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Opera as Social Showcase: Rituals of "Magic Mirrors" at the Margravial Opera House in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Bayreuth[1]

Abstract: This article proposes a ritualistic approach to opera in the historical case of the mid-eighteenth-century Margravial Opera House in Bavarian Bayreuth to argue that court opera can be understood as a variety of social showcase. In this view, court opera is a specific form of communication through which opera established the various types of relationship 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 will be established how the 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, like Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, Maurice Bloch, Stanley Tambiah, Catherine Bell, employing their ritual theory, especially Turner's concept of a "hall of magic mirrors".

Key Words: opera, ritual, Bayreuth, Markgräfliches Opernhaus, Wilhemina of Bayreuth

Preparation

Opera's ability to be considered a socially highly valued phenomenon in every society in which it was presented enabled opera to communicate or perform a relationship with different social agents (see Kotnik 2013). Opera has always

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established the various types of relationship between itself and the social worlds in which, and for which, it has been created. There are numerous examples showing opera's cultural prominence of being taken whether as the showcase of social interests and conflicts, as a place of various social agents, or as a symbol of multiple identifications and social positionings. Such examples can easily be found in metropolitan operatic centres, where opera's social powers were always best nourished, but our intention is to deliver a historical example from the small Bavarian town of Bayreuth (1748).

As a post-Renaissance invention, opera began its path as a pure court event or princely pleasure which was in favour of the display of the power of kings, dukes, princes and other kinds of absolute rulers who were the principal patrons of opera across European continent. In the course of the 17th century, Italian baroque opera experienced a huge expansion all over Europe, from present-day Germany, France, England, Spain, Austria and Eastern Europe. Due to this, opera was also a mirror of power, a sign of the political map and, of course, the reflection of the social dramaturgy of European royal thrones, aristocratic dynasties, princely houses and noble families. Therefore, it was not uncommon for opera composers and librettists to portray their authorities as idols while the artist's social status was valued by patrons and impresarios. Although it was spread across many lands and territories of Europe, opera remains a highly ceremonialized and ritualized social occasion everywhere. And one such illustrative example goes with the *Markgräfliches Opernhaus* in Bayreuth, an impressive example of absolutist architecture, designed in the spirit of a very different age to underline the importance of the ruler. There are few 18th-century theatres still in existence, but the Margravial Opera House is one of the most important. In the contrast to many ancient European theatrical buildings, it escaped destruction later on in its history. The artistic quality of its festive Italian baroque architecture leaves one of the finest social messages from that period to us. When the building was inaugurated in 1748 by Margrave Frederick of Brandenburg-Bayreuth and his consort Wilhelmina, the elder sister of King Frederick II of Prussia, on the occasion of the marriage of their only daughter Elisabeth Frederica Sophie with Duke Charles Eugene of Württemberg, there were few theatres to equal it. It seems that Wilhelmina, as the Prussian princess, wanted to follow royal standards from her native court in Berlin as much as possible, but was at the same time quite aware of the fact that the limited resources of the Bayreuth margraviate cannot fully meet some of her architectural dreams as well:

> Nevertheless, the Margravine and her husband functioned as builders in many ways and added a Bayreuth version to the Frederick-like Rococo in Prussia. Especially Prussia and Frederick II.: One would suspect that Wilhelmina consciously tried to emulate her brother also on this field. Frederick's Rheinsberg (and later Sanssouci) is faced with her Hermitage, the Opera House Unter den Linden in Berlin with her Margravial Opera House in Bayreuth. [...] In 1743 not only

> the reconstruction of the Erlanger Opera and Comedy House, but also the first concrete idea of building a new opera house in Bayreuth entered her mind. On 19 November Wilhelmina turned to her brother specifically in this case: "May I ask You to send me the plan of Your opera house? Yes, it is a perfect building. As the curiosity is the inherited legacy of our race, You will see mine hopefully soon." Frederick was flattered and ordered his architect Georg Wenzeslaus von Knobelsdorff, "to send You the plan of the opera house which is now fully completed; The building will hopefully find Your approval, seeing that it is beautiful from the outside and comfortable inside." This is exactly what Wilhelmina also wanted for herself in Bayreuth![2] (Oster 2005, 258–260)

After the first viewing, Wilhelmina enthusiastically wrote to her brother King Frederick II the Great that the interior designer Giuseppe Galli Bibiena had given his best: *"In these days I visited the new opera house. I was very pleased with it. The interior is almost complete. Bibiena has united the quintessence of Italian and French style in this theatre, one has to admit: In his profession he is a master"*[3] (Oster 2005, 287). Wilhelmina's opera house was a real *tour de force*. Giuseppe Galli Bibiena namely belonged to a whole dynasty of theatre designers who were active in all the major capitals of Europe. Giuseppe's uncle constructed the new opera house in Vienna between 1700 and 1704. That family also built the new opera house Teatro Comunale in their native city of Bologna. Accordingly, Galli-Bibiena's theatres were famous throughout Europe (Midgette 1996, 28). However, Wilhelmina's decision for Bibiena and not for the king's architect Knobelsdorff was surprising, regarding the fact that she

[2] Original (German): Dennoch haben die Markgräfin und ihr Mann in vielfältiger Weise als Bauherren gewirkt und dem friderizianischen Rokoko in Preußen eine Bayreuther Variante hinzugefügt. Überhaupt Preußen und Friedrich II.: Man wird den Verdacht nicht los, daß Wilhelmine bewußt versucht hat, es ihrem Bruder auch auf diesem Feld gleichzutun. Friedrichs Rheinsberg (und später Sanssouci) stellte sie ihre Eremitage gegenüber, dem Opernhaus Unter den Linden in Berlin ihr Markgräfliches Opernhaus in Bayreuth. [...] In das Jahr 1743 fällt nicht nur die Umgestaltung des Erlanger Opern– und Komödienhauses, sondern auch bereits der erste konkrete Gedanke an den Bau eines neuen Opernhauses in Bayreuth. In dieser Sache wandte sich Wilhelmine am 19. November eigens an ihren Bruder: »Darf ich Dich bitten, mir den Plan Deines Opernhauses zu senden? Es soll ja ein vollkommenes Bauwerk sein. Da Neugier das Erbteil unseres Geschlechts ist, siehst Du mir die meine hoffentlich nach.« Friedrich fühlte sich geschmeichelt und befahl seinem Baumeister Georg Wenzeslaus von Knobelsdorff, »Dir den Plan des Opernhauses zu schicken. Es ist jetzt ganz vollendet; das Gebäude wird hoffentlich Deinen Beifall finden, denn es ist von außen schön und im Innern bequem.« Genau so etwas wollte Wilhelmine auch in Bayreuth haben!

[3] Original (German): Dieser Tage habe ich das neue Opernhaus besichtigt. Ich war sehr erfreut darüber; das Innere ist fast vollendet. Bibiena hat in diesem Theater die Quintessenz des italienischen und französischen Stils vereinigt, man muß zugeben: In seinem Fach ist er ein Meister.

previously asked her brother to be awarded by the plans of his newly built royal opera house *Unter den Linden*. But it should be mentioned that the relationship between Wilhelmina and Frederick got stuck in conflict exactly at that period of time. And not just that; the margravial couple became politically closer to Vienna, the most hated court by Frederick, as both rivalled courts claimed the right over Silesia. Obviously, the new social atmosphere between the Habsburg and Hohenzollern court influenced Wilhelmina's search for an opera architect.

The interior of the Margravial Opera House is dominated by the elegant auditorium facing the elaborate proscenium which has an unusually deep stage behind it. A hall of these dimensions could not be justified by vast numbers of expected visitors, but probably by the fact that Margravine Wilhelmina as an opera composer and a great music lover wanted an opera house of her own in which the operas she had written would be staged. To paraphrase the message of the Samuel John Klingensmith's study (1993), court ceremony, social life and architecture were put together in order to prove the utility of ruler's splendour:

> [Despite the fact that the king could not participate due to the problems with haemorrhoids] the wedding was nevertheless the largest feast that Bayreuth had ever witnessed. The designers of the environment and the high officials formed the plan of scenes where the high guests appeared. Even their reception in the city was accompanied by a magnificent spectacle, the Salute was fired, and the trumpets sounded. With the arrival of the groom and his mother, the festive society was complete. In the centre of the festivities was the new opera house which was inaugurated on 19 September 1748, although there was no festive premiere. At the opening not an opera was performed, but the comedy *Démocrite* of Jean-François Regnard. Also some other French plays followed and then, on 23 September, the real inauguration happened with the opera *Il trionfo d'Ezio*[4] by Johann Adolf Hasse. It was an *opera seria* which was a serious opera in the Italian style, which was quite to the taste of the Margravine. [...] The distinguished guests spent their time until the wedding day on 26 September 1748 with masked balls, banquets and other kinds of evenings at the theatre. [...] For Wilhelmina, the festivities brought happiness and stress at the same time: "Yesterday", she wrote on 27 September 1748 to her brother in Berlin, "finally my daughter's wedding took place. You can imagine that the day was really tiring. I still don't understand how I managed to survive it ..." In the days after the wedding parties nevertheless continued, some plays were given on stage, and for the closing event the second opera of Hasse *Artaserse*[5] was performed. "For the end, the high princely lords were brought ... to the magnificent Opera House and dined during the performance in the boxes throughout the theatre". This was a widespread practice in the Baroque era: The opera house was not

[4] *Ezio* is the Italian name for Flavius Aetius, a Roman general and military commander of the closing period of the Western Roman Empire. Aetius was portrayed in several operas.

[5] *Artaserse* is the Italian form of the name of the king Artaxerxes I of Persia. Artaxerxes is the protagonist of a number of operas, all based on a text of famous librettist Metastasio.

> the place for artistic activities only, but was also a hall for parties and other special occasions.[6] (Oster 2005, 291–293)

The Bayreuth opera house was in service not only to advertise the union of art and political power, but also to reaffirm many relationships, for instance, between the Margraves and their people, between the Margraves and the king, between the local nobility and European intellectual elite, between Franconian provincialism and European cosmopolitism. Making impressive use of architecture demonstrates the importance of its role in the Bayreuth representation of power and authority. The fact that this opera house was built in a remote little Franconian town like Bayreuth is due solely to the lordly pretensions of the margravial couple, which were acted out in court ceremony.

Presentation

The court life was at that time acted out like a play. So, the Bayreuth opera house was nothing but the household of the ruling couple appeared on the stage, since the court was nothing more than a permanent stage where one comedy or tragedy after another was performed. The opera house thus became

[6] Original (German): Trotzdem wurde die Hochzeit zum größten Fest, das Bayreuth bis dahin gesehen hatte. Die Standesherren der Umgebung und die hohen Beamten bildeten den Rahmen für die Auftritte der hohen Gäste. Schon deren Empfang in der Stadt war von einem prunkvollen Schauspiel begleitet, Salut wurde geschossen, Fanfaren erklangen. Mit der Ankunft des Bräutigams und seiner Mutter war die Festgesellschaft komplett. Im Mittelpunkt der Festlichkeiten stand die neue Oper, die am 19. September 1748 ihre Einweihung, wenn auch noch nicht ihre festliche Premiere erlebte. Aufgeführt wurde keine Oper, sondern die Komödie *Democrite* von Jean-François Regnard. Es folgten weitere französische Theaterstücke und dann, am 23. September, die eigentliche Einweihung mit der Oper *Il trionfo d'Ezio* von Johann Adolf Hasse. Es war eine Opera seria, also eine ernste Oper im italienischen Stil, ganz nach dem Geschmack der Markgräfin. [...] Mit Maskenbällen, Festessen und weiteren Theaterabenden vertrieben sich die hohen Gäste die Zeit bis zum eigentlichen Hochzeitstag, dem 26. September 1748. [...] Für Wilhelmine brachten die Festtage Glücksgefühle und Streß zugleich: »Gestern«, schrieb sie am 27. September 1748 an ihrem Bruder nach Berlin, »hat endlich die Hochzeit meiner Tochter stattgefunden. Du kannst Dir denken, daß der Tag recht anstrengend war. Ich begreife selbst nicht, wie ich ihn überstanden habe ...« In den Tagen nach der Hochzeit wurde gleichwohl weiter gefeiert, Theater gespielt und mit *Artaserse* zum Abschluß eine zweite Oper Hasses aufgeführt. »Die Hochfürstlichen Herrschaften begaben sich zu diesem Ende ... in das prächtige Opernhaus und speisten allerorten während der Opera in der Loge.« Das war eine im Barock weitverbreitete Praxis: Das Opernhaus bot eben nicht nur Raum für künstlerische Aufführungen, sondern war zugleich Festsaal für besondere Anlässe.

the ultimate performance; it was the sanctification of the ruler made visible for all participants, his triumphant translation into a sphere between heaven and earth. All that was subject to detailed regulations and etiquette, which were absolutely obligatory for all participants, as the social life at Bayreuth opera house was strictly regulated by different hierarchies, ritual protocols and seating plans. Peter Krückmann vividly describes the ritualistic perspective of the moment when the margravial couple visited its opera house. When the ruling couple arrived in front of the opera house, they were greeted by spectators on the balcony above the portals. The couple entered the bare vestibule where guards were posted on the occasion of every opera performance, standing stiffly to attention and striking up with kettledrums and trumpets the minute the ruler arrived. After the low-ceilinged vestibule, the Margrave and his wife continued their way to the high foyer. It is made quite clear that they were not yet in the theatre proper with all its magnificence. It was all part of the gradual build up of the epiphany and final apotheosis of the ruling couple that they did not proceed directly into the auditorium through the passage on the ground floor, but ascended a double staircase to reach the court loge. The ceremonial entry of the ruler required that the public had entered the hall first. The music of the guards in the vestibule indicated that the couple's appearance was imminent. The spectators immediately grew restless and rose to their feet, and at the moment when the couple entered their loge, the tension created by expectant curiosity and devoted subservience was released in a tumult of joy and adoration. The entire decoration of the auditorium, of which the rest of the visitors also ultimately formed a part, was designed to celebrate that one moment, the entry of the ruling couple. The three-tired auditorium filled with the noblesse formed a colourful ornament to the Margraves. At that celebratory moment, the entire opera house was vibrating with life (recapitulated according to Krückmann 2003, 116–120). In the presence of the ruling couple, the audience listened to the performance with respect. Seating arrangement in the hall produced a semiotic template of power relations, with the Margrave and his wife set in the central loge as a shining jewel amid inferiors arrayed hierarchically about them. Thus, opera event turned around that social duality of the highly formal and conventional (highly formalized ritual of margravial attendance, rigid conventions of the Margrave's presence and of seating arrangements of others) and the overly performative (passionate reactions, applause, cheerful atmosphere). Wilhelmina's presence at the loge as the patroness of the opera house was the personification of noble moderation and moral order, while Frederick's appearance functioned as the authority of government and bringer of peace. At that time, opera often represented values that maintained the peaceful rule, humanistic social order and wisdom. The visitor

was given to understand that the peaceful rule of the Bayreuth Margraves was responsible for the existence of the opera house. All these ritualistic references and social symbols were used solely for the purpose of legitimization. The Margravial Opera House thus represents not only a temple of the muses, but also a theatrical haven of happiness. Some chroniclers even wrote that in view of such *"splendour in Bayreuth ... future generations will wish they had lived at this time"* (Krückmann 2003, 124). It was not in fact entirely out of place to celebrate the Bayreuth Margraves as bringers of peace. After all, they have succeeded – much to the frustration of Wilhelmina's brother in Berlin – in keeping the small margraviate out of the war between Prussia and Austria through the policy of strict neutrality.[7] The fact that the ruling couple also allowed themselves to be feted almost like gods is a reflection of the absolutist, theatrical spirit of the age in which they lived. Opera therefore manifestly served the cause of Bayreuth political interests. There, the opera house was actually a metonym for the margraves' more peaceful projects. However, their visits to the opera house could be whether official or private. If the visit was official, the couple was placed in the court loge. But this could not be the case if the visit was more private, or during a regular performance with no festive dimension. Otherwise, it was also quite usual to make distinctions between official and private visits to an opera. So, it is reported that two gilt armchairs covered in sky-blue velvet were usually placed in a central position in front of the first row for the margravial couple. It is also stated that Margrave Frederick seldom even sat here. He much preferred to lean against the balustrade of the orchestra pit during performances. This makes it look like as if even in his day Frederick was visiting a historical theatre, the inner structure of which was as foreign to him as it is to present-day visitors, and it was for this reason that he was acting unconventionally. In reality, however, even this behaviour is part of the ruler's sophisticated "performance" to his public (quoted and recapitulated according to Krückmann 2003, 124–125).

However, even though the Margravial Opera House was not a large public or commercial theatre, but rather a prestigious one made strictly for the purpose of the court, the performances there certainly were not the rituals for the Margrave alone and his wife accompanied by local nobility. The international nobility and the most distinguished intellectual elite of Europe gathered there at opera first nights what made that operatic jewel of the Bayreuth Rococo a special social

[7] For the details about the complex political relations between Prussian, Austrian and Bayreuth courts, see: Ruth Müller Lindenberg, *Wilhelmine von Bayreuth: Die Hofoper als Bühne des Lebens,* 53–57; Uwe A. Oster, *Wilhelmine von Bayreuth: Das Leben der Schwester Friedrichs des Großen,* 242–254; Peter H. Wilson, Prussia's Relations with the Holy Roman Empire, 1740–1786, *The Historical Journal* 51 (2): 353–354, 363.

resonance and turned court opera event into a heterogeneous medium of communication. The Margravine made Bayreuth one of the chief intellectual centres of the Holy Roman Empire surrounding herself with a court of wits, intellectuals and artists that accrued added prestige from the occasional visits of great enlightened minds, such as a Dutch physician Daniel de Superville, a French mathematician, philosopher and man of letters Pierre Louis de Maupertuis, a French physician and philosopher Julien Offray de La Mettrie, a Venetian polymath, art critic and opera connoisseur Count Francesco Algarotti, French philosophers Marquis d'Argens and Marquis d'Adhémar and, above all, François Marie Arouet de Voltaire who awarded Wilhelmina with the highest compliments: *"Madame, I will never forget the princely philosopher, the protector of the arts, the musical champion, the model of all social virtues"*[8] (Oster 2005, 253). Ruth Müller Lindenberg, Sabine Henze Döhring, Michele Calella, Cordula Bischoff and Günther Joppig well explicated in their articles how diverse roles of the Margravine's courtly "state affairs" were played, as a composer and musician, as a librettist and stage director, as a designer of state rooms and planner, as a theatre manager and opera patroness (Huber & Meyer 2014). Her life was inspired by philosophical discussions, evenings at the theatre, concerts and opera attendances. This contradiction between opera's "exclusive" character and "universal" mission marked its social and cultural determination at the Margravial Opera House as well. There, opera was not only a hermetically-closed project of the aristocratic milieu of the Franconian margraviate, but rather a much more colourfully-contested and propulsive social arena. During the wilhelminian epoch of Bayreuth court theatrical life which extended about nineteen years from 1737 till 1756, opera was taken as a serious state matter which could be turned, as eminent social duty, into a vivid personal engagement and painful sacrifice as well:

> Wilhelmina was constantly in touch with her virtuosi by following the whole spectrum of activities ranging from the voice training to the expression of the sublime. This well explains her connoisseurship. The fact that the Margravine herself personally controlled the work of her ensemble was the best guarantee of the high level of theatre's quality. And why this was important, Wilhelmina laconically reveals in a letter to her brother from 1754: "We have a lot of foreigners here, who have been attracted by the Opera." The famous Court Opera offered the guarantee that the visitors were not bored too much in Bayreuth and that the comparison with the court in Berlin/Potsdam did not turn out too shameful for the Franconians. [...] ... in grand opera events, it often occurred that a single act consisted of at least twenty scene changes. In

[8] Original (German): Niemals, Madame, werde ich die fürstliche Philosophin, die Beschützerin der Künste, die musikalische Meisterin, das Vorbild aller geselligen Tugenden vergessen.

> a three-act *dramma per musica*, around sixty changes of the scene could be seen. Considering such "stage magic", Wilhelmina could not possibly remain immune: She engaged an expert from France, about whom she reported to the brother on 8 January 1752: "We have a machinist from Paris who makes the eye pleased with his machinery. Everyone here says that it was a miracle, because such things have never been seen in Franconia yet." [...] From one report of that time we know that that the problem of heating the theatre was difficult to solve ... Considering the temporal extension of princely spectacle which did not, as a rule, satisfy people with one-hour performance, but took several hours of *dramma per musica*, that challenged the delicate health of the Margravine. Accordingly, one can appreciate the enthusiasm by which Wilhelmina was encouraged to stand such inconveniences. On 24 September 1754 she writes to the brother notwithstanding: "The opera season is over because my health no longer allows me to visit the theatre due to the great cold."[9] (Müller Lindenberg 2005, 99 and 101–102).

In addition to these operatic accomplishments and sacrifices, the Margravine was also a gifted opera composer, librettist and lutenist. On the libretto of Giovanni Andrea Galletti she even composed an entire three-act serious opera, entitled *Argenore* and premiered on 10 May 1740 for her husband's birthday (Müller Lindenberg 2005, 51). Additionally, she contributed the li-

[9] Original (German): Wilhelmine studierte also mit ihren Virtuosen die ganze Bandbreite von der Stimmbildung bis zum Ausdruck des Erhabenen. So erklärt sich auch ihre Kennerschaft. Dass die Fürstin selber sich für die Ausbildung ihres Ensembles einsetzte, war die beste Gewähr für ein hohes Qualitätsniveau. Und wozu das gut war, das schrieb Wilhelmine 1754 lakonisch dem Bruder: »Wir haben sehr viele Fremde hier, die die Oper angezogen hat.« Eine berühmte Hofoper bot die Garantie dafür, dass die Langeweile in Bayreuth nicht Überhand nahm und dass der Vergleich mit dem Hof in Berlin/Potsdam für die Franken nicht allzu beschämend ausfiel. [...] ... denn bei großen Opernereignissen traten in einem einzigen Akt nicht selter 20 Szenenwechsel ein. Damit kam man in einem dreiaktigen Dramma per musica auf etwa 60 Szenenwechsel. Wilhelmine war gegenüber solchem »Bühnenzauber« keinewegs immun: Sie engagierte sich einen Fachmann aus Frankreich, über den sie dem Bruder am 8. Januar 1752 schrieb: »Wir haben einen Maschinisten aus Paris, der das Auge mit seinen Maschinen erfreut. Alle Welt hier sagt, es sei ein Wunder; denn dergleichen Dinge habe man in Franken noch nie gesehen.« [...] Schwierig war allerdings, wie wir aus einem zeitgenössischen Bericht wissen, das Problem der Heizung zu lösen ... Bedenkt man die zeitliche Ausdehnung der fürstlichen Spektakel, die sich ja in der Regel nicht mit einem einzigen, für sich bereits mehrstündigen Dramma per musica zufrieden gaben, und nimmt man die zarte Gesundheit der Markgräfin hinzu, so kann man den Enthusiasmus ermessen, der Wilhelmine über solche Unbequemlichkeiten hinwegtrug. Am 24. September 1754 schreibt sie allerdings dem Bruder: »Die Opernsaison ist zu Ende, da meine Gesundheit es mir wegen der großen Kälte nicht mehr erlaubte, das Theater zu besuchen.«

bretto[10] and two cavatinas to the two-act opera *L'Huomo*[11] composed in form of *festa teatrale per musica e balli* by Andrea Bernasconi who was a *Hofkapellmeister* at Munich court (Focht 1998, 55). This opera is one of those small numbers of music-theatrical works with which the Margravine Wilhelmina, as librettist, contributed a strikingly independent profile to the court music: *"Opera as the art of ideas ... from the spirit of the Enlightenment"*, as it is imposed by the headline of the Sabine Henze Döhring's book *Markgräfin Wilhelmine und die Bayreuther Hofmusik* (Henze Döhring 2009a: 6). With *L'Huomo*, which was first premiered on 19 June 1754, the Margravine took her last opportunity for an intimate exchange of ideas without words using only the medium of music (Henze Döhring 2009b, 20). So, the Prussian princess invested the highest level of Hohenzollern symbolic capital in her operatic projects to bring the little backwater Franconian town into line with her cosmopolitan vision and, consequently, transform it into a cultural centre. She used the opera house to provide her with the kind of social input and intellectual stimulation she needed to enliven Bayreuth's provincial climate. With the magnificent opera house, her princely life *in einer Ecke* [in a nook], referring by that to the Bayreuth province in a letter sent to Voltaire when she left intellectually and culturally flourishing Paris regrettably (Oster 2005, 302), was not too mouldy and imperceptible for her anymore. Such Wilhelmina's operatic projects probably meant to be an esoteric activity accessible to the selected few, but the margravial elitism of the Bayreuth court equally communicated with broader publics exactly through the exoteric fame of the opera house.

Interpretation

Beneath such margravial "public" operatic appearances as "private" events, due to the fact that the margravial couple was literally at home at their own opera house, lies substratum of semantic assumptions about how the ruling couple transmitted meaning to its audiences and publics. The ritualistic character of the

[10] She also contributed librettos or textual adaptations of librettos for a two-act musical piece *Attalie* based on Jean Racine's *Athalie,* one-act *festa teatrale per musica e balli Deucalion et Pyrrha,* three-act *dramma per musica Semiramide* based on Voltaire's *Sémiramis,* and three-act *dramma per musica Amaltea.* For musical and textual details about these works, see: Ruth Müller Lindenberg, *Wilhelmine von Bayreuth,* 103–170.

[11] For more about this opera, see: Sabine Henze Döhring, "Die musikalische Komposition der Oper *L'Huomo*", 1–20.

operatic festive event, namely, suppresses the possibility of inventive spectatorial engagement or even the possibility to read or decode their opera attendance pluralistically. This assumption leads us perhaps to older Functionalist anthropologies of ritual (Arnold Van Gennep[12], Bronisław Malinowski[13], Max Gluckman[14]) which viewed ritual as homogenising mechanism to regulate and stabilize social institutions by adjusting social practices and social interactions, maintaining a group ethos, and restoring harmony after potential disputes. *"When 'structure' was the reality, 'ritual' was its expression and vehicle of reproduction,"* write American cultural anthropologists John Kelly and Martha Kaplan, the rituals seemed to be the practice that makes structures, the practice that defines and authorizes the social reality (Kelly & Kaplan 1990, 141). However, the Functionalist model which argued that rituals describe social order or reflect social structure was soon superseded by other models. Especially by the Structuralist model (Claude Lévi-Strauss[15], Edmund Leach[16]) which argued that rituals are not reflections of social structure, but are rather imposed on social relations to organize them into a social structure. And by the Symbolist

[12] The Van Gennep's model of the structure of initiation rites is introduced in his celebratory book *The Rites of Passage* (orig. *Les rites de passage,* 1909).

[13] When discussing the da capo arias as stage rituals of the eighteenth-century opera seria in Naples' Teatro San Carlo Martha Feldman (1995, 442) draws analogies with the Malinowski's magical rituals of indigenous populations, in particular the Trobriand of Papua New Guinea. Malinowski argued that rituals are a non-technical means of addressing anxiety about activities where dangerous elements were beyond technical control. According to him, magic is generally happened at the time when man comes to an unbridgeable gap, to a hiatus in his knowledge or limits in his understanding of the world, and yet tries to continue in his pursuit. This is why the Trobriand Islanders used magical rhetorical systems to cultivate their gardens of bananas and palms (*Cf.* Bronisław Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific,* 1922; *The Language of Magic and Gardening,* 1965[1935], particularly chapter 2 "Gardens and Their Magic on a Coral Atoll").

[14] On the Gluckman's functionalist analysis of the "rituals of rebellion" emphasizing on the ritualization of social conflict to maintain social equilibrium, see his book *Order and Rebellion in South East Africa* (1963).

[15] Claude Lévi-Strauss viewed ritual as complementary symbol system, not as structure. He was not concerned to develop a theory of ritual, although he did produce a four-volume analysis of myth *Mythologiques* which were "composed" in a manner of the Wagnerian operatic tetralogy; for more see Jamin 1999; Kotnik 2008 and 2009), but was influential to later scholars of ritual, such as Mary Douglas and Edmund Leach (Bell 1992, 42–43).

[16] On levels of ritual communication in primitive art practices, see Leach 1973, 221–234.

approaches to ritual (Victor Turner[17], Clifford Geertz[18], Mary Douglas[19], Maurice Bloch[20]) which promote to see rituals as forms of communication. And the

[17] Victor Turner combined Van Gennep's and Gluckman's models in order to develop a more structural model of symbols (see *The Forest of Symbols*, 1967) in rituals' process (see *The Ritual Process,* 1969). Drawing on Van Gennep's model of initiation rites, Turner viewed these rites of passage as "social dramas" (see *From Ritual to Theatre,* 1982) through which the community renewed itself by using ritual of *communitas* (see Edith Turner 2011) during the "liminal phase". Turner's writings of the 1960s and 1970s on ritual and its process became an influential corpus of knowledge and insights on the dramatic structuring of rituals. His late writings merged decades of pioneering work on ritual process with a lifelong romance with the theatre. The result was his famous notion of "social drama" which was directly inspired by ritual theory, specifically the tripartite analysis of rites of passage theorized by Arnold Van Gennep. For the relationship between social drama, ritual process and theater, see Richard Schechner's and Willa Appel's volume *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual* (1990). For the anthropology of experience, see Victor Turner's and Edward M. Bruner's volume *The Anthropology of Experience* (1986).

[18] Clifford Geertz expanded his ritual theory to the symbolic level that had been already recognized by Turner. The major role of ritual, according to him, is to bring together two aspects or models of social reality, the "model of" reality (showing how to interpret the world as it is) and the "model for" reality (clarifying the ideal state of the world) (see *The Interpretation of Cultures,* 1973). Symbolic anthropologists like Geertz analyzed rituals as language-like codes to be interpreted independently as cultural systems. Geertz rejected Functionalist arguments that ritual describes social order, arguing instead that ritual actively shapes that social order and imposes meaning on disordered experience. He also differed from Gluckman's and Turner's emphasis on ritual action as a means of resolving social passion, arguing instead that it simply displayed them (Bell 1992, 66–67).

[19] As a follower of Émile Durkheim and a proponent of a structuralist approach Mary Douglas contributed importantly to understanding of ritual purity and impurity (see *Purity and Danger,* 1966), theory of symbolism (see *Natural Symbols,* 1973[1970]) and, by addressing to the world of goods with Baron Isherwood (see *The World of Goods,* 1979) also to the anthropological understanding of consumption of cultural artifacts and artistic commodities. For our operatic historical example it is probably the most valuable insights she offered related to her argument that societies with strong group or strong grid were marked by more ritual activity than those weak in either group or grid.

[20] Maurice Bloch's study of ritual still bemoans the hegemonizing function of ritual (see *Ritual, History and Power,* 1989). He argued that ritual produced conformity. Due to this, the possibilities of creativity and inventiveness in ritual are diminished (Hughes-Freeland 1998, 2). However, if Turner privileged the liminal phase as by far the most important, Maurice Bloch, in his Marxist critique of theories of ritual, argues that the phases are inseparable. For Bloch, ritual is a form of ideology which provides an alternative to, or gloss on, everyday life. Because they can be highly formalized,

performative model (Stanley Tambiah[21]) which, in the wake of criticism of privilege for cultural structures, has posed the new question about the place of ritual and the place of structure in ritual practice. If the Functionalists, who traditionally viewed rituals as authoritative structuring of social codes and meanings that superseded the agency of their participants, had supported the idea that the margravial couple from Bayreuth simply used opera, in a ritualistic way, as means of social control and as balance between their subjects, this view would have been too narrow. But like the mirrors that multiplied shafts of light in the Margravial Opera House, beaming them from the auditorium to the stage, from the stage to the auditorium, from one side of the auditorium to the other and vice versa, the specular metaphor might suggest cultural refractions of a more intricate nature. The opera performances at the Bayreuth court were not there only

rituals restrict debate, and there is certain predictability to the ways in which people construct rituals across different social and cultural contexts. Rituals that inhibit contestation are, according to Bloch, not only integrating, as functionalists would put it, but mystifying as well. A practice-oriented approach to ritual is, in the case where mystification has the function of ritual, the best way to decode the potential disjunction between different interpretations of ritual by different participants in particular situations. Opera houses have always had a special taste for an extremely inventive cohabitation of splendors and miseries: exaggerated decor in the auditoria, pompous spectacles, visual prodigies of staging, magical scenes, magnificence, extravagance and the polished dignity of performed art work on the one hand, and scandals, intrigues and discrepancies in human relations on the other.

[21] Most of the performative approaches to ritual have been written, in one way or the other, in relation to Turnerian perspectives and paradigms. Recent anthropological studies of performance, theatre, dance, ballet and opera, written by Richard Schechner, William O. Beeman, Felicia Hughes-Freeland, Kirsten Hastrup, Anya Peterson Royce, Paul Atkinson, Helena Wulff, were biased toward more inclusive and processually-complex social interaction. Turner's model of ritual has been used in a variety of contexts by anthropologists, for instance by Richard Schechner (1985, 1988, 1993 and 1994), who sees ritual as performance or play. Like Turner, also anthropologist of Sri Lanka's origin Stanley Tambiah, focuses importantly on the ways in which different media combine in ritual action, but lays special emphasis on the visceral effects these media produce (see his rigorous prolegomena to performative studies of ritual in anthropology "A Performative Approach to Ritual", 1985). Martha Feldman notes: *"If Turner's romantic ideals of stageworks return us to the question of audience, Tambiah and most other performative anthropologies return us to the works on the stage. Turner leaves the relationship between ritual and theater hanging because the phenomenologies of audience are kept largely outside 'authorial' theater. Tambiah is alive to these larger dramas in ritual, but does not seek out the rituals in drama simply because his attentions are not trained on performative genres. Nevertheless Tambiah leaves open the way to a ritual view of theater ..."* (Feldman 1995, 442–443).

to regulate the relationship between the ruling couple and their humble subjects. The Bayreuth opera existed within multiple orders of meaning that intersected and reflected one another variously: the myriad constructed orders that included theatrical architecture, plot narrative, musical expression, and the seasonal cycle in which opera was produced; and the various experiential orders that involved performing, listening, applauding, heckling, and all the different social mores around operagoing, like modes of arrival, greetings in the atrium, sitting, standing, fanning oneself. Each of these components contributes to what the Glasgow-born anthropologist Victor Turner, in relating rituals to genres of theatre, called a "subtly variant message" (Turner 1987, 23–24). The same opera performed in different social atmosphere, or, each and every opera attendance performed by Wilhelmina and Frederick in front of the same audience but in different cultural circumstances could produce a whole set of subtly variant messages. And the result is something like a "hall of magic mirrors", each reflecting the images of opera's ritualistic sociality. As it was suggested, the margravial opera production at the Bayreuth court was intensely perplexed by the variety of political contexts in which the Margravine's precious pastime took place at her court. Even if it was the primary goal of the couple who sponsored their private opera production for public matters to reinforce the prevailing Hohenzollern hegemonies through the operatic stage, the realities of performing and spectating were likely refractory to such one-sided aims. Even very banal circumstances, such as the closing of the opera house before the season was expected to be finished, due to the bad weather and consequently the coldness in the theatre, are meaningful enough to see that modes of production could be complicated and extremely variable in themselves, and additionally converged with different conditions of the experience of opera ritual. Whereas Victor Turner saw the potential to release people from the binding structures of their lives into a liberating anti-structure or *communitas* in ritual, Maurice Bloch argued that ritual produced conformity. In Turnerian view, Bayreuth operatic events could be for the selected minority, who was invited to attend opera performances, seen as events of anti-structure. Especially for Wilhelmina, whose life was constantly caught between different political sides and interests, opera could function as her way to escape, from time to time, from the Bayreuth quite provincial everyday routine. For her, in particular, opera was a kind of the liminal phase of her life as political figure and governess, a phase in which a specific "anti-structure" appeared. If her political life was strengthened by difficult and complicated interests, sometimes even cruel political decisions, at the opera she could be, at least for a couple of moments, deliberated from that structure. The opera's anti-structure provided her a compelling personal experience where she could show her femininity, sensitivity, sensuality, emotional vulnerability, even hedonistic as-

pect. The opera performances at her opera houses thus functioned as a ritual mechanism that "periodically" or "occasionally" converted the obligatory into the desirable, the ordinary into the extraordinary, the political into the artistic, at the final instance, the public into the private. This mechanism of transforming one "life" of a person's being into "another life" is, in the Wilhelmina's case, part of the ritualistic process of commodification of different lives of her. Her ritualistic transformation of the status of her personality from the political figure to the opera lover could be interpreted within the social, political, cultural, economic, artistic and aesthetic contingencies that mediated the "right" symbolic meanings in lived operatic experience. The Australian anthropologist Nancy D. Munn describes the symbolic mechanisms of ritual as an "intercom" between cultural thought and complex cultural meanings on the one hand and social action and immediate events on the other. Objects signified by ritualistic media are extracted from their original "real" contexts and "converted" into condensed "symbolic currency", which then circulates in social action (Munn 1973, 579–580; according to Feldman 1995, 426). Due to this, operas which were sponsored and given on the margravial stage were nothing but ritualistic media and performative acts through which original political and social contexts of the Margravine's life were changed, by different architectural, artistic, musical, dramatic, and literary tools, to the well planned "symbolic currency", which then encompassed Wilhelmina's political personality with artistic, aesthetic and humanistic aura. Actually, many activities and duties she did, such as composing music, writing libretti and letters, organizing literary events, enjoying in philosophical discussions with the most famous intellectuals of the time, could be interpreted as symbolic acts of her way out. However, if we put her operatic events into a Blochian perspective, than we see that those rituals might fall along the spectrum of formality, with some less and some more formal and restrictive codes. The more the ritual was formalized by the ruling couple the less was open to be inventive by other visitors. French sociologist and anthropologist Jean Cazeneuve (see 1971) defined ritual as either individual or group act which allows space for improvisation, but above all depends on rules and faithfully reproducing model which forms exactly what is ritual within it. In Bloch's model, the formality of ritual, namely, denies the possibility of creativity. Innovations might be introduced in such formalized rituals, like court opera performances at the private theatre, but was quite clear who was allowed to break ritual conventions during the performance. It was the Margrave alone who, as the ruler, could transform his social credits, deriving from the Turnerian structure of power and superior position in society, into the Turnerian anti-structure at the opera. As such innovations of social behaviour at the opera became standardized by him, they were accepted by others as well. This tiny social detail of Mar-

grave's habits of attendance and watching the opera in the hall suggests that even quite formal rituals, as opera events were at the court of Bayreuth, were potential avenues for creative expression of participants.

Court ceremonies, opera included as it was part of the broader and more complex court ritual system, were usually, if paraphrasing the Turner's title "the forest of symbols", a "spectacle of symbols" in the eighteenth century. The Saxon cameralist, scientist and writer Julius Bernhard von Rohr (1688–1742) speaks about the great importance of traditional court ceremony in his two influential treatises, in *Einleitung zur Ceremoniel-Wissenschafft Der Privat-Personen* [The Introduction to the Ceremony Science of Private Persons] (1728) and *Einleitung zur Ceremoniel-Wissenschafft der großen Herren* [The Introduction to the Ceremony Science of Great Men] (1733). Why the ceremony is necessary for the ruler, he explains as follows:

> Some ceremonies have been established for very good reason. They are to be seen as a mean by which a ruler attains a particular end, namely that of instilling in his subjects great respect and reverence for his person. If these subjects are to recognize the majesty of the king, they must understand that he has the supreme authority and power and they must act according to show they acknowledge this. The ordinary man, who judges by appearances and does not make frequent use of reason, cannot of his own accord understand what is meant by the majesty of the king, but through the things he sees and otherwise absorbs through his senses he acquires a clear idea of the king's majesty, power and authority. (Rohr 1728, according to Krückmann 2003, 116)

However, not just the ceremony is good for the court, but also the court is the best possible place for the ceremony as *"no one is better at this than the members of the court"*, says von Rohr in explanation of the fact that the rule's household appeared in the opera house or on the stage, *"since a court is nothing more than a permanent stage, where one comedy after another is performed and where there is a constant procession of new characters who don the masks of their ancestors. When one play is ended, new masks, scenes, machinery, decorations and other items necessary for disguise are prepared so that the next play can be presented to the world"* (Rohr 1728, according to Krückmann 2003, 116–117). The performativity and rituality of court life itself was therefore directly related to the ruler's legitimacy. This held particularly true in the age of absolutism when court theatres and opera houses flourished in the eighteenth century as ceremonialized lengthening pieces of the courts. This was also the case with the Bayreuth court where life was regulated by daily routines, strict schedules, detailed regulations and highly codified etiquette. When attending the Margravial Opera House, the etiquette was essential for making a good impression. Everything mattered: walking, talking, dress code, presentation, greeting, salutation, gesticulation, compliment, voice tone, eye contact, laugh, even

breath control. In short, the attendance of the opera event was, to paraphrase Erving Goffman (1967), a very concentrated interaction ritual. Glances, gestures, movements, body positionings, verbal and non-verbal acts of communication, that people continuously fed, whether intended or not, into various situations of operatic events, were sequences or elements of the ritual of co-presence and face-to-face behaviour. Corporeal, emotional and physiological processes in each and every individual attendant of the opera event had to be harmonized with the demands of the court ritual. The spatial position of individual's body was determined by seating arrangement which produced a semiotic template of power relations in the auditorium. Catherine Bell addresses the distinctive qualities of "ritual body" discussing *"how the ritually constructed body, as the means and end of ritual practices, involves the mastery of specific strategies of power"* (Bell 1990, 301). Someone would ask what the line is where a court opera event stopped to be only a form of social activity and became a form of ritual. It is assuming that this line is drawn exactly there where visitors' bodies were transformed into "ritual bodies". In other words, it is at the moment when visitors had to subject themselves to the rules of the operatic event as a form of ritual. Bell addresses ritual in terms of social practice: *"Ritual practices certainly appear to be distinctive social practices simply insofar as they deliberately work to contrast themselves with other forms of practice. In this perspective ritual is not a set of distinct acts, but a* way of acting *that draws a privileged contrast between what is being done and other activities aped or mimed by the contrast"* (Bell 1990, 302). If we consider our operatic example through the perspective of "ritual body" and, consequently, "ritual power", than we have to add that in the centre there was the margravial couple set as a shining jewel amid subjects and inferiors who formed a hierarchically arrayed ornament around the Margraves. In short, the aesthetics of the ritualistic display of power was certainly not a mere chance. In the view of Bell's approach to ritual power, the Margraves used opera as specific social practice of public appearance that, when exploited in a highly ritualistic way, helped them to localize power relations effectively within the social body of the audience. When they appeared in the opera house, they actually communicated their massive social influence and political power and, consequently, created a hierarchy based on the economy of power relations which existed beyond the opera house. The ritualization of opera was a part of the delineation of power.

Accordingly, the entire opera house was studded with meaningful symbols. No one there could overlook the sculptural, pictorial and decorative spectacle of symbols, materialized in numerous allegorical figures representing fame, majesty, wisdom, justice, mercy, goodness, perfection, fertility and life itself. Through these virtues, the margravial couple guaranteed prosperity for their subjects. On the canopy over the court loge, two allegorical female figures were

placed, bringing tokens of homage for the Brandenburg eagle that has alighted between them at the same moment. The allegory of fame was presenting him with a garland of olive leaves. Zeus, the ancient Greek god of the sky, lightning, thunder, law, order, justice, and the ruler of the Olympian gods, was crowned with a garland in honour of his goodness and perfection. The other female figure, an allegory of fertility, was giving the eagle, which Zeus had appointed king of the birds because of its strength, an open pomegranate with the seeds bursting out of it. With its numerous seeds, the mustard plant which the allegory was holding in her left hand was also a symbol of the eternal renewal of life, or in other words, the continuation of the margravial family. The movement of the figures suggests that this was happening just at the moment when the ruling couple stepped under the triumphal arch and the canopy of the court loge. These allegories decorating the central loge were in function to symbolize the close and loyal relationship between the Bayreuth court and the king. The red eagle originates from the tenth century and represented the March of Brandenburg. Over the centuries, the Hohenzollerns made this province the nucleus of a power Prussian state and adopted the symbol. Thus, the red eagle became the most powerful symbol of the kings of Prussia and was therefore, in this case, directly related to the king Frederick II. In semiotic terms, these figures are a system of signs that expresses clear ideas. The eagle above the court loge is an indisputable signifier of the signified image of the king. Even though he was physically absent, he was, as a mental concept and as a symbol, always there to protect the Bayreuth court and its subjects in the opera house. The figure of Zeus could be interpreted as personification of the Margrave, whose glorious rule is accompanied by two women, his consort Wilhelmina, through the allegory of fame, and daughter Elisabeth, through the allegory of fertility: the first supports the rule; the second provides the continuation of the family lineage. The consecratory inscription above the court loge "PRO FRIEDERICO ET SOPHIA" clearly supported the allegorical use of symbols in the hall. Here she did not use the name she usually signed herself with, but her second name Sophie. This was made deliberately and certainly not by accident. The patroness of the opera house was presenting herself as the personification of wisdom, a Bayreuth Athena, while the traditional name of the house of Brandenburg, Fried(e)rich, means "bringer of peace" (German *Friede,* peace). The implication is thus that with Frederick and Wilhelmina alias Sophie an age of peace, wisdom and prosperity had dawned in Bayreuth, where Apollo, the ancient Greek god of music, poetry, art, truth, knowledge, and the son of Zeus, in the ceiling painting resides. The painting is highly ritualistically symbolized showing a massive cloud which has just drifted in front of the painted opening of the hall's ceiling. Then Apollo has appeared accompanied by his retinue. At this moment he stops playing his lyre and orders to one of the winged beings to fly down into the auditorium and

announce his arrival to the Margraves. The angel is visibly moved by his task and will now fly down to the margravial couple with his message: Apollo can now reside and the arts can thrive. Here the ruling couple adopted a theme that was incorporated in the symbolism of numerous rulers across Europe back to Roman Emperor Augustus. By presenting themselves as bringers of prosperity, goodness, peace and justice, the Margraves Frederick and Wilhelmina not only surrounded themselves with a mythological nimbus, but chose Apollo as their patron. This was a god predestined for their office who represented not only the arts at the opera house, but also the values that maintained the authority of government, such as moral order, noble moderation, prophetic vision, healing oracle, in the final instance, knowledge that is able through arts, like opera, to shed the light on the world (recapitulated according to Krückmann 2003, 74–88 and 121–123).

Stanley Tambiah's claim that ritual consists both of fixed forms and of unfixed elements, both the invariant and the variant, provide an interesting point to consider the eighteenth-century practices of operatic rituals. In certain aspects they were highly regulated and codified events, but on the other side, an open space for social behaviour existed as well. Von Rohr writes: *"In some places and in certain periods of time, no one is admitted to access the opera house, accept the one with a special ticket, scored legitimately by the Court Marshal Office. Sometimes it is ordered that only people who are masked can enter the house, and some other time it is ordered that people in disguise are not allowed to come in"*[22] (Rohr 1733, 810–811). So, the social practice of opera production and reception depended on a variety of factors. Listening to the opera was not prescribed or regulated but rather determined due to a specific situation. On the ordinary night, when there was no gala event or special visit of the Margraves, the Bayreuth court audience could follow the performance with less restricted behaviour and with limited focus on what was going on on the stage. However, in the presence of the Margraves, the visitors had to listen surely with greater attention and due respect. So, the dialectic between both political and ritualistic fixity on the one hand and behavioural and performative flexibility on the other was typical for the production and reception of eighteenth-century opera in general. There is a basic paradox of opera at the mid-eighteenth-century Bayreuth court. While Wilhelmina's dealing with opera was the result of a "proto-humanistic" or "proto-Enlightened" progressive vision and openness to the world, its rituals, its themes, and its ideals enacted through the court etiquette and through

[22] Original (German): An einigen Orten und zu machen Zeiten wird niemand eingelassen, als wer sich mit einen besondern Billet, so er aus dem Hof-Marschall-Amt bekommen, legitimiren kan. Bißweilen wird anbefohlen, daß ein ieder en masque erscheinen soll, bißweiten aber wird den maskirten Personen der Eingang verwehrt.

the spectacle of allegorical symbols in the opera house, mostly favoured one single message, the idea of absolutist sovereignty. Her flexible interest in subversive philosophical ideas went hand in hand with her fixed interest in obtaining the old social order, represented within her opera house through the private aristocratic form of entertainment, accessible for the uniform-class audience, composed by the selected minority. This contradiction indicates the heterogeneous nature of opera as a medium of communication. The Wilhelminian opera was seemed to be able to communicate equally with the enlightened visionaries and the representatives of the *ancien régime* in a cross-cultural and transnational manner. If considering this, than the Wilhelminian opera was not the ritual of the Margraves alone, of the court, or of the nobility, as it succeeded to incorporate various social agents, from fervent monarchists to public-spirited thinkers, into its ritual frame.

Termination

Recent anthropological studies of ritual provide some help to understand historical practices of opera. If older studies saw in ritual events highly stabilized form that condensed meanings in symbols and consolidated participants' sense of community, newer ones tend to underscore the social, cultural and aesthetic contingencies that mediate symbolic meaning in lived experience. The performative studies of ritual usually stress the multivalent and subversive possibilities of ritual as its stabilities. So conceived, following the way the American musicologist and cultural historian Martha Feldman applied the ritualistic perspective to the *opera seria* in eighteenth-century Naples (see Feldman's book *Opera and Sovereignty,* 2007), the meanings that margravial opera in Bayreuth extracted and organized out of contemporary anthropological theories of ritual codes would be mediated by the Margravial Opera House's spatial arrangements, rules of behaviour, by the surprise elements in performances, by shifting ideological, aesthetic and political pressures, and by the social affairs and positions of operagoers, even those who experienced the same splendid operatic spectacles there. The meanings that encompassed the entire margravial operatic machinery therefore could *"not be understood as fixed, since rituals are no longer thought of as universal and timeless, but as frameworks within which illusions of universality and timelessness can be projected through a kind of transforming lens"* (Feldman 1995, 427). Tambiah' theory of invariant and variant aspects of rituals provided a stimulating point of Feldman's entry for thinking about how social formalities, ritual codifications and performative practices intersected on the evenings when opera seria was performed in eighteen-century Naples.

Martha Feldman enters the field of historical practices of opera through the anthropological concepts of ritual and performance. In a bold musicological move, she reconceives Italian opera seria of the eighteenth century as a ritual performance, in analogy with approaches to ritual in anthropology. Her study reveals a basic paradox of a richly multivalent musical idiom in the case of Italian opera seria, which is marked by a rigid set of musical conventions and star-studded cast hierarchies, on the one hand, and also by a performative variability that is entirely situational and culturally unfixed, on the other. Her study explicates the cultural contradiction in the creation of the genre, implying that opera seria constituted a bourgeois form, attended by a mixed populace, while, at the same time, its narratives and themes almost homogeneously engaged with the ideological horizon of absolutism (Feldman 2007, 6). Playing a frankly functional role, these fixed and unfixed elements of the music of opera seria are contextually meaningful as a ritual frame for situational interaction. The reforms that opera seria underwent in the mid– to late eighteenth century were imbricated in continual efforts to accommodate the power-spectacle of courtly absolutism to the rationality of an emergent bourgeois consumership, with its increasing demands for agency in the public sphere. This fundamental contradiction implicated opera seria in numerous paradoxes. In Italy, seria was caught between the pompous splendor of halls and the proverbial indecorum of audiences; between rigid conventions of acting and dramaturgy and performers who improvized ornaments and recitative, dropped character, and even waved, smiled, and joked with the spectators. Opera seria thus turned around this duality of the highly formal and conventional (formal rigidity of plots, simile arias, ritornello structure, spectacular scenic design) and the overly performative (indecorum on the stage, excessive ornamentation, improvisatory performance, misbehavior of the audience in the house). At the *Real Teatro di San Carlo* in Naples, opera seria manifestly served the cause of Bourbon colonial interests. There, the opera house was actually a metonym for the king's more global colonial projects. On the one hand, the social life in the Naples's opera house was strictly regulated by different hierarchies, seating plans and similar, but, on the other, many travelers repeatedly remarked that the audience was often so noisy and undisciplined that one could barely hear the opera, except during the most favored arias (Feldman 1995, 429–31 and 470), or when royalty or dignitaries were present in the boxes. In the presence of the sovereign, the audience listened with respect, almost "through the king's ear" (*ibid.,* 444). The multifarious technologies through which opera seria dealt with and mobilized both the mental frame of bourgeois society and the ideological trope of absolutist sovereignty can be taken as a "ritual process" of seria's musical ramification. Drawing analogies with the Malinowski's magical rituals of indigenous populations, in particular the Trobriand of Papua New Guinea, she engages with the da

capo arias as stage rituals that allowed singers to interact with their multi-class audience. In this light, seria has often been termed ritualistic due to the fact that it was repetitive, conventionalized, rigid and formalized (*ibid.,* 442). Accordingly, opera seria transmitted meaning to its audiences, as Feldman suggests, in a ritualistic way in which seria's various forms of communication – librettos, arias, stagings – appear as envoys bearing fixed messages for community order and irrefutable authority to spectators.

Feldman's performative model of opera seria founded in ritual anthropology argues that opera seria is better understood as a variety of spectacle than as drama in the modern sense. In this view, opera seria relies for its effectiveness on compositional, dramaturgical and institutional forms that counteract representational congruities in plots, stage designs, and singers' genders. By applying theoretical models of anthropologists Victor Turner and Stanley Tambiah to the performative model of opera seria, she sees the ritual mechanics of opera seria as both highly fixed and highly unfixed, ranging from the interactions of singers and audiences to the structuring and delivery of arias and norms of acting. The highly ritualized attention to the stage was relegated mainly to the intersubjective play between singers and viewers. However, she contextualizes, such ritualistic interplay and many other practices that supported the creation of opera seria were embedded in the larger ritual system of Carnival, masking, and other forms of festivity (Feldman 1995, 423–84). Her application of anthropological theories to "musicological terrain" demonstrates that recent anthropological studies of ritual can provide some help in order to explain opera's past. With this, her anthropological study of opera seria enriches musicological studies with experiential dimension of music while also showing how socio-anthropological thinking can be helpful in understanding not only current but also past cultural experience.

The observation of ritual has been a primary concern of anthropology throughout its history. Anthropologists use "ritual" to denote any activity with a high degree of formality and a non-utilitarian purpose. In its broadest sense, ritual may refer not to any particular kind of event but to the expressive aspect of all human activity. To the extent that it conveys messages about the social and cultural status of individuals, any human action has a ritual dimension. In this sense, even such high-cultural acts as attending the opera house share a ritual aspect of worship, sacrifice and the crowd. Ritual provides anthropologists with one of their richest sources of information about cultures. In many cases, rituals explain, illustrate and dramatize a culture's nomenclature, taxonomy and mythology. Clifford Geertz's world-famous essay on the cockfight in Bali shows that the process of this Balinese ritual tells not only about such social groupings but also about Balinese notions of time, of good and evil, and of life and death (Geertz 1973). In his well-known cultural analysis of the social organization of

nineteenth-century Bali, Geertz offers a vivid portrait of symbols, myths, rituals, and ceremonies – in short, the theater – that essentially constituted *negara,* the pre-colonial Balinese state. In Bali Geertz found negara to be a "theater state", governed by rituals, ceremonies and symbols rather than by force. He reports that the Balinese state did not specialize in tyranny, conquest or bureaucracy. Instead, it emphasized an organized spectacle, a theater state designed to dramatize the ruling obsession of Balinese culture. The elaborate ceremonies and ritual productions the state created functioned to display the master image of political life, the kingship, as the theater state. The author shows, how the king, as both a ritual object and a political actor, was a paradox of active passivity. The closer he came to being an image of power, the further removed he was from the machinery that controlled this power. As Geertz writes: *"Court ceremonialism was the driving force of court politics; and mass ritual was not a device to shore up the state, but rather the state, even in its final gasp, was a device for the enactment of mass ritual. Power served pomp, not pomp power"* (Geertz 1980, 13).

The relationship between power and pomp is in Geertz's case reversed to similar relationships in the Western culture. The Balinese theater state seems to have exactly the opposite interplay between ritual and society compared to the high-cultural pomp of European and North-American societies, as in opera, for instance, where, to paraphrase Geertz, pomp served power, not power pomp. In European societies, the opera house has itself exerted various forms of symbolic power and was a demonstration of the strengthening of social bonds between monarchs and, mostly, exclusive groups of people. The Bayreuth example could be illustrative one in particular, because the margravial couple, who built the *Markgräfliches Opernhaus* to glorify the connection between the dynasty of Hohenzollern and the Bayreuth land, placed the opera house, as Krückmann notes, close to the former Margravial palace. The juxtaposition of the two buildings enabled Wilhelmina and her husband to advertise the union of art and power. Through opera, where this union took its highest form, the relationship between the margravial couple and its people was reaffirmed. This assumes that ritual has a communicative role wrapped in a web of symbolism. The glittering pomp and rite of presenting operas on the Bayreuth stage, particularly those authored anyhow by Wilhelmina, was obviously in service of the reproduction of the social hierarchy and symbolic forms of a margravial might and absoluteness The Bayreuth example presented here assumes a purpose, a function and a meaning behind ritual action personified in the form of the Margravine's and Margrave's presence, among people, at the opera house. This has implications for the relationship between ritual, dramatizing the presence of the ruling couple, and society, illustrating their relationship with their subjects in everyday life. However, in both the Balinese and the Bayreuth case, it is obvious that rituals tell

us important things about cultures and societies. In both cases, even though in a different way, the strengthening of bonds between the ruler and subjects was a clear demonstration of the strengthening of social bonds, or the legitimacy of authority. That opera is an affair and important spectacle for such cities is clear in the case of Bayreuth. It is therefore possible to regard the business of opera at the mid-eighteenth-century Bayreuth court functioning as a "hall of magic mirrors". To say with Turner, in this Bayreuth operatic hall of mirrors the reflections are multiple, some magnifying, some diminishing, and some distorting the entire operatic ritual, but these mirrors also provoke not merely thought, but also power feelings, even among famous European thinkers, as this was the case in Bayreuth. At the mid-eighteenth-century Bayreuth court opera house, the magic mirrors of the opera, literally, provoked reflexivity, or at least, the will to reflect the world. Those performances not only reflected who they were but also shaped and directed what they wanted to become.

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Opera kao slika društva: rituali "iskrivljenih ogledala" u markgrofovskoj operi u Bajrojtu u 18. veku

U članku predlažem ritualistički pristup operi u istorijskom slučaju markgrofovske opere u bavarskom Bajrojtu sredine 18. veka, kako bih ukazao na to da se dvorska opera može razumeti kao jedna vrsta slike društva. U tom smislu, dvorska opera se posmatra kao posebna vrsta komunikacije putem koje je opera uspostavila različite tipove odnosa između sebe i društvenih svetova u kojima i za koje je stvarana. Referirajući na operske rituale organizovane pod vođstvom i sponzorstvom Vilhelmine od Bajrojta i njenog supruga Frederika, biće utvrđeno kako je vladajući par koristio operu za niz društvenih i političkih ciljeva. Markgrofovska opera je, i kao žanr i kao institucija, interpretirana uz pomoć analitičkih modela antropologa rituala i teatra kao što su Viktor Tarner, Kliford Gerc, Moris Bloh, Stenli Tambija i Ketrin Bel i uz korišćenje njihovih teorija rituala, posebno Tarnerovog koncepta "dvorane iskrivljenih ogledala".

Ključne reči: opera, ritual, Bajrojt, markgrofovska opera, Vilhelmina od Bajrojta

Opéra comme image de la société: rituels des "miroirs magiques" dans l'Opéra des Margraves à Bayreuth au 18e siècle

Dans cet article je propose une approche ritualiste de l'opéra dans le cas historique de l'Opéra des Margraves à Bayreuth en Bavière au milieu du 18e siècle, pour montrer que l'opéra de cour peut être compris comme une sorte d'image de la société. En ce sens, l'opéra de cour est observé comme un genre particulier de communication à l'aide de laquelle l'opéra a établi différents types de rapports entre lui-même et les mondes sociaux dans lesquels et pour lesquels il a été créé. En se basant sur des rituels d'opéras organisés sous la direction et le parrainage de Wilhelmine de Bayreuth et de son époux Frederick, on déterminera que le couple régnant a utilisé l'opéra pour toute une suite d'objectifs sociaux et politiques. L'opéra des Margraves, en tant que genre aussi bien qu'en tant qu'institution est interprété à l'aide des modèles analytiques des anthropologues des rituels et du théâtre comme Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, Maurice Bloch, Stanley Tambiah, Catherine Bell, et leurs théories des rituels, notamment du concept de Turner de « salle des miroirs magiques » ont été utilisés.

Mots clés: opéra, rituel, Bayreuth, Opéra des Margraves, Wilhelmine de Bayreuth

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