THE WORK OF ART: exploring art as a social practice

helma sawatzky
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old Fashioned Limbertwig</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Limbertwig</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonpareil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Limbertwig</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smokey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table includes various apple varieties, each with a descriptive label.
THIS PRESENTATION DRAWS ON THE FOLLOWING READINGS:


'ART' as

A FIELD
Pierre Bourdieu

A WORLD
Howard Becker

A NETWORK
A GATHERING
Bruno Latour

A FIELD
Pierre Bourdieu
“A thing is, in one sense, an object out there and, in another sense, an issue very much in there, at any rate, a gathering... the same word thing designates matters of fact and matters of concern.

Objects are simply a gathering that has failed—a fact that has not been assembled according to due process.”

(Latour, 2004, p. 233, 245)
For ‘art’ or artworlds to emerge as a THING (a practice, a social phenomenon) requires a gathering of many participants that make it exist and maintain its existence.

(paraphrase of Latour, 2004, p. 245-245)
"...patterns of collectivity"
in which works of art emerge as
"joint products of all the people
who cooperate via an art world’s
classic characteristic conventions
to bring works like that into existence."

(Becker, 1982, p. 1, 3)
"A set of acquired dispositions of thought, behaviour, and taste, which is said to constitute the link between social structures and social practice (or social action)."

(Oxford Dictionary of Sociology)

"... a way of reading the objective relations that define the social space within which the habitus functions"

(Bourdieu as cited in Prior, 2008, p. 30)
“...the work [of art] is indeed made [...] a hundred times, by all those who are interested in it, who find material or symbolic profit in reading it, classifying it, deciphering it, commenting on it, combating it, knowing it, possessing it.”

(Bourdieu, 1994, p. 111)

“Art worlds typically devote considerable attention to trying to decide what is and isn’t art, what is and isn’t their kind of art, and who is and isn’t an artist.”

(Becker, 1982, p. 36)
ANTIQUES ROADSHOW

EXPERT DISCOURSE
“The authenticity of a thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it.”

“Art history may be seen as the working out of a tension between two polarities... the artwork’s cult value and its exhibition value.”

“The unique value of the ‘authentic’ work of art always has its basis in ritual. This ritualistic basis, however mediated it may be, is still recognizable as secularized ritual in even the most profane forms of the cult of beauty.”

WALTER BENJAMIN’S ‘AURA’

“...as soon as the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applied to artistic production, the whole social function of art is revolutionized. Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on a different practice: politics.”

“The unique value of the ‘authentic’ work of art always has its basis in ritual.”

“This ritualistic basis, however mediated it may be, is still recognizable as secularized ritual in even the most profane forms of the cult of beauty.”
the politics of ritual spaces

Frank Gehry
Art Gallery of Ontario

Jean Nouvel
Louvre Museum
Abu Dhabi
INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL WORKS OF ART

- created by a single artist, or
- touched by the Master’s hand
- unique
- scarcity & rarity of the object
- preciousness of materials
- history of ownership

(Zolberg, 1990)

Leonardo Da Vinci
La Gioconda
(a.k.a. Mona Lisa)
76.8 × 53 cm
1503–1505
FACE TO FACE WITH GENIUS
de- and re-facing genius
“The ‘charismatic’ ideology which is the ultimate basis for the work of art and which is therefore the basis of functioning of the field of production and circulation of cultural commodities [...] directs attention to the apparent producer, the painter, writer or composer, in short, the ‘author’, suppressing the question of what authorizes the author, what creates the authority with which the authors authorize.”

(Bourdieu, 1994, p. 76)

“That anything can become meaningful in this matrix of art practice is made possible by the configuration of an ‘artist’ who bears the marks of modern art scholarship and its theories of the avant-garde, and in particular that stinging mark of the Duchampian moment of 1917 that continues to be of so much concern to art historiography.”

(Cassar, 2009, p. 243)
Marcel Duchamp (1887 - 1968)

Fountain
1917

Marcel Duchamp (1887 - 1968)
“Casting the urinal in high-polish bronze turned it into a very precious commodity, a transformation that was similar to what happened when The Bachelors were put in the cherrywood vitrines.”

Sherrie Levine in an interview with Jeanne Siegel
http://www.aftersherrielevine.com/anxiety.html

3 MINUTE WONDER:
MARCEL DUCHAMP’s FOUNTAIN
Tate Channel

http://channel.tate.org.uk/#media/media/69699217001
&context:channel/search?searchQuery=duchamp
The ideology of creation, which makes the author the first and the last source of the value of his work, conceals the fact that the cultural business man (art dealer, publisher, etc.) is at one and the same time the person who exploits the labour of the ‘creator’ by trading in the ‘sacred’ and the person who, by putting it on the market, by exhibiting, publishing or staging it, consecrates a product which he has ‘discovered’ and which would otherwise remain a natural resource; and the more consecrated he personally is, the more strongly he consecrates the work.”

(Bourdieu, 1994, p. 76-77)
“Among the makers of the work of art, we must finally include the public, which helps to make its [the art object] value by appropriating it materially (collectors) or symbolically (audiences, readers), and by objectively or subjectively identifying part of its own value with these appropriations.”

(Bourdieu, 1994, p. 78)

“Works of art [...] are not the products of individual makers, ‘artists’ who possess a rare a special gift. They are, rather, a joint product of all the people who cooperate via an art world’s characteristic conventions to bring works like that into existence. Artists are some subgroup of the world’s participants who, by common agreement, possess a special gift, therefore make a unique and indispensible contribution to the work, and thereby make it art.”

(Becker, 1982, p.35)
The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods (Bourdieu, 1994)

The paradox of the art market

“The art business, a trade in things that have no price, belongs to a class of practices in which the logic of the pre-capitalist economy lives on...”

(Bourdieu, 1994, p. 74)

“This economic universe, whose very functioning is defined by a ‘refusal’ of the ‘commercial’ which is in fact a collective disavowal of commercial interests...”

(Bourdieu, 1994, p. 75)

A consensual hallucination?

ECONOMY + MARKETS

The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods

(Bourdieu, 1994)
“The only legitimate accumulation consists in making a name for oneself, a known, recognized name, a capital of consecration implying a power to consecrate objects (with a trademark or signature) or persons (through publication, exhibition, etc.) and therefore to give value, and to appropriate the profits from this operation.”

(Bourdieu, 1994, p. 75)
Damien Hirst’s platinum skull, studded with 8,601 diamonds, is said to have sold for $100 million

VIDEO:
The Great Art Bubble
Ben Lewis

Link to The Great Art Bubble by Ben Lewis:
http://cultuurgids.avro.nl/front/detailcloseup.html?item=32c62d8f6d2ab4e9f29fb73e22fb9e73