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Publisher: Routledge

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The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cele20>

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Published online: 18 Aug 2014.

To cite this article: Raffaella Bianchi (2014) Space and Hegemony at La Scala, 1776-1850s, The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms, 19:6, 730-746, DOI: [10.1080/10848770.2014.949942](https://doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2014.949942)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2014.949942>

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Space and Hegemony at La Scala, 1776–1850s

~ RAFFAELLA BIANCHI ~

ABSTRACT *This article focuses on the significance of space in the display of hegemonic power in the La Scala opera house in the years 1776–1850s. More specifically, it traces the changes in the use of space from Napoleon’s attempt to “democratise” La Scala by attacking the display of hegemonic hierarchy and subverting the status quo, to the Habsburgs’ attempt to “restore” a display of hegemonic rule. The analysis of primary findings demonstrates that the space of the opera house was reshaped not only physically through renovation but also by imposing rules and structuring attendance during performances. The social significance of La Scala’s theatrical space is also explored by identifying the means the Habsburg authorities used to control it as part of their response to the rise of the Risorgimento. The article thus traces the historical shifts in the political functions of space in La Scala from its early role of displaying aristocratic authority through the period of Napoleonic democratisation and finally the Habsburgs’ restoration politics of surveillance.*

The internal display of La Scala, with its gold and red velvet and its distinctive display of separate boxes, is one of the most familiar representations of the structure of an Italian opera house. While the elegance of La Scala’s architecture has been widely studied,¹ my focus in this article is on the significance of the space of La Scala as an arena to display relationships of power. My exploration of this subject suggests that the “authentic” display at La Scala changed through history: that is, the control of its space moved in tandem with shifts in hegemonic power.² Thus the structuring of its space reflected an engagement with changes in power, and renovations or new structures of its existing space represented a conscious display of power–relations. More specifically, the relationship between space and power at La Scala is explored by tracing the hegemonic shifts from Napoleonic to Habsburg rule. These were exciting times in European history. Aristocratic power, dominant in the *ancien régime*, gave way to the growing bourgeois forces and the emergence of nation–states that dramatically changed the map of Europe. How were these political changes displayed in La Scala? And how were these cultural shifts in the structure of power at Milan displayed in the structure of the space of its opera house? I address these questions by drawing on original archival sources and by contextualising the visual display of the opera house in terms of the politics of the period.



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My central aim is to show that hegemonic and dominant powers shape space not only physically, through renovations, but also by imposing rules and by structuring attendance at operatic performances. Since the physical space can be organised in a hegemonic display of power according to these rules, I also draw on sources that deal with the disciplining of attendance and the opening up of spaces to different social classes. Firstly, I highlight the close link between aristocratic power and the development of La Scala. I then propose an understanding of the space as hierarchically structured in boxes, underlining the social significance of the setting to which the audience was admitted. Thirdly, I focus on two renovations and their underlining ideas, namely, the Napoleonic renovation and its democratisation of space, and the Habsburg restoration and the disciplining of the aristocratic space through the principle of uniformity. I then turn to the display of political values on stage by discussing the political disorder occasioned by a Jacobin opera and an Austrian ballerina. This case study is obviously not an exhaustive examination of all the operatic productions of the period, but it exemplifies the attitudes of the government towards La Scala. Finally, I discuss the means of controlling space that were put into place by the Habsburg in response to the rise of the patriotic movement of the Risorgimento.³

ARISTOCRATIC HEGEMONY AND THE ORIGINS OF LA SCALA

Traditionally, La Scala—from its very foundation in 1778 by a group of aristocrats—has been seen as an aristocratic venue. It was, in fact, not the first venue devoted to operatic culture in Milan, for it seems that aristocrats had a distinctive role in the city's musical culture and occupied a privileged place in the musical venues of the time. Thus in the 1500s music was already performed at the Salone Margherita;⁴ the Regio Ducale Teatro, built in 1598 during the Spanish domination,⁵ was a construction of timber situated in the pentagonal courtyard of the Royal Palace, now the Piazzetta Reale.⁶ In the eighteenth century aristocrats were expected to participate in the cultural life of the opera house as well as in organising productions. There were two types of performance: opera seria, on mythological and historical subjects (the most famous melodrama being that of Pietro Metastasio), and the comic opera of the school of Venice, mainly based on librettos by Carlo Goldoni, who, between 1732 and 1770, wrote twenty-three librettos for the Teatro Ducale. Seven opera buffa were composed by Baldassarre Galuppi. Other composers working on Goldoni's librettos were Piccini, Scolari, Fischietti, and Lampugnani.⁷ The opera seria and the comic opera during the Carnival had separate managements: comic opera was run by an impresario,⁸ but opera seria was organised by a group of aristocrats, the "Cavalieri Direttori" (Gentlemen directors).⁹ Between the ages of fourteen and sixteen the young Mozart wrote three operas for the Regio Ducale Teatro: *Mitridate re di Ponto*, *Ascanio in Alba*, and *Lucio Silla*.¹⁰

From the eighteenth century onwards, aristocrats were not only involved in the artistic direction of performances but also enjoyed certain privileges. Importantly, the aristocracy established a private space in the opera house which publicly displayed their power. Boxes were private spaces where the nobles sat separately from the lower classes in the stalls. They were also used as private parlours for meeting friends during the

theatre seasons.¹¹ Of course, opera houses outside Italy may well have had aristocratic audiences, yet up to the nineteenth century they mainly offered court entertainment and their performances were supposed to please the monarch and to contribute to the display of his/her power.¹² However, this was not the case everywhere. In England, for example, opera was considered a lascivious art and was probably not deemed suitable for displaying the power of the monarchy,¹³ whereas in German-speaking countries the link between the court and operatic performances was more firmly established. But it was in Italy and, more precisely in Venice, that the first opera houses open to a wide public of ticket-buyers were built. Aristocratic families were usually involved in the enterprise, which was seen as a profitable investment. While an aristocratic family owned the building where operatic performances took place, these were entirely run by impresarios.¹⁴ Ellen Rosand has pointed out the importance of the financial backing of Venetian aristocratic families, and explains the development of these new opera houses in the context of cosmopolitan Venice and its many visitors (e.g., during the Carnival).¹⁵ In Milan, on the other hand, the development of opera as an artistic form and a cultural venue was closely linked to aristocratic life and the display of its culture.¹⁶ This also explains why the aristocrats played such an important role when it comes to La Scala—for it was they who built it following the fire that destroyed the Regio Ducale Teatro.

Three times the Regio Ducale Teatro was destroyed by fire: in 1699 it burned down and was immediately rebuilt; in 1708 the flames almost destroyed it and its reconstruction took nine years; and then, in 1776, it was burned down completely.¹⁷ Destruction by fire was not uncommon in opera houses and was mainly caused by the lighting and heating systems of the time. What is strange, however, is that in 1776 the Regio Ducale Teatro caught fire on the night of 25 February, when it was empty. A mystery surrounded this fire, as the circumstances were unusual and the perpetrator was never caught. In 1820 the poet Ugo Foscolo suggested that the fire must have been caused by someone who did not want to hurt anyone (late at night), but who wanted to destroy the opera house itself.¹⁸ It seemed that the fire was effectively started at the four main corners of the building. Giampiero Tintori found an anonymous letter addressed to the Emperor Ferdinand, in which a priest, Don Vincenzo Brusati, was accused of starting the fire, although Tintori himself doubted the veracity of this accusation.¹⁹ It was in fact rumoured in Milan that the Emperor had the opera house burned down, because he was irritated and his sleep was disturbed by the noise the opera-goers made going through his courtyard.²⁰ Other sources suggest that it was not Ferdinand himself who was annoyed, but his powerful minister Count Carlo Firmian, who was concerned about the potential danger of the proximity of so many people who were not easily controlled.²¹

Regardless of who had caused the fire, the fact that Emperor Ferdinand of Habsburg was under suspicion suggests that he was not very tolerant towards this form of entertainment. Still, a new opera house had to be built. This need was felt especially by the aristocrats, led by the “Nobili Cavalieri Associati,” which represented the owners of boxes at the Regio Ducale Teatro and which were responsible for choosing and signing the contract with the impresario.²² They reached an agreement with the Royal Chamber for funding the new theatre, whereby the Chamber bought the land in the area of the Church of Santa Maria alla Scala for the sum of 120,000 Milanese lire,

while the Association was to pay for the construction. The new opera house was called the Grand Theatre (Gran Teatro).²³ The boxes of the first, second, third and fourth rank of La Scala—called *palchettisti* (from *palco*, box)—became the exclusive property of the owners. La Scala continued to be dominated by its aristocratic founders, as seen in the lists of its *palchettisti*.²⁴ As it was some distance from the Royal Palace, the Royal Chamber decided to build a smaller opera house, the Canobbiana, closer to the Palace, which would serve as the palace theatre, although both opera houses bore the title of Royal Theatre. It seems, then, that from the very beginning, La Scala was an aristocratic venue, chosen, constructed and managed according to the will of the leading aristocrats of Milan.

THE OPERA BOX AS A PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SPACE

The list of box-owners at La Scala, however, shows that not all belonged to the titled nobility and that some came from the rising bourgeoisie. The gradual integration of sections of the upper bourgeoisie into the aristocratic milieu may be explained by several factors. First, the bourgeoisie had become more influential as a result of the economic developments described above. Second, the bourgeoisie needed a meeting place where its members could interact with the most influential people. Thirdly, as an emergent social class the bourgeoisie were attracted to the cultural capital of the aristocracy and emulated certain aspects of its culture. Moreover, opera was a much loved entertainment: going to the opera at La Scala was particularly favoured by the hegemonic upper classes, namely, the nobility, the upper bourgeoisie and the intellectuals. So, while artisans and commoners were limited to the *loggione* (the upper rank), the nobility had the privilege of owning a box as part of their cultural entitlement. In Pierre Bourdieu's terminology, going to the opera was a habitus of the upper classes, a habitus which reproduced their hegemony.

This hegemony was enforced through the organisation of a hierarchical space in which different parts of society, with the exclusion of the underclass, were represented. In this space the importance of family-groups or of individuals was marked by the positions they occupied in the map of boxes. The auditorium of La Scala comprises five ranks, with the upper ranks consisting of two galleries (*loggione*) which were open to a wider and more general public, while the hegemonic classes were seated in the lower ranks (the first and part of the second). Here sat the dukes and counts: in the first rank, for example, we find the Visconti family, which ruled the State of Milan during the Renaissance. Other distinguished family-names were Trivulzio, Belgiojoso, and Borromeo. The Republic of Venice owned box number 16 on the left of the auditorium, while the Duke of Modena had the first box on the right, situated on the stage itself (from which, today, the conductor sometimes enters). The duke had a privileged view and also privileged "access" to singers.²⁵ In the hierarchical structure of La Scala, the central focus of the theatre was not the stage, but the space facing the stage, namely, the Royal Box. Indeed, this box does not offer the best view of the performance, but rather it is the place where the occupants can best be *seen*. The circular space of the theatre was structured with the aim of making everyone visible to everybody else. With all the audience seated in balconies, the interior of the theatre

resembled a typical Italian piazza with its balconies. Each box was like a separate room (Fig. 1), to which the owners had their own key. Each box was separated from the next box by a partition that protected it from the neighbours' gaze.²⁶ And yet, all the



Figure 1. *Interno di un palco* [Interior of a box] (1844). Civica Raccolta delle Stampe “Achille Bertarelli”.

boxes were exposed to the gaze of the community. The box fronts were open to the stage and the audience, although it was possible to draw the curtains if one required more privacy. Only the privileged could own a box, and boxes were sold as private property. As Stendhal wrote in *Rome, Naples and Florence*: “Here, a box is like a house, and it is sold for between 20,000 and 25,000 francs.”²⁷ Thus a box was the private space par excellence, for it was owned privately and was considered as an extension of the private living room, decorated according to the taste of the owners.

However, as we have seen, this private space was open to the view of the public, exposing its occupier to the gaze of the occupiers of the other private spaces. The box can therefore be seen as a space where the private merged into the public sphere, where the personal became public.²⁸ Similarly, the spatial structure of the opera house can be related to this desire to turn the private into the public: individuals became part of a web of interrelated gazes and voices, of relationships that constitute the civic space of the city. Thus the web of gazes and voices encompassed the stage and circled the auditorium and did not only point in the direction of the stage, as is the case today. As Stendhal noted: “Despite the lack of light, I can distinguish very well people who are entering in the parterre. Greetings are exchanged across the opera house, from one box to the other.”²⁹ The audience’s gaze was thus projected onto a space that represented the space of the city, with its space structured in accordance with the city’s actual hierarchy of power.

NAPOLEON AND THE DEMOCRATISATION OF LA SCALA’S SPACE

La Scala’s spatial representation of power became evident when Napoleon introduced new rules against aristocratic privileges and ordered the removal of the coats-of-arms from all boxes. Aristocrats now had to notify the theatre in advance when they were not going to attend a performance so that their boxes could be made available for ticket-paying opera goers. In short, the space at La Scala was democratised and opened to the lower classes. In a poem written in Milanese dialect, the nineteenth-century poet Carlo Porta describes a night spent by the fictional Gioanin Bongee di gamb vert and his girlfriend La Teton at the Loggione of La Scala,³⁰ emphasising the popular aspects of this event, the long waiting, the people pushing each other, the fights in the audience and the unfair treatment of the soldier who confronts Gioanin Bongee. This playful account shows how times at La Scala had changed, for previously the lower classes were admitted only as servants of the nobility.

But Napoleon’s major revolution of the space was that he had benches installed in the parterre to allow the ordinary public—artisans, youngsters and women—to sit and freely cheer and ask for encores. This was the space that had been traditionally reserved for lawyers and doctors, the so-called *cappe nere* (black gowns). An encore could now be granted without the approval of the King, thus singers no longer looked up to the Royal Box before granting a *bis*. Thus, with the admittance of this new animated public to the opera house, instead of looking up to the Royal Box, singers now looked down to the parterre.³¹ This reduction of the symbolic importance of the Royal Box was central to Napoleon’s democratisation of space at La Scala: he wanted to turn it into six boxes of normal size. Yet although the work on restructuring the

box had started, it could not be completed before Napoleon fell from power and the Austrians returned to rule Milan.

THE RESTORATION OF LA SCALA BY THE HABSBURGS: THE PRINCIPLE OF UNIFORMITY

The Austrian authorities planned to renovate the Royal Box as part of the general renovation of La Scala. This was carried out in 1831, with the aim of highlighting the symbolic prominence of the Royal Box and of creating a uniform appearance of all the opera boxes: “In the centre of all these ornaments rises in all its splendour the box of the Crown; its parapet is ingeniously different from the rest, and the whole of the decoration is, as it was intended, very noble and sumptuous.”³² Thus on 15 March 1830, box-owners were alerted to collect their furniture so it would not be damaged while the renovation work was carried out.³³ The *Gazzetta Privilegiata di Milano* of 14 January praises the work of the painters Vaccari, Hayez, and Sanquirico. Vaccari divided the vaulted ceiling into 16 areas in vivid colours, and Hayez painted pictures with little angels and Bacchants. The writer only criticised the strong colours because he thought they made the ceiling look too low. Sanquirico decorated the parapets of the boxes, painted in gold on a shiny white background. Every third box was decorated with a so-called trophy. This was an image as large as a box, referring to the function of the theatre, depicting masques, musical instruments, and heroic and military emblems that alluded to the actions performed. The motif was repeated at regular intervals (every three boxes), so that the décor of boxes became uniform in colour and thus produced the aesthetic uniformity of the whole interior. Figure 2 shows the new opera house with its mainly azure blue décor, the uniformity of which was criticised by the *Gazzetta Privilegiata di Milano*.

Yet this *perfetta uniformità* (perfect uniformity) was explicitly mentioned in the new instructions published by the Direzione degl’Imperial Regi Teatri and signed by Duke Visconti di Modrone. The notice was addressed to box-owners, demanding that work should be carried out on their boxes and issuing precise deadlines. Firstly, box-owners were required to repair the windows of their *camerini* (literally, dressing rooms, at the back of their boxes, where food and amenities were stored), and this work was to be finished by 26 December 1830. Secondly, owners had to close their boxes so that the work designed to make the exterior of the boxes conform to that of box number 16 on the first rank on the left—used by the Military Commander—could be carried out. All paintings or bas-reliefs were to be removed in the process of making everything look the same. The instructions also provided new rules for the use of boxes, which were from now on to be kept open during performances, that is, from half an hour before a performance started, and were to be closed when it ended.³⁴ Thus the opera box became less of a private space of privilege and more like a rented space or like owing a family season ticket.

After the renovation of La Scala, the boxes no longer had the appearance of private living rooms or salons decorated according to the taste of the owners; rather, they now displayed the role of the institution. As mentioned, the aesthetic model of this renovation was the box of the military commander. It appears therefore that this



Figure 2. Giulio Rimoldi, *Teatro alla Scala, Interno* [Interior of La Scala Theatre]. Civica Raccolta delle Stampe “Achille Bertarelli”.

renovation, stipulating uniformity and order, was in tune with the political role of the Habsburgs as representatives of the Restoration of the old feudal order after the revolutionary turmoil of Europe during the Napoleonic years. Thus, whereas Napoleon tried to “democratise” La Scala by attacking the hegemonic hierarchy on display and subverting the status quo, the Habsburgs “restored” the display of hegemonic rule and of social hierarchy by the grandiose renovation of the Royal Box, while at the same time imposing a uniform and visibly subordinate order on the display of Milanese aristocratic privilege. There were, however, still other uses of La Scala as a cultural display of power, and these related to the space of the performance.

THE DISPLAY OF HEGEMONIC POWER ON STAGE

In *Politics and Popular Culture* John Street states that “politicians have always sought popularity, and in their search they have always allied themselves with the cultural representations of the ‘popular.’”³⁵ This is as true today as it was in the nineteenth century. As a place where the better-off and educated members of society gathered, La Scala was possibly the best available medium for political communication in Milan, and it was certainly used as such. Thus, for example, twenty-four hours after Napoleon’s triumphal entrance into Milan on 16 May 1796, the *Marseillaise* was performed to celebrate the occasion. A celebrative performance honouring Napoleon and the revolution was staged while Napoleon conducted his Italian Campaign. Similarly,

following the conquest of Mantua on 2 February 1797, a ballet in the French style, *Il Ballo del Papa ossia il Generale Colli in Roma* (The ballet of the Pope or General Colli at Rome), was performed at La Scala on 25 February. It was a display of anticlerical sentiment in which Pope Pius VI surrendered to the values of the Revolution: the Pope not only recognised the French Republic but also embraced the ideals of the revolution by taking off his tiara and wearing the Jacobin hat instead. Although authored by Francesco Saverio Salfi, a politician and professor at the University of Milan, and a leading dramatist of Italian Jacobin theatre, the original idea was Felice Lattuada's, a priest from Varese, lawyer to the bishop of Milan. The announcement of this performance produced a great deal of discussion, with the archbishop of Milan Filippo Visconti appealing first to General Kilmaine and then to Napoleon himself for it be banned or at least censored. However, the performance, the entrance to which was free, went on for eleven nights, and La Scala was so crowded that benches had to be taken out from the parterre to make room for more people.³⁶ These performances presented a security problem, for the massive crowds on the piazza della Scala led to public disorder and to street fights breaking out in the surrounding area until the National Guard had to intervene.³⁷

While such examples of the use of a stage for political purposes were not uncommon in the Revolutionary French theatre, in Milan this practice was met with some resistance. According to Barigazzi, some of the aristocrats did not attend these performances at La Scala so as to avoid the open display of French republican political power with its overt egalitarianism. However there was also a section of the aristocracy who took sides with Napoleon, joining the committee for the government of the city, among them Duke Gian Galeazzo Serbelloni, Count Pietro Verri, and Count Melzi d'Eril, who later became Vice-president of the Italian Republic.³⁸ The Milanese aristocracy was not a unified monolithic political bloc, but fragmented into parties: some of the nobles who supported or opposed the French and their new order now allied themselves to members of the highest ranks of the bourgeoisie who had no titles. However, since the hegemonic bloc at this time, represented by the supporters of Napoleon, were opera-goers, there is no doubt that La Scala was used for political purposes. Political messages were communicated from the stage through performances that were celebrations of political ideals. La Scala was also used as a sounding board for political proclamations to the citizens. A good example of this was the announcement of the victory at Marengo in 1800, which was read from the stage by an army official.³⁹

The Austrians at first did not appear to use La Scala as a spring board for propaganda. It was only around 1830s that the Habsburg government started to consider the stage of La Scala as a vehicle for political display, first by inviting mainly Austrians to perform there. One of the most interesting stories from this period is about the Austrian ballerina Fanny Elssler's performance at a time when Romantic ballet was taking Milan by storm. Her first performance was in *Armida* in 1844, and from then on she regularly appeared at La Scala three times a week.⁴⁰ She was compared to Maria Taglioni, the most famous ballerina at the time, by Theophile Gautier, for example, who described Taglioni as a Christian dancer and Elssler as a pagan dancer. Such was the adulation for Elssler that her fans would even replace her horses and pull her carriage through the street.⁴¹

In the fervent political climate of the Risorgimento, the extreme popularity of this performance art was clearly used for political ends.⁴² Elssler was one of the most popular ballerinas, which was why she was invited to perform at La Scala by Count Filquemont, newly appointed by Metternich to help Viceroy Ranieri deal with an increasingly delicate political situation.⁴³ Metternich, it appears, no longer trusted the aging Viceroy Ranieri, so he sent Count Filquemont to Milan in August 1847 with a new set of directions. Although the power was still officially in the hands of Ranieri, and Filquemont was only supposed to assume a political-diplomatic role, he in fact became the new *de facto* ruler of Milan. Filquemont decided to use La Scala as a means to divert the attention of the Milanese from politics, without realising that La Scala was itself an organ of political expression. Thus he invited the famous Austrian ballerina Fanny Elssler to La Scala with the express intention of bringing diversion to the people of Milan. Yet this was resisted to the extent that handwritten leaflets circulated among the Milanese encouraging them to boycott her first appearance at La Scala, so that no-one would be able to say that the “the Milanese were won over by the charm of a ballerina.”⁴⁴ Even though Fanny Elsser was a celebrated dancer and her dancing was appreciated in Milan too, this did not overcome the public resentment towards Austrian rule.

Indeed, politics brought Elssler to ruin in Milan, which shows that a staged performance had political significance for both the audience and the performers. On 12 February 1848, all corps de ballet dancers of the school of La Scala came to the theatre, wearing little medals with the image of Pius IX. The election of Pius IX and his decisive reforms had strengthened the patriots who believed that the Pope was a symbol of Italian unity. These medals were produced by young patriots of the democratic wing with the aim of rallying new members to the cause, and were also distributed to priests and ordinary peasants.⁴⁵ When Fanny Elssler first appeared on stage, she noticed the medals and then demanded that they be removed, or else she would stop the performance. Although the rest of the dancers supported her, according to the journalist and patriot Giuseppe Augusto Cesana, when the audience realised what had happened, they turned against Elssler. As soon as she appeared again on stage, they started booing and whistling, despite the presence of 100 army officers. From that night on, whenever Elssler appeared on stage, audiences from the boxes and from the parterre received her in silence, and people in the upper rows started to yawn and to openly mock her.⁴⁶ As a result, Elssler left Milan and broke her contract. Her beauty and graceful performance was no longer enough to capture the hearts of the audience of La Scala. Patriotic passion was now the key. And the space of the stage could no longer be used for displaying the hegemonic power of the rulers.

DOMINATING THEATRICAL SPACE: RULES OF ATTENDANCE, SECRET POLICE, AND CONSPIRACIES

During the Restoration, the Austrians were concerned to maintain their hegemonic control over an empire made up of different nationalities struggling for independence. This is evident from the very first measures enforced by the Habsburg government in Milan on its return to power in 1814. Immediately after taking control of the city on

26 August, the new authorities, “Cesareo Governo Provvisorio,” banned all corporations and organisations, and the announcement was posted at La Scala in September. Theatre goers, as well as the artists and employees of the theatre, were informed of the new prohibitions and sanctions (e.g., prison sentences of between two months and a year, and the confiscation of all property). The third paragraph of the proclamation specified a penalty of 200 to 1,000 lire in addition to a prison sentence to anyone who supplied a house or a room for public meetings. This rule made it very dangerous for patriots to meet in their private houses and was one of the reasons why La Scala became a meeting place for patriots. The new prohibitions on La Scala thus had an impact on the everyday life of the people of Milan and on their freedom of association. The politics of disciplining also comprised petty rules relating to private matters, such as when people should go home. La Scala had been the place where people spent a night out, so that by changing its opening-times, the new government influenced the Milanese way of life: from 8 January 1817 onwards, La Scala was to close its doors one hour after the end of a performance.⁴⁷ No doubt, restricting night life meant fewer public order problems. It is interesting that this regulation was not addressed to the impresario, but to the doorkeepers, caretakers, and policemen who were now in charge of imposing and overseeing the new rule.

Some of the policemen and soldiers whose task was to enforce the new regulations were officially on duty, while others formed part of the audience attending performances.⁴⁸ The announcement for the autumn season starting on 24 August 1822, for example, explicitly referred to the soldiers attending performances who would have had the “usual discount” (*solita facilitazione*) on the price of the season ticket of 40 lire. But now only soldiers in uniform who carried a document stating their rank, signed by the Military commander of Milan, could obtain the discount. Soldiers went to La Scala to enjoy themselves, but they nevertheless had to keep an eye on the Emperor’s subjects. An episode, which has become legendary in the history of Milan, took place on 6 January 1815, during an evening in celebration of Francis I. From 1811 men had to take off their hats as a sign of respect in the presence of the Emperor.⁴⁹ However, a young man had provocatively kept his hat on during the celebration as he stood in the parterre, near the boxes. Although the police tried to reach him they could not do so because of the audience. The governor of Milan, General Sarau, seated in the Royal Box next to Emperor Francis I, rose from his seat and walked over to the box nearest to where the young man was standing, and with a backhander flung the hat off his head. Since then, *Sarau* became synonymous with “backhander” and entered the language as a colloquial phrase: “I’ll give you a Sarau.”⁵⁰ Since it was now normal for police inspectors to be present at La Scala, between 1812 and 1817, soldiers were present not only to maintain public order—which had become a growing concern—but also to be walk-on actors during performances.⁵¹ In addition there were more and more plain clothed officers who spied on the audience, in search of potential dissenters, which brings us to the political conspiracy that was discovered in 1821.⁵² This consisted of a plan for an uprising in Milan combined with an invasion of the army of Piedmont. This conspiracy involved some of the most prominent intellectual and aristocrats of Milan, namely Silvio Pellico, Count Federico Confalonieri, Alexandre Adryane, Count and Marquis Luigi Porro Lambertenghi, Pietro Borsieri, Marquis Giorgio

Guido Pallavicino Trivulzio, Giuseppe Pecchi and Carlo Castiglia. Most of them served sentences at the Spielberg prison in Brno.

After this episode, control became even stricter, and it was considered necessary to avoid any situation that could spark off a political demonstration. The conspirators were sentenced to life imprisonment, which generated widespread discontent among the aristocracy. A few months later, new rules were introduced. On 7 January 1823, the following announcement was posted: “As it is important not to disturb the tranquillity of the audience, it is announced that at any booing or loud noise, the curtain will come down and the performance would be interrupted.” It seems that spectators had started to actively participate in the performances by expressing their political views and demanding encores, as suggested by the law passed in 1826 that made it illegal to applaud after specific passages or to ask for encores.⁵³ On 12 January “by orders previously published and enforced now by the General Police Direction, actors are forbidden to appear on stage if invited by applause, before the act they are performing is finished.”⁵⁴ This indicates that the audience clearly perceived and responded to the political messages of the performances. At the same time, it highlights the discipline enforced at La Scala by the Habsburgs, which was aimed at controlling any expression of political dissent and to discourage any demonstration of patriotic feelings. The presence of Austrophile impresarios, however, did little to change the attitude of the public.

In addition, the presence of the military during performances transformed the auditorium. The parterre, which in the seventeenth century had been occupied by the so-called *cappe nere*, was open under Napoleonic rule to a growing number of bourgeois spectators. It was now structured in ranks of chairs. Tickets for these seats were on sale to the general public, and this is where soldiers could be found as well. All the rules enforcing more control were formulated to achieve greater order, as suggested by the new rule of 1 February 1823, whereby the space was reorganised: “To make access to the chairs of the stalls easier, a space in the middle was created. However, it is forbidden to remain in the space formed by the above-mentioned division, which must only be used to pass between chairs” (at this period chairs rather than fixed seats were in use).⁵⁵

The government and its spies were keen to know who was in the opera house, aiming to control the movements of citizens around the building and to prevent illegal activities such as the formation of political associations. Thus the Governor of Milan, Strassoldo, wrote in his report to Vienna, addressed to the Chief of Police Sedlnitzky, that La Scala was not only a necessity to the Milanese people but was also very useful to the police:

It is also a necessity for the police, who find the public of all classes and of all parties gathered in this centre, and if [the police] keep their eyes wide open, they can keep up-to-date on all the events of the day, check them in every detail, highlight every nuance of all prevailing opinions, on every subject either of domestic or foreign affairs, [and this allows the police] to maintain control over every foreigner (everybody visits La Scala!); in short, to carry out all those actions that would definitely be impossible or practicable only at greater expense and with difficulty, and without any guarantee of success in a large city.⁵⁶

In conclusion, La Scala played a significant role in disseminating political values as well as displaying political hegemony in the period of Napoleonic rule. It is equally evident that, with the end of French rule, the Austrians did everything possible to reinstate their hegemony at La Scala, in a way that visually re-established their old order. However, while Napoleon primarily saw La Scala as an instrument of the politics of display, the Habsburgs saw it as a useful means of tightly controlling La Scala and its audience. This is also evident from the documents of the Napoleonic era that relate to La Scala, which were drawn up by an official committee in charge of public celebrations and parties, while the documents from the time of Austrian rule were written on police notepaper. But, as I have attempted to show, the strongest evidence of the principles underpinning Napoleonic and later Austrian hegemony at La Scala can be seen in the arrangements of its internal space and their political significance.

NOTES

I would like to express my thanks to Philip Gossett, Ruth Kinna, Martha Wörsching, Saul Newman, Robert Knight, Jeremy Leaman and John Ashdown-Hill for their helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this article. I am very grateful to the Civica Raccolta delle Stampe “Achille Bertarelli” and to the Biblioteca Trivulziana of Milan for their permission to reproduce the figures.

1. See Enrico Lonati, *La Scala: Its Building, Site, Restoration and Architecture* (Venice: Marsilio, 2004).
2. On the implications of the current trend of searching for authenticity in music, see Nicholas Cook, *Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6–10.
3. The literature on Italian opera and nationalism is vast. Most of the debate focuses on specific composers (e.g., Verdi) highlighting the relevance of their opera for Italian nationalism previous or post-Unification. For a more specific exploration of the responses of the Austrian government to the political significance of opera in Italian nationalism, see Philip Gossett, “Censorship and Self-Censorship: Problems in Editing the Operas of Verdi,” in *Essays in Musicology: A Tribute to Alvin Johnson*, ed. Lewis Lockwood (Philadelphia, PA: American Musicological Society, 1990), 247–57; and David Laven, *Venice and Venetia under the Habsburgs, 1815–35* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Most of these studies focus on the analysis of librettos and scores, whereas my aim is to extend the debate by using different sources on the organization of the opera house.
4. Mariangela Donà, “Milan,” at <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/18655>; accessed 8 February 2014.
5. Remo Giazotto, *Le Carte della Scala: Storie di Impresari e Appaltatori Teatrali (1778–1860)* (Pisa: Akademos & Lim., 1990), 5.
6. Giuseppe Barigazzi, *La Scala Racconta* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1989), 14.
7. Carlo Gatti, *Il Teatro alla Scala nella Storia e nell’Arte (1778–1958)* (Milan: Ricordi, 1964), vol. 1, 7–8.
8. The impresario was the manager of the opera house whose duties and commitments are well depicted in John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi: The Role of the Impresario* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Specific studies on the impresarios at La Scala include Mariagabriella Cambiaghi, “La Scala degli Impresari: Il modello organizzativo del XIX secolo,” in *Il Teatro alla Scala*, ed. Erica Cantarelli (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 2004), 37–48. The peculiarities of the system of management in Italy are explained in Franco Piperno, “Il Sistema Produttivo fino al 1780,” in *Storia dell’Opera Italiana*, ed. Luciano Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli (Turin: EDT, 1987), vol. 4, 1–75.
9. Barigazzi, *La Scala Racconta*, 22.
10. Barigazzi, *La Scala Racconta*, 19.

11. Donà, "Milan," at <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/18655> and <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O006673>; accessed 8 February 2012.
12. See Martha Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
13. See Edward J. Dent, *Opera: A Stimulating Guide to its Nature and Development* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1949), and "The Nomenclature of Opera," *Music & Letters* 25.4 (1944): 213–26; and the more recent, Thomas McGeary "Gendering Opera: Italian Opera as the Feminine Other in Britain, 1700–42," *Journal of Musicological Research* 14 (1994): 17–34; Serena Guarracino, "Voices from the South: Music, Castration, and the Displacement of the Eye," in *Anglo-Southern Encounters*, ed. Luigi Cazzato (Lecce: Negroamaro, 2011), 40–51.
14. The books of the first impresario are the source of Beth Lise Glixon and Jonathan Glixon, *Inventing the Business of Opera: The Impresario and his World in Seventeenth Century Venice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
15. Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 413–14.
16. For an assessment of the socio-political significance of opera houses in the Papal State, see Alex K rner, "The Theatre of Social Change: Nobility, Opera Industry and the Politics of Culture in Bologna between Papal Privileges and Liberal Principles," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 8.3 (2003): 336–41. An overview of opera houses in nineteenth-century Italy can be found in Carlotta Sorba, *Teatri: L'Italia del Melodramma nell'Et  del Risorgimento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001).
17. Giazotto, *Le Carte della Scala*, 5–6; Pompeo Cambiasi, *La Scala 1778–1906: Note Storiche e Statistiche* (Milan: G. Ricordi & Co., 1906), XIII; Barigazzi, *La Scala Racconta*, 23.
18. Ugo Foscolo, "Dell'Impresa d'un Teatro per Musica," *Opere Edite e Postume* 4 (Florence: Le Monnier, 1856): 391–92.
19. Giampiero Tintori, "La Scala e Milano," in *Le Capitali della Musica: Milano*, ed. Giorgio Taborelli and Vittoria Crespi Morbio (Cinisello Balsamo: Nuovo Banco Ambrosiano and Amici della Scala, 1984), 74.
20. Barigazzi, *La Scala Racconta*, 23.
21. Gatti, *Il Teatro alla Scala nella Storia e nell'Arte*, 1.3.
22. Giazotto, *Le Carte della Scala*, 5–11.
23. Promemoria, 15, VII 1778, Archivio Storico Civico Biblioteca Trivulziana.
24. In Cambiasi, *La Scala 1778–1906: Note*, 130–40. This book is a collection of primary sources edited by Senator Pompeo Cambiasi in 1906. The originals are lost, possibly as a result of the bombing at La Scala in World War II.
25. Up to the nineteenth century, male and female operatic performers often became lovers of members of the upper-classes, who were called *protettori*, because they protected and supported the career of the performers. See, for example, Davide Daolmi, "Arte Sol da Puttane e da Bardasse: Prostituzione maschile e 'nobile vizio' nella cultura musicale della Firenze barocca," *Civilt  Musicale* 6.1–2, 14–15 (February–June 1992): 103–31.
26. This is not the case in other opera houses, particularly in Northern Europe, as for example, the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden in London.
27. Stendhal, *Rome, Naples et Florence* (1826; Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 42. All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated. There is uncertainty on the reliability of some of Stendhal's comments, so we are not sure if the price of a box he mentions is reliable. However, the practice of selling boxes as private property is also confirmed by other sources, such as a list of box owners, so carrying different names in different years.
28. One could say that the construction of the public sphere in Italy, a country with a large number of illiterates in the nineteenth century, can be linked to the public space of the opera house. See Carlotta Sorba's paper, Carlotta Sorba "Audience Teatrale, Costruzione della Sfera Pubblica ed Emozionalit  in Francia e in Italia tra XVIII e XIX Secolo" in *Rileggere l'Ottocento: Risorgimento e Nazione*, ed. L. Betri (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2010).

29. Stendhal, *Rome, Naples et Florence*, 30.
30. Their names in the Milanese dialect refer to physical attributes: Gioanin (little Juan) has crooked legs and his girlfriend has big breasts. The Romantic poet Carlo Porta presents these characters on other occasions, and although the poems are comic they express empathy for the troubles of the lower classes. Carlo Porta, “El lament del Marchionn di gamb avert” [The lament of Melchior the crippled, 1816], in *Carlo Porta, Le Poesie: Edizione Critica a cura di Dante Isella* (Florence: Nuova Italia, 1955).
31. Barigazzi, *La Scala Racconta*, 56.
32. *Gazzetta Privilegiata di Milano*, 14 January 1831, 2. The year 1831 marked the nationalistic uprisings throughout Europe, which were followed by strict measures to restore the balance of power.
33. Cambiasi, *La Scala 1778–1906: Note*, 12.
34. Cambiasi, *La Scala 1778–1906: Note*, 92.
35. John Street, *Politics and Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 15.
36. Barigazzi, *La Scala Racconta*, 54–55, 58, 59.
37. Giuseppe Rovani, *Cento Anni* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1934).
38. Barigazzi, *La Scala Racconta*, 59.
39. A. Gagliardelli, “Quasi due Secoli di Vita,” in *La Nostra Scala* (Milan: Comune di Milano – Ripartizione Educazione, 1961), 11–24.
40. Cambiasi, *La Scala 1778–1906: Note*, 118.
41. Barigazzi, *La Scala Racconta*, 230, 235.
42. While in Italy opera is associated with nationalism, in other countries it takes on a different political significance. See, for example, Raffaella Bianchi and Bezen Coskun “The Function of Opera across Borders: Italian and Turkish Identity Construction,” in *Music across Borders*, ed. Serena Guarracino and Marina Vitale, *Anglistica* 13.2 (2009): 59–70; Harry White, “Operas of the Irish Mind: Cultural Theory, Literary Reception and the Question of ‘Irishness’ in Nineteenth Century Opera,” *Musical Theatre as High Culture? The Cultural Discourse of Opera and Operetta in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Vjera Katalinić, Stanislav Tuksar, and Harry White (Zagreb: Croatian Musicological Society, 2011); and Vlado Kotnik, *Opera, Power and Ideology: Anthropological Study of a National Art in Slovenia* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010).
43. Alfredo Bosio, *Storia di Milano* (Milan: Giunti Martello, 1984), 317.
44. “i milanesi furono vinti da una ballerina.” Aldobrandino Malvezzi, *Il Risorgimento Italiano in un Carteggio di Patrioti (1821–1860)* (Milan: Hoepli, 1924), 209–10.
45. Franco Della Peruta, *Milano nel Risorgimento: Dall’Età Napoleonica alle Cinque Giornate* (Milan: Editrice La Storia, 1992), 116.
46. Cesana in Gaston Vuillier, *La Danza* (Milan: Tip. del Corriere della Sera, 1899), 352.
47. Cambiasi, *La Scala 1778–1906: Note*, 61, 64.
48. “Atti relativi agli ispettori di Polizia in servizio nei Teatri” (Documents on Police inspectors employed in Theatres), *Spettacoli Pubblici*, 41, Personale (Personnel), 1, 1810–1825, Archivio Storico Civico, Biblioteca Trivulziana.
49. Cambiasi, *La Scala 1778–1906: Note*, 71, 60.
50. “Ti do’ un Sarau,” in Barigazzi, *La Scala Racconta*, 96.
51. “Atti relativi agli ispettori di Polizia in servizio nei Teatri” (Documents on Police inspectors employed in theatres), *Spettacoli Pubblici*, 41, Personale (Personnel), 1, 1810–1825, Archivio Storico Civico, Biblioteca Trivulziana.
52. Leading figures of the Italian Risorgimento, among them Silvio Pellico, took part in this conspiracy. For further details, see Raffaella Bianchi, “La Scala and the Struggle of the Risorgimento: From Restoration to the Barricades of the Five Days of Milan,” in *Viva V.E.R.D.I.: Music from the Risorgimento to the Unification of Italy*, ed. Roberto Illiano, *Studies on Italian Music History*, vol. 8 (Brussels: Brepols Publishers, 2013).
53. Cambiasi, *La Scala 1778–1906: Note*, 72, 81.
54. “è vietato agli Attori, per gli ordini già da lungo tempo pubblicati, e di recente richiamati in vigore dall’I.R. Direzione Generale della Polizia, di comparire sul Palco Scenico, quando vi sono invitati dagli applausi, prima che sia terminato l’Atto dello spettacolo in cui agiscono.”

55. “Regolamenti per servizio d’ordine sul palcoscenico” (Regulation for order on stage), *Spettacoli Pubblici* 5, Atti della Direzione Teatrale (Documents of Theatre Direction) (1830–31), Archivio Storico Civico, Biblioteca Trivulziana.
56. Strassoldo, in Bruno Spapaen, “Governare per mezzo della Scala’: L’Austria e il teatro d’opera a Milano,” *Contemporanea* 6.4 (October 2003): 600.
57. Spapaen, “Governare per mezzo della Scala’,” 593–620. The Panopticon was a circular prison designed by Jeremy Bentham with a central tower allowing a guard to observe all prisoners without their being able to tell whether they were being watched. See Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1991).
58. *Appalti – Direzione* (Tenders – Directions) 1818–1844, *Spettacoli Pubblici* 56, Archivio Storico Civico, Biblioteca Trivulziana.