

Artification and the Ontology of Art

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ABSTRACT. The aim of this paper is to show that the ontology of artworks, as traditionally understood, may draw valuable theoretical inspiration from the latest manifestations of artistic activities which often go beyond art traditionally recognised as such by the institutional art world. Artification — that is combining art with non-art — is an example of this phenomenon. The goal is achieved in three steps. First, the concept of artification is presented and clarified. I analyze Ossi Naukkarinen's definition of artification and reformulate it in a more clear manner by establishing necessary and sufficient conditions for artification's occurrence. Second, the structure of artified objects is revealed and motivated by comparing them with artworks involving non-art elements. As a result, it is argued that the artified objects gain their art-like status due to a physical and aesthetic integrity with the initial artworks. Finally, the last step provides information how the consideration over artification is useful and inspiring for the ontology of traditional artworks. I list and justify two such inspirations: (i) possibility of substantial change of artworks over time, and, (ii) reconsideration of what is artwork's matter and differentiate it from artwork's medium.

I. Introduction

The ontology of art is a subfield of analytical aesthetics which aims to provide information about the way in which works of art exist and last. It often draws on the findings of general metaphysics, epistemology or theory of culture. The aim of this essay is to show that the ontology of works of art, as traditionally understood, may draw valuable inspiration from the latest manifestations of artistic activities which often go beyond art traditionally recognised as such by the institutional art world. Artification, that is combining art with non-art, is an example of this phenomenon.

This paper consists of three parts. The first part will present the concept of artification, and the second one will be devoted to explicating the

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relationship between artworks and artfied objects as well as its consequence for aestheticisation. In the last part several issues will be presented which are related to the ontology of art and which take on a new dimension as a result of discussions about artification.

2. Concept of Artification

2.1. First, it should be established what artification exactly is. The best explanation of this term has been provided by Ossi Naukkarinen who gave the following definition of artification in his recent article (2012, p. 1):

The neologism "artification" 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 take influences from artistic ways of thinking and acting. It refers to processes where art becomes mixed with something else that adopts some features of art.

One could give many examples of different kinds of artification. For instance, sport which is becoming increasingly similar to art is a classic manifestation of this phenomenon, as well as urban graffiti. Also, the artification of business and the education system (for example, Aalto University in Helsinki) or health care is often mentioned in this context.

The above-mentioned definition of artification requires, however, to be slightly more specific if it is to be fully useful in further discussion about the ontology of art.

2.2. Firstly, let us agree that Naukkarinen's definition amounts to two following theses. Object¹ x is artfied when:

- (1) x is not a work of art;
- (2) x combines the elements of art and non-art.

These theses are conditions by means of which the concept of artification is defined. Naukkarinen does not, however, explicitly characterise

¹ It should be remember that this name may denote many entities such as physical objects (concrete things), events, processes, etc.

these conditions. If his definition only expresses the view that (1) and (2) are necessary conditions for artification to occur, then it seems that its explanatory power is too weak. It is because there might exist another necessary condition for artification to occur which was not mentioned in the definition and which we do not know about, for example, the context in which a potentially artified object is presented or received.

On the other hand, the introduction of a neologism means nothing else than formulating a stipulative definition which is required to list such conditions which will allow for using the new term in a language relatively faultlessly. This is why it seems that conditions (1) and (2) cannot only be sufficient conditions for artification to occur. Because what is the point of defining artification in such a way that there might exist signifieds it does not cover? For this reason I assume that Naukkarinen's definition is *ipso facto* a definition of equivalence which takes on the following form:

- (3) Artification occurs if and only if the conjunction of conditions (1) & (2) occurs.

Therefore, the above-mentioned definition does contain necessary and sufficient conditions for artification to occur.

2.3. Secondly, in his article Naukkarinen rightly observes that the concept of artification assumes prior existence of a certain definition of art. Indeed, each part of the definiendum (3) contains a reference to the concept of art so if there was no definition of art, its wording (3) would be uninformative. Naukkarinen does not, however, give any concrete definition of art because, if I understood his intentions correctly, the definition of artification itself should remain neutral in relation to various definitions of art. In other words, artification conceptually assumes the existence of a concept of art but it does not have an influence on how we should define art itself. Although formulating such a neutral definition is a good move, it seems that we are able to say something about the concept of art, the existence of which is assumed as part of the concept of artification. My personal belief is that it implicitly assumes that autonomy² is a necessary

² It might be about two ways of understanding the concept of autonomy. Firstly, it could refer to ontological autonomy which amounts to the thesis that objects of some

condition in a definition of art. It is only when objects of art are clearly “isolated” from the objects of non-art that we can talk about an explanatorily interesting definition of artification. It is only due to the strict division between art and non-art that artified objects can be “between” this and that and still not qualify as either works of art or objects (activities, events) of everyday use.

2.4. The last thing that should be made more specific here as regards the concept of artification is its relation to aestheticisation. Aestheticisation is usually understood as a process aimed at adding certain positive aesthetic properties to some object which does not have such properties. For example, aestheticisation of a flat might mean putting fresh flowers there, painting the walls in vivid colours, etc. When establishing the relation of artification to aestheticisation, Naukkarinen (2012, p. 4) states that “artification can be a special case of aestheticization”. Tomas Leddy (2012) is of a similar opinion – he differentiates between two types of artification: shallow and deep. It is the former that he identifies with aestheticisation processes because it is about taking on aesthetic properties which are characteristic of artworks by an artified object.

The belief that some (the majority) of the instances of artification are also instances of aestheticisation is quite intuitive. Such an approach to the subject matter seems to support the definition of works of art as artefacts exemplifying a particular array of (rare) aesthetic properties. Nevertheless, it is not the only acceptable way of perceiving relations between these phenomena. The next part of the paper provides some more information about the relationship between artification and aestheticisation.

kind are structurally (ontologically) separate from objects of other kinds. According to this thesis, works of art would be ontologically different from, for example, objects of everyday use. Secondly, it could refer to epistemological autonomy which means that objects of some kind are differentiable from objects of other kinds. For instance, objects of art would be discernible from other objects because of some (visible) properties. These two kinds of autonomy do not necessarily entail each other – therefore, they are independent from each other. Artification seems to assume that art (or works of art) is at least epistemologically autonomous.

3. Art and Non-Art: Artworks and Artified Objects

Let us now go on to the fundamental question, namely of specifying the nature of artified objects. As has already been emphasized, the relationship between institutionally recognised art and non-art is a crucial issue regarding the concept of artification. The structure of artified objects can be fully shown by comparing them with works of art which have non-aesthetic properties (ostensively not considered as art).

3.1. Let us analyse the two following works.

The first one is an untitled installation made by an Azerbaijan artist, Rashad Alakbarov. He is known for using shadows of everyday objects to create ephemeral landscapes and portraits.

He used a similar strategy to create a work in 2011. Collections of empty bottles and specific lighting produce the effect of a man's portrait. The theoretical message communicated by this artwork seems to be quite clear. What we call "art" emerges from everyday life or, to put in another way, works of art can even be made from a handful of rubbish.

The second work of art tells a similar story. A Russian-based duo, Mi-Mi Moscow, used frogs in a number of their installations. As an example, we will present a sculpture titled "Siberian Postman" created in 2005.

The piece consists of a hand made from gypsum which was decorated with a ring shaped like an airship. A living frog has been attached to its gondola. It all gives the impression that the frog is floating or flying thanks to the aircraft which has been set in motion by a human.

Although works of art, as we often think, aim to have a meaning for humans, we can use non-human elements in them. As the installation's authors said: "This project refers to people, frogs beings only actors".

For the purpose of this essay it is not necessary to fully explain the above-mentioned artworks. What I want to emphasize is that non-art elements (the bottles, frog) used in them can qualify as art (and, indeed, become art) because of their crucial importance for the artworks' structure.³

³ Here I would like to point to two facts. Firstly, I have adopted a tacit hypothesis that each element of a finished (see Hick 2008) work of art is classified as art itself. Secondly, it is obvious that every work of art (e.g. a painting) can be created thanks to certain elements which are not recognised as art (e.g. paints, canvas). What I mean is that an

Hence, it is hard to interpret these artworks without those elements.⁴ However, it would be an exaggeration to say that the transformation from non-art to art added any aesthetics properties to the bottles or frog. From the perspective of the realm of aesthetics they are the same as before they were transformed into art.⁵

3.2. We will now move on to artfied objects. To the best of my knowledge, the most suitable example of such objects can be found in street art.

Let us consider an artefact created in 2010 by a famous street artist, Swoon. She often uses public space to draw attention to problems of the local community. Leaving that behind, it is tempting to follow the changes in the course of this artwork's existence. In picture 3 (see Appendix) we can see it as it was originally brought into existence by Swoon.

One of the most significant features of street artworks is that they undergo constant change in public space (see esp. Riggle 2010), not only in terms of their perception by people but also due to interaction with the forces of nature. For instance, the above-mentioned work is partly overgrown by ivy (spring 2011).

However, this change was not counted as the artwork's disintegration. In contrast, a discussion started among the viewers on whether the ivy had been a part of the artwork during the process of its creation. As we saw, it was not.

aesthetic object such as a work of art may contain clearly distinct elements that do not have aesthetic properties and/or are not commonly treated as a material used for making works of art (rubbish, living creatures, etc.). Aesthetic elements of such a work take on their full meaning in combination with non-aesthetic elements (as well as a particular aesthetic significance in visual contrast to those elements).

⁴ One of methodological approaches in the ontology of artworks is that such ontology should have a descriptive character. In this case it means that the ontology of a given work of art should be determined based on the best interpretative conditions (compare Kraut, 2010).

⁵ What is meant here is obviously the classical conception of aesthetic properties according to which they are visually perceptible and discernible from non-aesthetic properties. It does not mean, however, that the whole work of art (and not only its non-aesthetic elements) did not change aesthetically. It can be said that the visual tension between aesthetic and non-aesthetic elements is also a certain aesthetic "superstructure". This agrees with the view that what is aesthetic is always made because of something non-aesthetic (see, e.g. Zangwill, 2008).

But does that automatically mean that the ivy is not a part of the artwork now? Please note that, for obvious reasons, the ivy is an integral part of the space occupied by the artwork. We cannot ignore the ivy, nor can we remove it without destroying some pieces of the work; we cannot even experience the work without appreciating the ivy, etc. In addition, the ivy is an aesthetic supplement to the biological motifs used in the artwork.

For these reasons we would say (as art appreciators) that the ivy has become a visual part of Swoon's work. It happened because the ivy was artified. So, it was intentionally recognised⁶ as non-art after the work had been created and then counted as an art-like object because of its physical and aesthetic integration with the work. Of course, artification does not result in creating a new, independent artwork. Artified objects gain their art-like status due to their connection with original works of art.

3.3. Now, we can roughly compare the artworks that have been presented with artified objects. Both groups consist of some non-art elements which have become art or art-like objects. But there are differences between them. First, when non-art is intentionally incorporated into an artwork by its author, then artified objects have non-art elements in them which were not intended by the author.⁷ Second, although non-art elements in artworks become art because of their theoretical valuable contribution to the meaning and interpretation of the whole work of art, they are not required to have any special aesthetic properties. On the contrary, candidates for artification may become art-like due to their aesthetic integration with the initial work.

The above juxtaposition seems to illustrate the general relationship between artification and aestheticisation. In the opinion of Naukkarinen and Leddy, as cited above, artification is perceived as a process lying within the broad spectrum of aestheticisation. It seems, however, that this could be approached in a slightly different manner. Let us note that the elements of non-art were counted as a part of a work of art not because of their

⁶ The element of conscious recognition of a certain object as non-art and its subsequent association with art (here – with a work of art) seems to be necessary.

⁷ They are often “added” by the recipients of a work of art. If they had been “added” by the author, then we could always say they are simply a part of a given work and not its artified element.

aesthetic properties but because of the recipients' cognitive and interpretative interests. In other words, ascribing aesthetic properties to certain objects does not mean that they will qualify as works of art. Paradoxically, the above-mentioned examples of artified objects seem to confirm this thesis. Ivy was artified not only because of its unity with the work of urban art but also because of its semantic and physical integration with it.

Artification and aestheticisation, even though they often go hand by hand, are symptoms of different processes.⁸ Aestheticisation simply means enriching some object with aesthetic properties, whereas artification may be associated with aestheticisation but it may also go beyond it. Artification means adopting practices that are typical of producing objects of art which do not always have an aesthetic character. For artified objects, this means, first of all, being connected to some existing works of art. This connection may occur both at the physical and purely conceptual level. To put it plainly, aestheticisation is a cultural mechanism whereas artification is both a cultural and institutional process. This is because there must be some institutional frames for art within which (against which?) artification will be taking place.

4. Inspiration for the Ontology of Art

Here I would like to point to the potential inspiration for the ontology of works of art, as traditionally understood, which could be derived from the discussion about artification (even from such a general discussion which has been provided above). The existence of such inspiration can be justified by at least two facts.

Firstly, if artification and the ontology of art really do refer to the same concept of art, then the phenomenon of artification is an especially sensitive barometer of all changes taking place in the world of art. What I mostly mean here is changes in the connotation of the concept of art. As artified objects *cannot* be works of art by definition, they testify to certain

⁸ Naturally, artification may occur *thanks to* aestheticisation. In such a case, however, these are not identical processes (if only because of the lack of temporal correlation between them).

conceptual limitations which are imposed on works of art by the art world (or artistic critique). Analyses carried out as part of the ontology of art should take into account the changing conception of what (or under what conditions) can be a work of art.

Secondly, artification reveals the complexity of processes such as aestheticisation or the commercial/public dimension of works of art. It seems important for ontology to take into account the wide range of theoretical fields in which works of art function. I would like to mention the following basic kinds of inspiration that artification provides for the ontology of art.

4.1. We gain some information regarding the existence and changes works of art undergo over time. As for the analysed street artwork made by Swoon, its matter became partially extended. This extension has a conscious and temporal character. Its main aim is to obtain the best possible interpretation of the work.⁹ It can be said that Swoon's work has an open character, that is to say:

(4) x is an ontologically open artwork if and only if: (i) x is created at moment t_1 by agent A ; (ii) at t_1 x has a defined¹⁰ matter m ; (iii) at moment t_2 agent B ¹¹ "complements" x 's matter by "an addition" m^* ; (iv) at moment t_3 x loses "an addition" m^* .

Agent B complements the matter of a work of art x having interpretative interests in mind. It is worth noting that B must have some good reason for which it "complements" x 's matter with an addition.¹²

The situation is slightly different when an artwork's matter has been permanently extended. In this case we would say that a work of art is ontologically undetermined. Its definition is as follows:

⁹ It is worth noting that, in this case, the omission of an artified object (iv) is almost impossible because of its physical integration with the original work.

¹⁰ By saying that a certain work of art consists of specific matter I mean that there is a conjunction of two factors. Firstly, a work of art consists of particular material and, secondly, it has a particular scope, i.e. the spatio-temporal area it occupies.

¹¹ It may be one person or some group of people (e.g. critics or viewers).

¹² As we already saw, it could be the impossibility to interpret/experience a work without an element which "extends" the work. It may be also related to some institutional frames within which an artwork is received.

(5) x is an ontologically undetermined artwork if and only if: (i) x is created at moment t_1 by agent A ; (ii) at t_1 x has a defined matter m ; (iii) at moment t_2 agent B “complements” x ’s matter by “an addition” m^* ; (iv) since moment t_2 m^* has become a permanent part of m .

An object entitled “Mermaid” made by the above-mentioned artist, Swoon, is an example of works of art understood in this way. The work is a mural situated on a metal window shutter and a part of brick wall. What strikes the eye first is the unusual surface on which the artist made her work. On the one hand, there is a shutter which is an object of utility. On the other hand, the shutter itself and the surrounding wall had been subjected to various artistic “experiments” before (one can notice traces of graffiti, fragment of a painting depicting a car, etc.). However, this matter, despite the seemingly defined material and scope, gradually changes over time. This “extension” is caused by “visual comments” (such as additional paintings made on the work’s surface, inscriptions, corrosion of the window shutter, etc.) added by “Mermaid’s” subsequent recipients. These physical “additions” m^* which interfere with the original matter m gradually become an inseparable part of “Mermaid’s” interpretation (if only because the work is not available in its state from moment t_1 any more). Thus, a work’s matter becomes permanently extended.

Obviously, at the moment a work of art is being extended, artfied objects (e.g. other inscriptions, graffiti) cease to be art-like and simply become a full-blooded part of an artwork. At this point we can see how artification may become a starting point for traditionally understood but not traditionally formed works of art.

4.2. This leads us directly to the question of what constitutes artworks’ matter. The opinions expressed so far regarding the debate about the ontology of works of art focused on what ontological category works of art belong to. The usual answer is that they are physical objects (e.g. Rohrbaugh 2003) or abstractions (e.g. Dilworth 2007), or a kind of pluralism is proposed (e.g. Irvin 2008). Although many of those analyses make an incredibly valuable contribution to the ontology of art, it is very hard to come across a text which directly deals with the question of what artworks’

matter is. Such a state of affairs may be caused by the fact that the definition of an artwork's matter seems banal:

(6) Artwork x 's matter is what and only what x consists of.¹³

It is usually believed that each kind of work of art has its own, characteristic material (that is, matter), for example, paintings consist of canvas and paint, sculptures of stone or metallic alloy, etc.¹⁴ Additionally, definition (6) is intuitively understood as referring to the moment when an artwork is created by an artist, which means that a work's elements (namely matter) are fully formed at the moment the work is created by an artist.

Artification motivates us to think over the question of artworks' matter. Let us notice that everyday objects are artified not only via physical interference with the material they are made from (e.g. aestheticisation) but also because they are given various sociocultural functions which are ascribed to a work of art.¹⁵ Elements that make up an artwork are not only its properties resulting from using a particular material (e.g. size, weight, texture) but also (if not primarily) properties derived from the cultural reception of a work of art, e.g. originality or being groundbreaking.¹⁶ It is worth noting that some features of this kind are ascribed to an artwork only after some time has passed from the moment they were created.¹⁷

¹³ Establishing what matter particular works of art consist of is not a trivial problem. It seems that a satisfactory aesthetic judgement about x can be made, or critics' review of it can be given, only if the whole of x ' matter has been taken into account.

¹⁴ It is slightly surprising that none of the researchers who are advocates of the thesis that works of art are non-identical to physical objects became interested in the question of art's matter (see, e.g. Margolis, 1974; Lamarque, 2010). Since, if a work of art (sculpture) is non-identical to its physical carrier (e.g. a piece of granite), then the question arises of *what* a work of art is made of. Solely establishing the ontological category which an artwork belongs to (e.g. an abstraction) does not seem to be a satisfactory answer.

¹⁵ This is what Leddy calls "deep artification": "Deep artification draws on features of art related to meaning, self-consciousness, reflection on one's culture, and exploration of the human condition" (Leddy, 2012).

¹⁶ Interestingly, an opponent of the idea that works of art change over time, Jerrold Levinson, seems to regard artworks' matter as something more than only the material they are made from. That is to say, when he talks about a change in a work of art (and not a change of interpretation!) he mostly means its semantic layer which is founded on a material but not made from it (compare Levinson, 1987).

¹⁷ It is often the case with the properties of being groundbreaking or original. When

That suggests that the relationship between a work of art and material should be investigated again.

4.3. With reference to what has just been said, the two following questions arise: What made it possible for the works of urban art modify their matter? Or, to put it better: What makes some works of art, and not others, able to change their matter over time?

One of the possible intuitive answers would be that it is an artist who, for example, by setting his/her work in a given context, determined the possibility of a change in the artwork's matter. Sherry Irvin (2008), among others, seems to hold such a view – she claims that, each time an artist creates a work of art, he/she specifies its “parameters”, that is its interpretative frames, which determine its ontological category.¹⁸ Although I sympathise with Irvin's stance, I cannot consider it to be a full explanation of phenomena that occur in the art world. Artification seems to indicate that recipients follow certain pragmatic interpretative procedures which have an influence on what they classify as a work of art.¹⁹ Of course, an artist has a considerable impact on how these cognitive interests are modified but he/she is not the only one. It is also curators and art critics that exert such an influence as they create normative frames²⁰ for the reception

the art world (critics, recipients) ascribes such properties to a specific work of art for the first time, then a critical judgement is made. However, we can say that, as the social reception of an artwork develops, these features become its part because it seems that, if they were not perceived, it would be impossible to culturally experience the artwork. (If, when evaluating Malevich's “A black square on a white background”, we did not take into account its groundbreaking properties, we would make an incomplete judgement about the work).

¹⁸ A consequence of such a view is, for example, the possibility that a work of art which *looks* like a physical object will *in fact* be an abstraction (compare Irvin, 2008). However, an artist him-/herself also encounters certain limitations regarding the establishment of “parameters”, which Irvin does not pay attention to. For instance, if an artist wants to create a painting, the painting has to take on the form of a physical object. It seems that the art world (which is independent from the artist) also dictates some general normative rules regarding the way in which particular works of art should look (and exist).

¹⁹ We should remember that works of art are intentional entities, which means that the way in which they exist (partially) *depends* on how we imagine their existence.

²⁰ For example, through arranging the exhibition space in a given way, which has an impact on the meaning of a work of art (see, e.g. Putnam, 2001).

of works of art. Thus, they also modify the cognitive interest of a work's recipients. Artification processes seem to show that an ontological category a work of art belongs to is determined by many processes of purely social nature and, in order to understand them, one should stop thinking about a work of art as an "isolated" object.

4. Conclusion

The main aim of this essay was to show that the studies of artification can creatively contribute to developing the ontology of works of art, as understood in a traditional way. The findings of this essay are the following: (a) the concept of artification was clarified and distinguished from aestheticisation, (b) recipients' cognitive interest was indicated to be a factor facilitating the formation of works of art, and (c) the need to investigate the question of artworks' matter was identified.

Although some of the hypotheses in this paper may be slightly exaggerated (e.g. the question of the spontaneous "extension" of works of urban art) or require a more thorough analysis, it seems that it has been demonstrated that obtaining the ontological status of "being an artwork" depends on factors such as the act of creation and social reception, the power of which is fully highlighted by artification.

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