

Consider Non~Formal Aesthetics

By:

Sunarto, Irfanda Rizki Harmono Sejati, and Ibnu Amar Muchsin

*Is the aesthetic still alive?
Has aesthetics/art ended (the end of aesthetics/art)?*
Georg Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)

Until now, in art education, Western aesthetics dominates as a science *that* has (as if) been patented for analyzing (formal) art (materials). Every time he researches, writes and analyzes the field of art, he always uses formal Western aesthetics. Finally, up to this moment, Western aesthetic formality (as it seems) cannot be shaken in its position in the study of art in Indonesia. From the classical aesthetic theory of Ancient Greece to Modern, it has become a 'mandatory' *formal* ²material in aesthetic (art) analysis.

From the context of formal aesthetics, is there no non-formal aesthetics or alternative aesthetics? Of course, what is meant here is non-Western aesthetics which can be used as a formal art object.

Looking for non-formal aesthetics is a 'resistance' to the dominance of established Western aesthetics. Western aesthetics has had standardization and recognition as a "science"; Meanwhile, non-formal aesthetics (possibly) still has no standardization or recognition as a science. Formal aesthetics is within *the grand narrative*, while non-formal aesthetics is still within the scope of *the little narrative*.³

Starting from Baumgarten

Since aesthetics was declared a science by German philosophers, Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762), the world of aesthetics developed rapidly. Baumgarten is especially known for introducing the word "aesthetics" to describe the influence of art and nature, which in the course of the 17th century replaced older theories of

¹ Poststructuralism/Postmodernism in positing emancipation from *the grand narrative* (Palmer, Donald D. 1997. *Structuralism and Poststructuralism for Beginners*. Matter. 76).

² *Formal* here as the mention of "Western Aesthetics".

³ Jean-Francois Lyotard. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press. Matter. 7; Hugh J. Silverman (ed.). 1990. *Postmodernism : Philosophy and the Arts*. Matter. 60.

beauty, especially those of Plato (427 – 348 BC) and Aristotle (384 BC–322 BC). Baumgarten coined a term from the Greek, *aisthanomai* , which was equated with (Latin) *sentio* (1739:79). He understood it to establish an outer, external sense, as opposed to an inner consciousness.

So aesthetics is the realm of *sensate* , the perception of reason and sensible objects. Baumgarten understood his use to be consistent with classical sources, but he was also aware that he was expanding logic and science into new realms. Baumgarten's interest lay in adapting Leibniz's rationalism to both the study of art and what became known after Kant as aesthetics.

After Baumgarten, many Western (and also non-Western) philosophers emerged, with various variations of their aesthetic theories. Western aesthetics has a rational- *sensitivae style* , a construct of thinking outside the tradition of *intellectual knowledge* . According to Baumgarten, the foundations of poetry and fine art are “sensitive representations” (*sensitivae*), which are not only “sensual” (*sensuales*), but are also connected with feelings (hence also connected with the faculty of knowledge and the faculty of will).⁴

Poetry is “perfectly sensitive discourse,” that is, discourse that awakens vivid feelings. This requires a high degree of “extensive (wide) clarity,” which is different from “intensive” (or intellectual) clarity. This means that an aesthetic representation must have many “characteristics,” that is, it must be characterized by many different properties or special elements , rather than some differentiated character. Beauty is supposed to be “disordered” and, therefore, excludes “differentiation,” the primary property of intellectual representation. The distinction is achieved by rendering each characteristic clearly characteristic of the representation. Determining these characteristics requires intensive clarity and leads to further abstraction of the concept of representation.

Foundationalism and Representationalism

Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) aesthetics as the pinnacle of universal critical (rational) aesthetics.⁵ In subsequent developments, critical aesthetics is believed to be related to language. There is a diversity of aesthetic language related to epistemology. Then epistemology itself received criticism from *foundationalism* and *representationalism*

Aesthetic foundationalism is a modern epistemology which believes that all aesthetic knowledge must be measured for its validity based on a generally accepted discipline or theory. This is where domination or ownership of theory (truth) occurs in aesthetics.

⁴ Giorgio Tonelli . 2006. “Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb (1714–1762)”. Matter. 493-495.

⁵ Immanuel Kant. 2000. *Critique of the Power of Judgment* . Matter. 123; 2011. *Kant: Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings* . Matter. 10-13

Since Rene Descartes (1596–1650), aesthetic perception (epistemology) has been dominantly representational. Aesthetic knowledge is seen as a precise representation of objective external reality within the subject's mental domain. ⁶Rationalism believes there is: *a sharp separation between humans as subjects and the world as objects* .

What Descartes expressed received further comments from Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), who said ,... that what allows humans to make representations of the reality of the world is actually the reality that humans are too attached to that world, never to be separated.⁷ The way the world is presented is always based on attachment. Meanwhile, this attachment can never be fully articulated and will remain implicit. That attachment mainly hides in language, especially *metaphorical poetic language, not scientific logical calculative* representational language .⁸

Considering Informal Aesthetics

Rephrasing the question: “is there no non-formal aesthetic or alternative aesthetic?” To answer this question there needs to be awareness of the "existence" of *little narratives* . An open rationality is needed to answer this question.

It is necessary to realize that formal aesthetics is, legitimately, the basis for universal art studies. And this has been happening for hundreds of years. At least, until now, we cannot simply 'eliminate' formal aesthetics in the world of art studies. The world of art (as if) still (will) need formal aesthetics; and non-formal aesthetics are 'eliminated'.

It is necessary to realize that it is impossible to abandon formal aesthetics 100%, however , in the long term, in the context of cultural independence, it is necessary to think about alternative non-formal aesthetics. Ki Hadjar Dewantara said it was necessary to think about aspects of one's own national culture but also still provide a portion for foreign culture.

The degree of human life which is outlined in the environment of all the peaks of our common cultural essence , should be considered as the first capital, which we must henceforth expand and deepen with new creations. Meanwhile, we should not hesitate to incorporate materials from foreign cultures, wherever they come from, as long as with these new materials our people can improve their lives by 'considering' what is already ours or 'enriching' in the sense of adding to it. what we have never had. As long as we don't just copy (*copy*), as long as we 'process' the new ingredients or 'cook' them into new dishes that taste delicious and improve people's cultural health.⁹

⁶J. Cottingham (Ed). 1992. *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Matter. 276.

⁷Martin Heidegger. 1996. *Being and Time* . Matter. 45.

⁸Martin Heidegger. 1971. *Poetry, Language, Through* . Matter. 60.

⁹Ki Hadjar Dewantara. 1967. Culture 2. Pg. 96.

Indonesian culture is quite rich, which has a variety of idioms, definitions, terminology and structures. Indeed, this cannot be said to be a standard theory. However, steps to make these various variations into a theory are very necessary in the context of independence. Independence here does not mean ignoring the formal, but rather 'making peace' as Ki Hadjar Dewantara said.

Until now, in research, analysis and commentary on art, especially Indonesian ethnic art, formality is still dominant. Some experts say that formality is not necessarily "suitable" for analyzing or dissecting Indonesian art. Formal expressions are often not suitable for expressing the intent or meaning contained in Indonesian art.

There are several examples of the use of non-formal aesthetics in the context of analyzing Indonesian ethnic art; there is the term *Senggakan*, which is by Supriyadi is used in the aesthetic analysis of *Gending*; ¹⁰Sunarto, who discussed *Rasa* as an aesthetic expression in Javanese art;¹¹ Benamou wrote about the aesthetics (*taste*) of traditional Javanese music.¹²

There are still many examples of writing that presents non-formal aesthetics as a 'scalpel'. Indonesian art as "material" should indeed be dissected with "formal" Indonesianness, although in certain cases it is still necessary to borrow formalities from the West.

Conclusion

Artistic life in Indonesia, scientifically, is still built on the dominance of Western theoretical giants. This needs to be a serious concern for Art Universities in Indonesia. Indeed, from a glance, there is a dynamic development of artistic life in Indonesia. However, this cannot be said to have made a significant fundamental

¹⁰ Supriyadi. " Senggakan: Musical Aesthetics that Cross the Ages " (May 28, 2022).

¹¹ Sunarto. "Rasa' in Javanese Art (26 June 2023).

¹² Marc Benamou. 2010. *RASA: Affect and Intuition in Javanese Musical Aesthetics*. In this book various questions are discussed: How is the *Rasa vocabulary* structured, and what does it tell us about Javanese aesthetics? Who or what has *Rasa*, and what kinds of musical, psychological, perceptual, and sociological input enter into this substation? How does *Rasa* express music? How can exploring such questions lead to a more complete understanding of emotions, aesthetics, traditional Javanese music, and music in general? The context of this book includes: gamelan, musical discourse, aesthetics, taste, linguistics, perceptual, intuitive, express, connotative. *Rasa* tries to get to the heart of Central Javanese traditional music (Gamelan) (Karawitan) by seeing and hearing what is closest to tradition. Based on several years of research at the Regional Cultural Center of Solo, Indonesia, Marc Benamou outlines various aesthetic criteria (*rasa*) applied by musicians in various contexts. Central to their aesthetic discourse was the complex notion of *Rasa* : feeling, feeling, convincing, mood, senses, inner meaning, faculty of taste, faculty of sensing, faculty of intuitive knowing, deep understanding – all rolled into one. A possibly universal psychological tendency, this book shows how the meaning of music is culturally specific. This specification results from the connotative nature of musical meaning, which, following Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) on linguistic meaning (especially in *language games*) (Ludwig Wittgenstein 1953. *Philosophical Investigation* . Pg 35).

contribution to the life of the nation. Art universities in Indonesia need to set an example of how to use non-formal aesthetics as a basis for an Indonesian way of thinking, so that Indonesian culture is not alienated in its own country. For this reason, very urgent matters need to be formulated:

1. Making terminology, idioms, themes and artistic contexts as formal (analytical) tools for the purposes of analyzing Indonesian culture/arts.
2. Producing researchers or artists who are "at home" (feeling "at home"), with multi-dimensional works that reflect the spirit of Indonesian culture, without the shadow of the dominance of Formal aesthetics.
3. Eliminating the stereotype that what is "true" and "beautiful" comes from Western observers . In this case, those who know and understand more about what is "true" and "beautiful" about Indonesian aesthetics are Indonesians themselves.

Reference

- Benamou, Marc. 2010. *RASA: Affect and Intuition in Javanese Musical Aesthetics* . Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cottingham, J. (Ed .). 1992. *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dewantara, Ki Hadjar. 1967. Culture 2. Jogjakarta: Supreme Council of the Taman Siswa Association.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1971. *Poetry, Language, Through* . Trans. by A. Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row. In this book there is also "*The Origin of the Work of Art*".
- Heidegger, Martin. 1996. *Being and Time* . Trans. by J. Staumbaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Kant, Immanuel, 2000, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* , trans . By Eric Matthews, and Edited and Translated by Paul Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 9780511804656
- Kant, Immanuel, 2011. *Kant: Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings* . Editors and Translators by Patrick Frierson and Paul Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 9780521711135.
- Palmer, Donald D. 1997. *Structuralism and Poststructuralism for Beginners* . New York: Writer and Reader.
- Silverman, Hugh J., (ed .). 1990. *Postmodernism: Philosophy and the Arts* . New York: Routledge.
- Sunarto. June 26, 2023. "'Rasa' in Javanese Art". Nusantara Institute. <https://www.nusantarainstitute.com/rasa-dalam-kesenian-jawa/>

- Supriyadi. May 28, 2022 . " Senggakan: Musical Aesthetics that Cross the Ages ". Nusantara Institute. <https://www.nusantarainstitute.com/senggakan-estetika-musikal-yang-melintas-zaman/>
- Tonelli, Giorgio . 2006. "Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb (1714–1762)". In Donald M. Borchert (*Editor in Chief*). *Encyclopedia of Philosophy Vol. 1* . New York: Thomson Gale. ISBN 0-02-866072-2
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1953. *Philosophical Investigation* . Translated by GEM Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell.