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Becoming a Fan: On the Seductions of Opera

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Abstract The following is a sociological report on a particular segment of an opera audience. Its purpose is to explicate the processes of initiation in an activity typically considered “high culture.” It differs from other accounts of cultural consumption in that it is concerned not with the correspondence between social background and taste, but with the processes whereby taste is assembled. Drawing upon an 18-month-long ethnography on opera fans in Buenos Aires, this paper has two aims. First, it shows that passionate opera fans enjoy opera based on their belief that opera is something that needs to be learned in order to be properly enjoyed. Second, it describes three diverse instances in which people learn about opera. Furthermore, this paper also has a theoretical objective: to extend and refine the classic model of affiliation and initiation into cultural practices established by Howard Becker with his case study of marijuana use.

Keywords Apprenticeship · Fandom · Initiation · Opera · Taste

Homeless at the doorsteps

One of the two lateral entrances of the Colón Opera House of Buenos Aires faces a walking section of Arturo Toscanini Street. The entrance is a tall, white door beneath a large façade sustained by a solid pair of Ionic columns. The once bright yellow walls surrounding it have faded and reveal humidity stains. Passersby leave leaflets there offering all kinds of services including weight loss programs and cheap toner replacements for office printers, and once performances are over, homeless men find shelter from the cold on the three gray steps. This is where those seated in the *cazuela* and *tertulia*—the upper floors with the cheapest tickets—gather in order to enter the opera house. Depending on the title, people congregate anywhere from an hour and a half to 20 minutes before the door opens for the opportunity to claim a good spot on the standing room floors—one with an unobstructed

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Fig. 1 A homeless woman sits next to the lateral entrance of the Colón.

view of the stage. Although there is an elevator, because it does not leave the ground floor until a good number of people are on board, most people forgo the long wait time and choose the stairs. Fans of all ages march up the four or five flights in a silent but fierce competition (Fig. 1).

It is winter in Buenos Aires, and there is a constant drizzle. Today, there are far more people than the usual 50 or so that gather before the opera house door opens. The pull of Wagner's *Die Walküre* seems to be too much to resist. There are over a hundred people—a few of them younger than the average audience member—and there is still a good 45 minutes until we get to enter the hall. Spectators either cover themselves with umbrellas or try to stay as close as possible to the wall, taking advantage of the many balconies, ledges, and embossed figures above. About 15 minutes before 8 P.M., a woman passes by and distributes flyers to the people in line. They are an advertisement for *Un Ballo in Maschera*, Verdi's opera, which is playing at the Avenida, the city's second opera house, at the same time. Staged by a new company financed by an opera enthusiast, its strongest selling point is the outside-of-the-Colón debut of an Italian soprano, Maria Pia Piscitelli, in the main role of Amelia.

The flyers immediately become a catalyst for conversation among strangers. I am standing next to a woman in her early sixties who looks briefly at the flyer before exclaiming, "I heard the first night was a disaster." She adjusts her large glasses and goes on, "I haven't gone yet, but my girlfriend went and said it was a mess. I'm going on Sunday. Have you gone already?" Before I can reply, the woman is rhapsodizing about how good "she" was the first time she saw the same opera at the Colón. Soon, our conversation is joined by the older gentleman in front of the woman and the young man behind me. It seems that everyone knows who "she" is but me. Before I can embarrass myself by asking, the older gentleman says, "But La Piscitelli was extraordinary. It's hardly a surprise, if you consider how good she has been before." Before I can say something about how I remembered her in *Norma*, the three of them start exchanging notes. "I think that what she did in *Simone*[1] was amazing," says the young man, to which the older man responds, "Yes, but I thought she fared even better the time she went toe to toe with June Anderson as

[1] Piscitelli sang the main female part, Maria, of Verdi's *Simone Boccanegra* in 2003.

Norma![2]" The woman—I would later learn her name was Noemí—says she thinks that Piscitelli was most memorable in *Don Carlo*.[3] The older gentleman goes on to voice his dissatisfaction about the rationale behind staging *Ballo* yet again. "Why do they need to stage an opera like that one? So many great singers have come to do it. How do you compare her with La Mitchell,[4] for instance?" To this, Noemí answers that although Piscitelli has a great voice and a nice presence, she saw an incredible *Simone* at the Colón, with a different soprano. She cannot remember whether she was Ukrainian or Polish,[5] "but it was at least some eleven years ago. And it was definitely better." The line has finally started to move, and the small group becomes quiet as all of them prepare to bound up the hundreds of steps that separate them from a complete and unobstructed view of the stage.

A scene like this is typical at the door of the opera house and often repeats itself inside. Fans engage in informal conversations about what they are about to see or other recent events in the local opera scene. In doing so, they point to certain topics and themes, and extend an open an almost automatic invitation to talk. These conversations usually happen in small groups, mostly one on one, as it is the fans that are alone that tend to speak to one another. If it is opening night, the questions are about the dress rehearsals, and the measure for comparison is past seasons. If it is any performance other than the first, the obvious question is whether you have already seen the opera. Regardless of whether they are discussing what they have come to see or another recent title, fans engage in comparisons to recent performances, other titles in which the featured singers appeared during past seasons, and—especially if the opera has never been performed in the country—standout recordings.

The aforementioned scene, just one of more than three dozen similar ones that I observed during my 18 months of fieldwork, illustrates opera fans at work. Fans gather to wait, converse, compare, and justify their preferences. This paper examines the creation of this particular type of devoted cultural consumer.

The blind spot: High culture and initiation processes

A significant body of sociological and anthropological literature has reflected on what it means to be initiated and how we traverse diverse stages in a transformative way until the moment in which we become one with the practice and transcend our previous status within a given community. Authors like Van Gennep (1961), Becker (1961, 1963), Turner (1967, 1974, 1977), Myerhoff and Moore (1975) and Wacquant (2003) have all looked at the processes through which people pass through certain rites of belonging that move them from one status and role to another. Generally, the focus has been on political communities, rituals of masculinity among members of segmentary societies, or the membership rituals one must pass through to be integrated into a profession. This perspective has not been

[2] Anderson and Piscitelli both sang the leading role in the opera. Anderson had four dates, but Piscitelli, her understudy, managed to eclipse her in her two performances. The falling rate of the peso against the dollar would make Piscitelli a far more frequent presence at the Colón than Anderson.

[3] She was Isabel de Valois in the 2004 season.

[4] Leona Mitchell sang the role of Amelia in the Colón production of 1994, the last time it had been performed.

[5] She actually referred to the 1995 performance, which included Finnish soprano Karita Mattila, renowned baritone José van Dam, and bass Ferruccio Furlanetto.

taken into account in order to understand how someone becomes a devoted and engaged consumer of a cultural product.

The following is a sociological report of a particular segment of an opera audience. Its purpose is to explicate the processes of initiation in a particular practice, usually considered "high culture" by North American sociology. It differs from other accounts of cultural consumption in that it is concerned not with the correspondence between social background and taste, but with the processes whereby taste is assembled, the diverse spaces where this happens, and the diverse stages through which it happens. It asks not only what people bring with them (their backgrounds and dispositions), but also what they see in a cultural product and how they learn to intensify their attachment to that product both internally (as they learn how to "feel" and "be moved") and externally (as they learn where and how to publicly display their appreciation). While authors like Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, 1979), Bourdieu (1984), Lamont (1992), and Lareau (2003) have signaled the importance of the family in reproducing high culture taste, they have fallen short in explaining how is it that certain characteristics of a cultural practice are rendered so meaningful as to mobilize someone to partake in it. In current sociological debates about the social character of taste, we rarely see why one initially engages in a culturally esoteric practice, what his/her initial reaction to it is, what meanings s/he attaches to the experience, or the diverse stages s/he traverses to reach a level of knowledge and mastery that guarantees, at least for him/her, the most complete enjoyment. Thus, we fail to see the mediations (Hennion 1997; Heinich 2001) that occur between social structure and taste.

Various studies of audiences and spectatorship have shown the role of surprise and the suspension of disbelief in enjoying a performance. The trope is as much a part of operatic scholarship and criticism, which preoccupies itself with the notion that something we love can become disfigured by our excessive knowledge of it (see Levin 1994, p.5), as it is of cultural sociology, whose authors suggest that audiences are props (Gamson 1994; Grindstaff 2002), that they can be conned by staged scenes of authenticity (Grazian 2004, 2007), and that they need to have a "fresh" take on what is being performed devoid of background information (Atkinson 2006) in order to enjoy it. Drawing on my ethnographic work, I set two aims for this article. First, I show that passionate opera fans enjoy opera not because they want to be swayed by it in their ignorance, but rather as a result of their belief that opera is something that needs to be learned in order to be properly enjoyed. Herein, I emphasize that while learning about opera is an eminently social activity, what is learned is a romantic understanding of operatic consumption, which teaches how to be one with the music, in a highly personalized and individualized way.

Secondly, I describe three diverse instances in which people learn about opera. One type is informal. It involves the surrounding, non-musical moments of the performance: ticket and door lines, intermissions, bus trips to other opera houses. A second kind is more formal as it includes classes, lectures, and conferences. A third kind takes place at the opera house as elder passionate fans either boo, sit silently, or clap, indicating the etiquette and the appropriate moments for each action. Passionate fans learn to enjoy opera *in foro interno*, responding internally to parts of the music that are supposed to demand an emotional reaction, and *in foro externo*, reacting publicly in an appropriate way.

This article has also a theoretical objective: to extend and refine the classic model of affiliation and initiation into cultural practices that Howard Becker (1953) established with his case study of marijuana use. This model makes sociability, or contact with other participants that already enjoy the activity, the turning point, and suggests that the activity is

ambiguous at first and does not produce the desired effects until one learns how to consume and enjoy it properly. I extend this model by including various settings in which fans learn the effects opera has on them, and complement it by including an instant of revelation[6] not contemplated in Becker's model, in which opera fans are not attracted to opera just by and through the company of others, but by an intense attraction (visual, corporal) they then have to socially learn how to control and maximize.

Methods and data

Throughout the 2002 to 2005 seasons, I conducted 18 months of ethnographic research of opera practices, centered mostly on the upper floor standing rooms of Buenos Aires' Colón Opera House, one of the most traditional houses in the world and one of the cornerstones of the international opera circuit (Rosselli 1984, 1990). I have been at all-night lines, attended some 70 performances, gone to up to six performances of the same title within a month, and taken bus trips to minor opera houses 400 miles away from the city. I interviewed 44 audience members as well as key music critics and producers. From 2004 to 2005, I conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews that lasted between 1 and 3 1/2 hours and included questions of initiation in musical activities, family history, personal trajectory, musical knowledge, and patterns of attendance. I concluded most of the interviews by asking what was missing from the interviews, which usually opened the space for a long, self-reflective narrative about the place of music in the interviewee's life. These interviews were specifically aimed at understanding and making explicit some of the links between personal life, social status, conceptions of transcendence and enjoyment, and musical engagement that were hard to formalize from observation alone. I conducted the majority of these interviews after 6 months of observing the interviewees participating in various activities such as opera parties, lectures, conferences, and disc clubs.

I focused this article on the upper/cheaper floors of the opera house, especially the inhabitants of the standing room, which makes up about 20% of the audience. Opera in Argentina, and the Teatro Colón in particular, has been simultaneously associated with the elite and high culture and given a civilizing and moralizing character while being consumed by a heterogeneous population, especially once you move the focus beyond the boxes and the orchestra seats (Matamoro 1972; Hodge 1979; Pasolini 1999) The upper floors are a relatively self-enclosed world. Here, 400 to 600 people get together for 3 to 4 hours at a time, three to four times a week. In this secluded space, people act as if protected from the outside world, with an intense sociability, which excludes external events. The secluded character of the experience makes for an in situ laboratory to observe social interaction, the fabrication of meaning, and the variations in intense engagement with the same practice by people from diverse social locations that, nevertheless, share a common space.

[6] Sociology has dealt with this nascent state in many ways. Weber made of these moments the unstable foundation for a charismatic attachment to an authoritative figure; Durkheim attributed the genesis of value formation and commitment to collective effervescence. More contemporary approaches, like Alberoni (1983), Giddens (1992) or Joas (2000, 2007) have focused on the phenomenological character of these experiences, though they mostly refer to religious or emotional experiences and not to aesthetic ones, as intense moments of self-transcendence and self-formation that then get then "routinized" or institutionalized.

The absence of a social location for passion

Most of my informants and interviewees come from diverse sections of the middle class, ranging from the lower rungs to a few who are considered upper middle class.[7] There are several petty accountants, a couple of lawyers, a dentist, two physicians, a psychoanalyst, a few high school teachers, two journalists, a physical trainer, a PR specialist, a semi-retired small shop owner, five public employees, a theater director from the independent scene, and a debt collector. A few of them have already retired and live off of small pensions or are still working part-time with their parents, as freelance translators, in public offices, or as schoolteachers. One of them is a voice coach. Another is an aspiring singer. Several others have also tried to professionalize their passion; four of them became musical journalists or radio producers.

Operatic passion attracts a wide net of people to the *cazuela*, *tertulia* and *paraiso* floors, which confirms their role throughout history as mixing spaces for a heterogeneous population. Based on most of the sociological literature available, however, I had imagined that I was going to find a population of fans from the local upper middle classes, which have always lived in the core or better accommodated neighborhoods of the city and have been educated on opera by their parents who brought them systematically to the Colón.[8] However, the life stories of the group point in a different direction, to a random act of initiation, sometimes during the adult years, made possible by someone in the family (usually not the parents), a friend, or a public educational institution. They also point to people from diverse backgrounds and many parts of the city and country. The group is heterogeneous enough as to make it difficult to find any specific position in the social space (Fig. 2).

Fans' life trajectories range from the story of uneducated, semi-employed Tito, the 48-year-old son of Italian immigrants, who never fostered his interest in opera, to the story of Andrea, a physician in her mid-sixties who lives in one of the most posh areas of Buenos Aires and was sent to the city by her parents. They vary from the story of Juan Luis, a 66-year-old record collector and amateur critic from a rich Spaniard artisan family that never finished college, but went "crazy" about classical music after hearing a random waltz on the radio, to the story of Natalia, a 31-year-old political scientist that works for a prestigious NGO and who "fell in love" with opera after falling in love with an amateur musician; her father never finished high school, worked in a factory, and to this day she does not own a record player. A few interviewees told me that their families actually deterred them from going to the opera. For instance, Irma's father actually convinced her to stop listening to the radio because opera was for "crazy old maids" while Franco's family found opera boring and not manly enough for a country boy.

If there is anything these stories share, it is the lack of early inculcated dispositions, a lack of a "naturalized" familiarity with the world of opera and classical music in general. While these people are from diverse fractions of the urban middle classes, their initial dispositions have not prepared them to appreciate, enjoy, or even be attracted to opera. Unlike the "black box" that the habitus is sometimes made to be, it is precisely those early generative dispositions—absent here—that constitute the "structuring structured structures" necessary for something to be attractive to us, to encourage us to participate in a social game, and to provide us with the schemas of appreciation. To quote Bourdieu (1990, p. 59):

[7] This means that they own more than one property and at least one car, travel abroad frequently, and have a credit card and a steady source of income.

[8] Bourdieu (1984, p. 17), for instance, cites attending classical music concerts or playing an instrument as practices that classify someone more strongly because of the "rarity of the conditions under which the corresponding dispositions are acquired." Those conditions include a familiarity with high culture not learned in educational institutions but transmitted and naturalized in the immediate family circle.

Fig. 2 A view of the upper floors from a *Paraiso* seat.

"The habitus is precisely this immanent law, inscribed in bodies by identical histories." Having a common habitus means sharing life trajectories and generative dispositions as inculcated mostly within the family; not understanding this would mean to think that just because passionate fans come from middle class backgrounds (regardless how much their life stories might diverge), they are likely to have the appropriate dispositions necessary to enjoy opera.

To explain why they engage with opera, it is necessary, then, to move from the background conditions to the foreground factors that make of someone attracted to opera a fanatic. It's also important to analyze the mediating institutions, the socialization instances, as Becker argues, that make opera not only something delectable and enjoyable[9] but something one must be in control of in order to appreciate in depth. The second part of this article will focus on how these fans learn to feel, believe, and "act" in opera (as in the triple sense of the idea of ritual), which parts of the experience they highlight, and how they invest themselves once the initial moment of surprise exhausts itself.

How they learned what an opera was

The first question I posed to fans like those who conversed at the entrance of the opera house was: How much do you need to know to actually enjoy opera? At the beginning of my research, some of my informants were really concerned about stating how much they have attended. They always pointed to someone else "who actually has been going forever

[9] Jack Katz (1988) advocates a movement from background conditions to foreground factors in order to understand why people commit crimes. He encourages other sociologists to follow his research strategy and think not only about the background conditions that would make someone a criminal (or an opera fan, in this case) but rather what about the foreground characteristics of the practice or object is seductive in itself (in the case of crime, its association with risk, danger, prohibition, etc). The result of this strategy is to understand what is morally and sensually attractive about a practice as much as how the practice is constitutive of the person who partakes in it.

and really knows about it." However, some of these people were at the opera house every time I attended, and when they finally told me how long they have been going, they would say, "just 25 years."

This highly experiential character of learning makes for a complex system, which proposes opera as an activity that: (a) refers to the past for reference and comparison; (b) demands extensive and intensive attendance; (c) encourages people to attend conferences and lectures, listen to the radio, read related books, and buy records—although these activities are always complementary and never a substitute for attendance; and (d) makes for an almost automatic and informal apprenticeship process in which the older members school the younger ones and are recognized and revered for their knowledge.[10]

However, the explanation of fans' engagement with opera is not exhausted by the social character of learning. A purely "social" explanation would make the pleasure object something ambiguous at first, which does not produce effects during the first few interactions or at least until fans are taught how to consume and enjoy it properly. On the contrary, most of the interviewed fans described the intense attraction they felt the first time at the opera house as something explosive (the preferred images are explosion, impact, shock) that was waiting for them and that they had been waiting for their whole lives (as in "love at first sight"), which had intense and enduring physical effects.

For instance, Julio, a voice coach in his early sixties, focused his testimony on the prowess of the first voice he heard. He remembered how intensely he felt the voice of Spaniard–American soprano Victoria de los Angeles the first time he went to the opera house. The unique timbre of her voice and the sight of her "singing 'Una voce poco fa' on the balcony while holding a big fan and wearing a very simple pink dress" made Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Sevilla* one of his favorite operas. It was only 2 weeks until he decided he had to make it to the Colón again. Some fans, like Franco, an employee for a PR firm in his late thirties, focused on the "magical" atmosphere that was especially palpable when he heard the aria of the Queen of the Night. "I did not know much about Mozart, who he was and all that, but I loved her high notes and that atmosphere of magic and innocence." It took only 1 month for him to decide to attend an opera again, although in-between, he made sure to buy a few records to inform himself. A few others, like Alicia, a doctor, focused on the intense physical effects the singer's voice had on her that first time; to her, the music "vibrated at the same frequency" as her body. The music not only affected her breathing but, as fellow fan Maria Luisa asserted, "pounded in time with the rhythm of her heart."

It's like going to my mom's house

Luis, now forty-seven, went to a Jewish high school in the western outskirts of the city, which meant that he seldom went downtown. Before going to the opera for the first time, he simply thought of it as something that started at 5 pm and lasted until midnight. His parents had a few records, including the suite from Bizet's Carmen, but listened mostly to AM radio talk shows. In his youth, he liked mostly Argentinean rock and folk music with nice harmonies and big voices. When he was twenty-seven, Luis' ex-brother-in-law told him he used to go now and again to the Colón and asked him if he wanted to attend. The first opera that Luis saw was *Carmen*, and he said, "It was love at first sight." He fell immediately for the sound of the opera house and the size of the stage. He started going constantly soon after he discovered that he could get inexpensive tickets upstairs and never stopped. Eventually, he started enjoying standing better than being seated. He saw the same faces again and again, but it took him ten years to start frequenting the off-Colón circuit, traveling to La Plata and later other provincial opera houses, such as the Rosario. After a while, going to the Colón was for him "like going to [his] mom's house."

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[10] In 2005, some members of the Opera House Orchestra circulated a petition in support of hiring some of the older fans as tour guides.

Unlike instances that require a formal process of initiation, be it being a musician (Becker 1953), a physician (Becker 1961; Friedson 2005), a tattoo artist (Sanders 1990), or a boxer (Wacquant 2003), it is hard to follow the trajectory of a novice opera fan. They are hard to identify, they are not isolated spatially within the house, they do not go through a series of formal steps in need to change status and acquire proficiency, and even when I did find people who were attending for the first time, that did not necessarily guarantee that they were going to keep attending. To summarize, they do not have a public display of signs (be it in dress, make up, or the space they occupy) that identify either their separate or their marginal (or liminal) status.[11] This posed a conundrum: how could I understand initiation stories if I could not witness them?

I opted to capture the peculiar character of the initial attraction to opera through life stories and interviews. People told me how they started attending opera, what it was that they remembered from the first time they went, and how long it was until they decided to attend again. The stories highlighted the house acoustics, the physical effects of the singers' voices,[12] and the grandiosity of the stage—the key "experiential hooks" that attracted them to opera. In some cases, this intense attraction matched the initial reaction that they had to music in general. Three of the interviewees who started to listen to classical music on their own despite their parents' opposition or lack of interest told me how they were entranced in such a way by the phonographic and radio versions that the logical next step was to actually witness the music on stage. Even in cases where people went to the opera house without knowing what they were going to confront, they returned less than 3 weeks later.[13]

Let me now present the diverse instances through which they learn to organize their initial attraction, internally (instances 1 and 2) and externally (instance 3).

Instance 1: Opera talk

Fans, in their initial confrontation, feel an intense attraction that they are compelled to explore and organize in order to maximize the pleasure it produces. Much like in Turner's analysis of the liminal period in Ndembu Ritual (1967, p.102), in which initiation is not merely about acquisition of knowledge but transformation of being, in learning how to

[11] A second strategy, which has become increasingly prevalent among contemporary ethnographic endeavors, of entering the instances of apprenticeship of the practice (Wacquant 2005; O'Connor 2005), carnally immersing oneself in the social world, following the steps of the natives, acquiring their skills and understanding in "body and soul," passing through diverse rites until becoming a full member of the community, was outside of my range of possibilities. Coming from a family of musicians, I am already a part of the musical world, and if anything, the challenge was not to domesticate the exotic while embodying it, but to find the distinctive qualities of a world I was not attracted to firsthand, which seemed "second nature" to me.

[12] The strength of this physical connection is such that one of the fans swears he smelled jasmine all throughout his first time at the Colón although it was nowhere to be found on or off stage.

[13] The retrospective character of these narratives does not invalidate them. However, I do not want to present these vignettes as self-explanatory stories. The profiles that I am presenting here are what Charles Tilly (1998) would call "standard stories," that is "the sequential, explanatory accounts of self-motivated human action." As such, these narrative self-portraits pose a logical structure (a fusion of "unified time and place, a limited set of self-motivated actors, and cause-effect relations centered on those actors' deliberate actions") which presents an insurmountable problem to sociological explanation. Paraphrasing Auyero (2006), if we want to understand why these fans do what they do, we are in trouble because cause-effect relations are not only the intended consequences of individual actions. I refer to these stories as a collection that may illuminate some of the traits that appear repeatedly and that may transcend the personal teleological narrative and help us better comprehend how these fans are constructed as fans, why they are attracted to opera in the first place, and why they intensify their investment with time.

absorb the powers that the cultural practice engenders and how to control what they already feel, *fans transform themselves*. The movement from novice to fan is complete when the powers of music are activated again, after their social status is redefined, and the tools to decipher the experience and control it are in place.

The compulsion to talk about, listen to, and learn opera—embodied in the phrase "I don't know enough"—signals not a cultural dispossession, as could be thought at first glance, but the active intention to find a more complete "effect," one that pays attention to the body but also tries to go beyond personal sensation into the realm of the work and its explanations. While the socialization is composed of many instances that imply forms of sociability, grouping, and exchange, passionate opera fans do not participate in the activity as a social activity; on the contrary, they experience it in a highly individualized way that results in an intense one-on-one relationship with that work and an internalization of how to "feel" opera.

"So, did you come on Friday?" was a question that I often overheard during my fieldwork. Passionate opera fans love compulsive conversation and what better opening gambit than asking another person in the standing room line (or already in the standing room) for their opinion of opening night (always a Friday)? Doing this helps fans establish complicity. "Was the soprano good enough? How did you like her? Were the tempi by the conductor appropriate? And what about that flying ship in the third act?" While initial questions refer to the current performance, the conversation will soon venture into other terrains: Do you know this opera? Have you seen it before? Have you seen it before at the Colón? Have you seen the singers playing other parts? How do these performances fare in comparison to what we have witnessed before, and if we have not been able to see the opera in the country before,[14] how do they fare in comparison to the recording we own? When attending a more contemporary and esoteric opera, like Berg's *Wozzeck*, the conversations can veer into even more complex terrains, like the influence of Strauss in the score and the tension between expression, atonalism, and theatricality. The questions are far from aggressive and are always inclusive, inviting. Those asking assume fellow audience members to have the same level of knowledge, and believe that even if this is not the case, their enthusiasm is the best way to proselytize and teach others how opera should be appreciated, evaluated, and enjoyed.

These conversations range in character according to the interlocutor. With some of the older and more pedagogically oriented fans, for instance, they always felt like a highly illustrated lecture with as many cross references as possible, mentions of the names of famous conductors from the past and their facility for the work at hand, the best recordings, and some obscure details from the composer's life meant to illuminate the choice of words at the end of the third act or a repeated motif, all adorned by literary quotes. On the other hand, younger fans made more sarcastic comments, poking fun at the most obviously run-down details of the staging, the poor casting, and for example, the tenuous relationship between the stage director and the conductor during rehearsals. Tito exhibited such sarcasm as well as knowledge at a performance of *Die Walküre*—playing with the well-known fact that Wagnerian operas are supposed to be performed without interruptions and are usually long by operatic standards—saying, "We are lucky there are no applauses in Wagner, otherwise we would never leave."

A few of the younger fans explained to me how they were slowly initiated through conversations into a more in-depth understanding of what to look for in an opera. While many of them seemed appreciative of the conversations for giving them a better

[14] This was the case with Massemet's *Don Quichote* and Verdi's *I Lombardi*, which both premiered in Argentina at the Colón during the 2005 season.

understanding of what to look for in an opera, some find the experience overwhelming at first. For instance, during her second opera viewing, Natalia's neighbor at the Paraiso tried to strike up a conversation with her and a group of women that began eagerly citing what parts of the opera they had and had not enjoyed and asking for her opinion as well. Natalia felt so new and had so little to say, that she decided to go out for a smoke during the second intermission. Franco, on the other hand, described a happier relationship to the conversational integration into the community of fans. He was initially educated by the radio, but once he moved to the city and started attending operas, he wrote down and took the advice of older fans. He interacted with audience members, especially the older men, who had witnessed singers like Nilsson or Colo. "At first I always kept my mouth shut," he reminisced. "I aligned myself with other people up until the moment I decided I knew enough as to take the muzzle off of my mouth to share my thoughts with other spectators." Tito has personalized this kind of relationship to the point that he recognizes Archimedes, a man in his early seventies, as his operatic and musical mentor. "He's like an open book. I always try to talk to him before we get in, and I look for him during the intermissions." Tito legitimizes Archimedes' authority by citing his background: "He came as a kid from La Paz, a small town in Entre Rios, and saw Toscanini conducting!" Since then, Archimedes has been a fixture of the Colón and the off-Colón scene. Tito had a late start; he did not come to the opera until he was in his late twenties, but has now been attending for some 15 years and is eager to follow in Archimedes' footsteps. As I mentioned before, he also offers his tidbits of operatic knowledge to those interested in listening to him and engaging in conversation.

There are short yet constant bits of operatic instruction and commentary exchanged all throughout a given performance. Fans talk for the half hour they might share at the door, standing in line, leaning against the dusty side wall; they talk at the box office, waiting for tickets to an almost sold out show and complaining about the slow and single clerk and the casual fan who does not know the layout of the Colón by heart and takes forever to choose a ticket. They talk while waiting for the performance to start, situating themselves in ideal positions on the top floor, and go at it during the intermissions when they either sit on the stairs outside of the rooms or roam through the hallways in search of a familiar face. Few say more than a few words at the end of the performance. They rather run down four or five flights, filling the stairwells to the brim, singing praises or shouting disapproval, and thus synthesizing what they expressed during their more elaborate previous conversations, before flooding the few forms of public transportation—usually buses—still available so late at night. Only a minuscule group will stay at the artists' entrance waiting for the performers to leave in order to exchange a few words or ask for a picture or an autograph. The intense sociability established at the opera house disperses once the show is over and everybody goes their separate ways.

The buses from Buenos Aires to La Plata—a 45-mile trip that takes over an hour and a half each way—constitute a more intense and concentrated version of what happens in the opera house. First, there is a self-selection process, only a handful of people travel from the Colón to the Argentino.[15] As Violeta, one of the women I met on my first trip, reflected, "This is a small circuit. We all come to the Colón, to the Avenida, to La Plata. After a couple of rounds, you recognize most of the faces. It's always the same ones." Though producers like Bela spoke of one occasion when there were eight buses going (some 500 people), there are usually between 80 and 200 fans who traverse the 45-miles looking for more opera. Secondly, because people are forced to be together in a secluded space for a longer period of time on the buses, the conversations that occur on board are also longer. The trip back resembles a dinner conversation among strangers, in which the performance

[15] The Argentino is La Plata's main opera house, the second most important in the country.

is absolutely dissected and more reasons and information need to be conveyed in order to fully do so and convince others.

Since most of the productions are local, bus conversations do not revolve around big names, international singers, or anthological versions. Rather, these conversations explore the intense, particularized knowledge of those who frequent the scene. For instance, coming back from *La Bohème* in La Plata in 2003, fans offered the names of singers they felt were better suited to play Rodolfo than the last-minute replacement who “butchered” the part and was nevertheless applauded at the end. Some fans were able to go so far as to suggest singers that not only performed regularly at the Argentino, but lived in La Plata. They did not stop there either. Because the company from La Plata was staging *Carmen* later that month at Luna Park, a stadium usually utilized for boxing matches and rock concerts, debates soon ensued about whether Luis Lima, a famous yet aging Argentinean tenor, was still good enough to play Don José as was announced, if there were better Escamillos available, and whether the amplification and venue would make the show something other than opera. Such conversations usually end just a few moments before the buses arrive at their final destinations, when people break away from the enchantment of opera and begin focusing on where they are going and the taxis or buses they are going to take.

For someone with a limited knowledge of the local world, these conversations can be hard to follow. While people reflect on what they like personally, they also take cues from others. As I mentioned before, the bus trip is an intensified version of the initiation environment. Because of the self-selection process and the extended period of time to talk, those with a more complete knowledge can borrow from many shelves and decide when to talk about the past, when to refer to a comparable production, and when to focus on the details of the current production. While other initiation settings also involve an imbalance between those already belonging to the small local scene and those in the process of becoming a member, the operatic trip makes a novice a passive receptacle for the details of how opera affects others and how intimacy with the object can help us attain both a more complete understanding and a thorough enjoyment of it.

For those for whom these informal situations are not enough, there is a more formal way to learn opera internally: the many conferences and opera appreciation classes that have multiplied alongside the increase in lyrical activity in the city. Unlike intermission conversations, classes make explicit what fans should be looking for in opera, what features of the experience they privilege, and how they should act during a performance. In the next section, I examine this second instance of becoming and learning.

Instance 2: The maestro in action

Several institutions in Buenos Aires schedule conferences that follow the operatic season. The Colón Opera house itself has a free lecture series by its in-residence critics as does the Italian Circle. Both opera companies residing at the Avenida (Juventus Lyrica and Buenos Aires Lírica) have started to have their own lecture circuit, one at the National Library, the other at a private cultural foundation, which also sponsors an “Opera for Kids” program at the Colón. Some 800 people pay up to 25 pesos (the equivalent of a seat on the top floor of the opera house) to see Marcelo Arce, a musical critic and proponent, discuss the current Colón season on a giant screen at the Avenida Theater. Arce actually has three different lecture series and “music-didactical” shows, as he calls them, although they do not always focus on opera. A few other music critics also have their own classes and lectures. Some, like Esteban Saavedra’s, which features professionals who are part of the official roster of the Colón, include live singers while others, often for wealthier patrons, culminate in a trip

to the Met, a European house, or even better, the Bayreuth Festival. Meanwhile, numerous amateurs offer appreciation classes in their apartments in which they show DVDs of that season's titles or focus on special cycles like Wagner's *Ring*.

I closely scrutinized the cycle of conferences at a small, local university located close to the Avenida. Most of the lectures there have between 30 and 70 students, depending on the opera and the speaker. Many of those who attend are preparing themselves to go to the opera house that week, trying to remember a forgotten storyline or anecdote, or just hoping to enjoy a free screening of an opera.

Sketches of an opera class

On a Wednesday night in July 2004, I enter a small room in the basement of a private Buenos Aires university. The room was usually used as a lecture hall and the seats are arranged as one would expect of a pedagogical institution. There are some fifty people in the room, most of them in their 50's; only eight or nine are younger than 30. Most of the people are already seated, dispersed throughout the room, and eagerly awaiting the "professor." The class, one of the many given that week in Buenos Aires, is not an adult education seminar but a public talk on how to properly appreciate *La Fanciulla del West* ("The Girl of the Golden West," an opera by Puccini).

The professor enters dressed in a light gray suit and carrying an attaché case. The feared critic of one of Buenos Aires' historic yet declining newspapers, he is about six-foot-three and wears grease in his combed hair. He smiles gently as a woman sighs a little and others in the room nod their recognition. He too seems to recognize some of them from a previous lecture.

He comes with a colleague, a fellow critic and former singer that has recently established a free newsletter which covers the musical season in Buenos Aires, focusing on opera. Before the video starts rolling, the professor provides some background information: "This opera was performed at the Colón in 1911, '15, '20, '30, '51, '79 and '86…"

The professor continues, "If you have to define Puccini, the basic words to understand him would be lyricism, symphonism, and harmonic beauty…OK, fast forward until the leitmotif… See, that's the leitmotif of the opera. It's in this aria at the beginning but also at the end and in one of the middle scenes. Isn't it a splendid phrase?… I hope you understand that this is a unique scene…. Now it travels through the Puccinian language, so dynamic. It has passion, emotion."

The professor points out a couple of other scenes, replays one of the key passages, and for an hour and a half, gives a talk in which adjectives abound and the description of the arguments takes turns with some references to the context of composition, the careers of the singers in the video, and the quality and luck of the diverse versions performed at other time at the Colón.

This scene gives us a good idea of what goes on in these classes. A figure that performs an authoritative role explains bits of a work using a vocabulary that conforms to the romantic musical experience: harmony, melody, and accompaniment; intense emotion; the essence of music beyond words. Such classes offer a definition of beauty as "a harmony of composition and the production of a sense of inwardness that enables audience members to enjoy the piece individually and in silence." (Johnson 1995, p 48). At the same time, such talks laud the singers as gifted people to be admired as the embodiment of beauty and maybe as much as the music that produces such emotion. Not much can really be said of the music, since language and music are two distinct systems and music is only comprehensible through metaphor and the concentrated effort of the listener.[16] Because the speaker cannot say much about the music beyond the information he can provide which may give listeners the tools to "decipher" the composer's intentions—another key element of romantic listening—he talks about all that surrounds its production: dates, casts, and personal

[16] Johnson (1995) traces the beginning of romantic listening to the late 19th century. It involved a new way of listening that involved not only a private understanding of listening as something closed off from community and inaccessible to language but also implied new rules of etiquette and the physical transformation of the theaters and concert halls. The result was a new experience; deeper, more personal and more powerful.

anecdotes from the life of the composer and well-known singers. Then, he also gossips a bit about the new production of the opera based on his viewing of the dress rehearsal.

These kinds of lectures and classes also have a secondary purpose of reenacting the past of the Colón as a way of understanding specific titles and performances in particular and opera in general. Most serious classes focus on what is being presented that season in Buenos Aires and utilize past performances in the city's "First Coliseum" as references. During a class from the same series of lectures as the example above, a critic, a "maestro" from the same newspaper, covered the most important arias from Donizetti's *Lucia*, playing versions from other Colón performances or by the then-headlining singers. He mentioned that Tita Ruffo and Maria Barrientos premiered it in 1911, but chose to play a 1930s version by Lily Pons who was the first singer that people identified with the part. He then summarized the singers of the 1950s and played a version from 1972 by Beverly Sills and Alfredo Kraus, remarking, "This was the last one we were able to see live, like things used to be, with the live anthological versions that the Colón used to have all the time. Those two artists made a mark in their time, so this is undoubtedly one of the best versions of *Lucia* you could listen to." At the end of the aria, the 60 or so people in the audience applauded along with the roaring audience on the recording. "Do you remember this?" he asked. "We were a part of that audience," to which a few people in the audience nodded. "Do you remember Tulio Boni?" People in the audience answered yes loudly and promptly. "The chorus was prepared by Tulio Boni," he reminisced. The class continued with a version from the Metropolitan sung by Caruso and Alicia Galli Curci from 1911, which the professor considered part of the house tradition, "since they also sang it at the Colón in 1915."

Opera's relationship to its past as a genre and as a practice is taught through the Colón, even when recordings do not refer to it directly. The narrative includes the names of the great ones that made the Colón and opera something worth engaging in. It shows the continuity between past and present, linking voices like Caruso, Pons, and Krause who sang *Lucia* at the Colón to international Argentine star Marcelo Alvárez who recorded it abroad. In doing this, the lesson makes sure the audience understands that the height of the Colón was the early 1970s and that the present is a period of decadence, but proposes that the traditional Colón way of doing opera is still alive in the great Argentine singers who cannot come because of economic reasons (Alvarez, Cura, Lima) but who triumph abroad. As such, this reenactment of the past, with its inclusive tones and its rhetorical questions, is another way of performing and delineating the boundaries of the cultural membership for the operatic community. As in other instances of initiation (Turner 1967, 1974), neophytes are taught content in smaller units that are easily recognizable (singers, voices, casts, titles, authors), thus providing them with a grasp of categories (melody, harmony, emotion) that allows them to think in the abstract, and with the ultimate standards of reference (the Colón, great international and national voices).

As we can see, the enthusiasm and knowledge of the professor, despite the special reverence granted to him among the members of the community, is not so esoteric.[17] It is

[17] Teaching a class like this does not involve special skills, like reading scores or playing an instrument, or serious studies that certify professorial status, like musicology or a thorough understanding of diverse musical theories. It means putting together, in the most diverse manner, dates, casts, soloists, and works. However, it does involve a specific kind of knowledge that derives from experience, the understanding by comparison of what a good performance is; the classification of the voices not only in their registers (soprano, for instance) but also in their style (*ligera*, *lirica*, *dramatica*, *de coloratura*, etc.) and peculiarities (whether deeper is better in the lower areas, whether it cracks at the highest part of its range, whether the voice has range or not, etc.) As I said before, this kind of knowledge can be acquired by anyone who is interested in investing themselves in the opera world. However, as I observed when talking with critics and while attending many performances as part of my fieldwork, it is a work of habituation that occupies most of an opera fan's non-working time.

only a more intensive and extensive gradation of the knowledge any amateur could have.[18] In fact, in some of the "classes," some people already know what they are "learning." They just go to refresh their memories before going to the opera, or even, *instead* of going to the opera, as it has become either too expensive, as most of the people in the audience are retirees, or too taxing, as standing up for 4 hours at a time is something their bodies can no longer take.

Another scene from a class taught by a radio commentator and critic for Buenos Aires' English newspaper underscores the equivalent knowledge of some critics and fans. When discussing the Buenos Aires offering of Massenet's *Don Quichote*, the critic was corrected three times. First, he referred to Strauss' *Rosenkavalier* as Stravinsky's *Rosenkavalier*; next, while summarizing the most important works by the same French composer, he included the seldom played opera *Cleopatra*, but forgot about *Werther* and was reminded of it by a woman in the audience; finally, and this is actually the one time where we can witness the availability of this kind of knowledge, when he referred to the last time *Thais* by Massenet was performed in Buenos Aires and said it was sung by the famous local soprano Delia Rigal in 1950, to which an old man in the audience corrected vehemently: "*1952!*" which was accepted as the right date by the critic.[19]

To summarize, the maestros play a dual role. On the one hand, they are the supreme beings of the amateur community. On the other hand, they are in charge of didactically guaranteeing that new audiences learn both the proper interpretation of the intentions of the music[20] and the proper behavior attached to it. Nevertheless, lively conversations and musical lessons are not the only way in which fans learn what to appreciate and how to do so. These other ways can be abrupt and sometimes even violent. I will dedicate the next section to exploring and explaining these strategies in depth.

Instance 3: Collective connoisseurship

Older fans utilize silence and booing as strategies for indicating which parts of the performance should be commended. This recommendation is twofold because it indicates whether the performance is worthy or not as well as the moments in which such appreciation can be shown. As any habitué of the opera house knows that there are specific parts where, regardless of how good the performance, it is not appropriate to demonstrate one's appreciation. This particular instance is critical in understanding how fans learn to appreciate opera *in foro externo*, as in the kinds of behaviors that are publicly appropriate and those that are not.

There are many moments in which older fans silence newer ones, as an "out of place" noise can distract them from the experience of being one with the music. There are three

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[18] Most of the "professors" or "maestros" are not trained musicians or musicologists or even historians. They are lawyers, accountants, and physicians who fell in love with the *bel canto* and achieved a higher rank within the operatic community to the point where they started exercising that power through paid activities for newspapers, radio shows, public lectures, or sometimes, free newsletters. Such newsletters guarantee them not only the recognition of the community, signified by the name "maestro" or "professor," but also free circulation among the institutions that constitute the opera social world.

[19] Delia Rigal sang the title part for the four performances of the 1952 season. She was a local favorite and shared the bill the only time Maria Callas came to sing *Aida* in 1949.

[20] When I asked patrons at a free concert about the best adjectives to describe opera, two of them answered separately, "Music can't be reduced to words. Music and language belong to two different worlds of thought; music belongs to a non-verbal register," and "I don't know the words. I just *feel* the music."

main types of disturbances: (a) an intruding noise like a cough or a candy wrapper; (b) applause in an inappropriate moment; and (c) undeserved applause. In the first case, the older fans tend to scold the candy opener with a stern look and will more explicitly indicate that that is inappropriate behavior if the offense is repeated. Some fans, like Ernesto, suspect that such interruptions only occur when the viewer is not interested in the music and fails to make an effort to concentrate on what is going on onstage. He offered the example of a winter performance by international Peruvian star Juan Diego Flórez during which no one coughed. This indicated, for him, that people were really focused. In the second case, confrontation escalates and older fans try to shame novices into understanding that a choral part, an aria that has not ended, or an aria where fans do not traditionally express emotion, are not milestones to celebrate. The immediate response is generally an exasperated "Shhh!" that is often even louder than the clapping.

Interesting[21] negotiations happen at seldom heard operas like *Don Quichote*, *I Lombardi*, or *Der Freischutz*. During the first intermission of the latter opera, which ended up being a success, one of the stage assistants worried about the audience's apparent lack of enthusiasm but rationalized the minimal applause with the audience's lack of exposure to the title and consequent doubts. In this case, the power of self-censorship was so strong that no one clapped anywhere but at the end of each act and after the grand finale. Producers often worry about the behavior of less regular fans. For instance, when producing *La Traviata* at Luna Park, a boxing and pop music stadium seldom used for opera that seats over 8,000 people, Bela was excited that "people clapped when they had to clap, liked what they had to like, and were moved by what had to move them." His remark demonstrates how etiquette, appreciation, and emotion go hand in hand as part of the same complex system in which rules of civility both constrain and enable (Sennett 1977) emotion and allow for its proper public display.

If we look at audience reactions in even more detail, we find some interesting rules of thumb about opera enthusiasm. One is that unlike the adagio *Primo la musica, poi le parole* (music before words), fans (and I'm talking here about most fans) always prefer singing over the instrumental parts. Moreover, they treat the instrumental interludes at operas, and especially at recitals, as moments where they can rest their attention, as parts where they are allowed to comment on what they have just witnessed, or even just take a breath. Chatter from the top floors usually covers the first few bars after an explosive aria and the instrumental beginning of most acts.[22]

The end of an aria is received in one of two ways. Sometimes, fans clap loudly, as is the case after a Verdian cabaletta (the fast final part of any operatic vocal ensemble, usually a duet) or Alfredo's first aria of the second act in *La Bohème*; they start freely doing so a few bars into the instrumental ending. On the other hand, they may exhale and wait a second or two before finally expressing their appreciation after a *finale piano* usually executed by a female soprano.[23] While it might seem as though appreciation follows form, certain fans police these moments. For instance, Juan Manuel hates people who start clapping and screaming over a delicate ending and always tries to silence them. Others like Franco, who becomes pensive after a delicate aria that ends not in exclamation but in a *pianissimo*

[21] For a sociology that inquires about the relationship between routine expectations, cultural products and performance, that is.

[22] In one of his classes on *verismo*, Arce also used instrumental interludes as an opportunity to speak about the opera and its meanings.

[23] An example of this with a male voice is Edgardo and Raimondo's final aria in *Lucia*.

lament, tries to make sure everyone else respects the moment in which the singer exhales before the end. This distinction between forte and piano ending arias is disbanded, however, according to whether the singer performs a high note near the end of its solo part or not. If that is the case, as in the death scene of *Lucia*, fans do not hold their breath, despite the aria's sad and pensive character, and start clapping and cheering immediately.

Novice fans are taught to respond to a recognizable fragment. For instance, if the aria performed is Verdi's *Celeste Aida* and it is awful, it doesn't matter—by the end they already know they have to clap for it. Apprentices should also clap after the scenes with a toast (*brindisi*), Violetta's solo "Sempre libera" in *La Traviata*, Tosca's "Recondita armonia," the "Si, mi chiamano Mimi" aria in *La Bohème*, Nabucco's "Va pensiero," and "Una furtiva lagrima" in Donizetti's *Elisire D'amore*. These are the basics. Afterwards, they can add some German arias to their clapping repertory, especially the "love duet" from *Tristan und Isolde*. Since the novices still don't have the subtleties of knowledge to distinguish between mediocre performances or really bad ones, they tend to respond with great enthusiasm to that which they can already recognize. A great example is the more than warm reception given to the last-minute replacement Rodolfo in a 2003 performance of *La Bohème* at La Plata's Opera House who cracked every high note and was stiff on stage due to the lack of rehearsal but when he sang "Che gelida manina," people hummed along and started clapping before he was done. A stage director who shared the 45-mile trip to the opera house with me to watch the performance called it the "Bohème effect:" even though she knew what was going to happen on stage and that the interpretation was very bad, she still felt like crying, found herself humming the melody both during and after the performance, and could not restrain herself from clapping.

Going back to the three types of interruptions and applause censorship, we have the final and most contentious one. In it, we see the attempts of passionate fans to socialize the rest of the house into their understanding of opera. This education involves both the substantial definition of what is "worthy" about opera, the appropriate moments and spaces to show the kind of appreciation elicited by a "good" fragment, and the delimitation of the boundaries of the community of connoisseurs. Herein, I want to emphasize how silencing and booing work as tools for individual and communal boundary setting and as mechanisms for reproducing the romantic understanding of music. The sensation of being cut off from the music has collective and individual dimensions.[24] In the collective sense, it is a matter of affirming oneself as part the deserving community of those who truly understand what opera is about; a moral lesson is taught to the noisemaker and opera polluter on behalf of the community. Individually, it is about being separated from the object of one's intense affection.

What I call "collective connoisseurship" is composed, then, of more and less implicit doses of persuasion and coercion. In the first account, younger and solitary fans tend to accept the legitimacy of both formal and informal "maestros" who teach them about opera and partake in numerous personal exchanges in which the boundaries of the appropriate features to look for are drawn. This does not happen overnight; it requires a long-term commitment to listening to commentaries and learning dates, casts, names, and registers; comparing what happens to oneself and what happens to others (Hennion 2007); and noting whether or not the effects we are looking for result from the highlighted elements. As I have explained, seasoned fans make no effort to hide what they think is the appropriate etiquette

[24] Here, I am adapting Katz's (1999) discussion of road rage as an embodiment and dramatization of the anger caused by being cut off from the car and the road.

for enjoyment and how it links to their understanding of opera and to the moments in which we should be moved by it. The furious gestures and fleeting yet intense glances that aim to silence all noises outside of the stage clearly demonstrate the coercive nature of how operatic knowledge (and cultural membership) is achieved.

Some concluding words on taste, attachment, and initiation

I am not arguing that all fans at Buenos Aires' opera houses, or even those in the upper floors, behave in the same way, but rather, that there is a certain commonality in how opera is understood to be transmitted, learned, evaluated, and reproduced. The instances fans pass through and the categories through which they learn are a modeled stylization of the whole process. As such, not all fans go through the same steps in the same way nor do they learn through the same fragments. Moreover, once fans accumulate a stock of knowledge, they are free to improvise and deviate from the learned norm without being punished for it. They are able to abandon themselves to their own musical whims, explore more contemporary work, exhume the less frequented operas by renowned composers, and look for the subtleties of smaller voices.

This article extends and refines the model for cultural affiliation that Howard Becker (1953) established when discussing the initiation of marijuana users. However, unlike Becker's original formulation suggests, fans not only get interested in the practice once they are socialized into it; they partake in a cycle of enchantment that starts with a visceral connection to the music or an interest in opera as spectacle. Fans get hooked in[25] when they are still outsiders, before having an active apparatus developed to interpret the experience or are thoroughly socialized in what constitutes the enjoyment and how they should decode it. While there are intense instances of sociability and socialization, the temporality structure is different here than in the original model. Learning through interaction happens not at the beginning, as expected, but as the "logical" continuation that helps to shape the initial attraction. The production of operatic fans continues mostly outside family ties and through many informal channels: bus trips, intermissions, and the lines at the door of the opera houses.

The *tertulia* and *cazuela* spaces trigger and cement the socialization process as the individuation one is supposed to achieve in his or her relationship to the music is presupposed by the space (the structure of the house and standing room make someone in those spaces an individual divided from others) and the fact that the *tertulia* and *cazuela* make it hard for people to go in groups, thus stimulating the possibility of one-on-one conversations among strangers. The classes, which are the most formal[26] means of bridging the gap between initial surprise and an intense, studious commitment to opera, make opera a meaningful experience anchored in a specific place (the Colón Opera House) and time (an elusive golden past) while showing a model for affiliation—the maestro, who enjoys opera thoroughly because of his extensive but not esoteric knowledge.

I do not think the uses of opera by this particular group of fans can be generalized; it is in the mechanisms through which they affiliate that the possibilities for generalization lie.

[25] I write this in a passive voice, since as Hennion (2007) reminds us, these forms of attachment are presented as something actively suffered, to which the person attaches while surrendering to, in an almost passive way.

[26] This is another point in which this model complements Becker's. Since he was discussing the initiation into a deviant practice, it would have been odd to find formalized initiation situations.

Unlike literature concerned with establishing a one-on-one relationship between a taste for high culture and family or educational background (Bourdieu 1984; DiMaggio 1987; Bryson 1996; Peterson and Kern 1996) or more recent literature that has focused on showing the link between cultural and social capital (which provides an instrumental account of sociability[27]), the formalization of this model could lead to a more complete model of aesthetic attachment that considers the interaction of background and foreground factors. Such a model would focus not just on the conversion of background factors into cultural practices but also on: (a) the initial circumstances that produced the coupling or uncoupling of these conditions; (b) the mediations that help transform initial attraction into more elaborate and sustained attachment; and (c) the kinds of sociality into which novice fans are incorporated. Doing this would help us to understand not only who likes what specific cultural product, but also provide us with a more accurate and complete picture of how, when and why they do it.

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[27] Contradicting recent findings and generalizations in sociological literature (Mark 1998; Lizardo 2006), in this case, cultural taste does not shape or evolve into a lasting personal network that goes beyond encounters at the opera house.

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