The Folk Concept of Art

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Abstract. What is the folk concept of art? Does it track any of the major definitions of art philosophers have proposed? In two preregistered experiments (N=888) focusing on two types of artworks (paintings and musical works), we manipulate three potential features of artworks: intentional creation, the possession of aesthetic value, and institutional recognition. This allows us to investigate whether the folk concept of art fits an essentialist definition drawing on one or more of the manipulated factors, or whether it might be a disjunctive or cluster concept. The results suggest that none of the three manipulated properties are necessary for an object to be art, though some, even by themselves, suffice. The folk concept of art might thus well be a cluster concept instead of an essentialist concept.

1. Introduction

The definition of art has been one of the central topics in philosophical aesthetics in the last century. However, finding a satisfactory definition of art turned out to be very difficult: traditional definitions of art often include objects that are not artworks or exclude objects that are, in fact, artworks. Thus, a second question has gained more and more attention recently: Is it possible to define art at all? If so, what kind of definition would it be? Are there any individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for an object being art? Is it rather a disjunction of minimally sufficient conditions that makes something art? Are these conditions (or set of conditions) determinate or indeterminate, i.e., is the concept of art closed, or is it open? If the last view is correct, objects that fall under the category of art share similarities rather than a determinate set of properties. There are three kinds of accounts of art: essentialist accounts propose individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions. Disjunctive accounts claim there are individually sufficient and jointly necessary properties. According to cluster theories of art, there is a set of properties that make an object art, but the set is not determinate and might change: the concept of art is open if its conditions of use are "amendable and corrigible" (Weitz 1956: 31).

Although most philosophers see the definitional project as (at least partially) descriptive – that is, dependent about how we *do* think about art rather than about how we *should* think about art, there is very little empirical research on what ordinary people identify as art, and the studies that exist are very limited in scope. In this paper, we distinguish between two kinds of projects in the philosophy of art – the essentialist definitions of art which specify individually necessary

conditions, and the cluster or disjunctive accounts. Our goal is to explore which of these three approaches correspond better to the folk concept of art. We present an overview of different types of accounts of art (sections 2 and 3) and discuss the role empirical research can play in elucidating the concept of art (sections 4 and 5). In sections 7 and 8 we report two experiments that aim to answer the questions of whether (i) the folk concept of art is essentialist, cluster or disjunctive concept, as well as (ii) the relative importance of three properties of artworks – intentional creation, aesthetic value, and institutional recognition – that are often seen as the most important ones by philosophers.

2. Three Types of Accounts of Art

There are three categories of theories of art: essentialist definitions, that specify individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions, disjunctive, and cluster accounts of art.

In the following, we will briefly present a few essentialist accounts.[1] *Historical definitions* emphasize the relation between a work of art and some earlier works. For example, they require an intended resemblance of an artwork to some acknowledged earlier pieces (Carroll 1993). *Intentional-historical definition* requires artists' intentions for an artwork to be regarded in the same way as other objects belonging to this category. Whether something falls under the concept of "art" depends on what was seen as art in the past and on the creator's intention for the object to be regarded as some prior art that the creator is familiar with (Levinson 2002). For example, a painting would be regarded "with attention to color, with attention to painterly detail, with awareness of stylistic features, with awareness of art-historical background, with sensitivity to formal structure and expressive effect, with an eye to representational seeing, with willingness to view patiently and sustainedly, …" (Levinson 1989: 24).[2] According to the *functional view*, art is defined by its purpose: there is some specific function that all works of art must embody, to satisfy some specific need that art can fulfil. The most standard type of functional definitions is *the aesthetic view*. On this view, art is created to satisfy the need for aesthetic experiences (Beardsley 1982, Zangwill 1995). Other functional definitions (e.g. Stecker 2005) do not specify a precise function. There are many possible functions of art, for example, according to Pignocchi, "bearing formal or expressive properties, imitating nature, inducing an aesthetic experience, bearing embodied meaning, inducing awe, being key elements of ceremonies, faithfully representing a certain reality, drawing

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[1] We should also mention historical definitions, for instance, the Platonic-Aristotelian mimetic theory, which holds artworks to be an imitation of nature, the expression theory of art (Collingwood 1938) which claims art to be expressive of the emotions of the artist, or formalist theories, such as Clive Bell's conception of art as a significant form (Bell 1914). These definitions are not often defended in contemporary philosophy anymore because there are objects we consider to be artworks that do not have representational or expressive properties. For example, mimetic theory excludes music, while expressive theory excludes conceptual art. Moreover, these definitions also identify properties that are not exclusive to art.
[2] See also Levinson 1993, 2006.

attention to a social or ecological problem, stimulating thinking about art, criticizing its futility, ostensibly violating the rules tacitly employed by an artistic genre in order to revive its language" (2014: 428–429). *Procedural-institutional definitions* claim that the status of being art is conferred upon an object by someone with authority (Danto 1981, Dickie 1974, Davies 2004). Advocates of this account mention procedures such as the object being created by an artist, held by someone with authority, presented to the artworld, and discussed by art critics and art historians. Objections to all accounts standardly employ counterexamples that demonstrate the respective theory to be over- or underinclusive.

All of the discussed definitions are essentialist: they invoke necessary and sufficient conditions for an object to be considered an artwork. This view is challenged by *anti-essentialists*, who tend to draw inspiration from Wittgenstein's idea of *family resemblance* (Wittgenstein PI 2009: §67, Weitz 1956, Ziff 1953, Dean 2003). Games, to take an example of Wittgenstein, come in many variations. There are board games, card games, Olympic games, ball games etc., but there is no single property (or set of properties) they all have in common. However, if something shares similarities with several things that have been called games before, the concept of game is extended to include a new example. The concept of game thus has no rigid boundaries.

Art, or so anti-essentialists argue, is similar in this regard. Although artworks do not all share a single property (or set of properties), each artwork shares at least one common property with other objects that are considered art.

> Suppose we can construct some set of properties […]. And suppose it can be shown that if various subsets of them obtain, then an object is art, that none of these properties has to be possessed by all artworks, but that all artworks must possess some of them. Then we cannot define "art" in the sense of giving individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for it, but we can offer a characterization of it – and account of what it is in terms of criteria or characteristics. Note that this account allows a great deal of indeterminacy in whether the obtaining of a particular subset of properties is sufficient for something to be art: there will be many cases where it is not clear whether this is so; what is important is that there are some subsets the obtaining of which is sufficient for something to be art. (Gaut 2000: 27)

There might be cases that would invite us to reconsider the use of the concept of art in a way that would allow it to cover new objects (Weitz 1956: 31). According to Roy T. Cook, the openness of the concept of art should be seen as an epistemological thesis: we are unable to specify which objects are or could be art (either in present or in future) (Cook 2013: 69).

One defendant of the cluster account is Berys Gaut. On his view, properties that ordinary judgment counts towards an object's status of a work of art include (1) possessing positive aesthetic qualities; (2) being expressive of emotion; (3) being intellectually challenging; (4) being formally complex and coherent; (5) having a capacity to convey complex meanings; (6) exhibiting an individual point of view; (7) being an exercise of creative imagination; (8) being an artifact or performance which is the product of a high degree of skill; (9) belonging to an established artistic form; and (10) being the product of an intention to make a work of art (Gaut 2000: 28). Dutton (2009) has argued for an account with a similar cluster of properties.

Some philosophers combine these kinds of properties into disjunctive definitions (Longworth and Scarantino 2010, Stecker 1994, Davies 2015, Hazelwood 2021). Such accounts specify a disjunction of sufficient conditions for an object to be considered art, but no conditions are individually necessary: properties such as *P* or *Q* are individually sufficient and disjunctively necessary. For example, Stephen Davies offers such definition: he holds that an object is art

> (a) if it shows excellence of skill and achievement in realizing significant aesthetic goals, and either doing so is its primary, identifying function or doing so makes a vital contribution to the realization of its primary, identifying function, or (b) if it falls under an art genre or art form established and publicly recognized within an art tradition, or (c) if it is intended by its maker/presenter to be art and its maker/presenter does what is necessary and appropriate to realizing that intention (2015: 375).

Properties included in disjunctive definitions are seen as constitutive of what it is to be an instance of art, therefore, this account of art is called definition – but one that is incompatible with classical essentialist definitions, because possessing any property from the list is seen as enough to be art, and there must be more than one property on the list. To illustrate, Longworth and Scarantino's *Disjunctive Theory of Art*, for instance, states:

> (DTA): ∃Z ∃Y (Art ↔ (Z ∨ Y)), where (i) Z and Y are either non-empty conjunctions (e.g. P & Q & R) or non-empty disjunctions of conjunctions (e.g. (Q & R & S & T) ∨ (P & Q & W) v. . .); (ii) there is some indeterminacy over exactly which disjuncts are sufficient; (iii) Z does not entail Y and Y does not entail Z; (iv) Z does not entail Art and Y does not entail Art. (2010: 163)

This definition specifies that none of the disjuncts entail each other and none of them entail Art. It ensures that disjuncts are not individually necessary, and that art cannot be defined merely by listing types of art.

In brief, although the cluster and disjunctive theories standardly include the same properties that are individually emphasized by other definitions of art, the main difference is that cluster and disjunctive theories deny that any of these properties are individually necessary.

3. The Most Influential Essentialist Accounts

From among the considerable variety of classical views briefly surveyed in the previous section, three accounts have proven particularly influential: The institutional account (Dickie 1974), the aesthetic account (Beardsley 1982) and the intentional-historical account (Levinson 1979). Dickie's *institutional definition* claims that a work of art is "(1) an artifact, (2) a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the art-world)" (Dickie 1974: 34). In other words, an artifact is considered an artwork if it is recognized as such by people belonging and acting in the name of relevant institutions. Beardsley's *aesthetic definition* claims that an artwork is "either an arrangement of conditions intended to be capable of affording an experience with marked aesthetic character or (incidentally) an arrangement belonging to a class or type of arrangements that is typically intended to have this capacity" (Beardsley 1982: 299). Put differently, artworks are, roughly, objects with dispositions to trigger aesthetic experiences.[3]

According to Levinson's *historical-intentional definition of art*,

X is an art work at t = df X is an object of which it is true at t that some person or persons, having the appropriate proprietary right over X, non-passingly intends (or intended) X for regard-as-a-work-of-art, *i. e.*, regard in any way (or ways) in which objects in the extension of 'art work' prior to t are or were correctly (or standardly) regarded (1979: 240).

Or, in short, an artwork is something that has been intended by someone to be treated in a way that some earlier artworks were treated (Levinson 2007: 74).

These three definitions are the most obvious candidates for an empirical study for three reasons. First, according to Stephen Davies in his famous book "Definitions of Art", there are two basic approaches to the question of how to define art, procedural and functional, and all (essentialist) theories of art can be reduced to one or the other of these two types of definitions. Dickie's institutional and Beardsley's aesthetic definitions are typical examples of procedural and

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[3] Beardsley defines aesthetic experience in the following way: "I propose to say that a person is having an aesthetic experience during a particular stretch of time if and only if the greater part of his mental activity during that time is united and made pleasurable by being tied to the form and qualities of a sensuously presented or imaginatively intended object on which his primary attention is concentrated." (1982: 81).

functional approaches. The function of art can be defined in different ways, but is usually held to be providing a rewarding aesthetic experience.

The requirement for intentionality is so common in the literature that almost all definitions of art require an artwork to be the product of an intentional action. For instance, Christy Mag Uidhir claims that this position is almost universally accepted in the literature, moreover, he argues that any artwork *must* be the product of a successful attempt to make art (Uidhir 2013). Moreover, the requirement of intentional creation is also highly influential in the psychological literature. Paul Bloom has extended Levinson's theory of art to all kind of artifacts, claiming that an object becomes a member of an artifact kind if it is created with the intention for it to belong to that kind (Bloom 1996), and it has inspired psychological research on artifact categorization. For these reasons, we must also consider a third account, Jerrold Levisons's intentional-historical definition.

Second, properties emphasized by these three definitions of art also usually figure in the cluster and disjunctive theories and they are usually among the first to be discussed. For example, they are part of both Gaut's (2000) and Dutton's (2009) sets of properties that "count towards being art". The same can be said about Longworth and Scarantino's *Disjunctive Theory of Art* (2010) because it borrows properties from Gaut's list. These three properties also correspond to the three disjuncts in Stephen Davies' disjunctive definition of art (2015), and are also emphasized by Stecker (2000) and Hazelwood (2021).

The third reason for choosing these three definitions of art is related to the extant empirical studies: an overview of the empirical research will be presented in the following sections, and we will argue that the three earlier-mentioned definitions (and the corresponding three properties of artworks) are important from the psychological perspective.

4. The Role of Empirical Research

Many philosophers of art claim that the project of defining art is descriptive, i.e. whether it is coherent with how art is commonly thought of (e.g. Kania 2011: 5, Stecker 2000: 60), and that the definition must "cohere with a wide spread of intuitions about the terms in which art is discussed and interpreted" (Davies 1991: 46).

In order for descriptivists to find out which of the large variety of definitions is the correct one, it is helpful to know which of them corresponds most closely with the folk concept of art. Empirical research is useful because it helps to confirm or disconfirm what the folk concept of art consists in. It provides descriptivists with data which helps examine how successful their definitions are, and to what extent they conform with ordinary intuitions. It is helpful to understand a conceptual structure of such a notion as "art" in order to make progress in the philosophical debates regarding its definition (Cova, Garcia, Liao 2015). According to Pignocchi, the work of cognitive

scientists and the work of philosophers who seek descriptive definitions are strikingly similar, except that philosophers rely on their own intuitions, while cognitive scientists test them with a wider set of participants (2014: 427). Denis Dutton, for example, claims that it is the folk concept of art that is being analysed, and the folk concept guides further expert investigation:

> The cluster criteria tell us what we already know about the arts. They may be adjusted at the edges, with items subtracted or added to it, but they can be expected to remain largely intact into the foreseeable future, governing what counts as investigation into the arts by neurophysiologists, philosophers, anthropologists, critics, or historians. (Dutton 2009: 60)

In contrast to descriptive accounts, there are views that provide a normative, or partially normative, definition of art (e. g. Gaut 2000: 39). Definitions of this sort aim to describe not how art is commonly thought of, but how it *should* be thought of, or what the concept of art *really* consists of (whether or not the folk agree). In this case, empirical findings may also be important for philosophers seeking to create normative definitions. Empirical findings can provide philosophers with a background against which the normative theories might be created, they could also provide knowledge of the kinds of problems and inconsistencies found within actual usage (Monseré 2016: 15). Any normative project must start with a descriptive step, as it is impossible to revise a concept without knowing how it actually functions (Meskin et al. 2018). A philosopher offering a normative definition must explain why people have mistaken intuitions, and why other definitions are intuitively appealing and yet false. Pignocchi argues that for the normative account of art, the most relevant direction in empirical research would be an inquiry into the justificatioof why something is art (2014: 427).

To date, empirical work in aesthetics has mostly focused on topics such as folk objectivism and subjectivism about aesthetic judgements (i.e. whether the folk see aesthetic judgments as objective or subjective; Cova and Pain 2012, Rabb et al. 2020, Cova et al. 2019, Bonard, Cova and Humbert-Droz, forthcoming), imaginative resistance (Liao, Strohminger and Sripada 2014, Black and Barnes 2017, 2020, Kim, Kneer and Stuart 2019), the ontology of musical works (Bartel 2018, Mikalonytė 2022, Mikalonytė and Dranseika 2020, 2022, Puy 2022) (for a review, see Cova (forthcoming)). However, to date, there is very little empirical research on the folk concept of art.

Mikalonytė and Kneer (2022) have investigated intuitions on AI-created art and have found that people consider objects made by humans and by AI art to a similar extent, even though they are not very willing to call AI-creators artists. Participants were asked to which extent they are willing to attribute artistic intentions to robots, and ratings of this ascription turned out to be relatively low. These results suggest that an object does not have to be created intentionally to be

considered art. However, many other factors that figure in the most influential definitions of art have not been tested in that study.

There exist two studies that were designed specifically to put various definitions of art to the test (Kamber 2011, Kamber and Enoch 2018). Kamber (2011) ran an online survey with a large number of objects (photographs, paintings, poems), asking participants whether they consider them art. Most objects were "hard cases" discussed by philosophers of art. Kamber has found many disrepancies between intuitions of art professionals and philosophers' claims about hard cases: for instance, almost half of the art professionals in the study categorised a Bugatti car as art. He concluded that none of the art theories succeeds in tracking intuitions. In a 2018 study, Kamber and Enoch presented their participants with the same set of objects and asked them to tell whether the objects are art. In addition, they asked the participants to consider a set of fourteen possible reasons for their judgments. The latter included that the object was made by a conscious agent, intended by its makers to be an object of aesthetic interest or appreciation, intended by its makers to evoke or communicate intention, or that the object invites interpretation, provides an imaginative experience, or is beautiful (Kamber and Enoch 2018: 21). Although intentional justifications were the most popular, the results suggest that none of the tested art definitions are fully in accordance with intuitions of art professionals. Kamber and Enoch note that Beardsley's aesthetic definition of art is more successful than the others. Based on Kamber's findings, Winner (2018) has argued that the concept of art is open, as proposed in Wittgensteinian manner by Weitz (1956): there are no necessary properties, just family resemblances, and conditions for application of the term might change in time.

In both studies conducted by Kamber, the participants were either art professionals (2018) or half art professionals, half "art buffs" (both groups mainly university faculty members) (2011). As such they are somewhat mute on the *folk* concept of art. Moreover, the studies have been described as having an "informal approach" of testing a big number of definitions using only one or two instances of artworks (Winner 2018: 21). Thus, although these findings are important, the folk concept of art is still largely underexplored.

5. Empirical Work Relating to the Three Core Factors

Let us have a deeper look at three factors – intentional creation, aesthetic value, and institutional recognition – and at the cognitive mechanisms that could lie behind the folk concept of art. Each of these three factors enjoys some support from the psychological literature and from psychological studies that were conducted with a view to explore only one or two aspects of the folk concept of art. We will survey the literature relevant to each of these factors: aesthetic value (5.1.), institutional recognition (5.2.), and intentional creation (5.3.).

5.1. Aesthetic Value

Alessandro Pignocchi has raised a hypothesis that the concept of "art" will intuitively seem appropriate to be used in cases where people believe that an artifact has been intended to fulfil a function which they believe that other artworks typically fulfil (2014: 439). He claims that the intuitions on whether some artifact is an artwork are determined by two factors: the functions that the person accepts as being normally fulfiled by art, and the intentions that the person ascribes to the author of that artifact. Although Pignocchi mentions several possible functions of art, for starters, we will test one function which Davies claims to be the most typical – that of inducing aesthetic experiences.

Empirical research has shown that artifacts are often categorized in terms of functions and intentions (Boyer and Barrett, 2004). Function-based explanations of artifacts, and even natural objects, are held to be a cognitive default (Kelemen, Rottman, and Seston 2013; Kelemen 1999) inherent in the reasoning of children (DiYanni, Kelemen 2005), and in reasoning of adults (Kelemen and Rosset 2009); also in non-Western cultures (Schachner et al. 2017).

An additional motivation to test the aesthetic definition is that Kamber and Enoch's (2018) results suggest that Beardsley's aesthetic definition of art is more successful than the others. If the folk concept of art is not radically different from that used by art professionals, we might expect their intuitions to favour the aesthetic definition. Moreover, research by Pelowski et al. (2017) shows a strong correlation between the classification of objects as art and ratings of liking, which suggests that appraisal and classification are interrelated. These results also offer some support for the aesthetic definition.

5.2. Institutional Recognition

McCallum, Mitchell and Scott-Phillips (2019) offer an explanation of how the institutional theory of art might work from a cognitive point of view. They claim that the institutional theory matches the main claims of the relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986). Presentation of an object as a work of art (such as putting it into a gallery) is an ostensive act. It suggests for the viewer two kinds of authorial intentions: not only informative (to communicate some information to the audience), but also the communicative one (an intention to point out the informative intention to the audience). According to McCallum and colleagues, institutional recognition and presentation "as a candidate for appreciation" is a kind of ostensive act which not only intentionally draws attention to an object, but also gives a reason to think that interpreting the object is worthy and will provide worthwhile cognitive effects. (2019: 25).

Kamber's studies suggest that both institutional recognition and aesthetic value might be important in judgments on what is art. However, in the 2011 study, more than half of the people were willing to categorize an aesthetically bad painting as art, while an even bigger number of participants categorized works that were institutionally recognized but unlikely to provoke aesthetics experience as art. These results suggest that neither aesthetic, nor institutional theory might *fully* track folk intuitions on what is art on their own. It is likely that categorization judgments will include both of these factors.

This hypothesis is supported by a recent study by Liao, Meskin, and Knobe (2020). These authors claim that the ordinary concept of art is a concept of a dual character, in other words, it contains two distinct sets of criteria, one associated with descriptive, another – with the evaluative dimension. In ordinary conversations about art, most people would agree that an object which is exhibited in a museum is art – in a descriptive sense. However, the same object is not considered art "when you think about what art really is" (Liao, Meskin, and Knobe 2020: 102), in other words, when you think about art in an evaluative sense. In this case, judging that an object is not really art is an evaluative judgment, and at the same time, both classificatory and evaluative senses are intertwined. Testing both aesthetic and institutional factors might help to better understand their relative importance for judgments on what is art.

5.3. Intentional Creation

Inferences about the mental states of creators are as important in categorizing works of art as they are for other artifacts. According to Bloom (1996), authorial intent is relevant to determining the kind of an artifact even if it is not directly connected to the object's appearance or function. Thus, intuitions on whether an object was created with an intention for it to belong to the category of artworks must play an important part in judgments on whether an object should be categorized as art.

Many empirical studies have shown that intention is essential for the way we think about art. Intentions have been found to be crucial for what people categorize as art (Jucker et al. 2014, Newman and Bloom 2012) – even more important than the appearance of the object (Newman and Smith 2018). Moreover, in Kamber's studies, when asked to provide reasons for categorizing an object as art, art professionals mentioned "being made by a conscious agent", "being intended by its makers to be an object of aesthetic interest", and "inviting interpretation" more often than other kinds of justifications for their judgments (Kamber 2018: 81). If ordinary folk deploy the same concept of art as art professionals, intentions must be an important factor. However, in our study on folk intuitions on whether AI can create art (Mikalonytė and Kneer 2022), we found that intentional creation is not seen by the folk as a necessary condition for an object to be considered

art. These results reveal that the exact role of intentional creation for judgments of what is art is still not fully understood.

6. Experiment 1: Painting

Our first experiment explores the extent to which the three most influential definitions of art – intentional, aesthetic, and institutional – are consistent with the folk concept of *art*. To this effect, we manipulated all three features in a between-subjects design, i.e. (i) whether or not the object was created intentionally, (ii) whether or not it is beautiful, and (iii) whether or not it received institutional recognition. As a secondary core dependent variable, we explored to what extent people were willing to deem the creator of the different types of objects an *artist*. Furthermore, we wanted to explore the mental-state requirements as well as their possible interaction with beauty and institutional recognition, and thus asked participants to what extent the creator desired, believed, and intended to make a work of art.

We will also test (Q1) whether any of the three features constitute necessary and/or sufficient properties for something being art, and (Q2) whether the folk concept of art is essentialist, cluster, or disjunctive concept. In contrast to Kamber's studies, our participants are not art professionals or amateur-experts, but rather ordinary people.

6.1 Participants

We recruited 797 participants on Amazon Mechanical Turk. The IP address was restricted to the United States. In line with the preregistered criteria[4], 336 participants who were not native English speakers, failed an attention check, or took less than twenty seconds to answer the main questions (including reading the prompt) were excluded, leaving a sample of 461 participants (female: 48%; age M=44 years, SD=14 years, range: 19–90 years).

6.2 Methods and Materials

We explored people's concept of art in a between-subjects 2 (*intention*: intentional v. accidental creation) x 2 (*beauty*: beautiful v. ordinary-looking) x 2 (*institutional recognition*: present v. absent). There were thus 8 conditions in total, to one of which participants were randomly assigned. The scenarios, were composed of the following elements (labels in bold excluded, stating either the presence (+) or absence (-) of the key features):

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[4] https://aspredicted.org/XTV_YKY

Intention

[+] A person decides to create a painting. She takes an empty canvas and applies paint onto it.

[-] A person accidentally brushes against some jars of paint that spill onto an empty canvas.

Beauty

[+] The resulting object looks beautiful, featuring an elegant interplay of different lines of paint. It captures the viewers' attention and evokes awe and wonder.

[-] The resulting object looks ordinary and uninteresting. It leaves the viewers bored and unimpressed.

Recognition

[+] Soon this object gets recognized by art critics, finds its way into a museum and some years later it appears in art history books.

[-] This object never gets exhibited in art galleries or museums, and it never receives any attention from art critics.

Having read the scenario, participants had to rate to what extent they agreed with the following claims on a Likert scale anchored at 1 with "completely disagree" and 7 with "completely agree" (labels in brackets excluded):

(1) "The object is art." [Art]

(2) "The object was made by an artist" [Artist]

(3) "The person wanted to make a painting" [Desire]

(4) "The person believed they were making a painting" [Belief]

(5) "The person intentionally made a painting" [Intent]

6.3 Results

A between-subjects ANOVA (see Figure 1) for art determined that participants were more inclined to judge the painting to be art if it resulted from intentional action ($F(1,453)= 59.02$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.12$, a medium-large effect), if it was beautiful ($F(1,453)= 43.52$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.09$, a medium-sized effect), and if it received institutional recognition ($F(1,453)= 7.67$, $p=.006$, $\eta_p^2=.02$, a small effect). No significant interaction terms were observed for art (all ps$>.255$). As suggested by the ANOVA main effects and illustrated in Figure 1, the impact of institutional recognition is marginal. What is interesting, however, is that – even in the absence of recognition – *either* beauty *or* intentional action suffice for judgments to significantly exceed the midpoint (one sample t-tests,

all ps<.009, see Appendix, Table 6).[5] Differently put, on the folk view, one can accidentally create genuine art if the creation is beautiful. One can also intentionally create genuine art if the creation is not beautiful. But if intentionality and beauty are lacking, institutional recognition does not, by itself, suffice to make the work a piece of art.
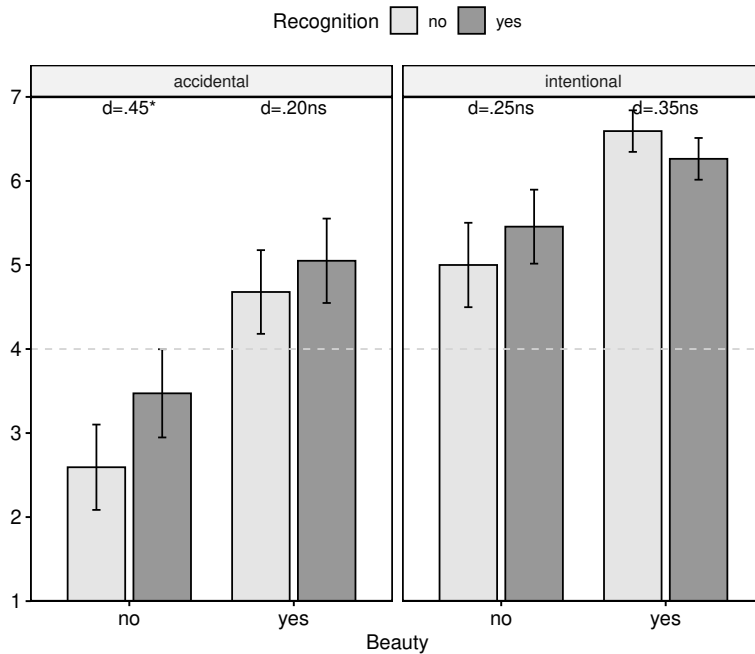

Figure 1: Mean ratings for art across intention (accidental v. intentional), beauty (no v. yes), and institutional recognition (no v. yes) conditions. Error bars denote 95%-confident intervals.

As regards the creator's status as an artist (see Figure 2), people were more willing to judge her as an artist if the painting was made intentionally ($F(1,453)$=49.04, $p < .001$, η_p^2=.10, a medium-sized effect). Whether the painting was beautiful or received institutional recognition did not influence the judgment of the creator's status as an artist (ps >.480). The results revealed small but significant interactions between intention and the other two factors respectively (ps <.035, η_p^2s<.03). All other interactions were nonsignificant (all ps>.074 see Appendix, Table 3). In contrast to the object's status of *art*, being deemed an artist requires acting intentionally: The creators of accidental artworks, even if beautiful and enjoying recognition, are not deemed artists (significantly below the midpoint 4 for all four accidental conditions, one sample t-tests, all corrected and uncorrected ps<.001, see Appendix, Table 6).

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[5] A qualification: The Bonferroni corrected contrast with the midpoint for the accidental, beautiful and unrecognized creation is nonsignificant (p=.339). Note that this still means that it is not significantly *below* the midpoint. The corrected contrast for the intentional, not beautiful and unrecognized creation is significantly above the midpoint (p=.004), see Appendix, Table 6.
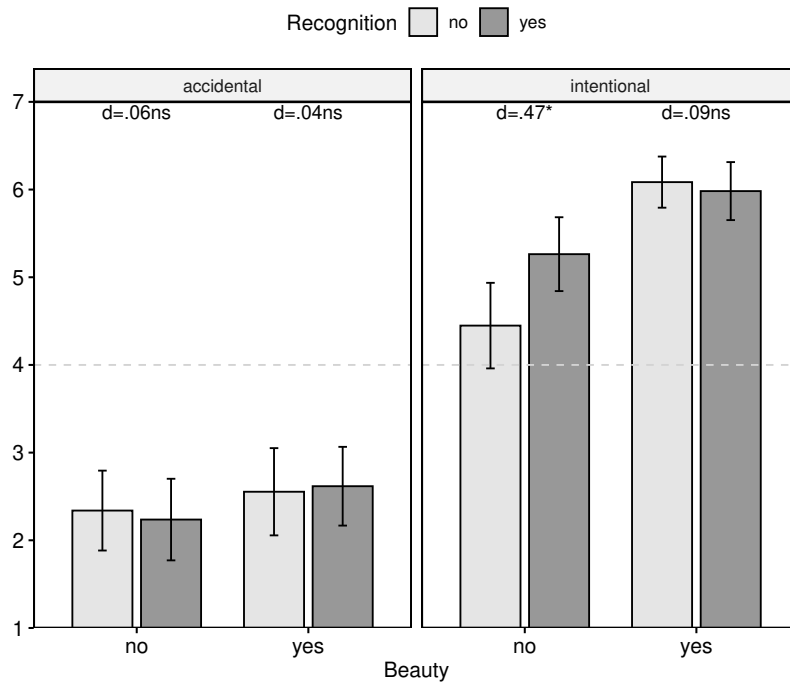
Figure 2: Mean ratings for artist across intention (accidental v. intentional), beauty (no v. yes), and institutional recognition (no v. yes) conditions. Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals.

The manipulation checks suggest that participants understood the scenario as intended. Aggregating across beauty and institutional recognition, attributions of belief, desire, and intention to make a painting in the intentional condition significantly exceeded those in the accidental condition (all ps <.001, all η_p^2>.35, indicating large effects, see Appendix, Tables 7-9 for detail). All three mental states correlated strongly with the judgment that the resulting object was art (r=.57-.59; all ps<.001; see Appendix, Table 4) and judgments that its creator is an artist (r=.76-.81, all ps<.001).

6.4 Discussion

Our experiment produced several findings. First, among the three manipulated factors, intentionality and beauty manifested a significant and pronounced impact on art judgments, whereas the effect of institutional recognition was significant yet small. Importantly, the creation was judged art (significantly above the midpoint of the scale) if it was specified either as intentionally created *or* beautiful. This suggests that, on the folk view, neither intentionality nor beauty are *necessary* features of an artwork though each is *sufficient* (at least for the scenario at hand). These three aspects of art correspond to three properties on the Gaut's cluster account of art, as well as on Denis Dutton list – direct pleasure, or aesthetic pleasure; art traditions and institutions, and intentional creation (although Dutton considers the latter condition necessary) (Dutton 2009: 52–60). These three properties, on the folk view, indeed "count towards" an object being

art, but are not individually necessary, exactly as the authors predict. Our results are consistent with Liao, Meskin, and Knobe's (2020): the ordinary concept of art seems to be associated with both descriptive (institutional) and evaluative (aesthetic) criteria. There is more than one set of criteria for application. The results are also consistent with Mikalonytė and Kneer (2022) who also found that intentionality is not a necessary condition for being art.

By contrast, the status of being viewed as an *artist* depended only on whether the object was created intentionally. Whether or not the object was beautiful or recognized institutionally did not matter. Our finding that beautiful accidental creations are art, even if they have no artist, is very surprising, bearing in mind that there is no artist to claim credit for aesthetically valuable artworks created in this way.

Paintings are not the only objects of art. In order to explore whether our findings generalize to another domain of artistic creation, we ran a similar, second experiment for music.

7. Experiment 2: Music

The goal of Experiment 2 was to replicate the findings of experiment for another aesthetic domain. We thus adapted the vignette to the context of music, again manipulating intentionality, beauty and institutional recognition.

7.1 Participants

We recruited 714 participants on Amazon Mechanical Turk. The IP address was restricted to the United States. In line with the preregistered criteria,[6] 287 participants who were not native English speakers, failed an attention check, or took less than twenty seconds to answer the main questions (including reading the prompt) were excluded, leaving a sample of 427 participants (female: 48%; age M=43 years, SD=13 years, range: 21–77 years).

7.2 Methods and Materials

The design of the experiment was near-identical to the one employed in Study 1. The only difference regarded the mode: This time, the agent does not create a painting, but a musical work. We again manipulated intention, beauty, and recognition, making for a total of eight individual conditions to which participants were assigned randomly. The scenarios, were composed of the following elements (labels in bold excluded, stating either the presence (+) or absence (-) of the key features):

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[6] https://aspredicted.org/1DS_ND4

Intention

[+] A person decides to compose a piece of music. She opens a blank stave sheet on a music notation software, writes notes on it, and carefully chooses instrumentation.

[-] A person uses a new music notation software for the first time. She opens a blank stave sheet, writes random notes on it, and chooses random instrumentation.

Beauty

[+] The result sounds beautiful, featuring an elegant interplay of parts. It captures the listeners' attention and evokes awe and wonder.

[-] The result sounds ordinary and uninteresting. It leaves the listeners bored and unimpressed.

Recognition

[+] Soon the piece gets recognized by music critics, is performed in concert halls and some years later it appears in music history books.

[-] The piece never gets played in concert halls, and it never receives any attention from music critics.

As in Experiment 1, participants were asked to rate on a 7-point Likert scale whether the resulting work is art, its creator an artist, and whether the latter had a belief, desire, and intention to produce the piece.

7.3 Results

For art (see Figure 3), an ANOVA revealed a small main effect of intention ($F(1,419)$= 14.76, p<.001, η_p^2=.03), a medium main effect of beauty ($F(1,419)$= 59.10, p<.001, η_p^2=.12) and a small main effect of institutional recognition ($F(1,419)$= 14.77, p<.001, η_p^2=.03). There was a significant yet small beauty*recognition interaction ($F(1,419)$= 9.47, p=.002, η_p^2=.02). As in Experiment 1, even in the absence of recognition, *either* beauty *or* intentional action (by and large) suffice for a creation to be deemed art, as none of the ratings are significantly below the midpoint (for corrected and uncorrected one-sample t-tests, see Appendix, Table 15). In contrast to visual art, in the context of music, an accidentally produced, non-beautiful piece is viewed as art if it receives institutional recognition (M=4.47, SD=1.68, uncorrected p=.041, corrected p>.05, see Appendix, Table 15).
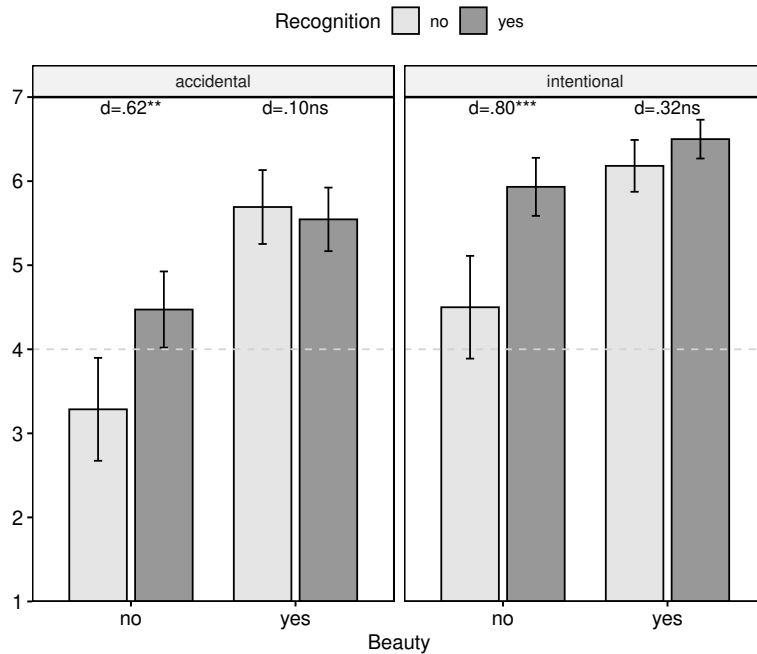
Figure 3: Mean ratings for art across intention (accidental v. intentional), beauty (no v. yes), and institutional recognition (no v. yes) conditions. Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals.

As regards the creator's status as an artist (see Figure 4), an ANOVA revealed that people were more willing to judge the creator an artist if she acted intentionally ($F(1,419)=23.41$, $p <$ .001, $\eta_p^2=.05$, a small to medium effect), if the piece was beautiful ($F(1,419)=24.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2=.05$, a small to medium effect), and if it was institutionally recognized ($F(1,419)=5.83$, $p =$ .016, $\eta_p^2=.01$, a small effect). There was also a small yet (just about) significant beauty*recognition interaction ($F(1,419)= 3.90$, $p=.049$, $\eta_p^2=.01$). All other interactions were nonsignificant (all *ps*>.169, see Appendix Table 12). In contrast to the domain of painting (Experiment 1), the requirements regarding the status of an artist are less stringent for the domain of music. Independently of recognition, those who accidentally produce musical works are deemed artists as long as the resulting works are either made intentionally *or* beautiful (significantly above the midpoint 4, one-sample t-tests, all uncorrected *p*s<.006, see Appendix, Table 15).[7]

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[7] The Bonferroni corrected *p* value for artist judgments of a creation that was accidental, unrecognized yet beautiful is *p*=.054, for the intentional, non-beautiful, unrecognized one it is *p*=.187.
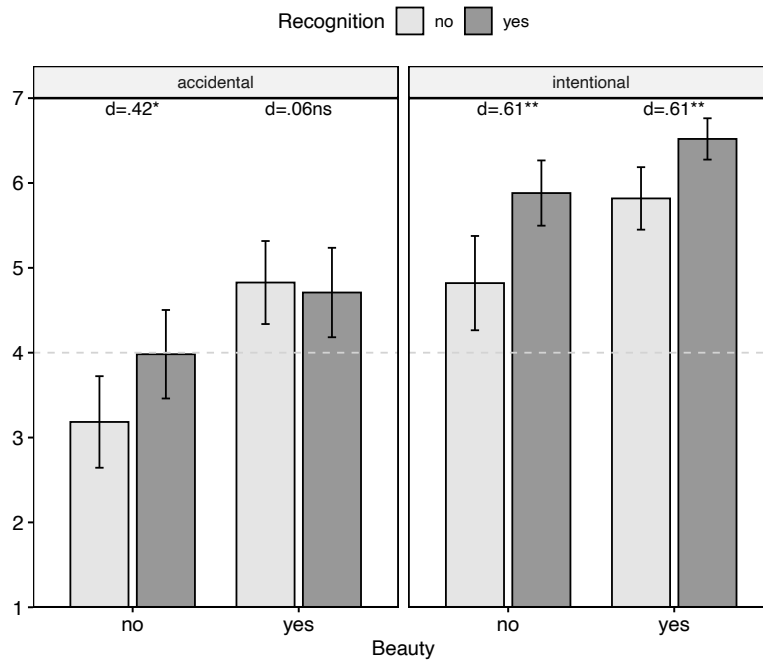
Figure 4: Mean ratings for artist across intention (accidental v. intentional), beauty (no v. yes), and institutional recognition (no v. yes) conditions. Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals.

As in Experiment 1, the manipulation checks suggest that participants understood the scenario as intended. Aggregating across beauty and institutional recognition, attributions of belief, desire, and intention to produce a musical work in the intentional condition significantly exceeded those in the accidental condition (all *p*s <.001, all η_p^2 >.42, indicating large effects, see Appendix Tables 16-18 for detail).

All three mental states correlated strongly with the judgment that the resulting object was art (r=.43-.48, all *p*s<.001) and its creator an artist (r=.61-.62, all *p*s<.001, see Appendix Table 13 for detail).

7.4 Joint Analysis

We conducted joint analyses for the entire sample of the two experiments. This allowed us to make artistic domain (visual art v. music) a fourth factor beyond behavior type (intentional v. accidental), beauty (yes v. no), and institutional recognition (yes v. no). For art judgments, we found a small though significant main effect for artistic domain (p=.029, η_p^2=.01). The beauty*recognition and the intention*domain interactions revealed significant though small effects (*p*s < .009, η_p^2s=.001), for detailed results, see Appendix, Table 20.). For artist judgments, we found a small though significant main effect for artistic domain (p=.008, η_p^2=.01). The interactions for beauty*recognition, beauty*domain, recognition*domain and intention*beauty*domain revealed significant though small effects (*p*s < .046, η_p^2s=.001), for detailed results, see Appendix, Table

21. Overall we found a significant yet rather small impact of domain on both art and artist judgments.

7.5 Discussion

Consistent with Experiment 1, beauty had a considerable effect on art judgments, whereas institutional recognition, again, had but a small effect. As concerns intentionality, the findings differed across experiments: This factor had a strong effect on judgements of art in the domain of visual art, whereas its effect was considerably smaller in the realm of music. Interestingly each of the three factors sufficed for an object to be judged as art. Only in the absence of all three factors was mean art attribution significantly below the midpoint. This finding suggests that the folk concept of art might be a cluster or a disjunctive concept: only in the absence of all factors participants are not willing to ascribe art status to the object.

The results do not allow us to clearly disambiguate between cluster and disjunctive concepts – at least in terms they are usually discussed in aesthetics. In this field, cluster and disjunctive definitions are usually held to be extremely similar (Davies 2004, Longworth and Scarantino 2010). When the two are distinguished, the difference is described in the following way: unlike disjunctive concepts, an open concept is not governed by a definite set of criteria for application. Since only three criteria have been tested in our study, it is impossible to tell whether the full set is determinate or not. The difference between cluster and disjunctive concepts is usually described in aesthetics in terms of a possibility of change, and future (potential) criteria for application (Weitz 1956, Cook 2013).

However, we can follow the contextualist interpretation of cluster concepts (as in epistemology, regarding the concept of knowledge (e.g. DeRose 1992, Cohen 1999, Stanley 2004)). If the difference between cluster and disjunctive concepts and, accordingly, their openness and closeness, is essentially the question of whether their conditions of application are context-sensitive, then our results show some support for the cluster theory. The application conditions for the concept of art seem to be context-dependent: they change from situation to situation. For instance, in the second experiment, institutional recognition was sufficient, while in the first experiment, it was not.

As concerns the status of being an artist: In the context of visual art only intentionality mattered, in the context of music all three manipulated factors proved significant. Intentionality or beauty of the object were sufficient by themselves for people to deem the creator an artist, and only in the case where the object lacked all three tested properties did people clearly refrain from judging the creator an artist. While it is not surprising that being an artist and creating intentionally

is tightly related, we found that in some cases, intentional action is not a necessary condition for being considered artist.

8. General Discussion

8.1 Overview of Findings

In the introduction we have distinguished between three broad categories of accounts concerning the concept of art: *essentialist*, *cluster*, and *disjunctive* accounts. Essentialism requires a set of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for an object to be art. According to cluster and disjunctive accounts, by contrast, an object can constitute art if it manifests one or several individually nonessential properties from a set of features.

Our empirical inquiry has explored (Q1) whether any of the three properties are seen by the folk as necessary and/or sufficient properties for an object's status of art, and, more generally, (Q2) whether the folk concept of art is an essentialist concept.

As regards question Q1, we found that none of the three properties proved *necessary*: Mean art ratings exceeded the midpoint of the scale in both the visual art and musical context if the object manifested only beauty or only intentionality. Correlatively, this suggests that either property was sufficient for an object to be deemed art.[8] Beauty exerted a substantial impact on art judgments in both artistic contexts, whereas the impact of intentionality was less pronounced in the musical context. Institutional recognition was clearly the least important feature of art: In the visual art context, it proved insufficient by itself (though in the musical context, mean art ratings for objects which only had the features of recognition exceeded the midpoint and just about made the significance threshold). Furthermore, we detected an interesting interaction between beauty and recognition: For nonbeautiful objects, the presence of recognition tended to substantially raise the level of art judgments.

Given that none of the three properties tested seem to capture a necessary feature of the folk concept of art, it seems that the folk concept of art is not essentialist in nature. Instead, it seems to be either a cluster or a disjunctive concept, and all three features tested seem to be part of the cluster of properties that *can,* by themselves or in conjunction with others, confer the status of art. According to our findings, in each context beauty suffices to confer the status of art. Intentionality does in the visual context and is trending in the musical context. Recognition is (just about) sufficient by itself in the musical context, though does not suffice when it comes to paintings. However, recognition exerts a significant influence on art judgments when the object

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[8] Note that in the musical context both were sitting on the fence: Objects that were only beautiful (M=4.47, SD=1.68, one-sample t-test, difference from midpoint of the scale, p=.048) just made the threshold of significance if uncorrected (not with Bonferroni correction, see Appendix, Table 15), objects that were only intentional (M=4.50, SD=2.15, one-sample-t-test, p=.106) did not.

lacks beauty. Both the context-sensitivity of the factor's relative impact, and the significant beauty*recognition interaction provides some support the hypothesis that the folk concept of art is a cluster concept: Consistent with what cluster theories would predict, the impact of each factor can change from situation to situation. It is sensitive both to artistic domain and the presence or absence of other features. In different contexts, different criteria might be relevant for categorising objects as art/not art.

As a secondary variable, we have also gathered data on the question under what conditions a creator is deemed an artist. Broadly speaking, whether or not an agent is considered an artist does – expectedly – track whether or not the object they created is deemed art. However, and this is an interesting and surprising finding, in the visual context, we found a divergence: Beautiful, accidentally produced creations (recognized or not) *are* considered art, though their creators are *not* considered artists. What this suggests, at least *prima facie*, is that the folk is willing to attribute the status of art to objects that were created *without* a creative intention, and *not* created by artists. This is surprising for several reasons: First, most authors in the philosophy of art work with the assumption that whatever is the real nature of art, it must be a result of intentional action (Dutton 2009, Mag Uidhir 2013). Artworks are almost always described as *artifacts*, which entails that they must be the product of intentional action. The role of intention for art status and art interpretation has been often emphasized not only by philosophers, but also in psychological and empirical literature (Bloom 1996, Jucker et al. 2014, Newman and Bloom 2012, Newman and Smith 2018, Kamber and Enoch 2018).

Second, quite obviously, being an artist and being the source of art-making intentions is closely related, because any object that is the product of intentional action must have a creator. For instance, according to Mag Uidhir, "if what it is to be an artwork is to be the product of a successful art-attempt, then presumably what it is to be the artist of a particular artwork is to be the source of the intentions directing the actions constitutive of the successful art-attempt of which that particular artwork is the product. From this it follows that an artwork must have an artist." (2013: 45). According to the standard view, art must be intentionally made, and it must have an intention-ally acting creator. That the folk is willing to recognize artworks that do not have an artist might sound paradoxical at the outset, in fact it is less so when we think of art created by non-human agents, such as artificial intelligence. And in fact, here too, even though AI-driven robots are standardly not deemed artists, their creations (in experiments similar to the ones here presented) frequently are (see Mikalonytė and Kneer 2022). One could wonder if people simply ascribe the creative intention to the human creator of AI instead of the AI-driven machine itself and consider the human creator the source of artistic intentions. However, the results of the current study show that the folk is open to the idea of art being created without a creator in a more general sense.

8.2 Limitations

Whereas, we take it, we have at least delivered substantial evidence that the folk concept of art is a cluster concept, and not an essentialist one, much work is needed to elucidate said concept in more depth.

First, our inquiry is limited to but two artistic contexts (painting and music). Given that even across these two contexts we detected some substantial differences, it stands to reason to explore a wide variety of further artistic domains, and ideally employ several distinct scenarios for each to test for intra-domain variation.

Second, although we have tested several properties that have prominently featured in both essentialist and disjunctive or cluster accounts of art, the net should be cast wider. Dutton, for instance, lists (though does not limit himself to) twelve distinct criteria in his cluster account; (1) direct pleasure, (2) skill and virtuosity, (3) style, (4) novelty and creativity, (5) criticism, (6) representation, (7) special focus, (8) expressive individuality, (9) emotional saturation, (10) intellectual challenge, (11) art traditions and institutions, (12) imaginative experience, and, in addition, intentional creation as a necessary condition (Dutton 2009).

Third, empirical research in the social sciences tends to oversample populations from WEIRD countries in general, and US Americans in particular (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan, 2010, see also De Block & Kelly, 2022). Some have argued for a surprising stability of experimental-philosophical findings across populations and cultures (Knobe 2019, 2021), citing studies that report cross-cultural convergence on topics ranging from the metaphysics of free will (Sarkissian et al. 2011), central intuitions in epistemology (Rose et al. 2019) and intentionality attribution (Lin et al. 2019), norms of assertion (Kneer, 2021), to key concepts in philosophy of law (Hannikainen et al. 2019, 2022). Others have countered this contention (Stich and Machery 2022), pointing to studies where results vary strongly across cultures. In experimental philosophy of aesthetics, there is but one study to date, which reports some, yet limited, divergence concerning intuitions of intersubjective validity in aesthetic judgments across 19 different countries (Cova et al. 2018). A systematic inquiry into the folk concept of art requires cross-cultural studies.

Fourth, given potentially diverging reasons for identical or similar responses, quantitative research of the sort reported in this paper might need to be supplemented with qualitative data, asking participants why they responded as they did.

Fifth, novel experiments are needed to better distinguish between cluster and disjunctive definitions. Future experiments can procede in two directions: (1) further explorations of the context-sensitivity of the concept of art, and (2) the possibility of new cases: under what conditions might the current application conditions be reconsidered?

Finally, whereas the vignette-based approach has its strengths as it allows experimenters to tightly control the manipulated factors, one might correctly argue that an essential part of aesthetic evaluation lies in a first-hand aesthetic *experience*, and the present studies do not involve such an experience. It has been argued that textual vignettes leave out many details which must be filled in by a reader in her imagination. Readers tend to choose different details, which leads to different intuitive verdicts. However, this problem in aesthetics can be solved by using visual (or aural) stimuli (Weinberg 2018: 237). It has been demonstrated in experimental philosophy of music that using acoustic stimuli in addition to text vignettes (vs. text vignettes only) has an effect on people's intuitions (Puy 2022). Hence, it might be helpful to include actual or potential works of art among the stimuli to explore the robustness of the findings here presented.

9. Conclusion

Whereas the correct definition of art is notoriously difficult to pick out, the broadest question in the literature on art theories – and also the question we aimed to explore in this study – is about the *type* of theory the concept of art requires. Can art be defined by individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions or by a disjunction of minimally sufficient conditions? If the latter is true, is the set of conditions determinate or not?

Our initial exploration of three factors – intentional creation, aesthetic value and institutional recognition – suggests that none of the conditions is seen by people as individually necessary. It remains to be discovered what is the role of other factors – for example, emotional expressivity or formal complexity – that are often mentioned by philosophers of art. Therefore, many questions regarding the folk concept of art remain open. However, contrary to the default position in aesthetics and literature on artifactual kinds, it seems that according to the folk view, intentional creation is not a necessary condition for an object to be art. It also seems unlikely that one of the less often discussed factors would be discovered in the future to be individually necessary. The application conditions are context-sensitive, and the folk concept of art seems to be a cluster concept. If the correct account of art must be consistent with the folk concept of art – perhaps at least to some extent – it seems that the cluster account is the most promising one we have at our disposal.

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