

Apply bourdieu's work on fields



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Cultural artefact has recently become the main study within the sociology department, due to the research sociological interest in fashion is increasing. Cultural artefact is the influence that is produced through our unawareness responses and attitudes toward the society. Hence fashion is important resource that illustrates the reflection of the current society or the era, at the same time individuals form and create their personal aspects of unique identity. Through this context, Crane (2000) who studied the social role in fashion states the fascination of the subject where one interprets their purpose about specific form of culture through clothing. In fact, appropriate appearance was the common powerful example of manifestation at point of time. Furthermore, style of clothing or fashion is the indication of the social status and gender, which strongly influences either maintaining or breaking down the symbolic boundaries.

According to Bourdieu, societies reinforce their distance or differentiate themselves from other classes through tastes, which is determined and maintained by the dominant of symbolic hierarchy. Thus, taste becomes 'social ammunition' that defines and retrains cultural objects; legitimate from the illegitimate, hence, in the lights of taste formation of fashion, this would be high fashion from the mass fashion (Bourdieu, 1995).

This essay focuses on to explain Bourdieu's theory of consumer taste and formation where fashion is applied strategically. Finkelstein notes that "fashion is an organisation of knowledge based on restricted access to goods and services" (Finkelstein, 1998: 80), and that the ability to recognize the fashionable reflects an actor's cultural capital. This is illustrated perfectly in the work of Joanne Entwistle and Agnès Rocamora, 'The Field of Fashion

Materialized: A Study of London Fashion Week' which has aided me greatly in exemplifying Bourdieu's key concepts of the field, capital and habitus in amplifying our consumer preferences in fashion. In this essay, I will attempt to clearly define the concept of field, habitus and capital and how these concepts are used to understand the social phenomena particular to fashion.

Bourdieu's theory is in continuous subject of interest, which is characterised by the 'cultural reproduction' or 'cultural capital'. Especially, it is evaluated that his forms of capital has brought a fundamental shift through bridging Marxist's distinction of class with Weber's cultural status to his theory.

Bourdieu has distinguished that within the competitive society, the forms of capital are classified as implements according to various activities. Hence important concept introduced by Bourdieu is that of 'capital', which he encompasses beyond the notion of material assets to capital that may be social, cultural or symbolic (Bourdieu 1986: cited in Navarro 2006: 16). The period from material to cultural and the symbolic forms of capital is the majority, which conceal the foundation of inequality. Furthermore, Bourdieu states that there are three crucial mechanisms in the forms of capital in class reproduction. Thus 'economic capital', the foundation of the structural class and based on this creation and standing in the invariable condition, will provide the 'cultural capital' and 'social capital' to convert into economic capital. "Cultural capital – and the means by which it is created or transferred from other forms of capital – plays a central role in societal power relations, as this provides the means for a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy, as classes distinguish themselves through taste" (Gaventa 2003: 6).

The most important contribution and emphasis in Bourdieu's capital awareness is an ability to distinguish the capital which could not be captured with only economic capital in the reproducing mechanism of social class.

These forms of capital are equally significant, and can be accumulated and transferred from one arena to another (Navarro 2006: 17). Bourdieu stresses the common feature of the cultural and social capital, which is used without distinguishing them. Due to the following reasons, two types of capitals are applied strongly as the mechanism of the production, where the social justice was approved. First of all, to be able to possess these two capitals requires long-term investment; therefore people who are attempting to raise their class may experience difficulty in overcoming these obstacles.

Secondly, unlike economic capital, it is difficult to qualify and for the social members to recognise the role of their capital visualisation within the social production. Therefore, the possessions of the cultural / social capital are related to the ability of generating the diversion in the social status and cultural preferences in the large community, which by all means fashion.

Fashion itself state's one's social class, which strongly relates to Bourdieu's idea of social capitalism. " fashion is treated as a cultural subject, in which most emphasis is on fashion as a badge or a means of identity." (P. Braham, 1997, p. 121) However, relationship between class and fashion can be divided in two opinions, agreeing to emphasis correspondence view to disagreeing, in terms of preferences in clothing and fashion is symbolically expressed to differentiate the status of class. In addition, looking through Bourdieu's concept of capital, there are two theories, which apply with the correspondence of emphasising the association between class and fashion.

One focused on the relation with economic capital and fashion, the other

being the cultural capital and fashion. Furthermore, the opposing views signify the connection between different characteristics other than class to fashion.

Within the significance of focusing the relationship between fashion and economic capital to class and fashion, there is a common concept by Simmel known as the 'Trickle Down theory', which illustrates the clothing act and fashion. Simmel perceived fashion as the product, which the economic capital is the foundation of structural class. He also at the time identified the 'Paris fashion' as the dynamic interclass mimicry and desire of many kinds. Since the lower class continuously mimic the upper class, the upper classes are in need to search for the new mode to differ from others. Thus, according to Simmel (1997), fashion can be seen faddish, however, the flow of the communication from 'top to bottom' is considered to be persistent. Moreover, after the WWI, the aesthetics of functional ready-to-wear products were introduced; hence the opposing of the 'top to bottom' flow became the movement of Western fashion history.

Veblen's 'conspicuous consumption' model is in attention with the itemised consumption within the fashion, which is idealised with the revelation of individual's economical capital. His work on 'The theory of the leisure class' (1899-1983) introduces the first response of 'conspicuous consumption' as the development of criticising an idea for the America's capital concept in profligacy. Veblen's states the one's reputation is represented by the ownership and conspicuousness, which provokes jealousy and symbolises the level of wealth within the group. Furthermore, the typical variation are established in upper-class, for example, one's idleness of spending

inconvenient production of time, sophisticated preferences, manners, lifestyle, and so on. All of the above examples are the necessity of time and expenses shown through the economic capital to symbolise one's ability and status. " Conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentlemen of leisure." (Veblen, 1899/1983)

Veblen argues different view on accepting the class of trend to Simmel. Thus, opposing to accepting new style in order to expose the indication of the discrimination between the lower-class to the community who aims to raise their social standing, the group of society in foundation to inherit the stabilised high status has relatively low tendency of interest in the latest fashion. These analyses has provided with the evidence of people's motivation on accepting fashion. This leads to Bourdieu's primary idea of ' Habitus'; the text ' La Distinction' demonstrates the manifestation of habitus. Habitus is considered as one of Bourdieu's most influential concept in his studies. The concept refers to our physical action such as, habits, characteristics, and abilities that we acquire throughout our life experiences which the idea is based on the cultural capital. In addition, it can also be seen as the structure, which is produced by through our thoughts and movement. This in turn, creates our external social world and structured by the social world. Therefore, habitus can be seen as the collective individuated, through the biological individual. Furthermore, habitus can be similar within groups of people; hence seen as a collective phenomenon. Habitus in fashion can be considered as style, it is depended on one's characteristic, the era of the society, and one's social status. This again is

emphasised in forms of capital where, without money these types of forms will not exist.

To explain the idea of habitus Bourdieu frequently uses the metaphor from the sports “feel for the game.” Meaning although our body and mind are constantly reminded of our surrounding, without having to consciously acknowledging it, each individual has an embodied kind of ‘feeling’ of the social positions of themselves. Habitus can also be counted as ‘taste’ for the cultural items such as fashion, art, food and lifestyle. Adapting this into fashion is reasonably obvious, by observing people’s taste in fashion; others are able to identify the mode at the time and also their characteristic, as nowadays individuals use fashion products to reveal their selves.

Accordingly, Bourdieu focuses on French society, where all the above cultural items are considered as social class positions. He strongly argues that the artistic sensibilities are surrounded by habitus. For example, the upper-class individuals are able to enjoy the rich culture without any limit compared to others, as they are exposed to the culture since the young age and this becomes their lifestyle unconsciously. Whereas the working-class are too busy and have limited access to the ‘high art’, therefore, they are unaware of such lifestyle. Hence, Bourdieu’s saying ‘feel for the game’ cannot be applied to the working-class, as they are not culturally developed and is unaware of the ‘game’. This same rule also applies in fashion, only the upper-classes are flooded with pre-shows and various kinds of information about trends. After filtering through the ‘designer wears / brands’, it trickles down to the street fashion, which then the working-class have chance to view and follow on with less price. However, the unconscious minds of the

working-class have strong need to follow the fashion and tends to over spend on things they do not need, they will never be able to feel and experience same way as the upper-class, therefore their demands are higher and cannot see the bigger picture. These kinds of inequality are mistakenly believed that some are born with finer things in their life compare to others; therefore this is where the middle-class appears. Middle-class society; the new money are introduced to guide the working-class to the better life. Nonetheless, although the middle-class may be wealthier than the working-class, their demands in consuming goods are higher than the upper-class. Before the middle-class was created, the high demands of the working-class was not much, as they were busy with their life and had limitation with their spending from the income. However, when the new money society arrived, they were stuck in between, they hope for the high culture social position, as well as having to work hard to stabilise their lifestyle. Therefore, they are

However according to Navarro “ Habitus is not fixed or permanent, and can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period” (Navarro, 2006, p. 16)

A third concept that is important in Bourdieu’s theory is the idea of ‘ fields’, which are the various social and institutional arenas in which people express and reproduce their dispositions, and where they compete for the distribution of different kinds of capital (Gaventa 2003: 6). A field is a network, structure or set of relationships which may be intellectual, religious, educational, cultural, etc. (Navarro 2006: 18). People often experience power differently depending which field they are in at a given moment (Gaventa 2003: 6), so context and environment are key influences on habitus:

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' While Bourdieu is concerned to pay attention to both structure and practice, his field theory errs too much in the direction of a structuralist analysis that neglects to fully document the ways in which fields are reproduced through the enactments of agents in daily practice and localized settings' (Crossley, 2004).

The world we live in is divided up by various kinds of fields. A field is considered as an organised production of characteristic of the social status, which influences the social situation for the society. However, this so-called arrangement and the association with objective status are fixed in forms of capital. Nonetheless the significance of the form of capital lies within the field. In other words ' capital' is applied to ensure the position of the agent clear in its field. Hence in the society, the predominant in terms of field is considered as the social status. The social statuses are depended on money, which also plays a major part in the form of capital. The source is able to gain its power and influence by using the capital in certain fields. Therefore, the relation between habitus, fields and capital are the transitional source.

Bourdieu believe that the social world is divided into various fields within every event and subjects, and within those small communities they hold their own set of rules, understanding and forms of capital. Despite the fact that some types of fields may have something in common, Bourdieu distinguishes each type of field as being independent from others. For example, fashion has countless fields; hence, each brand has their uniqueness and there are countless fashion brands which hold relatively similar products. However, although they may have similar designs people undertake those point of view as each brands interpretation of the common.

Likewise, Bourdieu's idea of field lies within these type of division. Although each field holds their own sets of beliefs it is the inevitable fact that they may have something in common, and within those area some field may suffer from losing competition with other related fields. It is inevitable cycle that goes around any type of field, for instance field of fashion, each generation of designers and producers are required to overturn the well-known artists who came before them. Nonetheless, this cycle continues only to be evaluated by the next new generations of 'avant-garde' who also may believe themselves as unique and powerful, therefore this cannot be redeemed in any kind of sense. It can be considered as a fact rather than a cycle, this continues competition to win and survive in each field one belongs to, this idea of cycle or fact is crucial. As Boyne (1993: 248) argues, field is a 'macro-structural concept', which allowed us to capture the role and socio-temporal orchestration of the event. Thus, in bringing together the field participants into one spatially and temporally bounded event, LFW renders visible, through its orchestration, wider field characteristics, such as field boundaries, positions, position taking, and habitus. This rendering of the field is the key to understanding LFW as a critical moment in the life of the field as a whole. Despite its ostensible aim to simply showcase next season's fashionable clothing, reproduce and legitimate the field of fashion and the positions of those players within it.

The positions of the agents in the field are determined by the amount and weight of the capitals they have. Fields are simultaneously spaces of conflict and competition as agents compete to gain a monopoly in the species of capital that most effective in the particular field. For instance agents in the

field of fashion, may use social and economic capital to gain a monopoly on the.....

Bourdiu him self conceptualizes field as being more like magnetic fields. These varieties of field each have its own internal logic and regulatory principles govern the ' game' on the field.

The most important field though is the field of power. The hierarchy of the power relationship within the political field serves to structure all the other fields. Society then assembled of relatively autonomous sphere of play that cannot be collapsed under any overall social logic, like capitalism, modernity or postmodernity. The very shape and division of it becomes a central stake to the agents. Altering the distribution and relative weight of the different forms of capital within a field become ten a mount to modifying structure of the field. Therefore fields have historical dynamism about them to have merely ability that avoids the determinism of the classical structuralism.

Bourdieu's theory of capitals, habitus, and fields exist in many form of category in society. However, these types of theories rely on the social status, and by adapting this theory in fashion illustrates that majority of mode relies on money and upper class society. Without, upper class's experience and adventure in establishing mode, others would not have high chance in experiencing the minimum. This is shown through people's taste in fashion. Fashion has now become key item to reveal one's character and social status.

Bourdieu's form of capital illustrates one's identity and their social status, habitus is considered as the unconscious mind revealing itself through style.

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Fields shows the division of social class. “ Bourdieu (1980) accounts for the tensions and contradictions that arise when people encounter and are challenged by different contexts. His theory can be used to explain how people can resist power and domination in one [field] and express complicity in another” (Moncrieffe 2006: 37)