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Philosofisch advies en onderzoek

Evaluating Art. Art, its Categories and the Normativity of Evaluation

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Two things

- The pertinence of art-internal categories
- The crucial value that art has for culture
- A case-study: suicide art

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Properties and responses

- You fear the car driving towards you
- “Watch out! A dangerous car!”

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Properties and responses

- You fear the car driving towards you
- “Watch out! A dangerous car!”
- But its speed is 3 km/hr
- Hume would say: there is no disputing your fear: you either have it or you don't!
- This is how we think about taste. But is it right?

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Properties and responses

- In practice, we discuss:
 - The property of the car
 - The appropriateness of your response: you are overreacting
- We can discuss the value of art works:
 - its properties and our responses to these
 - Personal responses need not be idiosyncratic

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Our example for today

- Tomorrow, Sunday, at noon, Jim Koon will kill himself at the town square
 - Everyone is invited to watch him, through posters and announcements
 - Should he be subsidized?

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Getting the Categories right

- Is it art?
- For that, it has to be in some art form



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Getting the Categories right

- Is it art?
- Which art form?
 - Not literature, or painting, or sculpture



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Getting the Categories right

- Is it art?
- Which art form?
 - Not literature, or painting, or sculpture
 - Ballet? Theatre?



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Getting the Categories right

- Is it art?
- Which art form?
 - Not literature, or painting, or sculpture
 - Ballet? Theatre?
 - Performance? Installation?



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Getting the Categories right

- Is it art?
- Which art form?
 - Not literature, or painting, or sculpture
 - Ballet? Theatre?
 - Performance? Installation?
 - Something new?



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- We decide on basis of how we think we should appreciate the “work”
- Distinction between art works and art forms
- A bad painting is an instance of the art form of painting



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Why?

- We must get our categories right, for two reasons
 1. Without the right categories we cannot evaluate the work
 2. The categories inform us about how we deal with these works



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- If Jim Koon's suicide were theatre we would judge its narrative coherence and the emotional and cognitive effects of the playing
- If it were a performance we would judge its power to thematise human vulnerability



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A neutral example

- Imagine the art world of the 3-D guernicas:
- All works of art have the image of Picasso's *Guernica* as their content, but differ in physical depth, in relief
- Relief is where the work's expressiveness and meaningfulness resides



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- Picasso's *Guernica* is flat and boring according to standards in that art world



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1st conclusion

- You must know the categories under which to sort the work — but then the evaluation still has to begin
 - The categories will tell you what is standard or deviant or even counter-standard
- But maybe Jim Koon's suicide is a new art form? How to decide?



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- Should we look at the beauty of his dropping to the floor
- The speed of his dying — the slower he dies the better??
- What would the next work in this art form be like?



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Something is wrong here

- But what is it?



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Something is wrong here

- We do not want this to be art. Why?




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Something is wrong here

- We do not want this to be art
- No audience is allowed to look at a suicide as if it were art
- We are held to interfere

- On moral grounds
- We are prohibited, in this case, to take up an artistic attitude




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Back to 1st question: is it art?


- With works of art an audience takes up an artistic attitude
- We refrain from moral interference, we let things go their own way, as if they are represented, not really there

- In some cases morality prohibits



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- Jim Koon's suicide cannot be an instance of an art form, because it cannot be art



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3 Conclusions

1. Morality allows art practice
 - Why? Because **art is crucial for culture**
2. Within art practice categories form our rules to work with:
 - Art form specifications
 - Genre specifications
 - Style specifications
3. Art-internal normativity derives not from 2, but from 1 — we are morally motivated to make great art; but we evaluate through the categories



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How to validate our values?

- We must dispute matters of taste [against relativism]
- Works must be of a certain kind, or we couldn't make sense of them
- Works must be meritorious, must be good at what they do



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- Art is not just an arena for fun; no mere place to flee our worries; no mere tear-jerking domain — its plays are serious
- Art practice requires that we suspend our moral agency, even in light of horrible (represented) events: it has to gain back our trust by artistic merit



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Beyond the limits

- New things must gain momentum in this arena by setting up a new art form
- Works from other art practices must either bring along their categories (and convince this art world of their pertinence), or conform to “our” categories, (and risk being mis-apprehended)



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