

INTERNATIONAL LEXICON OF AESTHETICS

ARTIFICATION

by Roberta Dreon

(First published March 1, 2018)

It. *Artificazione*; Fr. *Artification*; Germ. *Verkunstung*; Span. *Artificación*. The term is a recent neologism derived from the verb “to artify”, dating back to the mid-17th century – the Oxford Dictionary ascribes its earliest use to the Duchess of Newcastle (?1623-1673). The verb has a variety of meanings: to decorate and beautify (also with an ironic sense) to make something artificial, to turn something into art, and to improve one’s environment and life through art, but also to expand experiences and enrich the world through artistic actions and creativity. The substantive form ‘artification’ appeared within scientific debate at the beginning of the 21st century and is currently used in many areas, to signify the processes or/and the results of artifying practices and behaviors. These can consist in behaviors and processes of art making, in the transformation of something that is not art into something that is acknowledged as being artistic, or even in the application of artistic techniques and approaches to non-artistic objects and contexts.

THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

The introduction of the word ‘artification’ is relatively recent and basically comes from the academic debates within three independent fields of inquiry: the investigations into the evolutionary origins of art in natural anthropology (A), the sociology of art (B), and the current philosophical trend of so-called everyday aesthetics (C).

(A) The concept of ‘artification’ was originally developed by Ellen Dissanayake, who used it for the first time in a 2001 paper within the debate on the evolutionary origins of art. The term was proposed as a more refined version of her previous expression ‘making special’, introduced in 1982, to illustrate a specifically human disposition to intensify and deliberately make an event, situation or object salient through an intentional manipulation of its ordinary features.

Dissanayake’s approach to artification is characterized by a basic naturalist stance, emphasizing the narrowness of the dominant Western idea of art – as a separate realm of purely aesthetic values, basically purposeless and functionless, as well as offered to disinterested contemplation (Dissanayake 1992:39). Furthermore, Dissanayake adopted an ethological approach to the arts, by considering them as particular kinds of behaviors instead of focusing primarily on works of art as objects.

According to Dissanyake, artifying is the deliberate use of proto-aesthetic operations that can be found originally in mother-infant interactions, where a formal elaboration of the ordinary features of a conversation takes place spontaneously and unconsciously. Dissanayake sees “aesthetic incunabula” in the use of vocalizations and motherese, the repetition of expressions, the emphasizing of one’s voice tone and timbre, the exaggerating of facial expressions and bodily movements, multimodal reciprocal perception, rhythmical entrainment, and mutual attunement. From an ontogenetic perspective, they represent the first appearance of the basic alterations characterizing artifying behaviors, such as the simplification or formalization, repetition, exaggeration, elaboration and manipulation of expectations (Dissanayake 2013). Phylogenetically, these formal features can be seen as a development of non-human ritualized behaviors, where ordinary movements with a practical function – such as self-grooming or the fluttering of wings – are spontaneously altered and exaggerated in order to attract the attention of pairs in special situations (Dissanayake 2001).

According to this view, proto-aesthetic operations played an adaptive function in early interactions between human mothers and human neonates, who are structurally immature at birth. Reciprocally attuned, stylized behaviors help establish and reinforce intimate social bonds and draw attention to the fragility of neonatal life. Properly artifying behaviors are intentional further elaborations of proto-aesthetic operations, generally taking place within the framework of ritualized practices and ceremonies, where all bystanders must know that something particularly important is taking place.

(B) A very different concept of artification has been developed in the sociology of art, originally by Roberta Shapiro (Shapiro 2004) and later by Shapiro and Nathalie Heinich (Shapiro & Heinich 2012). In this field, artification is understood as a social change and describes the processes of transforming non-artistic objects, actions and practices into artistic ones. These changes occur both on a symbolic level and in practical contexts. Consequently, artifying practices are both material processes and discursive transformations, which include legitimation (i.e., the acknowledgement that something belongs to the realm of the high arts) among its possibilities.

Shapiro and Heinich are interested in mapping contemporary practices of art making as changes occurring in a general context where art has been developed as a domain different from craftsmanship and assigned a superior value. However, this is a gradual process, whose limits and extensions are continually reshaped. Artification is so widespread in the current world and so important as a key for understanding it because since the 20th century the borders between art and non-art have been constantly re-defined, while the agents of legitimation have constantly increased.

Among the various practices constituting artification, the two French scholars list “extracting or displacing a production from its initial context”, terminological changes, “legal consolidation”, the “individualization of labor” and the “intellectualization of practices” (Shapiro & Heinich 2012).

The two scholars contend that “the advent of the very notion of art” in the 18th century and “the elevation of a professional group of painters to that of high-status artists” (Shapiro & Heinich 2012) in the Renaissance should be considered as the paragon for current artification processes. Nonetheless, artification takes place in many additional fields beyond craftsmanship. It can emerge within the spheres of industry, as in the case of film, of entertainment, as in the case of video-games, and of technology, as in the case of architecture. Moreover, there are situations where processes of artification find hindrances or remain open-ended, as in the case of gastronomy or fashion.

In this field there is a strong tendency to consider artification a political function. Artification processes can play a part in politics as a means to broaden the number of people who have access to the fruition of art, as well as to affirm the right to self-expression of every individual or social group.

(C) Finally, the term “artification” was used by a group of Finnish scholars – Ossi Naukkarinen, Yrjänä Levanto, and Susann Vihma – who published a collected volume which took its title from the Finnish word for

artification, "Taiteistuminen". The general meaning of the word has been summed up by Ossi Naukkarinen as referring 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 acting" (Naukkarinen 2012), and yet does not turn out into a proper artistic object or event (Shiner 2012). Nonetheless, in the field of so-called everyday aesthetics, positions on this matter vary, especially with reference to the artification of organizational and management practices. In business literature, there is an increasing tendency to consider the arts and the ways in which artists operate as a possible solution to an ever-changing market, where complexity and uncertainty seem to be the main features. Creativity and innovation – which are supposed to be intrinsic to artistic production – appear as the best means to face such contemporary problems and managers are expected to learn abilities of this sort from artists. These assumptions are evidently problematic and have been discussed by many authors. Larry Shiner shows how this basic idea underlying the current business interest in the arts is connected to a simplistic idea of artistic procedures (Shiner 2012); Thomas Leddy emphasizes the connections between artification and aesthetization, as well as their ethical and political consequences (Leddy 2012), by affirming the need to discriminate between superficial forms of artification and deeper ways of artifying; Yuriko Saito argues "against the indiscriminate and uncritical adoption of artification" (Saito 2012), showing that this phenomenon confirms the power of the aesthetic to shape our lives and the kind of society we belong to.

Beyond this specific problem, the more general issue remains open of the connections between the different meanings of artification. Culturalistic and naturalistic meanings can be regarded as being completely independent from one another, and as implying conflicting views of the arts. Nonetheless, there could be also scope for combining the two perspectives, as suggested in a final note by Larry Shiner (Shiner 2012, Addendum).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- E.Dissanayake, *Aesthetic experience and human evolution*, "Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism", 41 (1982): 145-155.
- E.Dissanayake, *The core of Art. Making Special*, in *Homo Aestheticus. Where Art Comes From and Why*, University of Washington Press, 1992: 39-63.
- E.Dissanayake, *An Ethological View of Music and its Relevance to Music Therapy*, "Nordic Journal of Music Therapy", 10/2 (2001): 159-175.
- E.Dissanayake, *The Artification Hypothesis and Its Relevance to Cognitive Neuroscience, Evolutionary Aesthetics, and Neuroaesthetics*, "Cognitive Semiotics", 5 (2009): 148-173.
- E.Dissanayake, *The Deep Structure of Pleistocene Rock Art: The "Artification Hypothesis"*, in J. Clottes (ed.), *Pleistocene Art of the World*, Proceedings of IFRAO [International Federation of Rock Art Organizations] Congress, September 2010, Special number of "Préhistoire, Art et Sociétés, Bulletin de la Société Préhistorique, Ariège Pyrénées", 65-66 (2012): 1601-1611
- E.Dissanayake, *Born to Artify: The Universal Origin of Picturing*, in K.Sachs-Hombach & J.R.J.Schirra (eds.), *Origins of Pictures*, Cologne, Herbert von Halem, 2013.
- E.Dissanayake, *Genesis and Development of 'Making Special'*, "Rivista di estetica", 54 (2013): 83-98.
- Y.Levanto, O.Naukkarinen, S.Vihma (eds.), *Taiteistuminen*, Helsinki, Taideteollinen korkeakoulu, 2005.
- T.Leddy, *Aesthetization, Artification, and Aquariums*, "Contemporary Aesthetics", Special Issue 4 (2012).
- O.Naukkarinen, *Variations in Artification*, "Contemporary Aesthetics", Special Issue 4 (2012).

Y.Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics and Artification*, "Contemporary Aesthetics", Special Issue 4 (2012).

L.Shiner, *Artification, Fine Art, and the Myth of 'the Artist'*, "Contemporary Aesthetics", Special Issue 4 (2012).

R.Shapiro, *Qu'est-ce que l'artification?*, in *XVIIème Congrès de l'Association internationale de sociologie de langue française*, "L'individu social", Tours, 2004.

R.Shapiro & N.Heinich (eds.), *De l'artification. Enquêtes sur le passage à l'art*, Paris, EHESS, 2012.

R.Shapiro & N.Heinich, *When is Artification?*, "Contemporary Aesthetics", Special Issue 4 (2012).