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Everyday Aesthetics and Artification

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Everyday Aesthetics and Artification

Yuriko Saito

Abstract

Everyday aesthetics aims to illuminate the rich aesthetic dimensions of our lives that have been neglected in the modern Anglo-American art-centered aesthetic discourse. Artification, a new concept and practice, encourages us to experience various aspects of our lives normally not associated with art or aesthetics, such as business, education, and medical practice, from an artistic viewpoint. Both discourses are helpful in sharpening our aesthetic sensibility and enriching our aesthetic life. However, precisely because the aesthetic dimension of our lives exerts a considerable power in shaping our lives and the world, we need to cultivate aesthetic literacy and a vigilant attitude toward the use of this power. I argue against the *indiscriminate* and *uncritical* adoption of artification by exploring the ways in which the artification strategy can undermine the intended purpose and the value of art in a workaday environment and organizational practice.

Key Words

John Dewey, everyday aesthetics, function of art, the ordinary, the power of the aesthetic

1. The power of the aesthetic: general observation

With the recent emergence of everyday aesthetics in today's Anglo-American aesthetic discourse, [1] there has been increasing awareness and scrutiny of the ways in which the quality of life and the state of the world are profoundly affected by aesthetic factors. Humanity's ongoing project of world-making has often been motivated, even determined, by our aesthetic taste and response, sometimes consciously but more often than not without our noticing. The result has been mixed. At times the aesthetic considerations may move the world-making project toward a more humane and just society and a sustainable future, for example, by creating a certain structure that is designed with care and consideration for the people, materials and surroundings it will affect. Other times, our aesthetic responses work against the creation of a good society and sustainable future. Propagandists and advertising agencies guide our decisions and actions, as citizens and consumers, through various aesthetic strategies toward achieving their often problematic agenda. At the same time, our seemingly innocuous everyday aesthetic taste and preferences can lead to environmental harm, as seen in the United States, for example, by the objection to wind turbines and laundry hanging by presuming them to be eyesores, and the wide-spread obsession with weed-free, green lawns that require unsustainable cultivation and maintenance.

What is clear from these divergent results is the surprising degree to which aesthetic considerations wield power over our attitudes, decisions, and actions. If aesthetics has no or very little power to move us in a certain direction, we cannot make

sense of many societies' treatment of aesthetics and arts, including Confucius' emphasis on rite and music in cultivating appropriate behavior, Plato's proposal for censoring certain arts in his Republic and, more recently, Nazi Germany's promotion of Wagner's music and Riefenstahl's films. Nor can we appreciate Friedrich Schiller's call for "aesthetic education" as a complement to Kantian ethics, since he held that "the way to the head must lie through the heart."[\[2\]](#)

John Dewey made a similar point regarding the value of experiencing art, in particular that which is foreign to us:

We understand it in the degree in which we make it a part of our own attitudes, not just by collective *information* concerning the conditions under which it was produced. We accomplish this result when...we install ourselves in modes of apprehending nature that at first are strange to us. To some degree *we become artists ourselves* as we undertake this integration, and, by bringing it to pass, our own experience is reoriented. Barriers are dissolved, limiting prejudices melt away, when we enter into the spirit of Negro or Polynesian art. *This insensible melting is far more efficacious than the change effected by reasoning, because it enters directly into attitude.*[\[3\]](#)

Among more recent examples is the growing recognition that cultivating environmentally responsible attitudes cannot be accomplished by environmental ethics or scientific understanding alone; it has to be accompanied by appropriate aesthetic values. Aldo Leopold's land ethic is inseparable from a land aesthetic.[\[4\]](#) In promoting a sustainable landscape, Joan Nassauer has emphasized the importance of its aesthetic appeal to render it "culturally sustainable."[\[5\]](#) Finally, environmental educator, David Orr, has pointed out that "we are moved to act more often, more consistently, and more profoundly by *the experience of beauty* in all of its forms than by intellectual arguments, abstract appeals to duty, or even by fear."[\[6\]](#) These examples suggest that the power of the aesthetic to influence people's thinking and actions, for better or worse, is quite considerable. I hold that one mission of everyday aesthetics is to acknowledge this power and guide it toward better world-making.

2. The power of the aesthetic: application to artification

We can understand the newly emerging concept of "artification," the introduction of artistic practice and aesthetics into areas and disciplines not usually associated with them – as one attempt to harness the power of the aesthetic to engage in a certain practice, thereby achieving its intended goal more effectively. As the essays in this special volume indicate collectively, this strategy affects many areas of human activity, ranging from education and science to sports and home decoration. I am particularly intrigued by its adoption in workaday environments, whether it is business, industry, or organizational operation, because for many of us the bulk of our lives away from home takes place in such environments. In fact, at my home institution I am witnessing firsthand a growing interest in promoting artistic practice in business and organizational operations. I find some of the applications of

artistic practices and the power of the aesthetic in the workplace environment and operation to be promising and encouraging, while I have deep concerns with others. I would like to explore some of these strategies adopted in the workplace.

One way in which artification helps to promote a better work environment is the increased attention to the aesthetic dimension of its physical environment. A good example is the so-called green building that is not only environmentally responsible but also fosters workers' well-being through a comfortable, pleasant, and humane environment, with various sensory effects such as fresh air, natural light, and non-toxic building materials. Such an environment is found to promote workers' physical and mental health, and also to reduce absenteeism and increase efficiency and productivity.

Aesthetic attention to the workplace is not limited to its physical environment. More attention is also directed toward what one commentator calls "quotidian organization practices."^[7] These include the workers' experiences and emotions affected by the multi-sensory effects of the physical environment, the nature of human interactions, and the rhythm and movement of production. These constitute "the ordinary" or "the subjective" of organizational life, and have been generally neglected in the conventional organizational study that analyzes "objective" factors such as structure, policy, and statistics. Furthermore, workers' ordinary workaday experiences tend to be eclipsed by the more standout events, such as the change of a top executive or notable business successes and failures. Thus, one commentator notes that the recent trend in organizational studies "turns away from commodifying elite heroics... and becomes concerned with exploring and representing *the extraordinary qualities of the ordinary*."^[8]

In my work on everyday aesthetics, I emphasize the importance of exploring the ordinary aspects of our lives, not only to enrich and diversify the aesthetic discourse but also to acknowledge their serious implications on the quality of life and the state of the world and its future.^[9] The power of the aesthetic is such that, whether we notice it or not, and whether we like it or not, we are constantly affected by the aesthetic dimension of the environment and life.^[10] Insofar as we are sensuous creatures, we cannot but be affected by the aesthetic, which often leads us to certain attitudes and guides our action. In turn, this affects our collective and cumulative contribution to humanity's ongoing project of world-making, for better or worse.

The first step in steering our contribution to the world-making project toward a better quality of life and a better future is to highlight the way in which we are all affected by the seldom-noticed aesthetic dimension of our everyday life, including our working life. I therefore welcome this increased attention to the aesthetic dimension of our working life and environment, which has a serious impact on the quality of an organization and its products and operation, as well as on its members' lives.

However, the attention paid to the power of the aesthetic in a workplace is not limited to its environment or what is

considered its everyday activity. Perhaps more importantly, and in my mind problematically, the artification strategy also includes promotion of a new way of thinking and doing that breaks away from the traditional *modus operandi* based on linear and goal-directed planning, controlled order, stability, continuity, rationality, measurability, and predictability. According to the artification advocates, the conventional mode is obsolete in today's changing world due to globalization, technological advancement, increasing market force, unpredictability, and the lightening speed of electronic transaction.

The supporters of artification believe that in order to keep up with this accelerated pace of change and still succeed, we need a new way of thinking and operating. They claim that rather than conducting business as usual, with incremental modifications, what we need today is something radically different that promotes creativity, imagination, spontaneity, inspiration, passion, improvisation, experimentation, and constant innovation.^[11] They believe that the best practitioners of this new way of thinking and doing are artists, and that it behooves today's businesses and organizations to incorporate artistic skills and practices through programs such as artist-in-residence, member participation in art-making, communal experience of art, and artist collaboration on projects. That this strategy is based upon the understanding and appreciation of the power of the aesthetic is clear from the statement that "theory...does not *touch* people."^[12]

Various advocates of organization artification agree that by involving art in the organization life, the following benefits are expected: (1) discovering one's inner voice, (2) sharpening one's perceptive power, and (3) provoking and inspiring creative and imaginative ideas. Let me critically examine each one of these expected benefits.

3. Discovering one's inner voice

One of the presumed benefits of experiencing art, whether as a receiver or as a participant, is that we get in touch with our deeper self and find our own voice. The conventional wisdom in a workplace is that we keep such deep personal feelings in check and conduct ourselves in a "professional" manner. However, a part of the transformation of workplace operation encouraged by artification is that we experiment with modes that have not been tried before, including reaching deep into our emotional well and taking stock of our personal self, even in the workplace. For this purpose, experiencing art in various forms is considered to be the best means. A beautiful piece of music moves us, and poetry, journal writing, and photography also stimulate a part of ourselves that is not normally engaged, particularly in the work environment.^[13] The benefits here are variously described as "getting in touch with yourself," "inner transformation," or finding one's "own unique voice."^[14] There is a particular appeal of "treating everybody as creative individuals" because "every human being can in some way be awakened to become an artist."^[15]

While I do not deny the value of self-discovery through engaging in art, I find the predominant emphasis placed on it to be problematic. If art does help with self-discovery, it should also facilitate expansion and transcendence of one's

own horizon. Here I am invoking John Dewey's view that "the moral function of art" is "to remove prejudice, do away with the scales that keep the eye from seeing, tear away the veils due to wont and custom, perfect the power to perceive."^[16] In other words, "works of art are means by which we enter, through imagination and the emotions they evoke, into other forms of relationship and participation than our own." In light of this function of art, the creative industry advocates' primary focus on self-discovery through art may exacerbate a tendency toward self-absorption that (good) art can and should help us overcome. Furthermore, while respecting the artistic expression of each person's unique voice may have a democratic appeal, one commentator on arts in business warns of the danger in viewing anything as art, resulting in the "banalization" or "death of art," whereby "everything becomes a matter of personal taste and we end up with a degenerative idea of art as a question of the utmost subjectivity."^[17]

At its worst, such a view can be downright dangerous when applied to cultivating leadership skills. Consider the following claim by an advocate who encourages artification strategy for leadership:

All true leadership starts with coming home to oneself. ... Do not simply listen, read, and repeat what others say. Grant your own perceptions, ideas, images, feelings, and dreams the same respect that you give to the world's most respected leaders. True leaders, whether in the arts, business, government, science, or the military, view the world through their own eyes, their own values, and their own dreams.^[18]

The rejection of simply following or conforming does not necessarily imply the rejection of listening to others and engaging in dialogue with them. The artification advocates' focus on self-discovery without the accompanying emphasis on expanding one's horizon is problematic because it can lead to unreflected and unqualified self-aggrandizement. Applied to leadership, I find this to be a particularly worrisome prospect.

My concern here is akin to the problem I have in education where a premium is placed on students' expression of their own voice. Whether in writing, creating visual arts, or composing music, undue emphasis on subjective expression can compromise the upholding of standards. An implied fear of discouraging spontaneity and each student's genuine voice is that it will thwart individual growth and tacitly endorse a kind of artistic tyranny that stipulates a uniform artistic standard. Although there is much value in rebelling against artistic tyranny, artistic anarchy or *laissez faire* art, where anything goes, is also not desirable. In this regard, I find the artification advocates' emphasis on finding one's voice through participating in art experience in a work environment to be problematic unless it also recognizes a corollary importance on expanding one's horizon and engaging in self-critique.

4. Sharpening one's perception

The second benefit of art, according to the advocates of arts in business, is sharpening one's perception. Art teaches us to really see what's in front of us without relying on preconceived

ideas about the object. This way of seeing, American writer Annie Dillard stated, is challenging and requires “unpeach(ing) the peach.”^[19] Zen-inspired arts also promote this way of seeing the world “without the burden of self.”^[20] Similarly, although induced by mescaline, Aldous Huxley described the intensity of artistically experiencing things in *Doors of Perception*: “What the rest of us see only under the influence of mescaline, the artist is congenitally equipped to see all the time. His perception is not limited to what is biologically or socially useful. ... It is a knowledge of the intrinsic significance of every existent.”^[21] Artification strategy fully recognizes and utilizes art’s power for sharpening one’s perception.^[22] Referring to the participants in photography sessions who testified that their visual experience became fuller, enriched, and more intense, one commentator remarked that “when life is full of activity and information, we tend to switch on the ‘automatic pilot,’ which means that we do not really take in the world with our senses. Life becomes dull, but actually it is not life that is to blame, but rather our outlook on life that is poor.”^[23]

Such sharpening of the senses can lead to some tangible benefits, as indicated by improved diagnostic skills among medical students.^[24] However, advocates of arts in industry go further by encouraging us to adopt the “I-want-to-just-experience-life-to-the-maximum mindset.” Particularly because “in an office environment, experiencing life to the maximum is not always easy,” they recommend bringing “the same intensity (of experiencing art) in one’s job.”^[25]

I maintain that one of the missions of everyday aesthetics is indeed to sharpen our sensibility so that we don’t miss what Herman Hesse called “little joys.”^[26] We need to wake up and smell the coffee and the roses. The potential for aesthetic pleasure and artistic inspiration in the ordinary and mundane, or “familiar,” to borrow Arto Haapala’s term, is generally overlooked. Experiencing “the familiar” *as if* it were art renders it “strange,” which can create “a basis for sensitive aesthetic appreciation.”^[27] Referring specifically to organizational life, another commentator made a similar observation: “The ordinary... is easily strange enough” but it is eclipsed by “the atypical” which “can fend for itself,” so we need to make an extra effort to illuminate “the ordinary” to make it “strange” or “atypical.”^[28] I have no doubt that such an artistic attention will enliven one’s work life and environment. There is a lot to be gained by illuminating the ordinarily neglected, for gem-like, aesthetic potentials hidden behind the trivial, mundane, and commonplace façade that dominates our work life and environment.

However, I also see several problems with maximizing such an artfied life. First, can we really sustain the intensity of “experiencing life to the maximum?” Dillard, Zen practitioners, and others who recommend cultivating such artistic perception do not necessarily advocate adopting this mode of sensing all the time. It is not clear how this intense art-like experience can co-exist with the practical matters at hand if the former is to dominate our work life. One can have a fascinating art-like experience of a paper clip, for example, but a report needs to be written and the desk top needs to be organized, even in an artfied work environment. Huxley

indeed worried that "if one always saw like this, one would never want to do anything else" and "this participation in the manifest glory of things left no room... for the ordinary, the necessary concerns of human existence, above all for concerns involving persons."[\[29\]](#)

Second, even if it is possible for every aspect of our life to become art-like, the potency of "strangeness" that artistic vision entails would become diluted. Or, put differently, if our life becomes a continuous series of "an experience," in Dewey's sense, can we even make sense of the notion of "an experience?" While increasing the occasions for having "an experience" may enrich our lives, this notion has significance *precisely because* it stands out against the background of the humdrum. Dewey's characterization of the humdrum is rather negative, just as artification advocates describe a typical, un-artified working life as mechanical and dehydrated. However, it is not clear whether Dewey would advocate turning every humdrum aspect of our lives into "an experience." Indiscriminately increasing art-like experience will end up diluting the very intensity and specialness we seek. Instead, I think what needs to be pursued is a balance between such intense experience and the mundane.

What about the artification advocates' recommendation of experiencing "what you do in your everyday life as an art form?"[\[30\]](#) I believe that an event, activity, opinion, and the like, that make up our working life will function differently if they are considered a part of art. Consider Friedrich Nietzsche's view on creating a work of art out of life. For him, one can fashion one's self and life as a work of art by affirming every ingredient as contributing to an artistic whole, similar to the way in which a tragic event is necessary for a Greek tragedy or dissonance for classical music. That is, "even the ugly and disharmonic are part of an artistic game" and "it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally justified."[\[31\]](#) If successful, every contingency in life will be considered an inevitable and necessary part of an artistic whole:

...whatever it is, bad weather or good, the loss of a friend, sickness, slander, the failure of some letter to arrive, the spraining of an ankle, a glance into a shop, a counter-argument, the opening of a book, a dream, a fraud -- either immediately or very soon after it proves to be something that "*must not be missing*."[\[32\]](#)

The same artistic justification underlies what he called "a great and rare art": "to 'give style' to one's character," which is "practiced by one who surveys everything his nature offers in the way of weaknesses and strengths, and then fits it into an *artistic plan* until each element appears as artistic and reasonable and even the weaknesses delight the eye."[\[33\]](#)

We find a similar strategy in the *wabi* aesthetics associated with the Japanese art of tea ceremony. *Wabi* aesthetics celebrates normally depreciated qualities, such as imperfection, incompleteness, obscurity, and insufficiency, that are found in things like falling cherry blossoms, clouds that obscure a moon, fraying silk, and a cracked tea bowl. Tea ceremony embodies this attitude with its use of broken tea

ware, minimum and rustic décor, and meager amounts of food. But this aesthetics also goes further by rendering the difficulties in life easier to accept. In fact, this aesthetic justification of life's imperfections was quite consciously utilized for political purposes, first for maintaining the feudal system based upon class hierarchy and, more recently, for justifying the citizens' hardships during WW II and the glorification of Kamikaze pilots as falling cherry blossoms. [34]

Thus, the adoption of artification strategies, whether for personal, societal, or organizational purposes, without first examining their implications can have problematic consequences. That is, an unexamined and *indiscriminate* artification program implies that every aspect of life, self, organization, and society becomes justified by its contribution to the artified whole, and such aesthetic judgments would take precedence over other judgments, whether moral, social, or political. Some of life's contingencies are beyond our control, such as illness and accidents that befall us, and an aesthetic justification as a coping mechanism may be effective and prudent. However, other hardships in life are caused by social ills, injustices, our character flaws and careless mistakes. If we consider them as ingredients of an artified whole, we may come to conclude that they need to be kept for an artistic effect, such as contrast or incongruity. Thus, while artification may not necessarily lead to maintenance of the status quo of a society, organization, or individual, there is no guarantee that artification will lead to improvement. Artistic considerations do not always lead to the judgment that social ills, organizational problems, and personal shortcomings need to be addressed and overcome. Such a judgment must come from moral, social, and political considerations.

Earlier I mentioned that one of the missions of everyday aesthetics is to excavate hidden aesthetic gems in our everyday life. Our activities at home and at work can be experienced as such gems, bathed in shiny luminescence, with all bumps and warts transformed into positive qualities. Art is particularly helpful in directing our attention and appreciation to those gems that we normally neglect or even depreciate. However, another equally or perhaps more important mission of everyday aesthetics is to develop aesthetic literacy and vigilance toward the way in which the power of the aesthetic is used to promote a certain agenda or lead to a certain consequence. Sometimes we need to make a judgment that an artification strategy is neither appropriate nor desirable, but such judgments do not seem to be forthcoming from within an artified discourse.

In this regard, consider the artification strategy of modeling organizational practice as jazz improvisation. Its advocate explains that "jazz is an expressive art form that encourages players to explore the edge of the unknown, and if improvisation legitimizes risk taking, it is inevitable that there will be discrepancies, miscues and 'mistakes,'" but "rather than engaging in fault finding or holding one another responsible for inevitable errors that happen when one is experimenting on the edge of one's familiarity, each player is committed to sustaining the ongoing dialogue." [35] In short, "errors are often integrated into the musical landscape." This collaborative

team work is precisely one of the primary reasons for incorporating performance arts as an artification practice.

Proponents further claim that artifying organizational operations affords all participants a safe zone in which to explore their feelings and express ideas, "giv(ing) them permission" to experiment.^[36] By not having to deal with reality as is but rather as an artistic phenomenon, participants can "minimize the fear of failure" because "if you do the real thing here it is a high-stake, high-risk environment and what art can offer to us is to do the same thing but in a safer environment." If a meeting is regarded as an improvised theater production, then it attains a sense of playfulness and, as actors, we are relieved from direct interaction with others on a real issue and the whole exercise "does not call forth our defenses."^[37]

However, I don't think that what works effectively in creating an artistic performance is readily transferable to real life affairs. That is, in an organizational operation, shouldn't we acknowledge an error as an error, hold those who are responsible accountable, and devise ways to prevent future errors? It is true that an error in business and organization should provide food for thought for subsequent practices, but this is different from an artified vision in which the error is not acknowledged and treated as such but rather is viewed as part of an artistically creative process.

5. Inspiring creative and imaginative ideas

These observations about the possible problems of artifying organizational life relate to the third benefit of artification in business: art's power to provoke and inspire creative and imaginative ideas. Oftentimes art is credited with challenging the status quo and providing a new vision; this is precisely the reason why art is introduced into industry. As one advocate claims, "arts can be revolutionary when taking on the role of questioning our daily life and the status quo of society" and the role of art is "primarily one of provocation,...to stir the organization and keep the innovative spirit alive."^[38]

I agree that one of the important functions of art is to provoke thoughts and inspire people to engage in collective reflection. However, this provocative function of art is premised on the existence of a critical discourse supported by the artworld practice. Consider recent works of art that challenge the traditional boundary between art and life. Examples include environmental art in the form of activism, like tree planting and cleaning up the river, as well as what some critics call "relational aesthetics," such as Rirkrit Tiravanija's making and serving curry and Liam Gillick's setting up a space for conversation in a gallery or museum setting.^[39] While not different from non-art tree planting or eating curry, these activities are situated in what Arthur Danto calls "an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld."^[40] As such, these works of art cannot but make an artistic statement that is subject to a critical discourse, even when the artist's intention is to get his or her work away from the conventions of the artworld. However, insofar as the provocative elements of these art works are derived from their artistic statements, which are possible only in a context of the artworld, it does not seem possible for the

artified practice in an organization to be provocative or inspiring in the same way.

Controversy over art sometimes spills beyond the boundary of the artworld and generates a public debate. I don't think anybody will deny the value of critical discourse and a public forum in which to collectively discuss Damien Hirst's sliced up cow, Chris Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary*, Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ*, Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*, or *Alba*, a glow-in-the-dark bunny born of genetic engineering. People often complain about the closed and elitist nature of today's artworld, where it is very difficult for an amateur artist with no established track record to get his or her artwork christened as art. Furthermore, the audience is often alienated from understanding and appreciating many contemporary art objects unless they are familiar with today's artworld language. However, despite this possibly closed and elitist tendency, the artworld is *open* in the sense of providing a public discourse where questions can be raised about a work of art and interpretations can be debated.

In comparison, an artified organization is open in the sense that nobody has to be a professional artist or a member of the artworld to participate in its creation, production, and appreciation. However, an artified operation takes place in a kind of hermetically sealed context experienced only internally, within the organization, and without an overall umbrella consisting of general public, artworld, and critical discourse. Thus, in the most crucial sense, artified practice in an organization is *closed* because the end product of the artistic process is not subjected to public assessment or critical interpretations; rather, its value will be gauged only by its contribution to the organization's success.

One may respond that even if it stays internal to the company, artification promotes freer discussion and experimentation. Indeed, the greatest benefit of artifying discussion may be that it will give rise to new, creative, and imaginative ideas that have not been thought of before and would not have been arrived at without the promotion of artistic license. However, I am concerned about the possibility of an artified discussion compromising a genuine disagreement or debate, a conflict of ideas, a questioning of each other or, more importantly, challenges to fundamental assumptions and beliefs. At an old-fashioned meeting, I, as a member of an organization, can raise my concerns about the direction of the institution or the quality of its services and products in a straightforward way, which can then be debated. Of course, I may fail to persuade others to agree with me, but at least I have an opportunity to engage others in a debate. Does the same possibility exist if the whole exchange is regarded as an art production, such as an improvised theater or jazz performance? My dissenting opinion will then be a part of art, perhaps even an indispensable part, but it is not clear to me whether in that context my opinion will be acknowledged and responded to as genuine dissent.

One artification advocate characterizes "good artists" as "fifty to a hundred years ahead of their time" and "they describe what lies over the horizon in our future world...The artist... must...depict this new world before all the evidence is in. They

must rely on the embracing abilities of their imagination to intuit and describe what is as yet a germinating seed in their present time.”[41] Now imagine a genetic engineering company that is producing a genetically modified crop like vitamin A-rich golden rice, or strawberries with arctic jellyfish genes to prevent freezing. Artified practice in this company may inspire a more imaginative way of producing products, a new line of genetically modified organisms, a heretofore unimagined use of this technology, or an innovative marketing strategy. However, what the artified practice in this company is *discouraged from doing* is raising questions about the whole enterprise of genetic engineering and marketing genetically modified crops, or imagining a world without the enterprising technology of genetic engineering. The provocative function of art that artified practice seeks to appropriate thus actually loses its power as soon as it becomes subsumed under the organizational goal, whatever that goal may be.

It is not my intention here to debate the pros and cons of genetic engineering. It may very well be the case that this company’s genetic engineering project is motivated by and *in fact* serves a humanitarian goal. Artification advocates stress that twenty-first century enterprise must strive for compassionate capitalism, socially responsible industry, business with heart, and global corporate citizenship to dispel the stereotype that “business is a monster and business people are evil.”[42] However, in order for business to contribute toward better world-making, it has to survive in the first place by maximizing its productivity, innovation, profit, and that “magic ingredient” that gives the company “competitive advantage.”[43] If it goes out of business because it loses to other companies in the global competition, it cannot participate in the project of better world-making. Thus, art in this company cannot challenge the *raison d’être* of the company, its goal, or the whole industry. In such a context, the provocative value of artified practice resides only in raising questions about the existing business strategy and providing a possible new way of conducting business. The challenge of artified practice is limited to the means of achieving an end, not the end itself.

In contrast, artists working within the artworld are free to raise fundamental questions through their works. For every artist whose works endorse and celebrate unbridled capitalism or praise the brave new world of technotopia, there is another artist who challenges it. The point is that that is the *choice* each artist *can* make. Such freedom is not granted in artified organizations.[44]

Furthermore, the public gains by engaging in a debate regarding controversial art. Whatever the artist’s intention behind creating *Alba* may be, it does put a spotlight on the nature and value of genetic engineering. The same with Damien Hirst’s sliced cow, which, among other things, forces the society to reflect upon its attitude toward animals and our relationship to them. Ofili’s *The Holy Virgin Mary* and Serrano’s *Piss Christ* challenge us to think about the nature of religiosity and sacredness. Serra’s *Tilted Arc* makes us question the nature of public art and the extent of the public’s say in its fate. Whether regarding science and technology, animal rights, religiosity, or the value of art itself, the

controversy generated by these art works inspires and provokes people to reflect upon these issues, regardless of their familiarity with the artworld's convention and vocabulary. This provocative value of art differs from the presumed provocative value of artfied practice in business and industry because the latter is closed to public scrutiny, reflection, or challenge.

While part of the attraction of conceiving the whole organizational operation as art is the sense of safety felt by its participants in expressing their ideas, ironically that freedom ends up sacrificing the opportunity to pursue and explore various possibilities by working through disagreements and differing views. One advocate's own warning against using artification to "stir the pot" is telling in this regard:

Artistic processes are powerful beyond measure, which is good, of course, but they also make people think and feel, which is both good and bad, because if the business is a "flatland" business without real purpose or the organization is highly political...these features are illuminated through the sharp lights of the arts – because basically the arts disturb, provoke and mirror behavior. The result of "stirring the pot" in an unhealthy organization is often that the people who stay become cynical and the others (the best) leave the organization, because people who think and feel do not put up with bad organization. A highly political or unethical corporation will be wise to stay away from the arts – or use it only for entertainment and decoration.[\[45\]](#)

In fact, some critics characterize this possibly insidious implication of artifying business as an anesthetizing effect by pointing out that

The creation of an aesthetic is always directed to the shared language of a community (however defined), and the intention is to manipulate the signifiers to such an extent that the possibility of responding other than in the desired ways is minimized. At best, it aims at the suspension of disbelief, at worst we could say that we are told what to think. Success in such manipulation is, as always, a function of the exercise of power. The extent to which the process is successful, to which we accept the created aesthetic as a definition of the appropriate response to (an) organization is also the extent to which we abdicate or deny our *own* ability to formulate a response. Acceptance, intentional or unintentional, means that, as individuals, we accept anaesthetization.[\[46\]](#)

If they are correct in characterizing the artification strategy as having an anaesthetizing effect, then it is contrary to the provocative function of art that artification advocates are trying to utilize.

Looked at this way, what is touted as transformative, inspirational, and radically different turns out to be a further enhancement of the status quo. In this context, art loses what it does best, the reason for adopting art in business in the first place. One advocate states that "for most of the twentieth

century, managers stressed conformity, not unique perception, appreciation, or vision"[47] and that is one of the primary reasons for artifying business. However, as I have tried to show, on the most fundamental level artifying business ends up enhancing this conformist attitude.

6. Concluding remarks

Thus, as long as artification strategy in organization invokes the notion of art, we are confronted with two possibilities. One possibility is for the artworld model to be transferred to organizational practice so that the artified results also get subjected to critical discourse and public debate. But this is unlikely. Most often, particularly under a capitalist economy, the industry's purpose in using art is to promote successful business, not to enliven the artworld or encourage public discussion on art. Without such a critical discourse, the very value of challenging the status quo and raising fundamental questions, that which art does best, gets compromised.

The other possibility is to go in the other direction by expanding the arts-in-business model so it seeps into the artworld practice. However, this would lead to the demise of existing art discourse consisting of interpretation, criticism, and evaluation, and ultimately compromise the artist's role as a provocateur. Thus, insofar as artification applies to organizational operation, while something may be gained by making the boundary between art and work life porous, I believe there is also a price paid by both art and business.

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Endnotes

[1] Historically, everyday objects and activities were routinely discussed in the Western philosophical tradition, not to mention many non-Western traditions. One could claim that it is a very peculiar development of twentieth century Anglo-American aesthetics, which is focused almost exclusively on art. Only against this background can we characterize recent works on everyday aesthetics as "recently emerging." I owe this point to Ossi Naukkarinen.

[2] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1977), p. 50.

[3] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), p. 334, all emphases added.

[4] Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977). Part IV, where Leopold develops his land ethic, ends with a section on conservation aesthetic.

[5] Joan Iverson Nassauer, "Cultural Sustainability: Aligning Aesthetics with Ecology," in *Placing Nature: Culture and Landscape Ecology*, ed. Joan Iverson Nassauer (Washington D. C.: Island Press, 1997), pp. 67-83.

[6] David Orr, *The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture, and Human Intention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 178-9, emphasis added.

[7] Antonio Strati, "The Aesthetic Approach in Organization Studies," in *The Aesthetics of Organization*, eds. Stephen Linstead & Heather Höpfl (London: SAGE Publications, 2000), pp. 13-34; ref. on p. 16.

[8] David Silverman citing P. Jeffcutt in "Routine Pleasures: The Aesthetics of the Mundane," in *The Aesthetics of Organization*, pp. 130-153; ref. on 130, emphasis added.

[9] Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[10] The classic work on this point is Dewey's *Art as Experience*. Contemporary discussion of this idea can be found in Katya Mandoki's *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007). By far the most extended and sustained development of this point is Arnold Berleant's *oeuvre* spanning four decades, starting with the notions of aesthetic field and aesthetic engagement, and which developed into environmental aesthetics, which was then further developed to encompass every aspect of human life by establishing a new field of social aesthetics, as well as the aesthetic dimensions and implications of politics. His most recent work is *Sensibility and Sense: The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World* (Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2010).

[11] The contrast between the traditional and new modes of thinking and operating is consolidated from discussions by Lotte Darsø, *Artful Creation: Learning-Tales of Arts-in-Business* (Frederiksberg, Denmark: samfundslitteratur, 2004); *The Aesthetics of Organization*; Nancy J. Adler, "Going Beyond the Dehydrated Language of Management: Leadership Insight," *Journal of Business Strategy*, 31, 4 (2010), pp. 90-99; and Nancy J. Adler, "The Arts & Leadership: Now That We Can Do Anything, What Will We Do?," *Academy of Management Learning and Education Journal*, 5,4 (2006), pp. 486-499.

[12] Darsø, p. 63, emphasis added.

[13] Darsø provides case studies of incorporating these art practices in industry and organization in Chapter 4 of her *Artful Creation*.

[14] Darsø, p. 63, p. 31, and Adler, "Going Beyond," p. 5.

[15] Darsø, p. 112 and p. 98.

[16] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 325. The next passage is

from p. 333.

[17] Pierre Guillet de Monthoux, "The Art Management of Aesthetic Organizing," in *The Aesthetics of Organization*, pp. 35-60; ref. p. 58.

[18] Adler, "Going Beyond," p. 93.

[19] Annie Dillard, "Seeing" in *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*, eds. Richard G. Botzler and Susan J. Armstrong (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998), pp. 114-121; ref. on p. 119.

[20] Writing in the early 13th century, a Japanese Zen priest Dōgen defines enlightenment as follows: "Acting on and witnessing myriad things with the burden of oneself is 'delusion.' Acting on and witnessing oneself in the advent of myriad things is enlightenment." Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō: Zen Essays by Dōgen*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), p. 32.

[21] Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1954), p. 33.

[22] This can be compared to phenomenology's emphasis on experiencing "the things themselves." I thank Ossi Naukkarinen for pointing out this similarity.

[23] Darsø, p. 120.

[24] Adler, "The Arts & Leadership," p. 495.

[25] Darsø, p. 14.

[26] Herman Hesse, "On Little Joys," *My Belief: Essays on Life and Art*, trans. Denver Lindley (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1974), pp. 7-10; ref. on p. 9.

[27] Arto Haapala, "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place" in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, eds. Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 39-55; ref. on p. 50.

[28] Silverman citing R. Winder and N. Baker in "Routine Pleasures," p. 137.

[29] Huxley, pp. 34-5.

[30] Darsø, p. 63.

[31] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York, New York: The Modern Library, 1968), p. 141 and p. 52.

[32] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 224, emphasis added.

[33] Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, p. 232, emphasis added.

[34] I explored *wabi* aesthetics of the tea ceremony and its political implication in "The Japanese Aesthetics of Imperfection and Insufficiency," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55:4 (1997), 377-85, as well as in *Everyday*

Aesthetics, pp. 192-8. For the political significance of falling cherry blossoms during WW II, see Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[35] Frank J. Barrett, "Cultivating an Aesthetic of Unfolding: Jazz Improvisation as a Self-Organizing System," in *The Aesthetics of Organization*, pp. 228-245; ref. on p. 239 and p. 242. The next passage is from p. 239.

[36] Darsø, p. 181. The following passages are from p. 153.

[37] Darsø cites Judy Sorcum Brown on p. 151.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 29 and p. 74.

[39] I thank my student, Raine Vasquez, for the reference to Liam Gillick.

[40] Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," in *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, ed. Joseph Margolis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), pp. 132-144; ref. on p. 140.

[41] Adler, "The Arts & Leadership," p. 491.

[42] Darsø, p. 182. Other terms are rephrased from ideas scattered throughout Darsø's *Artful Creation* and Adler's "The Arts & Leadership" and "Going Beyond."

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 183.

[44] One could claim that artists, insofar as being engaged in art-making, are not raising the fundamental question about the very existence and importance of art-making. I am not sure whether the situation is equivalent to raising the fundamental question in artified business. It seems that many contemporary artists have raised the fundamental question about the *raison d'être* of art and artworld in their work, though the irony is that whatever artistic statements they make (against art and the artworld) cannot but be subsumed under the artworld context. However, artists do have the freedom to question the *status quo* of art and artworld, while practitioners of artification in business and industry may be discouraged from raising such fundamental questions. After all they are employed to enhance operational success, and even if they do manage to raise such questions, it is not clear whether their challenge would be taken at face value.

[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.

[46] Pippa Carter and Norman Jackson, "An-aesthetics," in *The Aesthetics of Organization*, 180-196; ref. on 195.

[47] Adler, "The Arts & Leadership," p. 494.