

**teorema**

Vol. XXXIV/3, 2015, pp. 159-175

ISSN: 0210-1602

[BIBLID 0210-1602 (2015) 34:3; pp. 159-175]

## Experimental Philosophy and Intuitions on What Is Art and What is Not

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### RESUMEN

Se acepta generalmente que los filósofos del arte confían en su intuición para justificar o criticar las definiciones que se proponen sobre lo que es el arte. Sin embargo, los filósofos experimentales han puesto en duda la importancia de la intuición en filosofía, dado que la investigación empírica muestra que las intuiciones de los filósofos ni son ampliamente compartidas, ni son consideradas fuentes fiables de justificación. Este artículo intenta aplicar estos desafíos experimentales al problema de la definición del arte. Se mostrará que, aunque los experimentalistas tienen razón al afirmar que no se pueden utilizar las intuiciones de los filósofos como fundamentos epistémicos para definir lo que es el arte, la investigación experimental por sí misma tampoco puede proporcionar una justificación a la hora de definir el arte.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *definición de arte, filosofía del arte, filosofía experimental, intuición.*

### ABSTRACT

It is generally agreed upon that philosophers of art rely on their intuitions to justify or criticize proposed definitions of art. Experimental philosophers, however, have questioned the role of intuition in philosophy, since empirical research shows that philosophers' intuitions are neither widely shared nor reliable sources of justification. This article aims to apply these experimental challenges to the project of defining art. It will be demonstrated that while experimentalists are right in claiming that philosophers' intuitions cannot be used as epistemic grounds for the definition of art, experimental research itself cannot provide justification for definitions of art.

KEYWORDS: *Definition of Art, Philosophy of Art, Experimental Philosophy, Intuition.*

Philosophers of art have given a great deal of thought to the question 'What is art?'. Usually, they try to formulate a definition of the concept of art. Most of them purportedly do this by testing their intuitions on what falls under the concept. This methodology seems to imply that the concept of art is a shared concept that is implicitly known to us and, correspondingly, that we all have the same or highly similar intuitions on

what is art and what is not, i.e. intuitions on which items are art and which items are non-art. Our intuitions, delivered by this implicit knowledge, enable us to formulate an analysis of the concept, in other words, to make the implicit knowledge explicit [Brown (1999), p. 33]. Intuition, like perception and memory, is then seen as a valuable, although not infallible, provider of knowledge [Sosa (2007)]. Nonetheless, there are vigorous debates over the correct analysis of art. Some philosophers perceive the disagreements as so deep, that they consider the whole project to be pretty hopeless. Still, as with other projects in aesthetics and the philosophy of art,<sup>1</sup> it has been argued that the project of defining art could progress by carrying out experimental research, in this case by surveying and polling intuitions on what is art [Kamber (2011)]. Disagreement among philosophers is then explained by the fact that philosophers' intuitions on arthood are corrupted by their philosophical theories.

The idea that philosophical questions can be clarified through experimental research is part of a broader movement within philosophy, aptly termed Experimental Philosophy. Unlike traditional 'armchair' philosophers, experimental philosophers run empirical studies in order to answer philosophical questions. Armchair philosophers, so it is generally claimed, rely on their own, supposedly universally shared and correct, intuitions as evidential base for their philosophical analyses. Experimental philosophers, on the other hand, argue that it is wrong for philosophers to assume the universality of their own intuitions, since intuitions show (cultural) variability and instability [Machery et al. (2004), p. B8]. Although all experimental philosophers use the same means, that is, empirical research methods, they are not at all unified in their aims. Roughly, a distinction needs to be made between the positive program of experimental philosophy that aims to collect data about intuitions in order to support or contest philosophical analyses, and the negative program that aims to establish that intuitions cannot make knowledge about philosophical concepts available to us [Vaidya (2012), p. 111]. In the latter view, intuitions are seen as a sort of spontaneous judgments that have no evidential value analogous to perception and memory [Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich (2006)].

The relevance of experimental philosophy for definitions of art seems clear: it is generally agreed upon that philosophers of art rely extensively on their own intuitions in order to formulate and test criteria for arthood and to criticize rival theories. Accordingly, experimental philosopher Richard Kamber, in his article "Experimental Philosophy of Art," proposes that philosophers' intuitions need to be tested experimen-

tally in order to be able to constitute evidence for definitions of art [Kamber (2011)]. Still, it is unclear how experimental philosophy can move forward the project of defining art, and, more specifically, how experimental data on intuitions can confirm or contest proposed definitions, since experimental research has demonstrated that intuitions on what is art, are conflicted. Succinctly put, this article aims to clarify whether intuitions can provide us with knowledge about the concept of art and whether experimental research can positively contribute to the project of defining art.

After clarifying the aims and scope of experimental philosophy, I will point out that the project of defining art is a right target for experimental philosophy, since most philosophers of art explicitly or implicitly claim that intuitions are evidence for their definitions of art. Then, it will be examined what experimental research on intuitions tells us about the project of defining art. Rather than helping to make implicit knowledge about the concept of art explicit, experimental research adds force to proponents of the negative program, since this research shows that intuitions on arthood are heavily confused and that there is no adequate way to establish which intuitions are most reliable for grounding a definition of art. Correspondingly, intuitions, whether attained through armchair reflection or experimental research, cannot deliver us explicit knowledge about the concept of art. Therefore, the experimental philosophy of art seems to be caught in a double bind: either experimental philosophers fall in the same trap as armchair philosophers and illegitimately use intuitions as evidence for philosophical theories, or experimental philosophers deny intuitions this evidential status and their findings seemingly have not much to contribute to philosophical research. I will suggest that their findings might still be able to play a role in the project of defining art, albeit a limited and modest role.

## I. EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY: AIMS AND SCOPE

Experimental philosophy is a philosophical movement that aims to criticize and improve or even abolish so-called armchair philosophy. Armchair philosophy refers to any a priori philosophical investigation. The often implicit idea behind armchair philosophy is that philosophers cannot and need not do experiments, or conduct surveys, to determine, for instance, what is moral, or what is knowledge. Rather, they consult their own intuitions on their subject matter to formulate and verify phil-

osophical theories. Experimental philosophers, on the other hand, argue that using philosophers' intuitions as evidence in philosophy is unjustified, since experimental research has revealed that these intuitions do not always match with folk intuitions, are biased, unstable, and show (cultural) variability.

Experimental philosophy appears to be especially relevant in the domain of conceptual analysis, since there reliance on intuitions seems ubiquitous. Although the project of conceptual analysis is not unified and in many ways ambiguous, most conceptual analysts try to formulate the conditions under which a concept is commonly applied. Depending on the context, 'commonly applied' can refer to folk as well as expert application. For example, when philosophers are analyzing a concept within physics, they are interested in physicists' intuitions rather than lay intuitions. Most practitioners of conceptual analysis underwrite descriptivism, not revisionism: they want to reveal how concepts are used, not how concepts should be used.<sup>2</sup> They aim to provide a descriptive analysis of philosophically interesting concepts such as justice, free will, knowledge and causation, through consulting their own intuitions. It is presupposed that intuitions, like perception and memory, provide reliable, yet not infallible, evidence: when somebody reports she saw a bus driving by a couple of minutes ago, one will take this statement as evidence for the reported fact, provided the reporter does not suffer from perceptual impairments and was not lying, distracted or confused. Correspondingly, so most defenders of armchair philosophy maintain, when a philosopher intuits that an action is just, then this is reliable evidence for the fact that the action is generally accepted as just. Experimental philosophers, on the other hand, question the evidential value of intuitions: they doubt that philosophers' intuitions can be used to reveal the established application of a concept.

What do experimental philosophers hope to achieve with their experimental research on intuitions? Some maintain that experimentalists' data will help to confirm or disconfirm philosophers' hypotheses [Kamber (2011), p. 206]. This branch of experimental philosophy is adequately named 'Experimental Analysis' since its aims are moderate and similar to the aims of conceptual analysis [Nadelhoffer and Nahmias (2007), p. 126]. It represents the positive program of experimental philosophy. Usually, moderate experimentalists survey laypersons' intuitions and point out where these vary from those reported by philosophers. Philosophical intuitions, it is assumed then, do not represent the pre-theoretical intuitions of the community, whether this entails a folk or an expert com-

munity. Pre-theoretical intuitions, so it is argued, are needed in order to evaluate philosophical theories. Experimental analysis is continuous with conceptual analysis: moderate experimental philosophers aim to improve, not put an end to conceptual analysis. Defenders of the positive program propose that philosophers should ‘embrace experimental methods as one more tool in the philosopher’s toolbox’ [Vaidya (2012), pp. 132].

Not all experimental philosophers believe that armchair philosophy can simply be reinforced by the findings of experimental philosophy. The negative program of experimental philosophy offers the so-called ‘restrictionist challenge’: they aim to radically revise or even abandon current armchair philosophical practices [Weinberg, Crowley, et al. (2012), p. 257]. They do not only hold that philosophers’ intuitions do not coincide with folk intuitions, they also provide evidence against the suggestion that we all share similar intuitions regarding philosophically interesting concepts [Gasparatou (2010), p. 38]. Since intuitions are not shared, using intuitions to justify philosophical theories equals unjustifiably privileging our own intuitions over those of others [Nadelhoffer and Nahmias (2007), p. 128].

Armchair philosophers have responded to this challenge by claiming that philosophers’ intuitions are more reliable than folk intuitions [Kauppinen (2007), p. 101] and have tried to verify this claim by empirical research [Livengood et al. (2012)]. This response is dubbed the ‘expert-defense’. Experimental research has indicated that philosophers are alike in being more *reflective* than non-philosophers [Livengood et al. (2012), p. 32]. Therefore, philosophers’ intuitions *are* more reliable than folk intuitions; philosophers are ‘expert-intuiters’.

Against the expert-defense, restrictionists have formulated several counterarguments. To begin with, it is easily ascertained that philosophers’ intuitions vary even among peers. How can it be decided which intuitions are correct when intuitions conflict among ‘expert-intuiters’? It could be argued that philosophers can rely on confirmed theories in order to do this. However, restrictionists argue that there are no well-established, consensus theories available in philosophy [Weinberg, Gonnerman, et al. (2012), p. 63]. Moreover, research has established that persons more inclined towards reflection have a tendency to impose ‘coherent arbitrariness’ on their judgments: they render later judgments consistent with earlier ones [Weinberg, Gonnerman, et al. (2012), p. 57]. In other words, it is suggested that philosophical thinking is subject to confirmation bias: philosophers treat evidence in favor of and evidence against the theories they accept differently [cf. Nanay (2013), p. 356].

This explains why philosophers' judgments are more stable, yet not untouched by philosophically-irrelevant factors. In short, the restrictionist challenge, if the challenge is valid, cannot be met without departing from the intuition-based methodology. Now, let us turn to the role intuitions play in definitions of art and see whether experimentalists' attacks are relevant in this field.

## II. INTUITIONS AND THE DEFINITION OF ART

In the philosophy of art, appeal to intuitions seems by and large a daily practice. Most noticeably, intuitions are used as evidential base for establishing the truth or falsity of definitions of art: they seem to make implicit knowledge about what art is explicit. Although many philosophers of art remain silent about their methods and aims, most definitions of art are rightly characterized as conceptual analyses of art. A conceptual analysis of art gives the conditions under which the concept art is applied. Most definitions of art aim to be descriptive: they aim to clarify the concept of art as it is used. Therefore, these definitions need to square with people's intuitions: if certain criteria of a proposed definition are counterintuitive, then the definition needs to be altered.<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that philosophers of art mostly do not aim to accommodate lay people's intuitions, but rather the intuitions of competent users of the concept of art, such as art professionals and art lovers. As Kamber rightly points out, although most philosophers do not elaborate much on the methods they use to define art, they seem to endorse this intuition-based methodology. As such, defining art is rightly seen as an 'armchair affair'. Noël Carroll does elaborate on methodology and claims that analyzing the concept of art is not an empirical question. Subsequently, the question is not settled by 'taking polls, running experiments, or making observations', but rather by reflecting on how we apply the concept of art and by seeing whether our philosophical theories mesh with our considered intuitions. He even calls intuitions 'mother's milk to analytic philosophers' [Carroll (1999), p. 11-12].

The following examples substantiate the claim that philosophers of art mostly are in agreement with Carroll and invoke intuitions, explicitly or implicitly, as evidential base for the truth or falsity of a theory of art. It is striking that philosophers use intuitions in order to defend clearly conflicting definitions of art: anti-essentialist, procedural and aesthetic theories of art are all justified by appeal to intuitions.

Berys Gaut is explicit about his metaphilosophical premises and states which requirements a theory of art must meet in order to be adequate. One of the main requirements is 'adequacy to intuition'. This means that a theory or definition of art '[...] must agree with our intuitions about what we would say about actual and counterfactual cases: if the account claims that some object satisfies the concept, but it intuitively doesn't (or vice versa), then that is one strike against the account' [Gaut (2000), p. 30]. In a similar vein, Stephen Davies states that important debates regarding the definition of art can only be settled by a theory that coheres 'with a wide spread of intuitions about the terms in which art is discussed and interpreted' [Davies (1991), p. 47]. Gary Iseminger provides us with another good example of how intuitions are given evidential status in the philosophy of art. He states that philosophical proposals in general explain certain intuitions on the philosophical topic under consideration. Theories that conflict with these intuitions lose credibility. Iseminger himself takes great pains to show that his aesthetic definition accounts for important intuitions about art [Iseminger (2004), p. 9-11].<sup>4</sup>

Most philosophers of art, like Noël Carroll, defend this use of one's own intuitions by implicitly or explicitly invoking the expert-defense: we do not need folk intuitions to ground definitions of art, since philosophers' intuitions are better informed and less biased. However, this reply faces restrictionist objections that cannot be easily countered. Like in other fields, philosophers', i.e. expert-intuiters', intuitions often clash over which items are art. Disagreements arise over hard cases, such as avant-garde art, culturally and historically remote artifacts, fashion and popular music. These are items whose art status is contested and therefore unclear. As restrictionists have argued, there is no easy answer to whose intuitions count or, in other words, how these identification problems are to be resolved. Philosophers of art cannot rely on well-established theories, since there are no such theories. There is heavy debate regarding virtually every theoretical framework for defining art; philosophers disagree over what kind of concept the concept of art is, what role intentions, history, institutions and aesthetic properties play in identifying arthood, and so on.<sup>5</sup>

Then, how do philosophers address hard cases? Rather than relying on a consensus theory, they render their identifications of hard cases consistent with the theory they defend. The way in which hard cases like avant-garde art and culturally and historically remote art are treated illustrates this very well. Jerrold Levinson, Noël Carroll and Arthur Danto

define or theorize about art in terms of historical embeddedness. Roughly speaking, this entails that an item can only be identified as art if the item is adequately related to preceding artworks; whether or not something is art depends on its historical origin. For them, avant-garde artworks are uncontested, and often even paradigmatic, artworks. Moreover, they argue that their theories are superior to other theories because they are able to account for avant-garde art. Conversely, for Nick Zangwill, Jerome Stolnitz, and others, who define art in terms of aesthetics, avant-garde artworks are art to a lesser degree, second order art or even simply non-art. Since for them, the exhibition of aesthetic properties or the elicitation of aesthetic experiences is essential to art-hood, 'non-aesthetic' avant-garde art is more or less excluded from the domain of art. It is clear that intuitions diverge on avant-garde art and that the defended theory and the philosopher's intuitions are mutually related. The same goes for culturally and historically remote art. For Levinson, many of these items are not fully art, while for Denis Dutton, Julius Moravcsik and others, they are paradigmatic artworks. Again, the latter see it as an advantage of their theories that they include these artifacts in the domain of art, while Levinson sees it as an advantage of his definition that it attributes them a borderline status [See Carroll (1993); Danto (1981); Dutton (2006); Levinson (1993); Moravcsik (1993); Stolnitz (1979); Zangwill (2002)]. These examples show that philosophers' intuitions and preferred theory are mutually reinforcing. As Dominic Lopes has pointed out, there is no easy way out of this impasse: both parties 'naturally believe that they have dealt with the hard cases as befits the hard cases, whether they rule them in or out of the domain of art works' [Lopes (2014), 58]. Nick Zangwill, for one, graciously acknowledges that philosophers of art's intuitions are corrupted by the theory they defend, whether they defend an institutional definition, like George Dickie, or an aesthetic theory, like Zangwill himself [Zangwill (1995), 534]. Moreover, confirmation bias is apparent in the fact that almost none of the leading figures within the debate on defining art have substantially altered their definitions during their careers, although all of their proposed definitions have been met with serious criticisms.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the restrictionist critique against the use of intuitions in philosophy is equally applicable to the philosophy of art.

Undeniably, philosophers need not and do not solely rely on their own intuitions. These intuitions should be aligned with how the concept of art is used in artistic practice. David Davies has most ardently defended this position [Davies (2004); (2009)]. Arguably, this is what many phi-



losophers in fact try to do. They look at what is seen as art in the field of the arts to evaluate their intuitions. Nevertheless, artistic practice does not provide us with a consensus approach to the identification of art. This is revealed when looking at how, for example, culturally remote art is treated in artistic practice: some remote artifacts are included in art museums, while others end up in archeological museums; some art historians include these artifacts in their art histories, others willingly or unwillingly exclude them. Similar observations can be made regarding fashion, popular culture and folk arts. In other words, disagreement among philosophers of art is mirrored by disagreements among practitioners within the fields of the arts. Since different practitioners attribute art status differently, they cannot provide an answer to the question which intuitions on what is art and what is not, need to be given priority.

To sum up, the project of defining art is a suitable target for the attacks of experimental philosophers. Correspondingly, Richard Kamber is right in arguing that philosophers cannot simply presuppose the universality of their own intuitions and use these intuitions as evidence for their theories of art. What remains to be seen is what experimental research on folk or expert intuitions on what is art can positively contribute to the project of defining art.

### III. THE EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY OF ART

In the following, I will evaluate the significance of the positive and the negative program of experimental philosophy for the project of defining art. First, I will focus on the positive program. Since Richard Kamber is the one who has done experimental research to evaluate definitions of art, his findings will be central. Thereafter, I will apply the restrictionist challenge to the positive program of the experimental philosophy of art and see whether their criticisms of the use of intuitions in philosophy are equally valid there.

Kamber performed several surveys to determine people's intuitions on what is art. His principal aim was 'to test the effectiveness of art theories in tracking the intuitions and judgments of art professionals and others about what is or is not art' [Kamber (2011), p. 199]. What is more, he suggests that disagreements between different definitions of art can be settled by means of experimental research. Accordingly, his project fits within the positive program of experimental philosophy. Kamber examined experimentally the criteria for arthood proposed by philosophers of

art such as Clive Bell, Arthur Danto, Noël Carroll and Jerrold Levinson. The outcomes of his surveys show that definitions of art are not always good at tracking intuitions. It is noteworthy that Kamber included Danto and Bell. Both philosophers clearly do not intend to simply track intuitions on arthood, rather they want to determine how the concept of art should be applied. For this reason, as Kamber himself realizes, he cannot justifiably accuse Bell's and Danto's proposals of not accounting for intuitions. Nevertheless, as noted above, many philosophers of art, including Noël Carroll and Jerrold Levinson, do refer to intuitions as grounding evidence for the truth of their theories. As such, they are engaging in descriptive conceptual analysis. It follows that these philosophers must account for intuitions. Philosophers should not use certain intuitions as evidential base and reject other intuitions because of the theory they are holding: this would render their philosophical practice methodologically unsound. A philosopher has to stick either to the descriptive level, in which case intuitions must be honored, or to the normative level, in which case intuitions may be discarded. If the two levels are confused, then it is unclear whether a philosopher wants to clarify how the concept of art *is* used or how the concept of art *should* be used [Cf. De Vreese and Weber (2008)]. Therefore, Kamber rightly uses his empirical data to *criticize* these descriptive proposals. The question that remains to be answered is how his data can help *verifying* definitions of art. In the following, the set-up and the results of Kamber's surveys will be discussed in more detail.

Since Kamber maintains that most competing definitions of art, like competing scientific theories, agree on 'the vast majority of cases to which they apply', he focusses on hard cases [Kamber (2011), p. 199].<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it would not be very useful to test our intuitions on the art status of, say, Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, Bach's *Cello Suites* or Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Therefore, he chose to survey intuitions on the arthood of artefacts that have a contested art status. He rightly holds that philosophers of art need a method other than that given by their own theories to resolve these hard cases. How, then, can quarrels over the art status of hard cases between competing theories be settled? Kamber suggests that experimental philosophy is needed in order to ground decisions on hard cases [Kamber (2011), pp. 205-206]. However, his surveys show that folk as well as art professionals' intuitions conflict on cases that are also hard cases within the philosophy of art, such as bridges, cars, amateur photographs, 'very bad art' and avant-garde art. This result is hardly surprising: this can also be concluded from studying existing definitions of art, look-

ing at the art world, or listening to people talk about art. The question that remains to be answered is which intuitions are to be disregarded and which are to be given centrality and how we can measure centrality and importance [Miller (2000), p. 233]. It is widely accepted, also among experimental philosophers, that information about the statistical distribution of intuitions does not automatically give us reason to accept or reject a particular philosophical view. Nonetheless, Kamber suggests that these results *do* have a direct impact, since he maintains that experimental research is needed for the *resolution* of hard cases [Kamber (2011), p. 206].

Let us first have a look at some results of Kamber's surveys: 68 percent of all surveyed subjects (hereafter: ALL) and 73 percent of the surveyed art professionals (hereafter: AP) identified Duchamp's *Fountain* as art; 71 percent of ALL and 67 percent of AP identified a documentary photo as art; 55 percent of ALL and 47 percent of AP identified a conventional amateur picture of a bird as art; 70 percent of ALL and 71 percent of AP identified Homer's *Illiad* as art; and 85 percent of ALL and 81 percent of AP identified a ceremonial mask from a primitive tribe in Patagonia as art. What can be concluded from these results? Firstly, it is obvious that we cannot decide that the majority is right, since there is not always a substantial majority. Therefore, philosophers of art cannot simply use these empirical data to back up their theories. Take, for example, the bird picture, an amateur photo. Nick Zangwill would include amateur photos in the domain of art provided they are the product of aesthetic creation, while Arthur Danto and George Dickie would most likely exclude them, since amateur pictures mostly lack 'aboutness', a necessary criterion for arthood according to Danto, and institutional embeddedness, a necessary criterion according to Dickie [Zangwill (1995), p. 534]. Kamber's results show that the contested status of amateur photography in the philosophy of art is also apparent in judgments of the folk and art professionals, but these results cannot provide an answer to the question who is right. Even if there are rather substantial majorities, say starting from 70 to 75 percent, it does not seem legitimate for a philosopher with descriptive aims to simply discard the minority [Brunnander (2011), p. 425]. On the contrary, a descriptive analysis should account for the fact that intuitions diverge on the art status of these cases; they should have a theory of disagreement. An appeal to artistic practice will most likely not be of much help, since art professionals also disagree over the art status of these items. One can, again, argue that we can invoke a theory for distinguishing correct intuitions from incorrect ones. Still, as has been argued above, there are no substantial consensus theo-

ries that philosophers of art can rely on. Moreover, provided we could find a standard for distinguishing correct from incorrect intuitions, philosophers could have no use for intuition anymore [a similar argument can be found in Cummins (1998), pp. 117-118]. If there were a well-established theory to distinguish correct intuitions on art identification from incorrect ones, then we could simply rely on this theory for art identification, and reference to intuitions would be futile. Therefore, the restrictionist challenge is equally valid with regard to the positive program of experimental philosophy, while it is unclear what philosophical insights the positive program can offer.

#### IV. SOME CONCLUSIONS AND SOME HOPE FOR DEFINING ART

Now, let us return to the article's initial questions: can intuitions provide us with knowledge about the concept of art and can experimental research positively contribute to the project of defining art? The first question can be usefully rephrased as follows: should intuitions be seen as analogues to perception and memory, or rather as spontaneous judgments like hunches or gut feelings? In the former case, intuitions provide us with knowledge, in the latter case, they do not. My findings indicate that intuition does not function like perception or memory in knowledge acquisition in the way proponents of armchair philosophy claim. Armchair reflection as well as experimental research has revealed that disagreement over intuitions is much deeper and more fundamental than disagreement over perceptions. Under normal circumstances, competent language users will have similar perceptions, and disagreement over perceptions can usually be resolved quite easily by pointing at failing perceptual capacities or irregular contexts. In contrast, it has been shown that intuitions over which items are art differ to a considerably large extent. These disagreements cannot easily be explained away and there is no easy answer to the question who is right. Simply put, the answer to the first question is negative: intuitions on what is art do not make implicit knowledge about the concept of art explicit. They mainly show that there is no unified established application of the concept.

Secondly, my findings lead to the conclusion that the positive program with regard to defining art is misguided.<sup>8</sup> Since philosophers' as well as surveyed intuitions on what is art are not shared, empirical data concerning intuitions simply cannot be used to ground definitions of art. Therefore, the restrictionist challenge is valid with regard to the defini-

tion of art. Radical experimental philosophers have rightly argued that moderate experimentalists, like armchair descriptive philosophers, need to provide us with a means to discern which intuitions track the philosophical truth. Yet, like armchair philosophers, moderate experimentalists have not offered an adequate way to accomplish this [Alexander, Mallon, and Weinberg (2010), p. 310].

From these two conclusions, it follows that neither our own nor surveyed intuitions can be used to justify definitions of art. However, this does not mean that the project of defining art itself should be abolished. There are other routes to defining art than by eliciting and testing intuitions, and other goals to attain with a definition of art than descriptive adequacy. This issue cannot be fully addressed here, but some suggestions will be offered. Recent metaphilosophical investigations on other philosophical topics, such as causation, function and knowledge, have suggested that descriptivism is not necessarily good in itself. Björn Brunnander, for example, has argued that the philosophical interest in ‘function’ was spurred by problems within the field and that a descriptive account of the concept is not what is needed in order to address these problems [Brunnander (2011), pp. 418-419]. The same could be said about the project of defining art. The matter became urgent when people within and outside of the field of the arts were confronted with items that seemed to claim or deserve art status, while being very dissimilar to what had been called art hitherto. This uncertainty about what is art and what is not generated doubt about how to approach these items, whether they should be subsidized, whether they deserve a place in art museums and so on. A descriptive analysis of art is unable to answer these problems, because when intuitions on what is art conflict, there is no way of telling which intuitions are valid. A fruitful definition of art, however, should be able to answer these problems. Philosophers have recommended different ways to attain these kinds of goals, such as the theoretical utility model [Weber and De Vreese (2009)], conceptual revisionism [Bishop (1992); Miller (2000)] and the development of alternative concepts [Brown (1999), p. 49]. Such approaches are normative; they aim to show how a concept is best used. Definitions of art, then, do not clarify how the concept of art is applied, rather they construct new concepts of art that are better suited for solving problems regarding the treatment, categorization and appreciation of certain artifacts.

Where does this leave experimental philosophy? As pointed out above, empirical data on intuitions cannot be used to verify descriptive definitions of art. Nonetheless, experimental research might have another

er role to play in the project of defining art. Indeed, we need to know how the concept is used in a specific practice, in other words, we need to know where the problems are, before we can formulate alternatives. Philosophers' intuitions will sometimes not suffice to do this, and there surveying intuitions can be helpful.

Ultimately, undermining the evidential status of intuitions should not be seen as a destructive conclusion: by getting rid of the obsession with being in accordance with intuitions and the descriptivist dogma, room is made for more fruitful lines of research.<sup>9</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In some of those other projects, such as the standard of taste, experimental investigation has led to insightful results. See: [Cutting (2007), pp. 79-94; Meskin et al. (2013)].

<sup>2</sup> For a clear exposition on the distinction between descriptive and revisionist conceptual analysis see: [De Vreese and Weber (2008)].

<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that there are openly normative definitions of art, such as Bell's, Collingwood's and Zangwill's definitions. These philosophers do not aim to account for intuitions: when intuitions conflict with their theories, intuitions are left aside. Pignocchi usefully distinguishes between descriptive and normative definitions of art. See: [Pignocchi (2012), p. 2].

<sup>4</sup> More explicit reliance on intuitions can be found in: [Levinson (1993); Stecker (1997); Meskin (2008); Longworth and Scarantino (2010)].

<sup>5</sup> The following examples illustrate some of these disagreements: Berys Gaut and Jerrold Levinson maintain that art is a vague concept, while Arthur Danto argues that the distinction between art and non-art is absolute [Gaut (2000); Levinson (1993), p. 422; Danto (1992), p. 110]. For aesthetic theorists like Nick Zangwill and Gary Iseminger, aesthetic properties are essential to arthood, while for Noël Carroll and Jerrold Levinson aesthetic properties are only historically, and thus contingently, important, but are not necessary conditions for arthood [Carroll (2009); Iseminger (2004); Levinson (1990); Zangwill (2007)].

<sup>6</sup> Jerrold Levinson, for example, did not substantially alter his proposed definition in a time span stretching from 1979 to 2002 [Levinson (1979); (2002)]. The same tendency can be seen in the work of other main figures within the

project of defining art, such as George Dickie, Noël Carroll, Robert Stecker and Arthur Danto.

<sup>7</sup> On a side note, it should be pointed out that philosophers do not agree on the vast majority of cases, since there is disagreement over the art status of a broad collection of objects, such as culturally and historically remote artifacts, folk arts, popular music and avant-garde art.

<sup>8</sup> Renia Gasparatou convincingly argues that the positive program is overall misguided. See: [Gasparatou (2010)].

<sup>9</sup> I would like to thank Violi Sahaj, Kris Goffin and the audience at the Annual Conference of the Dutch Association of Aesthetics (18-19/04/2013) for their comments on earlier versions of this paper. The research for this paper was supported by the Research Foundation - Flanders (FWO).

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