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Opera as Social Status: The Private Teatro Sociale as a Reproduced Disposition to Mantua's Cultural Habitus

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Abstract

That opera was and can still be a great source of social status, prestige, cultural and symbolic capital, is already quite well known. That it can play such a role successfully in an utterly specific and intricate manner, which today seems entirely anachronistic and obsolete, is rarer to find. One such example notorious for remaining a class in itself is connected to the Mantua opera house called Teatro Sociale, which is privately owned by the heirs of the original box-holders who built the theatre in 1822, thus in a quite different *Zeitgeist* than today. Since then, there have been many political and social changes for the city of Mantua, which has resulted in a noticeable transformation of just one province of a much larger foreign-domineering monarchy over the patriotic unification with other Italian lands to the democratic membership within the Republic of Italy. The renowned opera house of Mantua, a private institution with public purpose, has managed through all those years of massive social change to remain untouched by one single element; that is its box-holders never surrendered their boxes to the Municipality or the State. It is semi-privately managed by the heirs who have until recently administered it as if it were still the 1800s. With this article, we attempt to reveal the historical context and social particularities that help explain that social world of a specific cultural tradition that have produced and reproduced such enduring box-holding practices over time in a city where possessing the opera house was and remains more important than attending it. This analysis is done on the basis of the social status theories of Max Weber, Talcott Parsons and Pierre Bourdieu, but particularly on the basis of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, disposition, distinction and reproduction. Hopefully, through analysis it is easier to understand the "anachronistic" story of the tenacious and self-willed Mantuan box-

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holders, including a complex and historically conditioned situation showing that attending the opera house is one thing, but to own it is something else entirely.

Keywords: opera, social status, distinction, reproduction, Teatro Sociale, Mantua.

1. Preparation

Mantua is venerable in opera studies, music research, and theatre scholarship. More than any other northern Italian city, its musical history, and theatrical and operatic patronage have an established scholarly tradition that runs in a steady line from the 1880s and the writings of local savants such as Pietro Canal (1977[1879]) and Stefano Davari (1975[1885]), to Antonio Bertolotti (1890) and Ernesto Lui with Aldo Ottolenghi (1923). It continues through to the modern expansion of the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary-based archival opera scholarship, spectacle studies, exploration of festivities, theatre research, and historical musicology, especially of the Renaissance. Included as well is recent work by Giuseppe Amadei (1973), Iain Fenlon (1980), Giancorrado Barozzi (1982), Claudio Gallico (1983), Susan Parisi (1996), Paola Besutti (1999), Claudia Burattelli (1999), Paola Cirani (2001), Anthony Cashman (2002), Noris Zuccoli (2005), William Prizer (2009), Donald Sanders (2012), and Alessandra Moreschi (2013)¹. The above-mentioned authors present their musicological, historical or folkloristic accounts of the major trends in the patronal history of music and theatre in Mantua over the entire sixteenth century, from the arrival of Isabella d'Este Gonzaga in 1490 to the rise of spectacle amid the festive uses of secular music at the end of the sixteenth century; from the Renaissance festivities to first ducal theatrical settings; from the beginning of the *Teatro Sociale* to its recent and current social role.

The ancient duchy of Mantua, a territory of modest size but politically independent and of certain importance, had from its beginnings been marked by musical and theatrical activities. Since 1328, when the Gonzaga dynasty came to power, and for several decades, even civil wars did not dissuade the rulers from paying significant attention to various pastimes, from the usual and very popular horse races and rides (*palli*) to court festivities (*feste di corte*)².

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to those who helped me in collecting interesting literature and materials: Ms. Alessandra Moreschi, the author of the book *Il Teatro Sociale di Mantova*; Ms. Francesca Malucelli from the *Ufficio stampa del Teatro Sociale di Mantova*; and Ms. Karolyn Close, a teacher of the English language, for editing and proofreading.

² For court festivities and public displays of the Gonzagas, see Anthony Cashman's article "The Problem of Audience in Mantua", *Renaissance Studies*, 16 (3), 355–365.

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Yet in the fifteenth century, in the climate of the cultural fervour stimulated by Vittorino da Feltre, the Mantuan court began to organise its first spectacles and performances, some of them quite memorable, such as *Orfeo* by Angelo Ambrogini (called Poliziano). The splendid heyday of the Mantuan musical theatre was achieved by Vincenzo I and his children. Despite some serious problems, from the end of the sixteenth century until 1627, when the last member of the main branch of the family died, the Gonzagas managed to offer certain magnificent performances such as *Il pastor fido* of Giovanni Battista Guarini or *Orfeo* and *Arianna* of Claudio Monteverdi. It is due to those musical adventures that the Mantua of the Gonzagas had an image of a city with extraordinary grandeur, spectacular urbanity, cultural luxury and municipal refinement. Festivities, spectacles and shows which had already had enjoyed good fortune in the previous period were strategically used as political tools. They now constituted a vitally important element for the court. Triumphal fireworks (*fuochi trionfali*), comedies, masquerades (*mascherate*), costumed regattas (*regate in costumi*), equestrian parades (*sfilate equestri*), interludes (*intermezzi*), tournaments (*tornei*) and, above all, a new cultural form called *opera in musica* ('work in music') was found to be an excellent means to mask the insecurity of the rulers, economic difficulties, military fragility and the unsolved problems³ which heavily preoccupied the House of Gonzaga (Cirani 2001). As historian Giuseppe Amadei suggests, it is simply a taste for spectacle, an inclination to festivity and public exhibitionism which motivated the Gonzagas from Marquis Ludovico to Duke Vincenzo I – a period expanding more than a century and a half – to form a special climate for the artistic, musical and cultural breakthrough of Mantua of the Renaissance (Amadei 1973).

³ Not to mention the relations with Monferrato as they became particularly difficult after the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559. However, the flourishing situation began to change drastically after the death of Vincenzo II, the last representative of the ruling dynasty. In 1627, the direct line of the Gonzaga family came to an end with the vicious and weak last Gonzaga ruler, and Mantua slowly declined under the new rulers, the Gonzaga-Nevers, a cadet French branch of the family. The war of Mantuan succession broke out due to the very serious problems with the succession issues of the duchy, and in 1630 an imperial army of German mercenaries besieged Mantua, bringing the plague with them. Since then Mantua has never truly recovered, even though the city enjoyed a certain revival later at the beginning of the eighteenth century under the Austrian rule of the Habsburgs. For more, see Daniele Lucchini's *Rise and Fall of a Capital* (Mantua, 2013), Marialuisa Baldi's *Filosofia e cultura a Mantova nella seconda metà del Settecento* (Florence, 1979) and Giuseppe Fochessati's *I Gonzaga di Mantova e l'ultimo duca* (Mantua, 1912).

In operatic terms, Mantua thus figures as one of the northern Italian cities where opera began its path four hundred years ago as an aristocratic entertainment. In its earliest years, opera emerged as an enhancement of festivities and ceremonies designed to glorify the ruling dynasties. And this was also the case of Mantua under the rule of Vincenzo Gonzaga, the Duke of Mantua, who gathered the best poets, musicians, singers and other collaborators, including the duke's *maestro di cappella*, Claudio Monteverdi, considered the very first opera composer. That was, according to musicologists Lorenzo Bianconi and Thomas Walker (1984), probably because the Duke of Mantua engaged singers and musicians largely for the purpose of lending them as an instrument of prestige⁴ and cultural propaganda for his state, which was on the verge of collapse. The highlight of those Mantuan operatic efforts occurred in 1607 with the performance of Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, sponsored by Prince Francesco Gonzaga, heir to the throne, against the background of the wedding festivities of Francesco Gonzaga and Margherita of Savoy. The success of that performance, according to musicologist Piero Weiss, was certainly a highly exclusive court entertainment (Weiss, 2002) so great that it was doubtless a deliberate attempt to compete in the political game with Florence and perhaps even a symbolic temporary victory of Mantua over Florence⁵.

⁴ Susan Parisi also reveals Mantua's extensive and well organised recruitment of musicians and acquirement of instruments under the Gonzagas in the early Baroque. Inviting the best possible 'instrumentalists and singers with well-established reputations and considerable, or sometimes phenomenal skill, whose presence was intended to enhance the quality of music making and the prestige of the Mantuan establishment» (Parisi, 1996: 120) was of major concern.

⁵ A number of projects concerning music and opera in Mantua from the sack of the city (1630) to the end of the Gonzaga rule (1707) have been carried out recently revealing performances of operas and oratorios in the Sala del Refettorio (now the Sala dei Fiumi) and in the Sala di Troia in the last years of the seventeenth century. However, the crucial problem from the early Mantuan operatic history has been unsolved until recently, that is the problem of the location of the premiere of *Orfeo* in February 1607. This involved the careful scrutiny of a large number of surveys, documents and related materials which have taken researchers in unexpected directions, including the discovery of the original Sala degli Specchi ('Room [or hall] of the mirrors'). First, those documents confirm the practice in Mantua of private "concerts" reserved for select circles of the court and aristocracy just as occurred in the courts of Cardinals Montalto and Borghese in Rome. And second, they led to the remarkable discovery of the actual Sala degli Specchi of the sixteenth century. Namely, Renato Berzaghi's *Il Palazzo Ducale di Mantova*, available in all good museum shops in Italy, states that the present Sala degli Specchi was so called only in the eighteenth century, and that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the name referred to a

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Since that exclusive Mantuan operatic moment, many centuries have passed but some things do not change so quickly in this city. There is still a specific operatic anachronism of social exclusivity, the opera house *Teatro Sociale*⁶. The story starts as far back as 1549 with *Teatro Regio*⁷, the first stable theatre in Mantua and is followed, more or less in the same part of the Ducal Palace with other court theatres. There was, for instance, in 1608 a ducal theatre called *Teatro Grande di Castello* or *Teatro Grande di Corte*, the biggest theatre at the Piazza Castello, built there by constructor Antonio Maria Viani. After this point, other ducally-spirited theatres were inaugurated: in 1669 *Teatro Fedeli*, a comedy hall named according to the court maestro Luigi Fedeli and built by architect Fabrizio Carini nicknamed Motta; then *Teatrino Piccolo di Castello* which ran in the late seventeenth century; in the period from 1732–1781 *Teatro Vecchio* was made by famous Ferdinando Galli Bibiena. It burnt down in 1781 and was restored in 1782 and remodelled by Giuseppe Piermarini as *Teatro Nuovo di Mantova* and was active during the period from 1783–1898. This last court theatre in a long line of history of *teatri ducali* or *teatri di corte*, was demolished⁸. However, by the beginning of the 1800s, there was a need for a new theatre and in 1817 a society of the most illustrious and

room above the Cancelleria. The location of Monteverdi's Sala degli Specchi thus became open to debate until recently when musicologist Paola Besutti discovered that there was another, older Sala degli Specchi, where *Orfeo* took place. This does not necessarily mean, Besutti adds, that the Sala degli Specchi was used exclusively for music. Indeed, she finds the idea unlikely, as it is more likely that its function was presumably varied and adaptable to need. Such a flexible approach to court space turning different private locations into public shows was quite often in the case of hosting sixteenth- and seventeenth-century musical spectacles. For example, although the Mantuan court had a large theatre from the early sixteenth century, musical and theatrical events for more select audiences continued to be held in a variety of rooms sometimes specially prepared for the occasion. One case in point is the production of *Orfeo* in February 1607 with the support of the *Accademia degli Immaghiti* (summarised according to Besutti 1999: 452-454 and 463).

⁶ A very small part of this interesting story was delivered first in Kotnik (2015: 194-196); see also Kotnik (2016: 94-95, 113-114).

⁷ It was the court theatre, built between 1549 and 1551 by Giovanni Battista Bertani and erected at the request of regent cardinal Ercole Gonzaga and was located in the long building to the west of the castle which also housed the public armoury (Cirani 2001: 11). The Bertani Theatre was short-lived: in fact, it was destroyed by a disastrous fire, possibly arson, in 1588 (Moreschi, 2013: 15).

⁸ For more about the period of ducal theatres of Mantua, from the Gonzagas' spectacles of fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, several court theatres, first public halls for comedies, to *Teatro dell'Accademia*, better known under the name *Teatro Scientifico*, see Amadei, *I 150 anni del Sociale nella storia dei teatri di Mantova*, p. 3–98.

wealthiest citizens was formed with the aim of giving the city a new opera house. This was the *Teatro Nuovo della Società*; during the nineteenth century it was called *Teatro nazionale di Mantova* and today is known as *Teatro Sociale*. Those wealthiest members of Mantuan society paid for the construction by purchasing their boxes. That was often the case in many Italian theatres, as nowhere in the world except in Italy have opera houses always been a real speciality for the *popolo* or *cittadini*. The active involvement of citizens in producing opera is explicitly discussed by historian Carlotta Sorba (2006), who reveals that all great Italian composers, such as Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini and Verdi, built a close relationship with box-holders, local opera clientele and the general public by using direct communication and other strategies of public or semi-public activities to please the “public” in every sense.

2. Presentation

In Italy, opera houses are more than concrete, stone, glass and wood with beautiful decorations. There, opera houses were built to give cities or towns importance and dignity. The grandeur of the theatre was an indication of the prominence of the area. Theatres became the focal point of the city’s cultural, political and social life. For rich people, they were a home away from home. Many opera houses were paid for by the nobility who bought boxes in the theatre. They were known as the *palcbettisti*, similarly organised like the Condominio of the Teatro Sociale di Mantova, and treated their boxes like their second home. Since then many things have changed, but the opera house in Mantua still remains in a class by itself. The box-holders managed the Sociale from the very beginning when it opened in 1822, but unlike other opera houses in Italy, the box-holders never surrendered their boxes to the city or the state. Consequently, over the last decades, the Sociale has come to be seen as an eclectic anachronism, managed by the heirs of the original box-holders, who have till recently administered it as if it were still the 1800s. Despite that elitist management and perhaps even obsolete ownership, the Condominio of the Sociale expected the Municipality and the Province to sponsor their productions and join the administration of the theatre, which those public entities refused to do. In the last decade or two, that anachronistic situation led to numerous disputes between the city and the Condominio⁹. In 1999, their representative, Ezio Ricci, began to threaten that

⁹ The list of newspaper articles reporting about these disputes whether in local, regional or national Italian dailies and journals is long. Here are just two examples of media representations concerning the legal and social status of the Sociale: Cristina Del Piano, “Comune e Provincia sostengono il Sociale” [The Municipality and

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the opera season in Mantua could very well be the last. The Italian newspaper *Corriere della sera* dramatically reported: 'Its history is two centuries long. It is the symbol of spectacle and the cultural ferment of the city. However, all this counts little, it seems: the *Teatro Sociale di Mantova* is likely to close its doors. There is no money. The "Massimo", as the theatre is usually called, is likely to remain suffocated by the debt of nine contracts over the years. On the one hand, it is the property of the Sociale, a Condominio consisting of the most illustrious names of the city, that is to maintain its autonomy of management; on the other, there are the Municipality and the Province of Mantua who would also be willing to intervene with funding as long as they can be assured of influencing activities within the theatre. "The situation is really serious", explains the lawyer, Riccardo Riva Berni, the president of the *Condominio dei palchettisti*, and continues "There is a danger that the theatre can no longer offer the opera and drama programmes that have been the pride of the city for fifty years". "Public bodies have remained indifferent to our appeals all these years," adds Ezio Ricci, the secretary of the Condominio. The debt amounts to less than two billion, including some extraordinary maintenance costs. The co-production agreements with the theatres of Lucca, Pisa, Jesi and with the Region Lombardy (which enabled to draft the current opera season) fail to move obstacles. In addition, the state subsidy of one billion is not sufficient for operas. And what of the Municipality of Mantua? "One thing is our provision to prequalify the theatre, another is to have debts which no one has ever wanted to explain", says Eristeo Balali, the municipality's counsellor for culture, and he continues "We have heard about the deficit of one billion and 800 million from the press. From our part there is, still, a commitment to set up a committee to evaluate the possibility of the establishment of a private public foundation which would uplift the fortunes of the theatre"¹⁰ (Gorni, 1999: 51).

Province Support the Sociale], *Gazzetta di Mantova*, 24 November 2004, p. 28; G. V., "Il Sociale ai privati? Rispetto la scelta ..." [The Sociale to the Private Persons? Respect the Choice ...], *Gazzetta di Mantova*, 23 October 2004, p. 15.

¹⁰ Original (Italian): Ha due secoli di storia. In città è il simbolo dello spettacolo e del fermento culturale. Tutto questo, però, sembra contar poco: il Teatro Sociale di Mantova rischia di chiudere. Mancano i soldi. Il «Massimo», come viene chiamato il teatro, rischia infatti di rimanere soffocato dai debiti a nove zeri contratti negli anni. Da un lato c'è la proprietà del «Sociale» - un condominio in cui figurano nomi fra i più illustri della città - che vuol mantenere la sua autonomia di gestione; dall'altro ci sono il Comune e la Provincia di Mantova, che sarebbero anche disposti ad intervenire con finanziamenti, a patto però di poter incidere nell'attività del teatro. «La situazione è davvero grave - spiega l'avvocato Riccardo Riva Berni, presidente del Condominio dei palchettisti. C'è il pericolo che il teatro non possa più offrire i cartelloni di lirica e

As historian John Rosselli (1996) would point out, only a great fuss around opera can justify the financial costs to own and perform it. It is principally the box-holders who think that public organisations, such as the municipality or province, should finance their theatre even though the *Sociale*, like all the theatres in Italy, receives a contribution from the state for every performance. Despite the cancellation of certain productions, the theatre still hosts an opera season, but the season varies as does the number of productions. At times, the entire season can be cancelled as local media reported, or it is rumoured that it will be cancelled: 'No opera season at the *Teatro Sociale di Mantova* also this year. The money will be used for restoration. That is to say, it is the pledge of President Guido Benedini who wants to keep the building safe and beautiful. All expenses for construction will be taken upon the shoulders of private persons; Benedini says: "There are families here that have been paying for 200 years to continue to have a theatre." The Condominio will give up having a programme and will continue to rent the boxes for the events that request it ...'¹¹ (Gianola, Veneziani, Novellini, 2014)

In Mantua, opera attendance still seems to be a highly exclusive act of old social belonging and positioning. Due to this antagonistic clash of opinions, views, inscriptions and self-ascriptions, operatic events at the *Sociale* can be strange for tourists or non-local visitors who are not acquainted with this specific operatic problem. Since the boxes are still privately owned, there are

prosa che per 50 anni sono stati il vanto della città». «Gli enti pubblici sono sempre rimasti indifferenti ai nostri appelli», aggiunge Ezio Ricci, segretario del Condominio. Il debito ammonta a poco meno di due miliardi, comprese alcune spese di manutenzione straordinaria. Gli accordi di coproduzione stretti con i teatri di Lucca, di Pisa, di Jesi e con la Regione Lombardia (che hanno permesso di stilare la stagione d'opera attualmente in corso) non riescono a smuovere gli ostacoli. Così come non è sufficiente il contributo statale di un miliardo per gli spettacoli lirici. E il Comune di Mantova? «Un conto è il nostro apporto per la riqualificazione del teatro, un altro sono i debiti, che nessuno ci ha mai voluto spiegare - dice Eristeo Balali, assessore comunale alla Cultura. Abbiamo saputo del deficit d'un miliardo e 800 milioni della stampa. Da parte nostra c'è comunque l'impegno a costituire una commissione per valutare la possibilità d'istituire una fondazione pubblico privata che risollevi le sorti del teatro».

¹¹ Original (Italian): Niente stagione lirica anche quest'anno al Teatro Sociale di Mantova. I soldi serviranno per il restauro. A dirlo è il Presidente Guido Benedini, che vuole mantenere fede all'impegno di rendere sicura e bella la struttura. Una spesa, quella dei cantieri, tutta a carico dei privati; dice Benedini: «qui ci sono famiglie da 200 anni pagano per continuare ad avere un teatro». Il condominio rinuncerà ad avere un cartellone e continuerà ad affittare i palchi per le manifestazioni che ne faranno richiesta ...

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only a limited number of seats available for each performance – those in the orchestra and the top two galleries. Although the theatre is usually ‘sold out’, it is sometimes ‘half empty’ or poorly attended (Charna Lynn, 2005). In such box-holding situations one might say sarcastically that even the name of the theatre has become misleading. The name ‘Teatro Sociale’ was once meant to be, during the course of the risorgimental nineteenth century Mantua, a convincing description of the then social situation as such and of the spirit hidden in something like ‘Social Theatre’, ‘People’s Theatre’, ‘Folk Theatre’, ‘Civic Theatre’ or ‘National Theatre’. Those meanings have lost their credit and value in the last decades, when its social function and resonance would be probably better described using other names, such as ‘Teatro dei Palchettisti’ (Theatre of Box-Holders). This is perhaps even nearer to its original entitlement ‘Teatro della Società’ (Theatre of Society) even though its meaning could be understood today as more pejorative and exclusivist than two hundred years ago.

Social situations change, but the operatic emotion, flavour, passion, and some anachronisms remain. The Teatro Sociale in Mantua appears to be such an anachronism as it is still owned and run by the heirs of the first Condominio who make it clear that outsiders are not welcome. Behind this Mantuan dispute between the Condominio and the Municipality, an old antagonism between the public and the private is in place. On the one hand, this is what makes the contemporary Mantuan operatic scene a bizarre relic of its past social values, and on the other, it is also a trace of the times when opera still held standing and sway, practiced at the peak of its splendour and glory by its very ritual. It is not perhaps so much a fascination of the Mantuan contemporaries that has been at stake in recent decades as it is the fascination of Mantuan ancestors who obviously took opera with the utmost seriousness it deserves, who were fully interpellated into its subjects and formed a community relying upon it. So the contemporary box-holders are caught precisely by this mediated, delegated and inherited and hence, stubborn fascination. At the Sociale, the mythical or legendary beginnings of box-holders’ society are revitalised and re-imagined. It is at their opera house where their weird ancient rites and vanishing but still persistent origins and valuables, are presented and re-enacted, in both their past and present form. The more the box-holders’ social status is questioned, obsolete and even legendary, the more they persist in holding on to their operatic privilege. The moment they enter their Sociale, they begin to act in the same manner as their ancestors who built the opera house with their own money. Opera in Mantua thus retroactively re-creates the noble past that is almost lost today, yet is dearly needed and piously re-created. It is therefore no coincidence that the Condominio of box-holders would rather cancel a performance or even close

the theatre than give any benevolent sign that would make other citizens think that the theatre is entirely public and civic. The Mantuan example meaningfully indicates that the cultural transformation of opera from the elitist entertainment of a noble minority into a place of public events of/for citizens which started vividly yet in Venice in the middle of the seventeenth century and ended at the beginning of the twentieth century, is not entirely over yet.

3. Interpretation

Clearly, the story of the Mantuan *palchettisti* is a story about people competing with and for culture. The very definition of what can legitimately be called 'Mantuan Culture' with a capital 'C' is one of the strongest arguments of the box-holders' fight for their inherited role through which they have been related to their Sociale for two centuries. Is the Sociale the very symbol of Mantuan culture because of the Culture of its longstanding owners, or it is so because of the culture that has been and still takes place on its stage? The answer seems to be obvious: the Sociale is Mantua's Culture when it is owned and guarded by its box-holders. Or is it? Here it is the boundaries of Mantua's culture which are at stake. At issue is also the fact that the box-holders are currently losing the authority to define themselves and the substantive content of their Sociale. It is for this reason that we would like to offer an 'analytical alternative' to the essentialist views in which the cultural pre-eminence of box-holders at the Sociale was and could be interpreted as something which derives from the purity of their culture and from the authentic longevity of their theatrical life or from the very essence of their "inborn" aesthetic, artistic or moral values. It is these values which have enabled them to keep their theatre functioning. The box-holders' social commitments to the Sociale's theatrical and musical art are neither 'pure' nor 'natural' nor 'inborn'. They are in fact, if we use the vocabulary of Pierre Bourdieu, dispositions which come from affluence, inherited tradition and at least partly reproduced social standing.

The model of social stratification is a key element of the dominant cultural arbitrary of Western societies. Social class and social status have and continue to generate conflict regarding who defines what as Culture. The recent contention between the private body of Sociale's Condominio and the public body of municipal and governmental competences regarding the Sociale actually injects the presumption suggesting to us that there, in the very relationship between these two social antipodes, is something to be re-defined or re-fixed. And what is that? It seems to be the Culture of the box-holders that is put to question nowadays; the value of this Culture that seemed to be

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safely protected, untouchable and undoubted until recently. This conflict may have hardened the boundaries between the private and public matters as we live in a world of supposed postmodern eclecticism and cultural relativism which have both successfully contributed to the subversive dissolution of past Culture into present culture. Gradually, in the course of late twentieth century, the Sociale has perhaps ceased to be a sacred place of box-holders' Culture as it has become just one among other cultural places in the city. In the past, the box-holders had successfully nourished and monopolistically protected a domain of practices and objects which were subjectively defined as the Culture of the Sociale. Now, when the principles of their Culture are put into the process of social objectification, their cultural commitments to the Sociale become themselves objectified as something to be explained and re-examined. The classificatory boundary between subjective Culture and objectified culture becomes revealed as arbitrary and only one manifestation of the reality of class relations and status relations in the past, and not a result of the historically proven natural positions in Mantua's social universe.

One consistent theme which emerges in this Mantuan operatic example is related to struggles and competition over social status. When it comes to Culture, opera is certainly an eminent cultural symbol greatly communicated and imagined through high social status *par excellence*. In Mantua, opera has always been a matter of cultural distinction, of honour and prestige. The Sociale is only the last marker of this cultural distinction, which has significantly contributed to the maintenance of the urban class and the city's social stratification from the late Renaissance until today. Pierre Bourdieu has provided an excellent explanation as to what the point of 'cultural distinction' is: '... the idea that struggles for recognition are a fundamental dimension of social life and that what is at stake in them is an accumulation of a particular form of capital, honour in the sense of reputation and prestige, and that there is, therefore, a specific logic behind the accumulation of symbolic capital ...' (Bourdieu, 1990: 22).

In short, as defined in *La Distinction* (1979), distinction is, simply, a social strategy of differentiation which is at the heart of social life. It is therefore inherent to societies: the more developed and advanced one society is, the more important role the mechanism of distinction assumes. Thus, when we are dealing with the Sociale, we are actually tackling the way in which social investments and interests have been mobilised and organised in the struggle for social recognition or status to denote distinction in the community. In other words, the cultural status of opera has been unambiguous in Mantua from its beginnings. This primordial unambiguity of opera dates back to the beginning of the seventeenth century and has quite easily turned the privileged classes in the following centuries toward opera. In Mantua, the opera house

was and remains an indisputable place to see and be seen, but above all a place where people's social status continues to be vividly created and re-created within different parts of the community. Throughout its history, opera in Mantua has expressed strong meanings, values and represents a significant amount of social, cultural and symbolic capital embodying, enacting and negotiating the social status of its adherents, supporters, sponsors, donors and admirers. French philosopher Alain de Botton describes social status as '*one's position in society*'. The word derives from the Latin *statum* or standing (past participle of the verb *stare*, to stand). Generally defined, social status is the position or rank of a person or group within society. In a narrow sense, the word refers to one's legal or professional standing within a group, but in the broader and more relevant sense here, it refers to one's value and importance in the eyes of the society: 'The consequences of high status are pleasant. They include resources, freedom, space, comfort, time, and, as importantly perhaps, a sense of being cared for and thought valuable – conveyed through invitations, flattery, laughter ... deference and attention. High status is thought by many (by freely admitted by few) to be one of the finest of earthly goods' (Botton, 2004: 3).

As social human beings – perhaps a few rare individuals aside – we always rely on signs of respect from others to feel tolerable to ourselves. Worry about our social status or standing can inspire feelings of a lack of accomplishment and fulfilment. The hunger for status creates in people a kind of status anxiety which possesses an exceptional capacity to provoke sources of dissatisfaction. This is often so, regrettably, because status is difficult to achieve and even harder to maintain over an individual's lifetime or over generations.

The sociology of social stratification, which describes the way people are placed or hierarchically ordered in society, is of great conceptual and theoretical help to understand the importance of social status. Societies that involve the arrangement of individuals into *strata* or layers that lie one on top of the other in a hierarchy of advantaged and disadvantaged life chances are said to be stratified. The advantages and disadvantages possessed by members of social strata constitute their power. This power derives from the various resources available to them. Property and other economic elements that generate a substantial investment income and that can in turn, be used to buy education and consequently social prestige, gives power. Karl Marx and his followers, the Marxists, have seen property and other economic resources as the bases of social power, though this is only one part of the story. Alternatives to the Marxist view have proposed the importance of other, additional elements. For instance, the work of German sociologist Max Weber developed closely in reaction to Marx. One of Weber's main concerns was to

show that it is impossible to explain everything in terms of economic factors alone, and he recognised the importance of non-economic factors in social stratification. Class situation is only one causal component in life chances. The other causal components are to be found in the non-economic factors of status, of status relations and situations. Status relations and status divisions emerge from the distribution of prestige or social honour within a community. In its most general sense, a person's status is his or her standing or reputation in the eyes of others. People rate each other as superior or inferior in relation to the values they hold in common with other members of their society or a group within society. Those whose actions conform to these values receive approval and a great deal of prestige. In other words, they have a high status in their community. Those who deviate from these values or who conform to less central values are assigned a lower status and may be rejected as outsiders (Fulcher, Scott 2011).

If we see Weberian positioning of status through his broader theory of social stratification based on three factors of stratification – property (class), prestige (status) and power (party) – then it is clear that his notion of social status involves reference to social esteem and therefore an agent's orientation, motives and intentions¹². However, Weber's conclusions are based on status issues in complex or large societies. In small-scale societies, and in many face-to-face situations, status differences are based on detailed personal knowledge. For instance, in small towns, people know one another as individuals through frequent interaction in many different situations, and they can easily make an overall judgement of reputation or social standing. If in large-scale societies, a person's status depends more on the appraisal of a person's overall style of life. However, in small-scale societies a person's status can be tightly connected to detailed personal knowledge revealing what one thinks about the other. A style of life is the way that people carry out the tasks associated with their most important social positions and the customs and practices they follow as members of particular social groups. Occupations, gender-roles, ethnic-group memberships and class belongings may all be associated with particular and distinct styles of life, and it is these that are important in determining social standing. Attending pop and rock music concerts, for example, may be in many societies valued less highly than attending classical music concerts or opera. In such cultural circumstances, those who belong to the subculture of pop or rock music will be assigned a lower status than those who attend classical concerts and opera houses. One of the most important writers on this idea of status is Talcott Parsons (1954, 1971), a notable

¹² For Weber's theory of social status, see: Max Weber (1946, 1968, 2015), John Scott (1996), James Fulcher and John Scott (2011).

American sociologist, who argued that people's social status is determined by the social positions that are most important in defining their membership in their society. Some societies define membership by birth or lineage, and a person's status reflects his or her kinship, gender, and age roles. This is the case in many pre-modern, pre-industrial and tribal societies in which one can be placed in the stratification system by their inherited position, which is referred to as *ascribed status*¹³. However, in modern societies, membership is no longer directly determined by birth in this way. In modern societies, status is largely determined by occupation. Considering this, one can earn their social status by their own achievements, which is known as *achieved status*.¹⁴ Due to this, status can be defined in these two ways within sociological theory. Parsons was often criticised for exaggerating occupation as a symbol of social status as there may be competing criteria of social status, not just work-related skills or income. There are also dilemmas with Weber, in particular whether class and status are two entirely different things or not. The prevailing interpretation of Weber's theory of social stratification is that he is on the side of status which is obviously consistent with his methodological statements on the subject matter and approach to sociology, but this is less clear with respect to class, which according to Weber, rests on material interests and life chances as conditioned by one's economic situation. However, some sociologists claim that these seemingly objective phenomena are also premised on the agent's orientations and are therefore, in a way, interrelated. Consequently, John Brewer writes, there is no disjuncture between Weber's concepts of class and status, as is usually claimed, for economic recourses also involve subjective evaluations. Rather than the two concepts being mutually exclusive, one can describe their relationship as dialectical, with subjective evaluations of social esteem being wrapped up with subjective orientations to life chances in the economic factors and evaluations of how these are affected by a whole range of external factors. This is a view endorsed in Frank Parkin's analysis of Weber's work on stratification. Status groups are not exclusively concerned with the intangibles of honours and prestige for, he argues, they can be mobilised in the pursuit of material ends. The possession of status itself can

¹³ Ascribed statuses are usually fixed for an individual at birth. Such statuses are based on inborn or inherited characteristics through gender, sex, race, ethnicity and family background.

¹⁴ Achieved statuses refer to what the individuals acquire during their lifetime as a result of the exercise of knowledge, ability and skill. Such statuses individuals gained through their own efforts. They are acquired most often through one's occupation. However, occupation also provides an example of status that can be either inherited or achieved.

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be invoked as a springboard for the attainment of material possessions (Parkin 1982, in Brewer 1989). Brewer summarises: *'The implications of this dialectic are not fully addressed. It follows from this view that social status and class have to be thought of as social processes which can operate upon one another rather than describing different rigidly demarcated social collectivities'* (Brewer 1989: 85-86).

According to this interrelatedness of status and class, Weber developed class and status situations. Status situation, like class situation is a major causal component in life chances. Class situations are the economic relations through which control over material and marketable resources is organised for the attainment of income, asset, and other life chances. Status situations are the communal relations through which the prestige accorded to a particular lifestyle becomes the basis of life chances. Because status has this effect on life chances, Weber paid particular attention to the distinct interest people have in the preservation or enhancement of their prestige. He argued that people are motivated by their status interests as much as by class interests. Indeed, status interests may often be more important to people (Fulcher, Scott 2011). When attending an opera performance, middle-class or even lower-class opera lovers, for example, unite with those opera lovers who may represent a high class or the elite in the opera house, rather than uniting with other members of middle or lower class who consume other cultural forms than opera or classical music.

Besides Weber's and Parsons's theory of social status, there is a third one, probably the most influential created by the French sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu who developed his own theory of social stratification based on concepts of habitus, field, capital, disposition, distinction and reproduction. Bourdieu claims that how one chooses to present one's social space or one's cultural disposition to the world, depicts one's status and distances oneself from lower status individuals or groups. He hypothesises that individuals and groups present themselves to and make social distinctions from others on the basis of dispositions that they have internalised through various stages of socialisation. Consequently, these dispositions further guide individuals and groups towards their appropriate social positions, towards the behaviours that are suitable for them, towards practices that seem taken for granted by social agents, and towards social inclinations that appear to be their 'natural' lifestyles. Bourdieu shows that collective class and status fractions form and generate cultural, aesthetic and other ideological preferences in their individuals. Class and status fractions are determined by a combination of the varying degrees of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capitals. Individuals and groups with a greater amount of those capitals are also better equipped and empowered to project strategies of making social distinctions. Through different institutionalised mechanisms

of social domination, their symbolic goods come to be regarded as the attributes of excellence, prestige, esteem and recognition in society. It is not necessary to stress that those attributes deemed excellent, prestigious, or highly elevated, are shaped by the interests of the dominant class and by people with the best social positions. However, for certain dispositions the social origins of social agents are much more decisive than accumulated capital, as this was the case with aesthetic dispositions. They are, according to Bourdieu, the result of social origins rather than the consequence of accumulated capital. The acquisition of cultural capital depends heavily on *'early imperceptible learning, performed within the family from the earliest days of life'* (Bourdieu, 1984: 66). The transfer of cultural capital from one generation to another is not only a matter of economic transaction, but rather a cultural one based on the fact that the opinions, views, perceptions and dispositions of younger generations are those they are born into. Younger generations accept *"definitions that their elders offer them"* (Bourdieu, 1984: 477). According to Bourdieu, cultural repertoires, cultural itineraries, cultural preferences, or tastes in culture of an individual are indicators of class and status fractions, because trends in his or her consumption seemingly correlate with an individual's fit in society. Each fraction of a class, whether it be dominant or dominated, develops its own criteria to appreciate or disregard things. These criteria can be aesthetic, cultural, ideological or of other kinds. On these criteria, interests for consumption are created. Each class or status fraction organises its own consuming interests based on differing their social positions from social positions of other fractions.

In the Bourdieusian perspective, the Mantuan box-holders' admiration for music, opera, art and theatre is not an innate predisposition. It is an arbitrary, i.e. cultural and historically conditioned, product of a specific process of inculcation characteristic of the educational and socialisational system as it has been applied to upper-class Mantuan families, as it could also be detected from the history of the Sociale. In order to better understand this new Mantuan theatrical undertaking two hundred years ago, we should review certain historical events that marked life in the city for decades to come. In the eighteenth century, the city made a significant development under the rule of the Habsburgs, but when at the turn of the century, it was hit by the terrible military and political consequences of the Napoleonic wars. In 1796, the city was besieged by Napoleon's army as a move against Austria, who had joined the First Coalition against France, and in 1797 Mantua was surrendered to the French. Only two years later, in 1799, the city was recaptured by the Austrians after the siege of Mantua. The city later came once more under Napoleon's control and became a part of Napoleon's Kingdom of Italy. After a short period of French rule, Mantua returned to Austria in 1814, becoming one of

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the so-called Quadrilateral fortress cities in northern Italy. The *Quadrilatero* is the name of a defensive system of the Austrian Empire in the Lombardy–Venetia, which connected the fortresses of Peschiera, Mantua, Legnano and Verona between the Mincio, the Po and Adige Rivers. In 1815, Mantua became a province in the Austrian Empire's Kingdom of Lombardy–Venetia. Agitation against Austrian supremacy, however, culminated in a revolt which lasted from 1851 to 1855, and was finally suppressed by Austrian imperial military forces. One of the most famous episodes of the Italian *Risorgimento* took place in 1852 in the valley of the Belfiore, where a group of Italian rebels, among them also citizens of Mantua, was hanged by the Austrians. Several political and military events that followed from 1859 to 1866 resulted in the final incorporation of Mantua into the Kingdom of Italy. If we return to the beginning of that century, we could say that after the Restoration, between 1816 and 1820, the population of Mantua was affected by a renewed love of theatre. This interest is not only related to a collective anxiety typical for the difficult period of wars, sieges and political instabilities, but can be taken as a moment of cultural awakening in Mantua, in which its important local personalities began to search for new ways and spaces to fulfil people's cultural and social needs. The first theatre built after the Restoration is *Teatro della Pace*, created by a group of young amateurs and housed in a room of the Andreasi Palace. Its activity began in 1816 as an amateur theatre, but soon became a public theatre. Another theatrical space was found in the *Anfiteatro di Piazza Virgiliana*, more known to the locals as *Arena*. This amphitheatre was inaugurated in 1821 and remained active as a summer theatre until 1919, the year of its demolition. It is these active theatres and the entire cultural climate of Post-Restoration by which the city of Mantua was politically and socially embraced when Luigi Preti, the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce of Mantua (*Camera di Commercio di Mantova*) conceived the idea of a new theatre (Moreschi, 2013; Amadei, 1973). Preti was *un notevole*, a notable member of Mantuan society at that time. To have such a high-minded idea is one thing, but to inject it into reality is something else, and Preti was well aware of that. The plan for what was to be the *Teatro Sociale* had already been developed by Preti in 1816. He was entrusted with the detailed exposition in the form of a brochure printed by Eredi Pazzoni and distributed on the 4th December of that year. This is the introductory chapter in the history of the largest Mantuan theatre. The expenditure planned for the entire implementation of the project amounted to around 209.000 liras and the largest amount of money was expected to come in from purchasing boxes and dressing rooms. The proposed cost was 126.000 liras for 45 boxes of the first and second order, 12.800 liras for 4 stage boxes, 55.000 liras for 25 boxes of the third order, 10.200 liras for dressing rooms of the first and second order and 5000 liras for

dressing rooms of the third order. Preti's proposal was presented to the Provincial Delegation in January 1817. The Provincial Delegation was a superior political and administrative body of the province which invited promoters of the new theatre to appoint a Commission vested with the powerful people needed to officially submit the application for the construction and management of the theatre. The first Commission consisted of the following notable Mantuans: Marquis Federico Cavriani, Luigi Anselmi, Count Giovanni Arrivabene, Luigi Preti, Pietro Tommasi, Giambattista Nievo and the lawyer Innocente Pastorio. The Imperial Royal Government authorised the construction of the new theatre in October 1817, even though it did not fully take into account the potential consequences for the old *Teatro Regio* of the construction of the Teatro Sociale, except a peremptory condition to the owners of the Sociale ordering them not to give performances in the spring and summer seasons. Some of the owners of the Teatro Regio had in fact strongly opposed Preti's initiative and his adherents. Such disagreement understandably derived, Amadei writes, from their legitimate right to defend their own particular interests in the city, but probably also mirrored the individual political inclinations which divided powerful citizens of Mantua between the proponents of the new civically-oriented theatre and the protectors of the old courtly-inspired one. Despite these political divisions, they actually all belonged to a specific category of citizens, aristocrats and members of the high bourgeoisie, who were already divided among themselves in more or less nuanced ways by different criteria, such as family backgrounds, properties, financial resources, social etiquette, artistic attitudes, cultural itineraries etc.

The first *palchettisti* to whom we owe the creation of the Teatro Sociale are marquises (Francesco Zanetti, Luigi Strozzi, Tullo Guerrieri, Giuseppe Cavriani, Baldassare Castiglioni, Nicola Gazzoldo, Carlo Di Bagno, Federico Cavriani, Gaetano Riva Berni), counts (Giovanni Arrivabene, Francesco Rizzini, Filippo Quaranta, Ascanio Beffa, Giuseppe Casali, Francesco Bulgarini, Antonio Beffa Negrini, Ferdinando Arrivabene, Carlo Gardani), barons (Teodoro Somensari), noblemen (fratelli Benintendi), counsellors (Leopoldo Petrozzani, Luigi Menghini), advocates (Carlo Petrali, Innocente Pastorio, Carlo Amadei, Vincenzo Partesotti, Dionisio Riva, Enrico Puerari, Giuseppe Gorini, Pietro Tazzoli, Francesco Tonelli, Carlo Cognetti, Girolamo Grossi, Antonio Gorini), intelligentsia (Gaetano Tirelli, Antonio Bonetti, Carlo Ceroni), engineers (Antonia Folia, Mario Suzzara, Luigi Vittori), noble and bourgeois women (Marchioness Marianna Zanardi Guerrieri, Teresa Tosi, Annunciata Montesante Ripa, Rosa Villani Cedurelli, Annunciata Villani,

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Cristina Veneri, noblewomen Eleonora Galizzi and Giulia Tommasi, Anna Testa Reyna), military persons (Federico Kandshuk) and the like¹⁵.

Among the box-holders were people who were not just linked to the local nobility and the imperial government, as in the case of Marquis Luigi Strozzi, who was the court chamberlain, industrialist and future Italian senator, but also businessmen, landowners and women. The presence of women among the box-holders is notable in a society that saw the feminine figure as mother, wife and mistress, and admitted them to enter the public sphere only occasionally and only for a selected few. There are also names which destined the history of the city of Mantua, such as Pietro Tazzoli, advocate, praetorian and conciliatory judge in Goito, married to Countess Isabella Arrivabene from the famous Mantuan noble family, and father of Don Enrico Napoleone Tazzoli, an Italian patriot, Presbyterian and the best known of the martyrs in Belfiore. Then, Alessandro Nievo, grandfather of writer, journalist and patriot Ippolito Nievo. There were also members of notable Mantuan aristocracy. For instance, Count Giovanni Arrivabene, an Italian patriot and liberal politician with a significant role in the Risorgimento movement, economist and senator from 1860, the uncle of Adelia Arrivabene, one of the most admired young Italian actresses of the time, but above all, a member of a late-medieval Mantuan family, with the noble title from 1479 given by Emperor Frederick of Habsburg III, in which the knowledge and the virtue of citizenship created a legacy of at least three uninterrupted centuries. Countess Marianna Zanardi, born as Marchioness Guerrieri, was a renowned Mantuan patroness of art and science through the importance of both lines, the Zanardis and particularly the Guerrieris who during the Renaissance were in service to the Gonzaga court and were granted the title of Marquises in 1506 and received the exceptional privilege, as the most beloved of the Gonzaga family, to add the name Gonzaga to their family name for their proven loyalty to the ruling dynasty and for their military merits. Marquis Tullo Guerrieri Gonzaga was mayor of Mantua from 1811 to 1815 and president of the Municipality of Mantua. Other family members held crucial political positions in the city, such as Odoardo Guerrieri Gonzaga who was a member of the Municipality of Mantua during the Austrian Restoration, and Bonaventura Guerrieri Gonzaga who was the Austrian imperial royal chamberlain. Giuseppe and Federico Cavriani belonged to a famous Mantuan aristocratic family, already flourishing and rich in the eleventh century. In 1638, the Cavriani family was granted the title of Marquis by the Gonzagas, and around 1700 they were rated as the

¹⁵ For a detailed list, see Amadei (1973: 548), Moreschi (2013: 40-44) and Preti's *Memoria sul nuovo teatro di Mantova* (1824), but with due attention to certain differences in names appearing on these three lists.

richest landowners in the city. In the nineteenth century Marquises Cavriani continued to play an influential role, this time linked to the Insurrectionary Committees of Italy, and Marquis Federico later became a senator of the Kingdom of Italy. Marquis Baldassarre Castiglioni also derived from an old Mantuan noble family of governors, politicians, diplomats, courtiers, and prominent Renaissance humanists and writers, such as his ancestor Count Baldassare Castiglione, the author of famous tractate *Il Cortegiano* [*The Courtier*] (1528) which even today remains a vivid portrait of Renaissance court life and is legitimately treated as one of the most important works of the Renaissance. Also Nicola Ippoliti Gazoldo [Gazzoldo] came from a renowned medieval Mantuan noble family dating back to the eleventh century, first as counts Ippoliti, then as marquises with one branch of the family who held its own imperial fief of Gazoldo, a possession of Mantua of ancient origins with economic and administrative autonomy from the twelfth century until 1796. Count Francesco Rizzini, also on the list of box-holders, was the most illustrious member of the Rizzini family and whose liberal political vision opened to the national Risorgimento and provoked the majority of Mantuan nobility which was traditionally inclined to the old Habsburg habits. He not only socialised with the Jews segregated in ghettos to show the others of his noble rank how wrongly and grotesquely prejudiced their views were, but unceremoniously displayed in public his enlightened anti-conformism subverting the social fact he was well aware of that *'dentro da la cerchia antica tutti si conoscevano'* (inside the old circle they all knew each other). Count Filippo Quaranta held several political positions between 1830s and 1860s, including senator of Piedmont and Turin in the 1830s and 1840s, and senator of the Kingdom of Italy appointed in 1862. Count Antonio Beffa Negrini, a military personality of Mantua, belonged to a noble family of Asola dating from the sixteenth century from which came several men of letters and the military. Among the box-holders we find pharmacist Cesare Albertini, an elder Italian patriot who was influenced by the French revolution and therefore repeatedly imprisoned by the Austrians in 1799–1801. He was arrested and processed in Mantua in 1815 on charges of political activities, but was released after spending six months in jail. He was catalogued by the authorities as a 'democratic, hardy terrorist'. He was sentenced to death for his active involvement in the riots of 1820–21. The sentence was later commuted to a prison sentence and he was held in the fortress of Spielberg where he died of starvation ten years later. Among the box-holders were also some who were directly involved in the work of the construction of the theatre, like Anselmo

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Besazzi for whom Preti writes that he was responsible for the gilding of the interior¹⁶.

The construction of the theatre under the architectural command of Luigi Canonica was successfully pursued even though the cost of the edification of the building was much higher than had been anticipated by the Preti group. The sum of expenses amounted to almost 355.000 liras, while the sum from the sale of boxes totalled a little less than 280.000 liras. The solemn opening of the great theatre on the 26th December 1822 was a grand manifestation of palchettisti, a public manifestation of their social needs, abilities, values and longings. *Gazzetta di Mantova* celebrated this achievement on the 28th December 1822 with the following ecstatic apotheosis to the historical idea of theatre: ‘The antiquity, each study and art contributed to raising great Theatres, as we call buildings used for public performances, which in honour of the gods, during festive times were celebrated. Such a meaning of this name has been left to us after all, even though its use changed in part; in order to honour the fine arts with an agreeable understanding of the people was intended to do so only Theatre. The taste nowadays for respective buildings

¹⁶ Alessandra Moreschi, *Il Teatro Sociale di Mantova*, p. 44; Umberto Coldagelli, ‘Arrivabene, Giovanni’, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 4 (Rome, Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 1962); also ‘Arrivabene, Giovanni’, in *Treccani.it – Enciclopedia on line*, Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana; Published March 15, 2011; Retrieved July 5, 2016, from <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-arrivabene/>; Giovanni Battista di Crollanza, *Dizionario storico blasonico delle famiglie nobili e notabili italiane estinte e fiorenti* (per ‘Arrivabene’, Vol. III, p. 151); Daniela Ferrari (ed.), *I Cavriani, una famiglia mantovana* (Mantua, 2012); Raffaele Tamalio, ‘Guerrieri, Vincenzo’, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 60 (Rome, Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 2003); also ‘Guerrieri, Vincenzo’, in *Treccani.it – Enciclopedia on line*, Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana; Published March 15, 2011; Retrieved July 5, 2016, from http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vincenzo-guerrieri_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/; Claudio Mutini, ‘Castiglione, Baldassarre’, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 22 (Rome, Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 1979); also ‘Castiglione, Baldassarre’, in *Wikipedia italiana*; Retrieved July 5, 2016, from https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baldassarre_Castiglione; Roberto Navarrini, *Gazoldo degli Ippoliti da Fendo a Comune* (Mantua, 1999); Franco Mondadori, *Apogeo e declino di una famiglia: La famiglia Rizzini dal XVII al XX secolo*, p. 7, 9, 61–68 (Mantua, 2002); Giuliano Capilupi, ‘Albertini, Cesare’, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 1 (Rome, Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960); also ‘Albertini, Cesare’, in *Treccani.it – Enciclopedia on line*, Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana; Published March 15, 2011; Retrieved July 5, 2016, from [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cesare-albertini_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cesare-albertini_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

has come to the point, that there can be no city, there can be almost no small country that its Theatre does not rise popular pastime¹⁷ (Amadei, 1973: 115).

It was this meaning that was and should be placed upon the existence of this great new building due solely to a Society of illustrious and wealthy citizens of Mantua. Everything in the theatre should reflect the will of Sociale's box-holders to deliver to the population of Mantua the best possible pleasure in the five-tiered theatre. Each tier was made up of 27 boxes with their respective dressing rooms. In addition, to be comfortable and of sufficient size, the boxes had a lovely view of the stage and were decorated and furnished with exquisite taste.

In speaking of the narrative of different administrative, political and social circumstances that led to the constitution and the opening of the *Nuovo Teatro della Società*, it is appropriate to bring into the picture the observation gathered by Ernesto Lui, the custodian of the Sociale at the time of its centenary, which perfectly depicts the weight and symbolic value that this massive collective cultural undertaking assumed in that far distant year of 1822. It was with the spirit of that epoch that the theatre was automatically recognised as a representative sign of pride and patriotic bond to the city and to its people during a period when the concept of homeland was connected with the local reality more than anything else (Moreschi, 2013): 'But the theatre was adored for theatre; and that theatre especially, because it arose with the will of the citizens and not of the oppressors. It was a great victory that needed to be celebrated, and if the news sounded too benign about this historical inauguration, it is not the art, and the art of music especially, which must reconsider the truth. It was celebrated a birthday with the determination of having accomplished an enduring work, with the determination that others would have done more. It was a new arena of arts for today and tomorrow, and we have to take a bow reverently when thinking of this inauguration'¹⁸ (Lui, Ottolenghi, 1923: 12).

¹⁷ Orig. (Italian): L'antichità, ogni studio ed arte poneva nell'innalzare grandiosi Teatri, siccome chiamansi gli edifici destinati a pubblici spettacoli, che in onore degli dei, ne' giorni festivi, si celebravano. Un tal nome conservossi fino a noi ma l'uso cangiò in parte; perocchè ad onorare le arti belle con gradevole intendimento del popolo venne unicamente destinato il Teatro. Il gusto oggidì per siffatti edifici è giunto a tale, che non v'ha Città, non v'ha quasi piccolo paese che Teatro non faccia sorgere a passatempo popolare.

¹⁸ Original (Italian): Ma si adorava il teatro per il teatro; e quel teatro specialmente, perchè sorto con volontà di cittadini e non di oppressori. Era una grande vittoria che si doveva celebrare, e se le cronache suonano troppo benigne sulla storica inaugurazione, non è l'arte, e l'arte musicale specialmente, che deve rivederne la verità. Si celebrava una data di nascita con la sicurezza d'aver compiuta un'opera duratura,

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Ambitiously performed for the first operatic premiere were *Alfonso ed Elisa*, an opera of Saverio Mercadante, and a heroic ballet entitled *La Gundeberga* which was composed and conducted by Giuseppe Coppini. The second opera and ballet in the programme were *Tebaldo e Isolina* of Francesco Morlacchi and *L'allievo della natura* of Coppini. The Teatro Sociale opened its doors with the heavy veto by the Imperial Royal Government dictating the permission of performances in the spring and summer seasons in order to prevent the interference of the Sociale's activities with the activities of Teatro Regio. Such a decision, however, had left a certain space for many exceptions, albeit always linked to prose and almost never to operatic evenings. It should be noted that the Teatro Regio, both because of its decentralised position in the city as well as its obsolete architectural structure, became more and more devalued regardless of the activity of the Sociale. The audience, in any case, preferred lighter theatrical entertainment over more demanding musical repertoire.

The first significant event in the history of the Sociale dates back to 1825 and would change the content of the theatrical activities of the city. At the end of April that year Austrian Emperor Francis I, accompanied by his wife, arrived in Mantua and, of course, the Teatro Regio was predisposed politically and ideologically to accept guests and offers performances in honour of the imperial couple. They attended two staged works, *L'inganno infelice* of Rossini and *Adelina* of Pietro Generali. During one of the performances, the management of the Sociale succeeded in getting an invitation from the king to his royal box. The emperor, also willing to pay a tribute to the new city theatre, proposed an event to be organised at the Sociale at the expense of the Municipality. On the evening of the 1st May, the sumptuous hall, brightly lit, welcomed the enthusiastic imperial couple. Following this, the restrictions regarding the functioning of the Sociale were immediately repealed and in so doing, the citizens of Mantua in this act saw the implicit recognition of the Sociale and its primacy over other theatres in the city. Nevertheless, season after season one problem remained unsolved, leaving the Società of the theatre in continuous economic difficulties. The debts incurred for the edification of the theatre were paid late and this is why the company was forced to produce its program without allocation of funds, hoping to have the expenses paid back. Also the financial intervention of the Municipality remained limited to half the expected sums due to the uncertain risorgimental

con la sicurezza che altri avrebbe fatto di più. Si era aperta una nuova palestra agli artefici dell'oggi e del domani, e noi dobbiamo inchinarci riverenti pensando a questa inaugurazione.

situation, in which two antagonistic groups of citizens were deployed to war, intellectuals and wealthy patriots, both important members of the Sociale, and in which the occupational forces managed to exhaust the municipal funds (Moreschi, 2013: 53-54). The company's economic situation had become increasingly serious in the 1830s. In 1832, the box-holders convened at the Sociale assembly and decided to shoulder the outlay of an extraordinary fee to pay off debts and provided the program of opera for the carnival season. The Municipality was ready to argue, pointing out that the subsidy was strictly depended on the way the theatre functions and spends money. The dialogue between the Società and the Municipality usually reached a stand-still when the imperial royal authorities interfered with their directions. The nineteenth-century history of the Sociale thus has one recurring event, with more or less intense accents, with more or less varied cues, but with a common thread that substantially prognosticated an epilogue which always led to the same result: the *salti mortali* of administrators on both sides, that being the Municipality and the Società of box-holders. However, despite constant contests regarding municipal subsidies the Sociale managed to open its doors on time according to the law. It even hosted some acclaimed singers, such as the appearance of the famous Giuditta Pasta in the spring of 1830, and other notable appearances during the period of the Risorgimento, such as the concert in honour of Gioacchino Rossini. In addition, a young Giuseppina Strepponi and the famous Giuditta Grisi appeared on the Sociale's stage. The political tensions which were harbingers of the upcoming dark years from 1848 to 1853 were also reflected in the social climate of the theatre. When the Duke of Modena, Francis IV of Austria attended the performance on the 8th September 1837 with his family, he received an icy reception by the audience of the Sociale. There was no applause greeting the arrival of the high guest to the royal box. Amadei writes that official chronicles did not even dare to speak straightforwardly about this unusual event which clearly demonstrated a critical antipathy between the citizens of Mantua and the authorities of the imperial royal government. After seven years of rather fluent municipal subsidies, dark clouds gathered again over the relationship between the Municipality and the Società in the early 1840s. Having considered the request of the Sociale, the City Council had agreed on the continuation of the subsidy, perhaps even extending the guarantee of seven to ten years, but had rejected the idea of an increased share. Only if the box-holders increased their donation would the Municipality re-examine the possibility of changing its part as well. The assembly of box-holders, however, declared the impossibility of making additional sacrifices in terms of financial contribution, and so the matter was postponed to the City Council for a final decision. Shortly thereafter, this delicate question concerning how much money the box-

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holders and the Municipality should contribute to the program of the Sociale was agreed on the basis of voting within the new decision-making body called the Provincial Delegation, which for this matter consisted of members of municipal counsellors and box-holders (Amadei, 1973).

In 1848, a historical year for the Europe of the nineteenth century, life in Mantua was considerably affected. Now revolutionary critique of the Austrian domination and risorgimental excitement was no longer strictly limited only to a few liberal aristocratic salons and some patriotic bourgeois families, but became a quite collectively vibrant momentum involving all social classes in the city. The thrill of freedom was so powerful that even traditional places of an old conformism were shaken to the ground by this complicated atmosphere. The patriotic uprising and thwarted political conspiracies immediately became part of the Teatro Sociale, where the social climate of the public in the city could have been accurately measured. Many of the most active Mantuan patriots and members of the *Comitato provvisorio*, which defended the *Congregazione municipale* in cases of emergency, were also box-holders of the Sociale. On the 18th March 1848, when the people of Mantua celebrated the day of San Anselmo, the patron saint of the city, the news of the Viennese revolution reached the city. The day when people first flocked to the central square of the city to spend time together in the atmosphere of recitations, moving silence and *tricolore* flags, culminated within the walls of the Teatro Sociale. Many local eyewitnesses left reports about that day, so it is possible to reconstruct this festive narrative quite easily. Negrini, for instance, writes: "Towards evening the demonstrations of joy reached unspeakable intensity, especially at the Teatro Sociale. The stalls, the boxes and the lodges were filled with people in a frenzy; ladies tying together their handkerchiefs into knots were making a huge chain which symbolised the fraternal union of all attendants; the soldiers of the Haugwitz regiment consisting mainly of Italians fraternised with the citizens; the three-coloured flag handed on from one box to another was greeted with thunderous applause and loud voices shouting "Viva l'Italia", "Viva Pio IX" [long live Italy, long live Pius IX], mixed with those of "Viva Mazzini", down with the Jesuits; the hymn of Pius IX, requested by thousands of voices, was repeatedly played by the orchestra and sung in chorus by the spectators; everything, everything was worth to make impressive the free expression of a feeling of the people repressed for so many years"¹⁹ (Quazza, 1966: 295, according to Moreschi, 2013: 61).

¹⁹ Original (Italian): Verso sera le dimostrazioni di gioia raggiunsero un'intensità indicibile, soprattutto al teatro Sociale. La platea, i palchi, le loggie rigurgitavano di gente in delirio; le signore, annodando ognuna il proprio fazzoletto con quello della vicina, avevano formato un'immensa rete, che legava in segno di unione fraterna tutti

And Amadei gives a similarly glorified report about that unforgettable evening at the Sociale: “The Theatre, usually almost deserted, had that evening no empty box; and to every song and repeatedly demanded and applauded popular hymn to Pius IX, the audience reacted frantically with several “Vivas”; and all the boxes were almost magically decorated with flags and rags of three colours which were tied together forming a *chain* that ran all around the hall, so that was a marvel to see. An immense flag passed from one box to another, accompanied in the meantime with enthusiastic shouts: *Viva l’Italia, viva la Costituzione* [*Long Live Italy, Long Live the Constitution*]; and the police commissioner with the delegate had their turn to greet and pass around the new national symbol. The singers were asked to sing the hymn of Pius IX; and also after some other innocent appeals were made by all attendants in the mood full of hope on the near future²⁰ (Amadei, 1973: 192).

Through such pseudo-operatic ‘semblances of unity’, to use Giovanni Morelli’s words, opera not only won a type of institutional success that confirmed its special connection with the newly established Italian nation (Morelli, 2003) but was against the social and political background of the dominant Risorgimento ideology, as Roberto Leydi pointed out, adopted ‘*as a cultural symbol of the building of an Italian nation*’ (Leydi, 2003: 289-292). Despite this general cultural cliché going back to the historical representation of the Risorgimento movement and offering a model image of a “happy union” of opera theatre and the nation, the near future appeared very turbulent and unpleasant for the Sociale. The theatre was forced to close its doors from time

gli spettatori; i militari del reggimento Haugwitz, composto in buona parte di Italiani, fraternizzavano con i borghesi; la bandiera tricolore, passata da palco a palco, venne salutata da scroscianti battimani e da grida altissime di viva l’Italia, viva Pio IX, frammiste a quelle di Viva Mazzini, abbasso i Gesuiti; l’inno di Pio IX, richiesto da migliaia di voci, veniva ripetutamente suonato dall’orchestra e cantato in coro dagli spettatori; tutto, tutto valeva a rendere imponente quella libera manifestazione di un sentimento da tant’anni represso.

²⁰ Original (Italian): Il teatro, di solito pressochè deserto, non aveva in quella sera un palco vuoto; e ad un brano abitualmente applaudito per il richiamo di certo inno popolare a Pio IX, il pubblico s’abbandonò a frenetiche viva; e tutte le logge mostraronsi quasi per incanto ornate di bandiere o pezzuole a tre colori, le quali insieme aggruppate formavano una *catena* che girava tutt’intorno alla sala, sicchè era una meraviglia a vedere. Una sterminata bandiera si fece passare da palco in palco, in mezzo alle entusiastiche grida di: *Viva l’Italia, viva la Costituzione*; ed il commissario di polizia col delegato dovettero alla lor volta salutare e trasmettere in giro il nuovo stendardo nazionale. I cantanti dovettero intonare l’inno favorito di Pio IX; e dopo anche altre innocenti dimostrazioni si ritirarono tutti coll’animo pieno di speranza in un prossimo avvenire.

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to time, some performances were deliberately disrupted or blockaded by those on the Austrian side, and the war permitted a limited program only. However, the Austrian authorities, in fact, strove to keep the theatrical activity alive in the city because the normal functioning of the theatre facilitated the distraction of the people and extended the relationship between the population and public institutions. The patriotic box-holders rejected paying the membership fee, while the government was willing to provide the funds to implement the carnival season and therefore to ensure the proper functioning of the theatre, but the rebellious citizens of Mantua balanced their disagreement with certain abstention. 1852 was a year full of Mantuan conspiracies which ended with the terrible events in Belfiore which further persuaded people to turn away from foreign government and side with the patriots. One decade later, the political situation which had surfaced the new war made the citizens of Mantua less and less interested in the leisure of opera and music. The Teatro Sociale remained closed from 1859 to 1866. In 1866, Mantua and Veneto were finally liberated. The Sociale was reopened by politically important operatic events. On the evening of the 16th November 1866, Vittorio Emanuele II, King of Italy, attended the performance of Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*. All the people of Mantua enthusiastically applauded to one of four political architects of the unified Italy. In front of the heartfelt crowd, on the evening of the 9th March 1867, Giuseppe Garibaldi attended the performance of *Il Trovatore*. The next day, with an electoral meeting in the theatre, he stood there as a triumphal candidate for the position of the democratic deputy of Mantua (Moreschi, 2013; also Amadei 1973).

In the following decades, the situation with the theatre passed more or less in the traditional manner of disputes, prevarications and negotiations between the Municipality and the box-holders for money to finance the program. When the allocation of funds from the part of the Municipality was reduced or a reduction was threatened, it sometimes happened that the start of the new season was postponed or even cancelled. If the box-holders were not ready to rescue the season with higher contributions on their part, seasons actually depended on grants from the Municipality. Even the promising scores of several operas by minor composers such as Campiani's *Alberto di Saviola*, *Elvira di Valenza*, and *Taldo*, Graffigna's *Veronica Cibo*, Mela's *Il convento di San Nicola* and *La testa di bronzo*, and Mazzucato's *Esmeralda*, or musical events, such as concerts of Carlotta Patti, Arturo Toscanini or Ottorino Respighi, and festive receptions of Pietro Mascagni and Umberto Giordani introduced to the audience during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was not a guarantee that the Sociale's management would avoid financial problems on a regular basis.

After being closed during the WWI and transformed into food storage, the Sociale continued to function under the social circumstances of Mantuan cultural mediocrity and provinciality. Surprisingly, the theatre remained active the entire period between the wars as well as during WWII, although mostly with cinematographic shows, patriotic manifestations, political conventions, meetings of war veterans and assemblies of resistance forces. The legal management of the Condominio was elected on the 4th September 1943 and was composed of Tito Azzini, advocate Ennio Avanzini, Marquis engineer Guido Riva Berni, engineer Giuseppe Volpi Ghirardini and Smeriglio Gadioli. This was replaced by governing authorities of the occupying German forces first, and later by the American forces, until May 1945, when the Condominio could finally give the theatre its proper institutional function once more (Amadei, 1973; also Moreschi, 2013). In the early 1950s, the direction of the theatre remained almost the same: the president was the undersecretary of the state Ennio Avanzini, the vice president Tito Azzini, and the counsellors Giuseppe Volpi Ghirardini, Marquis Giovanni Riva Berni, Romolo Tragni, the secretary Giuseppe Giovannoni, the artistic consultant maestro Ettore Campogalliani. In 1954, when television entered the life of Italians, the managing Condominio of the Sociale continued its work with the same cast of characters, except in the position of the secretary (Giuseppe Giovannoni was replaced by Ezio Ricci). The economic situation of the Sociale was burdened by the costs of building restoration and was again worsening. It is for this reason that the general assembly of box-holders gathered in 1955 rejected the budget presented by management, which included the cost of the usual performances and practically announced a crisis. Behind this crisis was actually a conflict between two different conceptions of organising the season. In any case, the ‘crisis’ of the Sociale became a matter of hot public debate in *Gazzetta di Mantova*, additionally spiced with a polemic controversy in which was involved advocate Mario Genovesi, the spokesman of *innovatori*, those who demanded innovation in the Sociale’s management. This controversy, however, was neither new nor original nor would it be the last in the recent history of the Sociale. The newspaper of Mantua helped to raise the temperature around the Sociale by publishing the figures of the revenue that should have been made in the last three seasons, including governmental subsidies, contributions of the Società of the theatre and incomes from the box-office: 14 million liras in 1952, 13 million and 817 thousand liras in 1953, 16 million and 810 thousand liras in 1954. Some members of the Condominio were very unsatisfied with the controversy stimulated by journalists and certain box-holders, because they were narrowly focussing on how much money was spent for one season and almost not at all on question of the existence of their beloved theatre. Some box-holders called upon the president

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of the Condominio Avanzini to take responsibility for his lack of authoritative and balanced involvement in this issue. It was therefore not unexpected that undersecretary Avanzini was unanimously acclaimed honorary president for life and replaced by a new person, Giuseppe Norlenghi, the benefactor of countless civic initiatives. Other members of the direction of the theatre were Marquis and advocate Giovanni Riva Berni, engineer Mario Camerini, Marquis Luigi Capilupi and doctor Carlo Morandi (Amadei, 1973). Even the list of certain famous singers, appearing on stage in Mantua, such as Margherita Carosio, Beniamino Gigli, Marisa Pintus, Renata Tebaldi and others could not repair the general impression of the unstoppable decline of the Sociale. Behind the splendour of operatic, cultural and political events that took place at the Sociale from time to time, there was always a certain latent administrative and financial crisis going on, with the old recurring dilemma about who would pay for what. This latent crisis became public at the summit of the Società of the theatre in 1965, when the vice president Riva Berni and two his counsellors informed the newspaper that they would resign their managing positions within the Condominio. As usual, a hot polemic followed but was artificially minimised by declaring that the conflict was, at the general assembly of box-holders, considered useful and constructive, and that the assembly had unanimously rejected the resignation offered by those three counsellors (Amadei, 1973).

From the 1960s to the 1990s, the activities of the theatre continued to be very much connected to political and cultural events but produced in a grey institutional atmosphere. With the arrival of the millennium, the problem of building inadequacy and safety systems was ever more central to the Sociale's everyday biorhythm. After 2000, there were several closings of the theatre due to restoration work.

And here we come to the point where we have started our operatic or, more precisely, pseudo-operatic story from Mantua. One mechanism which seems to persistently underlie the above historical overview of the Teatro Sociale is social distinction. Throughout history of the existence of the Sociale, its owners and supporters have tried to make belonging to their theatre unambiguous even though the external and sometimes even internal challenging circumstances mostly did not allow this privilege. The tripartite model of keeping the theatre functioning, the State, the Municipality and the Society of the theatre, was also the main obstacle thwarting the cultivated heirs and successors to confront their own distinction as natural and taken for granted. In the Bourdieusian manner, Culture is dissolved into culture. The fact that they own the theatre, this very marker of their social value, their status, has been seriously challenged more and more. This is the point at which what Bourdieu calls the 'cultural unconscious' comes into the story of

the Mantuan box-holders. Attitudes, aptitudes, knowledge, themes and problems, in short the whole system of categories of possessing the theatre acquired by the family records and the city's collective memory contribute to the organisation of the cultural habitus as produced and reproduced by the heirs of the first owners. For them, the theatre is about reproduced cultural distinction; a distinction that cannot be fully established in the past Mantuan class systems anymore but can remain rooted in the past cultural classification systems precisely through the theatre. To corroborate this perspective, we should summarise some findings given in Bourdieu's lengthy sociological study *La Distinction*, first published in France in 1979. One of the tasks which Bourdieu set out for himself in *Distinction* is the re-conceptualisation of Weber's model of social stratification, in particular the relationship between class and *Stand* (status). The concepts which he adopted to mediate between these are class fraction and lifestyle. He was actually interested in the conjunction of class and status by showing how social status involves cultural practices that emphasise and exhibit cultural distinctions, which are a crucial feature of class differences. Social status may be conceptualised therefore as lifestyle; that is, as the totality of cultural practices such as dress, speech, outlook, bodily dispositions, taste, preferences, interests, styles of thinking and living etc. Bourdieu begins with a relatively familiar standpoint indicating the link between cultural practices and social origins, mediated in large part through formal education and informal socialisation. He establishes that people learn to consume culture and this socialisation, cultivation, and education is differentiated mostly by social class (Bourdieu, 1984). If we transpose this view to our example we could say that the more the heirs of the original box-holders are concerned with the theatre's primordial legacy and its legitimate Culture, the greater the influence of social origins upon their practices, interests and preferences related to the inherited ownership of the theatre has become. The 'taste' for possessing the theatre has become one of the key signifiers and elements of their social identity and lifestyle. Through the theatre, the heirs of the first owners have marked their 'cultivated naturalness'; that is the familial habitus which enabled them to disguise what they have learned as what they were born with. To understand this changed position of box-holders today in comparison to their ancestors, we must decode the play of meanings attributed to two different capitals, the economic capital (theatre ownership) as well as cultural capital (frequency of theatre-going, enthusiasm for opera and classical music), which are both the source of the value coming from the ownership of the theatre. The two forms of capital mentioned above are, according to Bourdieu, usually inversely related: the more of one, the less of the other, a general rule which also may hold true for Mantuan box-holders. Of course, this produces a rather more complex image

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of the relationship and the interaction of class and status. In other words, the less the box-holders can economically express their position in the theatre, the more they depend upon their social origins; the less the importance of the social class of their ancestors for their social positions in today's Mantuan cultural habitus, the more their ownership of the theatre is an artificial symbol of their social status and lifestyle (Bourdieu, 1984). We have learned the following from Bourdieu's *Distinction*: whether we are talking about the economic power of the first owners of the theatre or about social strategies and cultural consumptions of their heirs to transform the ancestral economic capital into their own cultural and symbolic capitals, we are actually dealing with the same issue. Specifically, this is the manner in which the cultural practices of box-holders are determined, at least in large part by the history and objective structure of their existing social world, and how those practices contribute (perhaps unintentionally) to the maintenance of its existing social structure. Using a theatre as a Bourdieu's model of a multidimensional social arena, in which economic and cultural capitals are both the objects and the weapons of a competitive struggle between the State, the Municipality and the Society of the theatre, allows us to better understand the habitus of Mantuan box-holders with their individual and collective dispositions, subjective expectations of objective probabilities and social reproduction. As can easily be seen even from the list of the original box-holders, they were quite a heterogeneous group with different social origins, titles, occupations and very likely with different combinations of economic and cultural capital and with different lifestyles. The ownership of the Sociale was perhaps one of the rare things which made them homogeneously related, even though there were certainly some traditional elements regarding the primary interactional determinants of class or status endogamy which in the nineteenth century went along with the general social mechanism that individuals tended more to meet and marry within rather than between social classes, and hence within rather than between lifestyles or status groups.

Social distinction is at the very heart of a hierarchy of legitimacies indicating who is related in what way to the theatre, and consequently, to the history of Mantua in the last two hundred years at least. However, despite these legitimacies, members of the Condominio can stand in a different relationship to the theatre than to the dominant groups with no access to the Sociale's opera box within the Mantuan cultural habitus. The habitus of each box-holding family is generated by their contrasting positions within the objective structures of the Mantuan society, and the different subjective expectations of the objective probabilities to their respective class locations and status displays. However, we should add that our intention is not to centralise or isolate too deterministically the role of box-holding within the

Mantuan cultural habitus as such. It is quite likely that not all the heirs use the parental or familial cultural achievement as the only indicator of the amount of their cultural capital, or the inter-generational transmission of it circulating within the cultural habitus of Mantua. In the last chapter we will try to suggest a much broader and maybe even less specific dimension of box-holding and owning the theatre related to social positions and dispositions in particular. One thing, however, seems obvious: the private Teatro Sociale which was meant to be used for public purposes is not just about theatre-owning or opera-going. It is also about culture and social status; about culture as an object and means of different social struggles, even the most symbolic ones in the city; about culture as a hereditary marker of social identity; about culture as a memorable historical place of Mantua.

4. Termination

The creation of the Sociale should also be seen through the optics of the noticeable competition between the aristocracy and bourgeoisie and is therefore, according to Maurizio Bertolotti, the progressive momentum of the bourgeois class whose desire it was to give a certain impetus to economic development, to re-design the urban structure of the city and finally, to the formation of a new cultural centre where one could meet and socialise, as is well documented by a beautiful memoir of Luigi Preti, the principal promoter of the opera. The new theatre was built in order to faithfully reflect the social structure of the city and thus the hegemony that was imposed by the aristocratic class; if not the other way, then through the location of boxes as a good portion of boxes, especially of the first two tiers, belonged prerogatively to the noble families. However, since the representation of the bourgeois class in the structure of crowded boxes was anything but insignificant, it would be better to say that the image of the seating plan in the hall during a performance had to above all reflect the integration of two influential classes, the high bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, into one single ruling class. It is not possible to fully explain why this image, taken here without further contextualisation, does not offer a complete picture of the complex and even contradictory relationships which intervened into the world of Mantuan aristocracy and bourgeoisie of the first half of the nineteenth century. We will limit our elaboration to a referential story about Attilio Magri, the Mantuan agronomist and publicist, which is particularly meaningful in this regard. After returning home from his long journey across Europe, he reluctantly received the social position of a tenant in the city where noble gentlemen still dictated the biorhythm of the city and the possibility for success. However, despite poor prospects he did not lose hope of one day being able to live the life of a

gentleman and become part of Mantuan Society. In the 1860s, with bold economic success, he became a rich man. Magri moved to the city to live in a gentlemanly dwelling rented together with Count Arrivabene. Finally, now he could afford a box in the Teatro Sociale, otherwise not the prestigious one as that of the proscenium which was purchased by his master and patron in 1817. The count would for a long time remain a model of aristocratic yearnings in the eyes of Magri, while becoming a gentleman and the owner of estates and funds which made him an odious profiteer. However, a deadly combination of wasteful spending on his lifestyle and poor harvests brought him to personal bankruptcy, and his relationship with Arrivabene suffered too and even ended with a dispute in court. Before irreparable financial failure, Magri enjoyed the prestige to the fullest, in the same way the high society of the city did, also through the theatre, its performances and events, so through the cultural lifestyle that is of great interest to our purpose. During the carnival festivities of 1871, 1872 and 1874, he organised three masquerades in the theatre, in which among other things he dealt with the problems of economic and social progress of a Mantuan citizen. During the masked ball in 1872, entitled *La posta a domicilio* [*The Post at Home*], he distributed messages showing a revolt of noblewomen against their husbands and by which he denounced the social egoism and inertia of the Virgilian nobility and proposed initiatives to combat unemployment and promote welfare and education for the lower classes; among these a society of mutual aid of workers and artisans of Mantua that should be financially supported by aristocratic ladies. Magri's testimony of his time as well as of his strong social interests disguised in the form of political communication through the theatre and cultural events characterised an important component of the new rural bourgeoisie in the city of Mantua in the first decades after the Unification of Italy (Bertolotti, 2005).

Bourdieu's central argument in *Distinction* was that struggles about the meaning of things, and specifically the meaning of the social world, are an aspect of class and lifestyle struggle. In this respect, it is essentially the same argument he delivered in his other important book, in *La Reproduction*, co-authored with Jean-Claude Passeron. In it, it was confirmed that the social reproduction of the established social order and social hierarchy is largely secured by different kinds of struggle, also a symbolic struggle for honour, esteem and prestige, which is part of a process of cultural reproduction. In the very essence of the process of cultural reproduction it reproduces the class relations and status relations of the social structure. Culture, art, music, opera and theatre meet social reproduction in a model of the social construction of taste, aesthetic preferences, cultural itineraries which although it has a certain amount of obvious authenticity, are somewhat too closed, neat or elitist to be plausible for the wider population. There are two main texts which will be

referred to here to outline Bourdieu's contribution to the understanding of social reproduction and cultural reproduction: the first has already been mentioned *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* and was published first in French as *La Reproduction* in 1970; and second is an article entitled 'Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction', which first appeared in French in 1971 and was published in English in 1973. Reproduction is, plainly said, a phenomenon of transmission which is fundamental to every society and to its *ordre des successions*, the order of successions, that is to say to the management of the relationship between past and successive generations. It is a mechanism whose function is connected exclusively with positions by which a 'patrimony' of past generations is successfully transmitted to their descendants, and even more important, it is perpetuated continuously by these descendants. Such transmission of heritage is active in all fields and their social categories also within the cultural field where it could function as an unequal and privileged *principe de réalité*; a principle of reality which is responsible for the social differentiation imposing intense competition between different social agents to provide better positions and dispositions in society. One of the contradictions of reproduced heritage is that reproduction of a patrimony does not always assure social positions for heirs that would derive from that patrimony alone. This is why social agents need different strategies of reproduction in order to preserve the obtained privileges and remunerative social order. Reproduction is, on the one hand, a specific type of the redundancy of the social world, but on the other hand, it has certain advantages as well, particularly related to its stability, continuity, and predictability. Reproduction is determined in part by the tendencies which are immanent to social agents in the form of habitus and in part by the tendencies to reconstruct the structures of which they are the product. If the traditional or pre-capitalistic societies essentially ensured their reproduction through the forming of habituses, modern industrial societies have produced a major dependence on procedures which have tended to ensure the reproduction of economic and cultural capital (such as inheritance procedures, criteria of access into the field, or measures of success in societies), as well as the rationalisation of practices (protocols, rules, agendas, hierarchies, taxonomies). These have ensured the predictability and calculability of these practices. Without practices that are highly rationalised, historically contextualised, and socially memorised, the Mantuan box-holders could not ensure the successful transmission of their collective cultural heritage to their heirs and those heirs could not perpetuate their inherited cultural disposition to their Teatro Sociale successfully in the way that this specific disposition is perceived as an intrinsic part not just of their personal and familial identities, but of the municipal collective identity too.

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When people think of the private status of an opera house of public significance, they usually tend to see such a cultural institution as an anachronism which is entirely odd and foreign to the contemporary understanding of who should own cultural institutions with a public purpose and mission. However, the story of the Teatro Sociale is not interesting so much due to its potential anachronistic or exotic character, but because it is mainly a story about social and cultural reproduction. Indeed, among all institutions which legitimately pose the question of the hereditary transmission of power and privileges, probably none has been worse adapted to European contemporary society than an opera house provided by private owners in contributing to the reproduction of the structure of class and status relations. A choice of cultural itineraries and attitude to theatre- or opera-going are in the Mantuan example certainly at least partly produced and reproduced by the family backgrounds of box-holders. Numerous factors which make future generations of Mantuan box-holders 'at home' in their opera house create and reproduce class inequalities and status differences between those who attend the theatre and those who have no need to because they own it. The subtlety of the reproduction of operatic privilege is one of the main themes of this operatic 'anachronism'. The private status of the Sociale, in a way, consecrates privilege by dissimulating it or by masking it, by treating every visitor as if he or she was equally important for the theatre when, in fact, the attendants actually enter the theatre with different "rights" of access based on locally inscribed cultural endowment of audiences. This is the point where individual privilege is translated into collective merit. Indeed, the past and present box-holders tended and still tend to remind the community that their privilege to possess the greatest theatre in the city is something good not only for them but for all citizens of Mantua. For disadvantaged Mantuans, participation in the Sociale must certainly be a financial effort and a status struggle; for members of the Condominio it is their legitimate heritage. Bourdieu's theory of reproduction is useful in this case as it helps one understand that the interested culture of box-holders, which is most likely still the culture of the dominant classes in Mantua, is legitimate by different social agents than an inherited culture. A culture that is reproduced explicitly by box-holders but implicitly also by some municipal and state bodies as an 'inborn' or 'natural' disposition to its habitus. Such reproduction is even legally protected in Italy by the state law no. 800 from 1967 which instituted a special group of theatres and opera houses called *teatri di tradizione* [*theatres of tradition*] whose function is significantly related to 'a particular cultural impulse they offer to local musical and artistic traditions'²¹. In this group, there are 29 Italian theatres and opera houses,

²¹ Original (Italian): che dimostrino di avere dato particolare impulso alle locali

including the *Teatro Sociale di Mantova*, and the majority of them are privately owned and privately or semi-privately managed (A. T. I. T. 2015).

When we speak about the box-holding disposition to the Mantuan cultural habitus, we are actually thinking of many social antagonisms that could not be specified and broadly elaborated upon in this article but are involved in every socially stratified society. These socially stratified societies are never homogenous but differentiated and have multiple schemes of relationships on the basis of which people meet each other and directly or indirectly compete with one another through their complex interactions and a system of durable and transferable dispositions which represent a structuring structure of their habitus. Habitus can be described as a system of structuring dispositions; that is of learned aptitudes or structured structures which function like structuring structures or principles which are constituted and organised in practice. Practices, however, are neither structuring nor structured, as they are neither a mechanical sediment of structured dictates nor a result of the fact that social agents intentionally and deliberately pursue their goals. Rather they are a product of the dialectical relationship between the structured fields (for instance, in the form of the heritage of past social worlds and their different domains) and structuring habitus (the current status and activities in the social world) as a system of permanent and transmissible dispositions. In the Bourdieusian manner, habitus and field can exist only in their interdependence and through the logic of practice. Although the field is constituted on the basis of the different social agents involved (and therefore also their habitus), it is actually the habitus which represents the transmission or the transposition of objective structures of the field onto the subjective structures of the actions of social agents which make their habitus an important factor that contributes to social reproduction. Habitus is namely the main generator and regulator of practices which constitute social life in the field. The relationship between the habitus and the field is always two-way. The field exists because its social agents possess dispositions needed to build this field, and at the same time by that very fact that the social agents are involved in the field, they also employ in their habitus a certain amount of proper knowledge which enables them to constitute the field according to their needs, goals, motivations and interests. In the Mantuan example, the role of the *Teatro Sociale* in the city and for the city should be seen precisely as the cultural manifestation of social structures of economic, political and social fields. Habitus namely manifests the structures of the field, while the field mediates between the habitus and its practices within the field. It is within the field where individuals and groups constitute themselves as social agents of

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the field, and it is within the field where they compete and fight each other. They do this by investing various forms of capital in their competitions, including economic (financial wealth, properties, material goods), social (social class, status, standing), cultural (taste, preferences, orientations, itineraries) and symbolic capital (recognition, reputation, esteem, prestige, fame). However, if the first three forms of capital are the basic types of capital, Bourdieu saw the fourth as one that denotes and characterises any form of capital, though the social agents do not take it as such. The symbolic capital is therefore a vital source of power and privilege of social agents. People who hold large amounts of symbolic capital can use their power against those who possess less symbolic capital, and thus force them to change their actions, goals, motivations, and interests. This happens because those who possess great symbolic capital can also use it as form of a symbolic violence against those who have less symbolic capital in a community. This kind of violence does not need to be explicitly visible and physical, but can be a soft, unperceived violence, invisible even to its victims; a violence that is actually happening as a form of imposing categories of consciousness, thinking, communicating, feeling, socialising and perceiving to those who are dominated social agents who consequently take the imposed social order and hierarchy as something for granted, legitimate, and as a natural state of affairs. Such an imposition of social order that the dominant classes thrust themselves upon the dominated classes create a domination which requires a systematic judgement by using reflexivity. This is a theoretical form of an intellectual practice, indispensable for a critically founded study of symbolic dominations, of the control of practices and of the transformation of un-thought as well as unthinkable thinking categories into well-thought and thinkable ones, as this is the main intention of this paper²². The main goal of our research was therefore not to give value labels to the world of past, recent and current Mantuan box-holders and their numerous struggles for inherited economic, social, cultural and symbolic capitals as something culturally anachronistic, socially unjust or morally unacceptable. Rather, we have been focused on the social world of a specific cultural tradition that has produced and reproduced such enduring box-holding practices through time in a city where possessing the opera house was and remains obviously, still, more important than attending it, or at least equally important as somewhere else just attending it. One thing, however, is

²² This rough outline of Bourdieu's complex theory is based on my recent more extensive application of Bourdieusian perspectives to a completely different topic, i.e. the delicate problem of the relationship between academic and media worlds discussed in the book *Homo academicus in mediji* [*Homo Academicus and the Media*] (Koper–Capodistria, 2016).

clear: only a highly differentiated, historically long-situated, well-urbanised and intellectually advanced social world is able to produce such a durable cultural habitus in which durably contested and negotiated box-holding practices and practices of spectacle appear today as something archaic, anachronistic or traditionalistic.

The joyous definition of Mantua as a ‘city in the form of a palace’ may find, according to Ettore Albertoni, the counsellor for culture, identity and autonomy of Lombardy, its resonance in the definition of its entire territory as a ‘land in the form of theatre’, as attested by the volume of Noris Zuccoli on the forms, importance and functions of the historical theatres of Mantua. After all, more than fifty historical theatres have been identified in the province (Zuccoli, 2005). Here, the theatre has been always a place of joy, entertainment and fantasy, but of the kind which has not left anything to chance. In Mantua in particular, citizens have well understood the theatre, this ancient place of performance, spectacle, festivity, expressive manifestation, public visibility and, in the last instance, community as such. In the theatre and with the theatre, belonging to the city has become meaningfully publicly affirmed. This is why the theatre in Mantua has always been treated as a cultural building of local identity, but even more represented as an inescapable referential point or the social barometer of the city’s past and present value, vitality, distinction, urbanity, and representativity²³. The story explored in this article is a story of discovering and re-discovering the theatre as a place of people’s strong identity and of their persistent cultural energy. The story of Mantua’s self-willed or self-sufficient box-holders teaches us one crucial lesson today: to attend the opera house is one thing, but to own it is something entirely different.

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²³ There are longings in Mantua for a new opera house (See Massimo Pastore, *NAM. Nuovo Auditorium Mantova*). If this will happen, the box-holders of the Teatro Sociale will certainly be exposed to a new historical challenge and to a new social duty to redefine and reformulate their inherited dispositions to the Mantua’s cultural habitus of the twenty-first century.

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