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When is Artification?

Roberta Shapiro & Nathalie Heinich

Abstract

How do people do or make things that come to be seen as works of art? In other words, when is there artification? The answer to this question is simultaneously symbolic, material, and contextual. It has to do with meanings, objects, interaction, and institutions. We seek to define not what art is nor how it should be considered, but how and under what circumstances it comes about by way of methodical observation and inquiry in a variety of fields. Circus acrobats, breakdancers, fashion designers, chefs, graffiti artists, printers, photographers, and jazz musicians are some of the examples we explore. This pragmatic and empirical perspective enables us to present a typology of forms of artification and examine its sources as well as the questions of de-artification and obstacles to artification.

Key Words

art, artification, artists, categories, legitimation, pragmatic sociology, recognition, social change, valuation

1. Addressing an old issue in a new way

Our title pays homage to Nelson Goodman's famous article of 1977 "When is Art?"^[1] It is indicative of the descriptive turn in analytical philosophy that was then taking place in the realm of aesthetics. By denying that art can be defined by its essence, Goodman argues that art is a category that must be defined by reference to context and usage.

As sociologists we are very sympathetic to this perspective as it redefines things and beings in terms of process and context. In posing the question "When is artification?", we would like to take the pragmatic stance a step further. In our own professional creed, this has a specific consequence. It puts action to the forefront, both in its own right and as a gauge of the values and meanings that are relevant for the actors. In taking this stance, we also focus on how art is engaged in social change on a par with many other social activities.

Seeking to understand what art people cherish and admire has long been an important purview of the sociology of the arts. Although this is certainly of interest, it is not our main concern. We take a materialistic view and first observe 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, and the norms they abide by. How, through this nexus of

action and discourse, do people do or make things that gradually come to be defined as works of art?

There is no straightforward answer to this question. The solution is to be found on many interrelated levels and is simultaneously symbolic, material, and contextual. Art emerges over time as the sum total of institutional activities, everyday interactions, technical implementations, and attributions of meaning. Artification is a dynamic process of social change through which new objects and practices emerge and relationships and institutions are transformed. In order to understand this process, we must first describe it, and this may only be achieved by methodic observation and inquiry in the field. Thus, our stance is neither essentialist nor normative, but descriptive and pragmatic. We seek not to define what art is nor how it should be considered, but how and under what circumstances it comes about. We want to map the processes through which objects, forms, and practices are constructed and defined as artworks and see what consequences this emergence has. How do these processes develop? What specific actors and institutions are involved? How do they give birth to productions that are meaningful not only for specialized minority groups, such as artists, patrons, curators, and sociologists, but to the point that the status of these productions as art becomes common knowledge and goes unquestioned?

The paragon of such a social transformation is the advent of the very notion of art and the elevation of a professional group of painters to that of high-status artists, first in the royal courts of Renaissance Italy, then in France and all of Europe. Throughout the Middle Ages, sculptors and painters belonged to guilds and were part of the mechanical arts. They were craftsmen situated in the lower ranks of a very hierarchical social order. As they fought to gain independence from the guilds and thus be defined as practitioners of the liberal arts, they were likened to poets rather than manual workers.^[2] Their personal worth was gradually recognized and they gained status and prestige over a span of centuries. The modern system of the arts, based on conceptions of the artist as genius and the uniqueness of the aesthetic experience, was stabilized with new institutions devoted to the arts and the development of a specialized market controlled by intermediaries in the nineteenth century.^[3]

Since then, countless other groups of people, objects, and activities have undergone transformative evolutions that can be compared to this inaugural process. Until quite recently, it characterized the institutional arrangements of Western societies alone but has now expanded widely. Artification has continued and goes on before our very eyes. As sociologists, it is our job to conduct inquiries, and then analyze and shape data documenting these cases, and seek to understand their limitations. Thus we attempt to build a theory of artification as social change based on the greatest possible accumulation of empirical data.

A large part of the data we draw upon comes from original monographs discussed at the meetings of a research seminar we organized regularly in Paris from 2004 to 2008. Many of these are due to be published in a book on which this paper is

based.^[4] Other data come from our readings of the literature in sociology, anthropology, and cultural history. Overall, our materials constitute a corpus of research on changes affecting painting, printing, crafts, cartoons, graffiti, tribal art, outsider art, cult objects, national heritage, photography, cinema, theater, circus, breakdancing, magic, luxury fashion, gastronomy, and jazz, a seemingly motley collection of phenomena that we hope to demonstrate are, in fact, connected by a coherence we call artification.

In this paper we do not address substantively the questions mentioned previously; those are taken up in detail in the monographs. What follows is an attempt to theorize across the data to discover what the artification process is and is not, where it comes from, and how to classify its manifestations, before concluding with some thoughts about contrary trends such as de-artification.

2. What artification is not

Before proceeding further, a few words are in order about our conception of what artification is not. First, we do not use artification as a metaphor and thus disregard assertions comparing things to art or people to artists. Although the historical importance of the category of art explains the success of such comparisons, observation in the field has shown their practical impact to be minimal.^[5] The power of metaphors to institutionalize art is next to nil.

Second, our inquiry must be differentiated from recent research that focuses on specifically exclusive world views based on scholarly informed perceptions of art. By contrast, our work has a wider scope, including discourse and practice on both popular and cultivated levels. Thus, the problem of artification has little to do with "artialization," a term created by the philosopher Alain Roger to define a specialized world view that constructs nature into landscape through the perceptual framework of art.^[6] Likewise, we take Edouard Pommier's remarkable book about scholarly discourse on art in the Renaissance as one among many sources that document different types of change during that period.^[7]

Furthermore, our corpus does not include controversial cases that are part of an artified world, as are common in the field of contemporary art. Nor is our inquiry directly concerned with the sociology of taste. Indeed, our assumptions are shaped not by axiology, based on what value social actors attribute to things, but by pragmatic description. How does the whole roster of actors involved define these things?

Finally, and this is probably the most important distinction of all, artification is not to be confused with legitimation. This is a point we cannot stress enough. Despite an apparent similarity, the two concepts are quite different. Indeed, we contend that the concept of artification is a theoretical and empirical advance over legitimation, and we would like to demonstrate that here.

The dominant legitimacy paradigm would have us study various gradings of value that are indicators of low culture versus high. This is not what we are addressing here. We direct our attention to a prior phase during which non-art is

transformed and constructed into art. This is why our corpus does not include material about arts commonly considered low-ranking, such as naïve painting or pop art, or the process of relabeling that led to their recognition as high art, or monographs, such as Howard Becker's, about marginal artists and mavericks and their subsequent acknowledgement as legitimate artists.^[8] We also bypass a large portion of the sociology of art and culture, such as the Bourdieusian theory of domination and cultural theory. Bourdieu used the concept of legitimation (or canonization) as a touchstone for his work on the artistic field, while research in cultural theory tends to insist on symbolic boundaries and hierarchies. The main limitation of these important works is their near-exclusive focus on classification and hence their difficulties in explaining change.

The paradigm of artification we propose puts the emphasis on material aspects and concrete situations of change in a dynamic and pragmatic orientation based on the observation of actions, relationships, material, and organizational modifications. Indeed, we take artification to be an all-encompassing process of change, both practical and symbolic, of which legitimation is merely a part and a consequence. The attribution of meaning, recognition, and legitimation are all results of concrete transformations. "Meaning is the consequence of activity."^[9]

In addition, the valuation of art creates a process of circular causation. The artification of an object necessarily brings about legitimation of that object. Conversely, the desire to secure legitimacy for a practice that someone deems unjustly undervalued may, in turn, spur a process of artification. Nevertheless, it remains not only that artification and legitimation are distinct processes, but that the former, rooted in materiality, encompasses the latter.

3. Processes of artification

So what *is* artification? We see artification as a process of processes. We have identified ten constituent processes: displacement, renaming, recategorization, institutional and organizational change, patronage, legal consolidation, redefinition of time, individualization of labor, dissemination, and intellectualization. Without entering into a full description and analysis of these ten processes nor addressing all of them, we will give a few brief examples.^[10]

Extracting or displacing a production from its initial context is a prerequisite for artification. This happened when jazz was first transcribed in musical notation, when film broke away from its initial site at fairs, when graffiti was photographed and published in books, and when breakdancers left the street for the stage.

Terminological change is a second modification. In the case of painting in France, the word *imagiers* (image makers) that designated craftsmen was progressively replaced by that of *artistes* during the eighteenth century. This example also highlights the institutional change seen in the shift from the guilds to the Royal Academy and changes in classification, such as the shift from the mechanical to the liberal arts and changes in the hierarchy of pictorial genres. Under the

Academy system, the king bestowed pensions on a very small elite of painters; now, the institutionalization of government grants provides for endowments. These support systems enhance the perception of an ontological difference between art and those activities deemed unworthy of such official monetary support. In France today, government support favors the artification of circus, magic, and breakdancing.

Legal consolidation is another important step. French painters confirmed their new status in the courts in the seventeenth century and writers and composers were granted intellectual property of their work in the nineteenth century. In the United States, legal decisions that culminated with the end of censorship restrictions in the 1960s furthered the artification of cinema.

Another significant process is the individualization of labor. As painting moved from the master's workshop to the painter's studio, it underwent a continuing process of individualization; by the nineteenth century, activity that was once collective progressively became solitary. When breakdancing first appeared on stage in France, most choreography was collective; today individual *auteurs* choreograph hip-hop ballets.

Finally, discursive reinforcement and the intellectualization of practice are an essential part of artification. Biographies of painters were first published in the Renaissance, art critique was first published in the eighteenth century, and academic art history developed dramatically during the nineteenth century. These elements intensified the growing trend toward the intellectualization of the relationship onlookers and painters have with paintings. In France, media discourse on breakdancing took an aesthetic turn by 1992, with journalists referring to art and art history rather than to the social and cultural traits of the dancers. In turn, the content of hip-hop ballets has become increasingly reflexive.

4. The many origins of artification

What are the spheres of social life in which conditions have proven to be the most favorable to artification? As we shall see, artificatory practices spring from multiple sources.

Craftsmanship comes to mind first. As we already mentioned and is now well known, painting served as the exemplar for the modern system of the arts based on the autonomy of the artist. The prerequisite for this was the refusal by painters to be considered menial laborers and their collective break from the craft guilds during the Renaissance period. Sculptors followed in their stride. Centuries later, traditional artisanship has again been the source from which arts and crafts emerged, as did photography in the 1800s and graphic arts in the 1900s. The path from craftsmanship to art implies professionalization, intellectualization, and a trend toward authorization, that is, the individualization of production. Objects are understood to express personal intention; they are nominal and original; and the maker's signature appears as a synthetic marker of these mechanisms.

Artification also emerges from industry. Film started as a modest endeavor in fairs and rapidly rose to the rank of a

million-dollar industry in the 1920s. Although there were attempts to make artistic films at the very onset of cinema, well before World War I, motion pictures began to be considered as art by the general public much later in the century. This happened first in Europe and then in the United States in the 1950s, when film directors progressively adopted new aesthetic norms before breaking away from the industrial studio system. Independent film production grew and directors gained greater control over the production process. Comparing professional critics' film reviews in the 1930s with reviews published forty years later, Shyon Baumann showed the change over time and how contemporary assessments of film are now informed by the perceptual framework of art.[\[11\]](#)

Video games are another industry that seems to be undergoing artification before our eyes. Some creators are famed individuals trained in major art schools, winning important distinctions (the three authors of video games dubbed *Chevaliers dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* by the French Minister of Culture in 2006), and their products are identified as coherent bodies of original work. Historically the products have gone the path from low-brow to middle-brow, from shoddy arcades haunted by adolescents to sophisticated games for adults in domestic environments. Critical discourse has developed in academia and in various media, and there is an ongoing scholarly discussion about the artistic nature of video games, not least in this journal.[\[12\]](#)

The spheres of leisure, fun, free time, travel, and tourism give rise to artification, as well. Photography as a "middle-brow art" studied by Pierre Bourdieu and associates[\[13\]](#) arose from pursuits such as these. To some degree this is also true of *art brut* and self-taught art.[\[14\]](#) Considering "tribal art" and "primitive art" as works of art in their own right has meant rejecting the perceptive framework that Western collectors of curios and travel souvenirs had long imposed.[\[15\]](#)

Entertainment is an important source of artification and many activities travel the path from entertainment to art. The first films were shorts shown at peep shows at fairs in the 1890s. Even after technological progress and organizational complexity lent the medium greater autonomy, for decades movies were considered coarse amusement completely devoid of artistic qualities. Similarly, jazz, magic, circus, and breakdancing were long defined as simple pastimes; they are now seen as performing arts. Jazz, in particular, underwent major transformations around World War II. Artistic complexity, the emergence of the virtuoso soloist, the growing importance of critical discourse, and other transformations contributed to the redefinition of jazz as art.[\[16\]](#) In recent years, magic, circus, and breakdancing have ceased to be defined as purely playful, childish endeavors and have integrated the canons of theatrical and choreographical representation.[\[17\]](#)

Similar mechanisms are at play in the visual arts. Comic books, once the sole province of children, have now morphed into elaborate "graphic novels," and some have secured eminent critical acclaim.[\[18\]](#) Graffiti has also become more refined, while involving a wider socio-demographical spread than at its inception, as well as engaging an array of

institutions in the art world, such as galleries, museums, and publishing houses. In all these instances, artification concurs with the social elevation, sophistication, and coming of age of both producers and consumers, the individualization of production, and the advent of the author. Works are evaluated in terms of objective criteria of "beauty"[\[19\]](#) rather than solely in terms of the subjective pleasure they provide, and this forms the basis for a novel experience in these spheres: aesthetic appreciation.

Several practices we have observed lie astride the spheres of leisure, showmanship, and sports. As a rule, practitioners of trapeze,[\[20\]](#) circus horseback-riding,[\[21\]](#) or breakdancing[\[22\]](#) must arrange their actions according to social conventions other than those that qualify as gymnastics or buffoonery if they seek to be defined as artists. Physical prowess, sheer virtuosity, or stark facetiousness are detrimental to the transfiguration of a practice into art. In theater as in sports, virtuosity must become an aesthetic, and gesture must command grace in order for the incorporated technique of *ars* or skilled making to turn into that accomplishment of beauty we call art. Magicians and circus routines become individualized and are attributed to the creative genius of specific actors; feats of dexterity are recast as creations and interpretations. Thus the consolidation of the improvised jazz solo in the 1940s consecrated widespread social recognition that black musicians possessed artistic sensitivity (called "soul").

Technique points to manual dexterity but it also signals the expertise necessary in maneuvering tools, machinery, and equipment. For it to be metamorphosed into art, technique usually must be made invisible. This is evident in the case of architecture and in "fine art crafts." Architecture was classified as a fine art in the various tables of knowledge drawn up during the eighteenth century.[\[23\]](#) But in the contemporary understanding of the word, neither architecture nor crafts can be said to be accomplishing a process of artification. Rather they are in a state of perpetual tension between art and technique, and are acknowledged as art (rather than *artes*) only to a degree. Béatrice Fraenkel, who interviewed the highly skilled printers of the Imprimerie Nationale in Paris in 1997 before it was dismantled, showed that limitations in both technique and the division of labor put insuperable obstacles to the artification of traditional type-setting.[\[24\]](#)

Photography gives an interesting example *a contrario*, in that one of the factors contributing to photography's promotion to the rank of art seems to rest on an at least a partial emancipation from technical constraints. Soon after the invention of the medium in 1839, photographers starting using soft focus, thus departing from the convention of clarity in representation. This particular method of producing blurred pictures came to signify the conventional means of conveying an artistic quality to the images.[\[25\]](#) Finally, new techniques in the mode of new devices give birth to novel artistic objects and practices, as research on phonographs,[\[26\]](#) video, and Internet art[\[27\]](#) has proven.

Artification also derives from science, at times intertwined with group interests. Heated public debate surrounded the

founding of the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. The political interests of the French central government, in particular of Jacques Chirac, President of the Republic from 1995 to 2007, locked opposing anthropologists and art historians in power struggles. The end result was the dismantling of the ethnological Musée de l'Homme founded in 1937 in favor of the Musée du Quai Branly and a new museological policy. The new museum exhibits as art such things as tools, trinkets, household items, and other like objects that the previous institution had defined as ethnographical artifacts.^[28] In the realm of contemporary art, museology is another example. As curators assert themselves as the authors of the exhibits they organize, this area of expertise shows a growing trend toward artification.^[29] Cookery is yet another instance in this sphere. Recent developments in physics and chemistry that derive from the food industry are essential sources of artification in contemporary *haute cuisine*, with the scientific rationalization of culinary production as the basis of *avant-garde* creations invented by chefs like Ferran Adrià, Pierre Gagnaire, and Heston Blumenthal.^[30]

Religion is an obvious fount of artification. But although the transformation of religious artifacts and activities into art has been studied abundantly in the case of Europe from Antiquity to the Renaissance, it is hardly acknowledged in other times and places, although an ongoing process of artification affects objects and practices of devotion in societies throughout the world. Frank Myers has shown how the complex transformation of ritual objects of Aboriginal peoples into Australian contemporary art represents the "hybrid collaboration of numerous agents."^[31] Similarly, Gilles Tarabout describes the metamorphoses of cult practices in southern India and their promotion to the status of art.^[32] In both instances, as in the case of the support granted by Canada to Inuit sculpture,^[33] political entities and national governments place high stakes on artification. Thus cultural productions that formerly were known only within the boundaries of small communities, and eventually to a few scholars and experts, are now art forms that are celebrated worldwide and have come to represent the status and identity of nation states. In an interesting contrast to these situations, Emilie Notteghem observed on an infinitely smaller scale the artification of cult objects in contemporary France. The process is complex (objects must be both desacralized and aestheticized), but here there are no strong community, economical, or political stakes. This may explain why artification is fragile in this case and why some objects she observed periodically regain their ritual status.^[34]

Artifacts designed for political purposes may be reconstructed as art when their primary function as agitprop begins to wane, as in the case of murals.^[35] The related sphere of social work has a longstanding history as a seat for trends toward artification. Community and social workers encourage their constituents to engage in various practices for reasons of social melioration. Some practices tend to become artified, such as graffiti,^[36] theater,^[37] modern dance,^[38] and breakdancing.^[39] The personal connections of certain social workers with the art world and their professional worldview concerning art as social good contribute to this trend.

Finally, misdemeanors or criminal acts may become engaged in a process of artification. Graffiti is a case in point.^[40] It is undergoing a complex process of sustainability, aestheticization, individualization, and legalization as its status changes progressively from vandalism to art.

In this section we have briefly reviewed the spheres of crafts, industry, leisure, entertainment, sports, technique, science, religion, politics, social work, and illegal practices. Hence, we observe that there are many parts of social life from which artification may derive (we have identified nearly a dozen) and that artification is not marginal, but a mechanism much stronger and diversified than we might have initially thought. So let us now turn to the specific ways in which this mechanism operates and observe the results that it yields.

5. A typology of artification and resistance to artification

We identify four types of artification: durable, partial, ongoing, and unattainable. The first type is simply what we define today as art, for it is, in fact, the outcome of a process of artification that has proven both comprehensive and enduring. This is the case in painting, already mentioned above. Let us add literature, music, and dance. These were already part of the liberal arts, and their makers did not go down as difficult a path as did painters and sculptors from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century in asserting their creative powers. Nevertheless, they did struggle at length for their autonomy, as Norbert Elias' study of Mozart illustrates so well.^[41] During the Enlightenment, artists of these core disciplines went through a process of consecration,^[42] and during the Romantic period, these arts were redefined as vocational and grounded in a requirement of artistic individuality.^[43] In the Western world, their status as art now goes unquestioned throughout society.

The second type comprises stabilized cases of partial artification. In some instances, artification is incomplete but does not seem to have cause to expand further without favorable conditions. This is the case with architecture, which never fully attained the status of a fine art because of technical and utilitarian constraints, and with many crafts forever in limbo between art and artisanship, or art and industry, such as bookbinding or the making of stained-glass windows. In other instances, recognition, not utility, is at stake. The artist has crossed the four circles of recognition by peers, critics, merchants and collector, and public acclaim, as defined by art historian Alan Bowness,^[44] but is either acknowledged for only part of his or her production or by only part of the potential public. For example, only the sectors of photography labeled "fine art photography" or of film labeled *cinéma d'auteur* are recognized as art. Other genres are defined by profound intra-group differences. Comic book readers range from mundane teenage consumers to highly cultivated collectors of rare books. The world of bullfighting is characterized by an uncompromising alienation between aesthete aficionados and militant opponents.^[45]

The third type touches on cases of artification that are recent, barely accomplished, and in progress. Outsider art and *art brut* fall into this category, as do readymades. All have gained

recognition from critics and museums barely one or two generations after appearing in the public sphere. In pursuits such as curating contemporary art exhibitions, breakdancing, and graffiti, the artification process seems to be on the verge of completion; it is taking place before our very eyes. In these instances, the concept of artification manifests its relevance most particularly by revealing phenomena that otherwise would have gone unnoticed.

Finally, there are cases where the process encounters obstacles that seem insuperable and the accomplishment of artification seems unattainable under present conditions. Indeed, some practices host sporadic artificatory movements that do not come to fruition because of the socio-economic arrangements that are contrary to the traits that have historically constituted art as an institution. Thus we can venture that pursuits such as typography, gastronomy, oenology, gardening, or perfumery, while perhaps being qualified as arts in a metaphorical sense, will not garner recognition for their producers as full-fledged artists in an enduring, institutional, and universal fashion in the near future; nor are their works commonly acknowledged throughout society as oeuvres to be presented for purely artistic appreciation.[\[46\]](#)

Assuming that artification is a dynamic, ongoing process, this typology is open-ended. Which example belongs to which type is fluid and may change depending on various contexts. If the market economy disappeared and restaurants did not have to make a profit, or if a new mode of production for haute cuisine emerged, a consummate artification of gastronomy might endure. One could also imagine that if there was major inclusion of outsider art and graffiti in fine art museums, and their producers controlled dissemination and sales, they would be completely artified. But opposite trends could also prevail, and artification could be arrested.

This brings us to a last important question. Are there contrary processes, processes of counter or de-artification? Can we identify cases where a legitimate art has lost its acknowledged status? Although there seem to be very few cases in point, our investigating procedures may be at fault. Calligraphy, gardening,[\[47\]](#) and elocution may well be de-artified practices, provided historical research establishes that they were indeed institutionalized arts and not *artes*, that is, virtuoso crafts demanding high levels of skill but not defined by claims to originality. Nevertheless, recent research does reveal cases of de-artification, although it is difficult to evaluate how definitive they are. Diana Crane described how the transformation of French haute couture into an elite luxury industry now controlled by international financial conglomerates has entailed a loss of artistic autonomy for fashion designers.[\[48\]](#) Emilie Notteghem, in her study of objects of the Catholic cult in contemporary France, revealed just how flexible the system of artification is when it comes to objects of religious reverence. Items enter and exit the system; they may return for a while to the world of ritual, and then re-enter the art system and be redefined as museum pieces.

This case of intermittent artification discovered by Notteghem is reminiscent of a comparable situation in a very different

society: the intermittent heritagization of artifacts observed by anthropologist Pierre Centlivres in Afghanistan. Centlivres noted how, on some occasions they considered appropriate, tribal elders would borrow back artifacts that their tribes had donated to the National Museum of Kabul and were on exhibit there. These examples underline the importance of the general process of resistance against artification (and, by the same token, resistance against heritagization). Resistance to artification is a built-in, structural component of the artification process.

One of the most dramatic instances of such a trend resulted in the acute deheritagization and de-artification by voluntary destruction in 2001, when the Taliban government dynamited the monumental Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan, on the grounds that they were idols. Clearly, the result of heritagization and artification can be highly volatile in certain contexts. In the case of the Buddhas, it hinged on many factors: the general worldview held by the Taliban, the manner in which radical clerics defined a particular cultural production (the Buddhas), issues of power between ethnic groups and regions, and international politics. There, action against artification can be understood, among many other meanings, as leverage in power struggles and a particular instance of action against westernization.[\[49\]](#)

Resistance to artification can be internal or external. In cases more familiar to us, such as those based in contemporary France, observation suggests that internal resistance originates from potential artists and members of their family, while external resistance comes from sponsors or administrators and is rooted in a variety of values. When producers and their close relations refuse the move toward art, they do so typically in the name of family values (outsider art), working class values (outsider art, jazz), and solidarity among peers (breakdancing). In all these instances, artification appears to social actors as the process of social differentiation and stratification that indeed it is. They would prefer to evade this, for in artification they see a risk to group cohesion. Institutional or corporate actors also may put forth obstacles to artification, often in the name of quality and consistency ("maintaining standards") in order to defend group interests (keeping the outsiders out).

In France, government bureaucratic practice provides an interesting example of de-artification. The category of national heritage (*le patrimoine*) implemented by the public administration of *l'Inventaire* (a department of the Ministry of Culture) was initially invented for the census of historical monuments construed as masterpieces of artistry. It has been progressively extended to include non-artistic objects, such as milestones, farmhouses, and various popular artifacts such as tombstones.[\[50\]](#)

What are the conditions necessary for artification and the obstacles to its achievement? Luxury and upper class activities that produce objects that are easy to transport, enhance individuality, and secure autonomy to the maker seem to be among the prime conditions for the realization of artification, as in the case of easel painting and luxury fashion. But it is true that the practices of lower class groups,

or of partially socialized groups, like youth and inmates, also undergo artification. Such is the case for jazz, hip-hop, graffiti, or self-taught art. In those instances, favorable circumstances seem to be a tightly knit network of cooperation, collective organizations, and a rich corpus of critical discourse. *Avant-garde* initiatives give impetus and visibility. Government support and long-term cultural policies consolidate the artification process.

Nevertheless, the inferior social status of its practitioners, audience, or public is indeed an obstacle to artification and does seem to slow its progress. Other hindering factors are the utilitarian nature of a practice (crafts, architecture), dependence on clientele (architecture, gastronomy, fashion), technical constraints that put physical prowess before artistry (sports, magic), or limitations to transportability (gardening, graffiti). Artification thus appears as a major indicator of a general trend toward the valorization of art in modern Western societies, both at the level of common sense and for philosophical inquiry.[\[51\]](#)

Our inquiries into artification follow a nonsubstantive orientation, common to analytical philosophy and the social sciences. According to this perspective, there exists no “art in-itself” (*en soi*), grounded in an essentialist definition that would enable us to describe how social actors experience “art for-themselves” (*pour soi*), but only historically situated, collectively accepted, and relatively stabilized conceptions of what social actors understand by the word ‘art.’ The nominalist turn in analytical philosophy has unpacked the question “what?” into an array of queries such as “for whom?,” “under what conditions?,” and “when?” In this perspective, art is not a given but the sum total of all possible operations of artification. Going back to Nelson Goodman, we may now proceed just one step beyond the question we started with. Art is when artification has happened.[\[52\]](#)

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Endnotes

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- [4] Nathalie Heinich and Roberta Shapiro (eds.), *De l'artification. Enquêtes sur le passage à l'art* (Paris: Ehes, 2012).
- [5] Nathalie Heinich, *L'Art contemporain exposé aux rejets. Études de cas* (Nîmes: Jacqueline Chambon, 1998).
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- [10] For a more complete description, see N. Heinich and R. Shapiro, "Postface. Quand y a-t-il artification?" in *De l'artification, op. cit.* (2012).
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[16] Paul Lopes, "Diffusion and Syncretism. The Modern Jazz Tradition," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 566 (1999), pp. 25-36; Olivier Roueff, "Domestication du goût et formation du champ du jazz en France, 1941-1960," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 181-182 (2010), pp. 34-59.

[17] Graham M. Jones, *Trade of the Tricks. Inside the Magician's Craft* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Roberta Shapiro, "The Aesthetics of Institutionalization: Breakdancing in France," *The Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society*, 33, 4 (2004), 316-335; Magali Sizorn, "De la course au trapèze aux Arts Sauts," in *De l'artification, op. cit.* (2012).

[18] *Maus* by Art Spiegelman (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), the only comic book to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize (in 1992) is the most obvious example. See: Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007); and Vincent Seveau, "La Bande dessinée," in *De l'artification, op. cit.* (2012).

[19] In this section we take the word 'beauty' as a compendium for all the aesthetic qualities as seen from the standpoint of the beholder.

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[21] Caroline Hodak, *Du Théâtre équestre au cirque. Commercialisation des loisirs, diffusion des savoirs et théâtralisation de l'histoire en France et en Angleterre, 1760-1860*, Thèse d'histoire (Paris: EHESS, 2004).

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[23] Larry Shiner, *op. cit.* pp. 81-86.

[24] Béatrice Fraenkel, "L'improbable artification de la typographie," in *De l'artification, op. cit.* (2012).

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[32] Gilles Tarabout, "Passages à l'art. L'adaptation d'un culte sud-indien au patronage artistique," in *L'Esthétique: Europe, Chine et ailleurs*, eds. Y. Escande and J. M. Schaeffer (Paris: You-Feng, 2003).

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[34] Emilie Notteghem, "Frontières et franchissements. Les objets du culte catholique en artification," in *De l'artification*, *op. cit.* (2012)

[35] Francesca Cozzolino, "Les murs ont la parole: Sardaigne," *Le Tigre*, n° 1, March (2007), 50-55.

[36] Virginie Milliot, "Quand l'art interroge l'espace public. Le graf, le travail social, l'art contemporain et le politique," in *L'art contemporain, champs artistiques, critères, réception*, eds. Jean-Pierre Saez and Thierry Raspail (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000).

[37] Serge Proust, *Le comédien désemparé. Autonomie artistique et interventions politiques dans le théâtre public*, (Paris: Economica, 2006).

[38] Emily E. Wilcox, "Dance as l'Intervention. Health and Aesthetics of Experience in French Contemporary Dance," *Body and Society*, 11, 4 (2005), 109-139.

[39] Roberta Shapiro, *op. cit.* (2004) and (2012).

[40] Marisa Liebaut, "L'artification du graffiti et ses dispositifs," in *De l'artification*, *op. cit.* (2012).

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[45] Nathalie Heinich, "Framing the Bullfight: Aesthetics versus Ethics," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 33, 1 (1993), 52-58.

[46] There is a body of literature, particularly in the realm of "everyday aesthetics" that upholds that productions such as

these are art. Although space lacks to develop a full discussion of this point, there are a number of reasons why we disagree with the reasoning that leads to this conclusion. First, the argument is normative and essentialist. We are asked to recognize art as the hidden truth of everyday pursuits. Second, it is non-realistic. Working conditions, legal and symbolic status in society, organizations and institutions, critical discourse, economic exchange, and similar aspects of life in society are completely disregarded. Finally, the manner is rhetorical and moralizing; these authors seek to persuade. See, for example, Glenn Kuehn, "How Can Food Be Art?" in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, eds. Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 94-212; ref. on pp. 194-195: "Food is art; I am convinced that this is true. Problems arise, of course, when I try to convince others just how food can be art." One might call this author an experiential activist. His stated goal here is not to describe reality, but to persuade others to feel differently about it.

[47] Above, we mentioned gardens in reference to an ongoing discussion in the realm of the aesthetics of everyday life. Does the experience of gardens warrant our defining them as art? (See Thomas Leddy, Mara Miller, David E. Cooper) Here, we mention gardens a second time, but in an historical perspective; gardens, like architecture, were classified as fine art in eighteenth century tables of knowledge.

[48] Diana Crane, "La mode," in *De l'artification*, *op. cit.* (2012).

[49] For a detailed discussion of this very complex issue see Pierre Centlivres, "The Controversy over the Buddhas of Bamiyan," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* (2008), <http://samaj.revues.org/document992.html>.

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[51] Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *L'Art de l'âge moderne. L'esthétique et la philosophie de l'art du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

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