

Undergraduate Sociology: Literature Review Sample

The elevation of art through commerce: An analysis of Charles Saatchi's approach to the machinery of art production using Pierre Bourdieu's theories of distinction.

Literature Review

The Rules of Art was published in French in 1992, and translated into English in 1996. However, the ideas that appear in this book were already being advanced in other academic work such as *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984), *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public* (1991) and *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991). *The Rules of Art* actually tracks the literary field in France during the nineteenth century and uses the success of Gustave Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* (1869) to follow the emergence of an autonomous (from the market) literary field and understand why Flaubert and his literary text have been sacralised throughout the proceeding decades by literary scholars. Throughout *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu uses a unique methodology to analyse this text. However, although innovative, this is not relevant to this particular dissertation. What is relevant is Bourdieu's discussion of Manet and Duchamp. Bourdieu argues that Manet and Duchamp became successful artists because they managed to separate from its present day institution of the French *Académie* of art, while separating from the popular demands of the emerging bourgeoisie – thus, they managed autonomy, through artistic freedom, creating their own art movement, which in turn meant that the *Académie* and the market both were tamed and redirected by these artists. Brown and Szeman (2000) agree with this appraisal of Bourdieu's ideas. They argue that what these artists achieve is the institutionalisation of their particular brand of avant guard.

Before this can be further examined, it is necessary to understand two fundamental theoretical concepts of the sociologist: that of *habitus* and *field*. *Habitus* concerns the subject in society. Bourdieu argues that each person has their own *habitus* which is influenced by their background, education, and familiar financial and symbolic resources. These aspects of a person determines where they will be placed on the social space, as each institution (whether that of commerce, politics or finance) has its own manner of comportment. As such, *habitus* is not deterministic.

Individuals can change their position in the social space. However, to do so, they will need to achieve great education, and even change their manner of speech and dress; more so if they do not have the financial backing or network of connections to access the social spaces higher up in the echelons of society. The *field* refers to a particular grouping, such as the field of commerce, or of literature or of art. Each *field* is assumed to be autonomous, with influence from the *meta-field* – which is what Bourdieu identifies as the field of power. Each field has its own mix of capital within it, in which its participants strive for; which can include economic, cultural or symbolic capital. With economic capital being self evident, in the world of art, symbolic capital is what is conferred to by high end institutions, such as a degree, an award, a particular title or the accumulation of respected reviews and academic study of an artist's work. Owning cultural capital can include owning a gallery and deciding who can be exhibited in it, or being in charge of a well regarded industry publication and choosing which works and artists get reviewed.

Thus, this is a starting point for viewing the art collector, or dealer, under this gaze.