

Contemporary Aesthetics

Special Volume 4 (2012) ARTIFICIATION

2012

Introduction

Ossi Naukkarinen

Aalto University School of Arts, ossi.naukkarinen@aalto.fi

Yuriko Saito

Rhode Island School of Design, ysaito@risd.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics

 Part of the [Esthetics Commons](#)

This Introduction is brought to you for free and open access by the Liberal Arts Division at DigitalCommons@RISD. It has been accepted for inclusion in Contemporary Aesthetics by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@RISD. For more information, please contact mpompeli@risd.edu.

[About CA](#)

[Journal](#)

[Contact CA](#)

[Links](#)

[Submissions](#)

[Search Journal](#)

[Editorial Board](#)

[Permission to Reprint](#)

[Privacy](#)

[Site Map](#)

[Publisher](#)

[Webmaster](#)

Introduction

Ossi Naukkarinen &
Yuriko Saito, Guest Editors

Introduction

This special issue of *Contemporary Aesthetics* deals with the phenomenon we call *artification*.

The neologism refers to situations and processes in which something that is not regarded as art in the traditional sense of the word is changed into something art-like or into something that takes influences from artistic ways of thinking and practicing. In some cases, non-art may eventually turn into art proper but, strictly speaking, such processes fall on the fringes of this issue's focus. We are mostly interested in the contemporary interplay of art and non-art and not primarily in how to produce actual institutionalized art, even if these two questions may illuminate each other and thus should not be totally separated. In any case, we believe that the concept of artification is useful for understanding a topical and important cultural phenomenon that currently affects our ways of thinking about art and its relations to other spheres of culture.

In recent years the art/non-art interplay has been a topic of discussion in various contexts. Surprisingly, many have been interested in the possibilities that arise from mixing art and artists with business, scientific research, health care, environmental activism, and education. One can say that these fields, among others, appear to be in need of artification. Proponents of artification and similar concepts often claim that these practices lack creativity or other features typical of art and therefore art is specifically equipped to correct this deficiency. They believe that incorporating art into these practices facilitates change and that the change is for the better.

To our knowledge, apart from occasional non-scholarly uses of the word, the original Finnish term *'taiteistuminen,'* or artification, was first coined and used in this sense by a group of Finnish scholars, Yrjänä Levanto, Ossi Naukkarinen, and Susann Vihma, in an anthology named *Taiteistuminen* published in 2005. Because the book was written in Finnish, it reached only a limited audience. However, the practice of artification is now wide-spread beyond Finland, and it is our belief that it must be critically examined in a larger aesthetic discourse.

There are scholars who have used the same term even earlier but in a slightly different way. It was possibly first introduced by Ellen Dissanayake in her article "An Ethological View of Music and its Relevance to Music Therapy" published in 2001 in *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy* (10/2: 159-175). For Dissanayake, artification means transforming things into art proper by making and producing art or making art to exist. The equivalent French term was used by Roberta Shapiro, who also contributes to this volume together with her colleague Nathalie Heinich, in her presentation "Qu'est-ce que

l'artification?" at the XVIIth congress of AISLF (Association internationale des sociologues de langue française) in 2004.

In this special volume, however, we focus on the notion of artification that is different from that developed by Dissanayake. That is, our interest lies in those processes where something that is not art gets affected by art but does not turn into art in the traditional sense of the word, that is, by being accepted into the institution of the art world. Moreover, in Dissanayake's evolutionary sense, artification has always taken place as long as the human race has existed whereas, in the sense accentuated in this special volume of *Contemporary Aesthetics*, it is clearly a contemporary phenomenon. While Shapiro and Heinich are also primarily interested in the phenomenon of artification in the sense of producing art proper, their contribution to this volume develops their ideas in light of the way we use the term.

Our aim is to trace and analyze this contemporary discussion and the phenomenon in more detail. Is it really so that certain non-art areas become artified, or is this just a figure of speech? Does artification refer only to our attitude regarding the artified objects or activities, or does it include some specific actions? If artification happens, how does it change the area that becomes artified and how does it change art itself? What is expected from art and artists? What is meant by the word 'art' in the first place? How do artified practices differ from institutionalized art proper? Does this have anything in common with those loose ideas about top chefs and football stars being artists?

We believe there is a compelling reason for compiling this special volume on artification. Ideas related to artification are becoming more and more common but, as they are presented from very different perspectives and in very different contexts and ways, it is often hard to make sense of the discussion and the practices related to it. A critical overview has been missing, and that is what we expect this volume will offer. Furthermore, discussing artification may indicate some changes in our conceptions of art in a more general way. As art in all of its forms is a major cultural phenomenon, including art schools and galleries, concert halls, poems, theaters, auctions, biennales, installations, critics, artists, and masses of audience members, it deserves careful scrutiny from many directions. And, finally, no other term seems to capture the nature and scope of this contemporary current quite as readily.

The approach the contributors have taken is, broadly speaking, philosophical. That is, the concepts, ideas, and phenomena related to artification are critically analyzed, contextualized, and interpreted. Accordingly, the purpose of the writings is not to provide a simple handbook on *how to* artify a specific non-art practice. Furthermore, the focus is on generalizable notions about the theme, even if empirical studies of concrete cases are discussed. That is, we are not trying to provide water-proof empirical evidence for or against the effectiveness of artification; rather, we offer conceptual tools and points of view that can be used when making sense of various instances of artification. How the tools should eventually be used is left for the readers to decide. As is typical in philosophy, we try to

offer common points of reference and conceptual tools for analysis, rather than a set of definitive answers.

Although the discussion in this volume is thus primarily philosophical, it is further enriched by the contributions by authors whose expertise lies in other disciplines, such as art history, sociology, and design. We firmly believe that including discussions from different disciplines is crucial in developing a multi-faceted understanding of the artification processes. Artification is not only a conceptual issue but also has historical, institutional, and very practical aspects, and we expect these essays together will help illuminate them. As such, they should be of relevance and interest not only to professional philosophers but also to anyone interested in the cross-fertilizations of art and non-art artists, curators, teachers, scientists, businessmen, and many others. By making the discussion accessible to a wider audience from different disciplines, we are honoring the mission and commitment of *Contemporary Aesthetics* as well.

The issue consists of fourteen essays that are organized into two parts. The first part includes general theoretical interpretations of the phenomenon, and the second part offers detailed analysis of specific case studies.

Theoretical analyses

Ossi Naukkarinen's opening article, "Variations in Artification," gives an overview of the recent artification discourse. What kinds of discussion and action can be gathered under the concept, and how are different versions related to each other? From where do they emerge and what do they reveal of ideas connected to art? These general issues are clarified by a particular focus on the ways art has been incorporated into business discourse. He suggests that the phenomenon can be interpreted from two perspectives: from that of the artified fields, and from the perspective of art.

Yrjö Sepänmaa's "Flows, Vortices, and Counterflows: Artification and Aestheticization in Chiasmatic Motion on a Möbius Ring" also focuses on various types of artification, identifying eight different versions. Moreover, Sepänmaa compares artification with its close neighbors, aestheticization and beautification, and their counterparts, de-aestheticization and uglification. Through their analysis, Sepänmaa draws a many-sided picture of the constantly changing roles of the arts and the aesthetic in our contemporary world.

Larry Shiner's "Artification, Fine Art, and the Myth of 'the Artist'" examines three different interpretations of artification: the decoration, transformation, and modification types. He argues that claims about artists and creativity related to artification are often based on widely accepted but misleading, conventional views about art and artists. Shiner supports his claim by examining examples that show how artful making is typically closer to the idea of craftsmanship than to the modern or post-romantic image of "the artist." He also suggests that when it comes to finding models and metaphors for innovation, businesses and other organizations could better draw on such fields as science, engineering, design, or craft than on the world of high art.

"Everyday Aesthetics and Artification" by Yuriko Saito examines the relationship between everyday aesthetics and artification. She shows how artification can be a useful strategy in everyday aesthetics practice. However, the focus of her paper is on the ways in which artification can be misleading, inappropriate, or undesirable in our everyday aesthetic life. In particular, she explores the possibility that artification may compromise the very everydayness of everyday aesthetic experience as well as the importance of recognizing and making moral/political/social/ environmental judgment on the end served by various aesthetic practices in our everyday life.

Tom Leddy's "Aestheticization, Artification and Aquariums" distinguishes between a superficial sort of artification and a deep sort. Leddy, like Sepänmaa, situates artification within the larger question of aestheticization, and understands aestheticization in terms of recent psychological work on supernormal stimuli and of Virginia Postrel's defense of style and surface in the commercial world. He then explores this general point by addressing artification and aestheticization within aquariums and argues against scientific cognitivism, instead arguing in favor of aesthetic pluralism in relation to appreciating natural environments. Leddy concludes his essay with a reflection on ideals of artification and the role of the professional philosopher of art and aesthetics in contemporary life.

In her essay "Pending on Art," Pauline von Bonsdorff states that artification is often approached from a contextualist perspective where "art" refers to objects that are presented and appreciated within socially recognized art institutions. Yet alternative approaches are possible. Von Bonsdorff's article examines what a naturalist approach could mean for how we see art and artification processes. The naturalist approach developed here looks at the arts first as cultural *practices* that evolve together with discourse but where discourse is not privileged over practice. By analyzing the evolutionary and onto-genetic origins of art and its function in all human cultures, and by describing the criteria of art as a cluster, naturalism opens the border between art and non-art. Von Bonsdorff suggests that with naturalism, we can ask whether some of the changes described as artification allows us to recognize art outside institutionally legitimized art worlds.

Aleš Erjavec's "Artification and the Aesthetic Regime of Art" discusses attempts to ascertain whether some common features can be found between artification and Jacques Rancière's aesthetics, especially his notion of the "aesthetic regime of art." Erjavec argues that Rancière's project of "art become life" can be employed as a common denominator of both theoretical frameworks, that is, of artification and of the aesthetic regime of art. Nonetheless, the art to which Rancière's notion is primarily applicable is different from the art in the traditional sense, which seems to form the empirical basis of the notion of artification. Erjavec points out these differences and thus clarifies the relationship between artification, Rancière's aesthetics, and certain traditional understandings of art.

The theoretical part of this volume concludes with Roberta

Shapiro's and Nathalie Heinich's "When is Artification?" which analyzes transformation processes where non-art turns into art. They argue that it is important to clarify what people do and how they do it, the things they use, the places they go, the persons they interact with, the things they say, the norms they abide by, and how, through this nexus of action and discourse, people do or make things that gradually come to be defined as works of art. Such processes are simultaneously symbolic, material, and contextual. For Shapiro and Heinich, artification is a process of social change through which new objects and practices emerge and by which social relationships and institutions are transformed. Thus, for them, the term 'artification' really refers to processes where certain things turn into art proper rather than into something "like art," which is the way the term is defined for this volume and the sense in which it is used by others in this volume. However, since it is often difficult to make a clear distinction between the two processes, we believe that including their differently-oriented discussion helps enrich our overall understanding of the concept.

Case studies

The second part of the volume devoted to case-study opens with Yrjänä Levanto's essay entitled "... and I'd look at my hands and think of Lady Macbeth... ." This title is a quote from Bruce Chatwin, whose highly personal views on art, the art world, and art history form the subject matter of Levanto's essay. Chatwin developed an approach that differed from established art-historical writing and sought to have things considered as art that had not previously been considered as such. From Chatwin's viewpoint, one possibility for a special kind of artification was to "smuggle" new material into the existing art system. Levanto focuses on Bruce Chatwin's enthusiasm about André Malraux and his ideas about *Le Musée Imaginaire* and also makes use of Chatwin's interest in Heinrich Wölfflin's idea of *Kunstgeschichte ohne Namen*, art history without names. Levanto analyzes in details Chatwin's *One Million Years of Art*, one of his most enduring achievements in this area.

The second essay of this part is Stephen A. R. Scrivener's and Su Zheng's "Projective Artistic Design Making and Thinking: The Artification of Design Research." The essay starts from the notion that the introduction of artistic ways of thinking and doing into non-art domains, such as business, typically happens because the host domain recognizes that art has something to offer of value that it lacks. However, it is by no means easy to establish exactly what it is that art actually does have to offer. In their paper, they approach this question by examining problems encountered in what might be called the "researchification" of artistic design. Following an historical and experiential account of the problematic conjunction of artistic design and research, they conclude that the projective making and thinking strategies of artistic design offer something of value not only to the artification of research but also to artification in general.

In her essay "Artification in Natural History Museums," Kaisa Mäki-Petäjä points out that museum exhibitions have changed considerably over recent decades, concurring with a rise of a

general movement of aestheticization in the Western culture. She claims that this is usually a result of an attempt to make the exhibitions more appealing but also has to do with the intention to communicate certain type of information, especially of an ethical and affective kind. From her point of view, artification that is related to this more general aestheticization appears to be in conflict with the science-based purposes of these exhibitions. The question is, does science and scientific knowledge, or the viewer's position on and understanding of it, change when it is presented and experienced as art or as art-like?

Susann Vihma's "Artification for Well-being– Institutional Living as a Special Case" also deals with design issues. She reminds us that nowadays millions of people live in institutional residences that significantly differ from their homes, and these residences are typically designed in a certain way. Her article looks more closely into the quality of these habitations and points out some critical characteristics of them. One of the salient questions circles around the concept of homeliness, which is the main objective for realizing institutional living in many countries. Artification is seen as a means for achieving a homely atmosphere, in addition to stimulating the inhabitants and the staff. Vihma suggests that the conception of artification as a *process* would support measures to improve the milieu and help to meet the many divergent interests regarding the institutional habitat.

Kari Korolainen's "Artification and the Drawing of Distinctions: an Analysis of Categories and Their Uses" relates the artification discussion to home atmospheres as well. Yet, his main point is to examine in detail how we actually distinguish between phenomena such as art, decoration, and furnishing within our ordinary conversational contexts. The interview specimens are examined by adapting the ethnomethodologically oriented method of Membership Categorization Analysis. The results indicate that the speakers rely heavily on the context of the interview situation and also use flexible logical means, such as conditioning and comparison, to make the discussed issues more comprehensive. There is not one single conception of art or artification but several, and they tend to change contextually.

The volume concludes with Matti Tainio's "Artification of Sport– The Case of Distance Running," by opening yet another, presently very popular perspective on the phenomenon. Tainio deals with the possibilities of artification in the world of sport using distance running as an example. Sport is seen as one specific strand in the history of physical culture that has strong traditions but also possibilities to develop something new, and Tainio tracks such changes. Sports were first defined mostly as competitive activities but, by end of the twentieth century, its significant part became devoted to seeking fitness and certain experiences. Here, artification played a role in bringing about this transformation. Tainio also shows how, through the developments of contemporary visual arts, sports have become a possible medium of the arts.

Finally, we wish to thank Academy of Finland that provided funding for the research project *Artification and Its Impact on*

Art (www.artification.fi) that made this publication possible. We also want to thank our universities, Aalto University School of Art, Design and Architecture and Rhode Island School of Design, for their support. This volume would not have been possible without the generous support of Arnold Berleant, the Editor of *Contemporary Aesthetics*, who, along with his staff, provided extensive editing work. We are truly grateful for their work in preparing the publication of this volume. But above of all, we are most grateful to the authors of the essays.

Ossi Naukkarinen,
Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture
ossi.naukkarinen@aalto.fi

Yuriko Saito
Rhode Island School of Design
ysaito@risd.edu

Published on April 5, 2012.