

Undergraduate Sociology Dissertation: Full Dissertation Sample (Introduction)

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.

Introduction

Germaine Greer (2001), the Australian feminist and social commentator, has stated that marketing is the real art form of the twentieth century, adding that it is a destructive art form. This type of art form has saturated every level of society and every human activity, to the point where the art form of the twentieth century has permeated through to art itself. As such, what Saatchi has done as an art collector, bringing marketing to art in such a way, has meant that he has brought art to the masses without devaluing it so much in front of the art critics. It is an obvious outcome. Saatchi is well known for being a guru in the advertising industry where one of his most famous campaigns (which he oversaw with his brother) was the promotion of the Conservative Party lead by Margaret Thatcher during the 1979 general election under the slogan 'Labour isn't working'. In his advertising ventures, he has always displayed artistic panache together with a strong competitive streak, with an unwavering belief in capitalism (Bickers, 1997).

However, even though Charles Saatchi is seen as a twenty first century gate-keeper of the art world, where he has the ability to promote or destroy artistic careers, there is a lack of substantial commentary on his involvement in this industry. As such, this dissertation proposes taking a closer look at how Saatchi is influencing the current artistic field. As a starting point, the theoretical base of this dissertation will be composed of Pierre Bourdieu's ideas regarding art production and consecration. Bourdieu, a French sociologist, has been poorly received by British and American scholars, as his main tenet is that art does not have an intrinsic connection to what is universally beautiful or true, but that it is created in an attempt to reflect social classes and to promote ideology and consumption. The trick of art, according to Bourdieu (1996), is that it negates this commonplace objective, through dressing itself up as a pursuit of creation, where artists are gods and their creations, sacred objects. Hence, Saatchi's aim may be to promote art that would not be seen

or reviewed by the major galleries and museums – art that is relevant, contemporary and ‘edgy’ – but a Bourdieu filter would track this and question the real motives of such a venture. Bourdieu takes the artistic and divine out of art – it would question Saatchi’s role as creator of a new movement of art gearing towards popular appeal. In this light, part of this dissertation will have to deal with this reactionary approach to Bourdieu in order to discover a true critique of the sociologist’s work.

From this theoretical base, the dissertation will move to developing an overview of Saatchi’s role in promoting art in the United States and Britain, together with a catalogue of artists that have been endorsed by Saatchi. The works themselves will not be analysed, as this is material for other dissertations, however, the response they elicit will be viewed analytically in this dissertation.