understanding of indigenous non-Western, but particularly non-European, art and music to just aspects of an entirely indigenous culture, whereas the Euro-centrically established studies of art, music, and culture debated whether to appropriate "indigenous" arts from the "superior" Western understanding of art and culture, or to primitivise them into something "less" than the art of Western civilisation. As a result, from this point on, the perception of cultural phenomena and practices in different societies all over the world became an important epistemological issue: how to read them, what kind of role do they have in their own societies as specific practices, how can what we know about them change our conception of what constitutes art, music, or theatrical practice. As Morphy says, the fact that the word "primitive" was applied to the arts of non-Western societies for so long tells us something about the European or Western concept of art and the role it has played in the positioning of "other cultures" in Western thought (Morphy 1994, 648).

The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud,[4] on discovering the human unconscious, became famous for his claim that the subject is not at home

[3] Cf. Howard Morphy (1994, 648–85).

[4] Anecdotally, Freud proclaimed himself to be particularly recalcitrant to music. But philosopher Mladen Dolar writes that it was not so. His musical references are curiously numerous, and show no lack of acquaintance with music, and opera in particular. Freud refers most often to Mozart, but also to Bizet's *Carmen,* Wagner's *Master-Singers* and *Tannhäuser*, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, and Offenbach's operas. In the analysis of one of his crucial dreams in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the "revolutionary" dream about Count Thun, we come across Freud humming to himself Figaro's cavatina "Se vuol ballare signor Contino" from *Le nozze di Figaro* on the platform of a railway station, after seeing by coincidence

in his own house. This fundamental finding had a delayed entry into anthropology but has lately played an important role by transforming the colonial anthropological paradigm into the postcolonial one. The crucial point that caused this epistemological break within the discipline was, to my mind, exactly the idea that an anthropologist is not altogether at home in their own culture in the sense that should they be completely familiar with the society in which they live, there would be no need for them to study it. The idea that an anthropologist does not necessarily need to visit a symbolically foreign and different culture in order to constitute themselves as an anthropologist was the historical prerequisite for something that might be called the "anthropology of opera." This fact perhaps highlights why it is necessary for any discourse[5] about the anthropology of opera to begin with the problem of definition. Just as anthropology is not what it once was, the same can be said for opera today. If opera seemed alien to anthropologists, this traditional antagonism between the culture of opera and the culture of anthropologists was, at least in the last three or four decades, noticeably overcome. Before the nineteenth century, the concept of opera was entirely connected with the ceremonial[6] display of the European monarch's body and power. But from the nineteenth century on, opera became a public and relatively popular art, "consumed" by the middle class. As an artistic genre it was, from the period of Romanticism and national awakening, treated as the national art, able to attract "spontaneous" national identification in the members of its audience. Accordingly, in the nineteenth century, opera had become the perceivable socialisation norm of European and American bourgeois life with its culturally-minded and sophisticated bourgeoisie: the bearer of cultural goods and the embodiment of "civilised" values, morals, civilities, and aesthetics. There is something to this, as artists during this time (usually led by Wagner) believed that operas should no longer be a mere

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the Austrian Prime Minister. Dolar discovers from Freud's letters that he used to hum arias from *Don Giovanni* to his dog, and so on (Dolar 2006, 128). For a detailed list of Freud's musical and operatic susceptibilities see Lecourt (1992, 219–23).

[5] When using this term I mostly refer to Foucault's conceptualisation, as defined in his books *L'ordre du discours* (1971) and *L'archéologie du savoir* (1969), in which he says that discourses are, "practices which systematically form objects about which they speak."

[6] On the ceremonial sides of opera, see the historically-oriented contributions of Andrea Sommer-Mathis, Dorothea Schröder, Christine Fischer, Francesco Giuntini, Rainer Kleinertz, Francesca Menchelli Buttini, Reinhard Strohm, and Martha Feldman in the volume *Italian Opera in Central Europe* (Dubowy et al. 2006).

"ceremonial display" as they once had been. However, Ruth Bereson makes the point in her book *The Operatic State* that opera has continued to be perceived as an elitist ceremonial display. For instance, Bereson quotes Anthony Gishford, who notes that, "by the beginning of 1916 a new generation of opera-goers was in being—the war profiteers. Most of them cared nothing about music but a great deal about being seen in the right place" (Bereson 2002, 105). However, in the nineteenth century, opera, like art, music, and religion, was one of those concepts used to exclude people from civilisation and distance them from European and American culture. However, this social exclusion also happened within the common Western culture, as people from the periphery, not to mention peasants or those from the lower classes, were entirely excluded from urban cultural luxury. Just as opera could be used in the past to distance "other" people from "civilised" Westerners, it can also be used, as Lévi-Strauss's work indicates, to bring Westerners closer to "un-civilised" non-Western people exactly through opera.

Furthermore, it is also important to mention the "hinterland" of—particularly, but not only—French interpretative capacities during the period from the 1960s to the 1990s, which are characterised by the fact that they were establishing historical, theoretical, and practical summaries of performing arts through a multiform disciplinary landscape viewed from the perspectives of dramaturgy, *théâtrologie* or theatre studies, aesthetics, *sémiologie* or semiotics, linguistics, hermeneutics, communication theory, and theatre anthropology. One could say that the development of all of them in the 1960s and 1970s was largely stimulated by various aspects of the humanities and social sciences, and that their process of perfection was, among other factors, also based on an irreducible gap between theory and practice on the one hand and the coincidence brought about by their explanatory potency into the skies of discourses about opera on the other. The credit for bringing a visible reorganisation of traditional perspectives into the field of opera studies goes especially to dramaturgy, semiotics, hermeneutics, and anthropology, and is due to the epistemological arsenal of these branches. Dramaturgy (Jacquot 1968; Moindrot 1993a; Naudeix 2004; Satgé and Lavelli 1979) has brought into the field of opera theory a structural reading of dramaturgical action, opera subjects, opera figures, and space and time in opera. It was obliged by its influences to rethink the dramaturgical theories and their categories, and especially to rethink the classical—and actually in its main part, still classicist—dramaturgy of opera. It thus made an important cognitive move from traditional operatic dramaturgy (as a "performance" of a certain libretto) towards the anthropology of performing operatic practices (as a

dramatic/textual and stage/scenery universe) and ethnoscenology (as a descriptive field of European and non-European intercultural operatic practices, e.g. the phenomenon of Chinese opera). Semiotics (Nattiez 1971; 1973a; Noske 1971; Salazar 1984), as a propaedeutic and epistemological reflection on the production, classification, and understanding of signs has, in a certain sense, completely reorganised the traditional image of opera as a homogeneous performing "coagulation." It is due to its help that opera's social world has been, without any particular hegemonic digressions, unfolded as a seriation of signifiers and signified; consequently, with a microstudy of these signifiers and signified, the interpretative field of opera has been significantly widened. Signs in opera as elements of operatic machinery (e.g. operatic space, subject, figure, light, libretto, sound effects, stage, decor, gesticulation, mimicry, movement, mask, hairstyle, costumes, stage properties, scenery, stage management) and their contextual uses have introduced into the theory of opera an interpretative power of new categories significantly surpassing the traditional Algarottian conception of the so-called "operatic machinery" (Algarotti 1764) with their discernment and precision. Hermeneutics (Gérard 1992, 929–31) have brought, with their departing philosophical principles, a fresh wind into the field of the interpretation of libretto, discourse as texture of opera spectacle, and opera genres or forms as principal components of performing operatic literature. One could say that by means of hermeneutics, opera genres have been disbanded and deformalised by becoming perceived as an expression of the relationship between opera art and the world. In the field of the production of knowledge about opera, the contribution of anthropology (Lévi-Strauss 1983a [1964]; 1990 [1971]; Leiris 1966; 1992b), with all of its sociological and theatrological nuances (Duvignaud 1965; Hennion 1992, 932–34; Pedler 2003), can be seen mainly in the domain of reception from the aspect of audience or social reception.

Let me now move to the second asymmetry, which will, it is hoped, help to explain why anthropologists were reticent to study opera. While all anthropologists would insist, Atkinson says (2004, 94), on an analytic relativism to the point of suspending common-sense values and assumptions concerning "high" culture or "elitist" art, and the self-evident importance of different cultural forms, in practice the discipline has displayed a collective inverse snobbery. Popular culture has recently received much more extensive attention than so-called serious or high culture. Popular music receives more anthropological attention than "classical" music. Films and musicals are more studied than opera or the "straight" theatre. I think that this anthropological snobbery is a reflection

of a wider anthropological culture that treats the bourgeoisie and high-class groups of society as negative reference-points rather than subjects for empathetic research. It seems that an anthropological snobbery is a great and important subject to explore when explaining opera from an anthropologist's view. If one were to expound on anything else I would hope that it would be this subject. On the basis of this, we could take Atkinson's claim as probably one of the most important reasons to explain why social or cultural anthropologists did not very often go to the opera with a professional purpose. Opera's urban glamour—whether represented through the splendour of the post-Renaissance court and pre-revolutionary spectacle, the pomp of Romanticist national myths and sentimental melodramas, the modern political party, or the massive postmodern media event—seemed hundreds of miles away from their traditional activities or priorities, and well removed from their view of life. For four-hundred years, opera's aim was to fascinate and create phantasms, focusing principally on the culture of Europe and the West, while anthropology's task was rather different: the deconstruction of such fascinations by focusing mainly on non-European or non-Western cultures. Opera has been in service for centuries as the eminent ritual of the Western, highly classy, urban life. In contrast, anthropologists usually came into contact with ritual professionally, in remote rural societies far away from courtly splendour and bourgeois polish. However, if, during this long period, the anthropologists perceived opera as something outside their domain, this disconnection between the culture of opera and the culture of anthropologists has been, we hope, overcome during the last three or four decades.

The engagement of anthropology with ritual dates from a time when anthropologists dealt largely with data drawn ethnographically from fields remote from the West. Rituals or ritual events were seen as stabilised forms that condensed meanings and symbols that consolidated the sense of "traditional" community. Ritual was, in the colonial tradition, represented as a static cultural product and highly sociable narrative of "isolated" or "primitive" societies. Newer anthropological studies of ritual have tended to emphasise the more dynamic and interactive aspect that mediates important symbolic meaning within a community. Following this, we might also affirm that operatic events are multimedia rituals. They are events that mix genres as they mix media. Librettos, scores, vocal styles, modes of acting, compositional performances, costumes, scenographic practices, ideas of stage management, audiences' habits, and social resonances of media and public all carry their own social distinction, semantic codes, and ritualistic actions. Each of these components