

Analyzing and Explaining the Relationship between University Field and the Legitimate Tastes of Tehran's Theater Audience

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Introduction

The field of action of the spectator covers a broad range, from the simple act of buying a ticket to decoding and interpreting the performative text. Because of the live nature of theater, audience is of greater importance in theater as it is one of the few arts in which the spectator is part of the definition of the art in terms of the thematic and performative status; Furthermore, in modern societies, the consumption behaviors of individuals provide the basis for the formation of social identity. Consumption is based on perception and way of valuation and is consequently selective and derived from attitudes, values and tastes; it symbolizes the characteristics through which the individual is judged. This process of selection emerges in the cultural consumption, cultivated taste, and the cultural competence used in the nature of cultural goods and the way they are consumed – originates from the extent to which cultural capital is possessed; and the indices of cultural capital can be official education, family background and occupational cultural. That is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences. The studies by Pierre Bourdieu, as one of the most influential cultural sociologists, on habits of art consumption constitute a part of his broader sociology dealing with the cultural and material structures of inequality in society. In Bourdieu's sociology it is argued that culture is an important domain of the struggle between social groups and classes, where there is an incessant, endless conflict over the bases of identity and hierarchy. Taste is one of the most vital stakes in the struggles fought in the field of the dominant class and the field of cultural production. In fact, like many other cultural studies theorists, Bourdieu is interested more than anything else in examining the relationship between culture and power. In this regard Bourdieu deals with "the charismatic conception which, by refusing to take into consideration the social conditions of production and reception, makes it impossible to fully understand cultural phenomena and, moreover, produces effects of symbolic violence in that it conceals the mechanisms that hinder access to culture, thereby making it a rare good, inaccessible to the majority. According to Bourdieu, that is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences. For the same reason Bourdieu believes that people internalize their class realities and express them through their cultural choice. Thus, the origins of differences among individuals manifest themselves in the field of culture, and university field and education certificates play a key role in legitimizing the cultural capital of individuals. The considerable increase in the number of theater halls in the last decade has resulted in fundamental changes in the process of production and consumption of theater in Tehran, affecting various agents, from production teams and theater owners to spectators. The present research examines the causes and meanings of these changes using the theoretical concepts of Bourdieu's sociology and by considering the importance of university field in the formation of cultural capital and establishing the legitimate taste. Since a popular belief about theater spectators in Iran is that they are only members of the elite and intellectuals of the society and also due to discussion and debates arising as a result of the increase in the number of theater halls in Tehran and the entrance of new spectators into the circle of theater-goers, as well as the importance of educational capital in the formation of taste in the framework of Bourdieu's thought, the present research, by explaining and classifying habitus and the capitals of legitimate theater field and examining the relationship between the capitals and interests of new spectators and those of university field agents, deals with the formation and analysis of their tastes. This study also seeks to analyze how legitimate theater field is defined and its boundaries are determined by the audience and the academics; because of the interests they seek, the audiences of these subfields employ strategies and struggles in order to legitimize their definition of legitimate theater field.

Material & Methods

The interaction between the habitus and capital of the audience of private theater field and agents of university field and the struggles and strategies of each party in theater fields are analyzed so that the way for the analysis and classification of their actions and choices is paved. Thus, using the methodological framework of Pierre Bourdieu and the causal and interpretative analysis of the experimental data collected through qualitative (semi-structured interview and observation) and quantitative (mixed questionnaire) methods in theater and university fields, the differences in cultivated tastes of professors, students and theater audience and the areas for their application in legitimate theater field have been studied. data collection in the interviews was conducted based on the process of "grounded theory". People in the study are selected based on their relevance to the subject of the research. They are not selected for constructing a (statistically) representative sample of a general population. Thus, of all different types of semi-structured interviews, the present study will focus on problem-centered interview because in particular, by using an interview guide incorporating questions and narrative stimuli it is possible to collect biographical data with regard to a certain problem; and also process orientation in the research process and in the understanding of the object of research. In order to cover both theater and university fields, in-depth interviews were carried out with ten university professors, twenty-eight drama students and graduates and sixteen theater spectators (educated in majors other than arts). Based on distinctions between these two fields, the geographical position of theater halls, type of performance, whether the theater hall was a private or state hall, the time of the play, and the price of the ticket, the spectators of the following plays were considered as the research population; overall, 48 spectators (each performance four people, 28 students of performing arts and 16 spectators educated in majors other than arts) were studied (through interviews and questionnaires).

Since the present research is based on an a priori theoretical framework – Bourdieu's field theory – directed content analysis was used to analyze the interviews. For this purpose, by relying on Bourdieu's theoretical concepts to focus on research questions, and by taking into account predications regarding the relationships among research variables, the key concept for the classification of initial codes for theater spectators was institutional cultural capital; and, for university professors, it was their presence or absence in the field of production of theater.

Discussion of Results & Conclusions

With the formation of and the increase in the number of private theater halls in Tehran and subsequently the

increase in the number of agents in the fields of production and consumption, three important changes occurred in theater field. Changes in the habitus of production field, which because of withdrawal of financial support of the government, resulted in shorter rehearsal time, employment of well-known cinema and television actors to attract large audiences, and the use of texts and plays most favored by spectators. The transformation of the de-limited field of theater production to the large-scale field of production resulted in the entrance of new spectators into the field of theater, with their different interests, habitus and cultural capital, and a taste quite different from that of former spectators. These distinctions are mainly shaped by institutional cultural capital and the background of the spectator in the field of theater. The economic dependence of theater field on the presence of these new spectators has caused theatrical performances to adapt themselves to the cultural capital and habitus of these spectators. This led to an increase in the symbolic violence exerted by the agents of educational institutions and some production agents on private theater and their spectators and taste. Cultural capital has been used less and less in waging struggles in the legitimate theater field and determining the moves for struggle, and economic capital and the presence of larger audiences played a more prominent role in the logic of production and consumption of the legitimate theater field; this means that the effect of agents, especially agents in university field, who enjoy cultural capital has decreased. In other words, these new spectators and their new taste have gradually turned into the field of power in theater field, and it is their taste – cultural capital and habitus – that imposes its system of perception and classification on theater field and has been able to somehow eliminate distinction in theater halls and the types of performance by taking a central positions.

Keywords: Theater Spectators, Legitimate Taste, University Field, Field Theory, Pierre Bourdieu

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