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Aesthetic Perception in The Experience of Javanese Gamelan Pengrawit

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Abstract: Aesthetic perception is an individual's perspective on aesthetic objects. Javanese Gamelan as an aesthetic object for pengrawit certainly contains various values and ideas from the musicians themselves. Aesthetic perception in Russel Sharman's view is the imposition of value on experience. This paper attempts to explore the experience of the musicians in interpreting their experiences in contact with the Javanese Gamelan. The three subjects studied were Suwito Radyo, Sukisno, and Sito Mardowo. Data were collected by in-depth interviews, observations, and literature studies. The data obtained was analyzed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to reveal the truth behind the phenomena experienced by the subject. This study found four aspects that influence and shape the subject's aesthetic perception. The four aspects are: social aspect, personal aspect, musical aspect, and psychological aspect.

Keywords: aesthetic perception, pengrawit, javanese gamelan

1. INTRODUCTION

Javanese Gamelan is one of the indigenous cultural expressions of the nusantara archipelago before the influence of Indian culture (Haryono, 2008). The existence of Javanese Gamelan is closely related to the values and ideology embraced by the Javanese society in particular. These values then form an aesthetic system within Javanese culture. This indicates that Javanese Gamelan is a form of culture that reflects the thoughts, behavior, and ideas of the Javanese people (Koentjaraningrat, 1993).

All the values embedded in Javanese Gamelan are made possible by the role of the performers, known as pengrawit. The pengrawit is a key actor in the continuity of Javanese Gamelan art. Looking at the roles in a musical activity, Miller (2018) distinguishes three human roles: humans as composers, humans as players, and humans as audience members. Therefore, the experiences of each role are undoubtedly different. This demonstrates that the aesthetic experience related to music is a subjective experience. Each individual can uniquely and distinctively experience its symptoms when engaging with music.

Referring to the aforementioned three human roles in musical activities, the composer is the role that can fully experience all musical events. As the creator, the composer can also take on the roles of the player and the audience. Therefore, the term "pengrawit" mentioned in this text primarily pertains to the pengrawit who assumes the role of a composer. This implies that the

pengrawit not only plays Javanese Gamelan but also creates compositions (*gending*).

The pengrawit plays a crucial role in fulfilling the community's need for the beauty of Javanese Gamelan. This role emerges due to the vital function of Javanese Gamelan in people's lives, such as entertainment, rituals, and manifest their aesthetic expressions. At this level, Gamelan becomes a medium that unites the community within an aesthetic system (Wadiyo, Haryono, Wiyoso, & Shabrina, 2021).

According to Hananto (2020), Javanese Gamelan embodies values that are expressed through aesthetic symbols and are subjective, depending on the customs and traditions of the supporting community. This is demonstrated through his study of the sekaten celebration held by the palaces in three different regions: Cirebon, Yogyakarta, and Surakarta. The study found that the aesthetic values embodied in the symbols of Javanese Gamelan differ in these three regions, despite having the same purpose and being held simultaneously.

In conclusion, Hartanto emphasizes that the values within the cultural beliefs of the supporting community of Javanese Gamelan are indeed reflected in the symbols found in Javanese Gamelan used for the sekaten ceremony. This is supported by demonstrating the alignment between what the community experiences and what is presented by the palace through the performance of Gamelan Sekaten. Hartanto's study provides a foundation for the understanding that the values believed by the community are also embedded in their art, specifically in Javanese Gamelan during the sekaten celebration or ceremony.

The pengrawit, who is the central figure in the Javanese Gamelan ecosystem, will always express their thoughts and ideas in every piece they create. The values of the community serve as the foundation for the pengrawit's artistic endeavors. Aesthetic perception plays an important role in the creation of a Javanese Gamelan composition. In this context, aesthetic perception refers to the viewpoint of Russel Sharman (1997) who states that "Aesthetic perception is the attachment of values to experience". Aesthetic perception involves attaching values to experiences. This idea suggests that aesthetic perception is formed through aesthetic experiences with a work of art. Javanese Gamelan, in this case, is the artistic object aimed at by Javanese Gamelan pengrawit. Values can be interpreted as the worth, goodness, or beauty that serve as the basis for behavior and attitudes in life.

Sharman's concept of aesthetic perception aligns with the ideas put forth by Mikel Dufrenne (1973), who states that there are three key moments that contribute to the emergence of aesthetic perception. These three moments are presence, representation, and reflection. All three moments must be present in the experience of the Javanese Gamelan pengrawit in order to be transformed into aesthetic perception.

This paper, therefore, aims to explore how aesthetic perception manifests in the experiences of Javanese Gamelan

pengrawit. Such a study is expected to fill the gaps in knowledge regarding subjective musical experiences. Understanding how Javanese Gamelan pengrawit develop aesthetic perceptions that are then reflected in their works can contribute to the knowledge of how an aesthetic system is formed within a particular culture.

2. METHODS

This research is conducted using a qualitative phenomenological research method. Qualitative research is used because it prioritizes the natural conditions (natural setting) of the researched object. Phenomenology is employed as the approach in this research as its aim is to uncover the aesthetic experiences of Javanese Gamelan performers (pengrawit) (Sugiyono, 2017). The researcher serves as the key instrument in qualitative research, responsible for determining the research focus, selecting informants, collecting data, conducting analysis, and arriving at the findings or conclusions of this research.

The object of study in this research is the aesthetic perception within the experiences of Javanese Gamelan pengrawit. The data sample in this research is purposively determined by the researcher. The researcher selects three Javanese Gamelan pengrawit subjects who have made significant contributions to the Javanese Gamelan art ecosystem. The three pengrawit are Suwito Radyo, Sukisno, and Sito Mardowo.

Data will be collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and literature review. The collected data will then be analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) through four stages. These four stages include transcription of interview data, giving exploratory comments, formulation of emergent themes, and formulation of superordinate themes (Kahija, 2017).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Four Aspects of Subject's Experience

Through this research, four aspects encompassing the experiences of the pengrawit as subjects have been revealed. These four aspects are the social aspect, personal aspect, musical aspect, and psychological aspect. These four aspects were found to have an impact, drive, and motivation in shaping the self-image of the subjects as Javanese Gamelan pengrawit. The findings of these four aspects strengthen and confirm the results of previous research conducted by Arifin (2020). In his study, Arifin identified four dimensions in the experience of *panjak juru kendhang*, namely the personal dimension, social dimension, musical dimension, and the dimension of feeling.

The social aspect encompasses various external factors that contribute to the three subjects becoming Javanese Gamelan pengrawit. The three subjects in this study come from artistic families and have grown up in an artistic environment. These conditions have allowed the three subjects to establish close relationships with

Javanese Gamelan. The fluid social relations within the Javanese Gamelan ecosystem are part of the social dimension that significantly influences the ongoing interactions within the Javanese Gamelan environment. The experiences of the three subjects clearly indicate that the environmental conditions play a significant role in shaping their identities and decision-making processes. Family and artistic environments act as an incubator for the three subjects to understand Javanese Gamelan. Cultural values can also be effectively conveyed through this conditioned context. As a result, the internalization of cultural values within Javanese society can occur successfully (Sudarsih, 2019).

The personal aspect is demonstrated by the internal interest and passion. The intrinsic interest in Javanese Gamelan is one of the determining factors. The three subjects have a strong drive to learn Javanese Gamelan. This internal drive motivates them to pursue formal education to sharpen their skills. The emergence of self-motivation is crucial as it determines the success of their life goals. Their success as Javanese Gamelan *pengrawit* is evident in their abilities and mastery of Javanese Gamelan performance. The presence of both the social and personal aspects ultimately leads to the musical aspect of the subjects.

The musical aspect refers to the skills and abilities of the three subjects in playing Javanese Gamelan. The three subjects are generally recognized as artists who have made various contributions to the world of Javanese Gamelan art. One evidence of this is the various works produced by the three subjects. They also play the role of teachers and trainers who have trained and produced other artists. Musically, the three subjects are capable of playing all Javanese Gamelan instruments and understanding the characteristics and philosophies of each instrument. They also have a deep understanding of the extra-musical aspects that surround their works.

The psychological aspect in this research aligns with the dimension of feeling in Arifin's (2020). perspective. It is subjective and related to the emotions, affections, and development of the subjects' personalities. These findings indicate that in the experiences of the three subjects, Javanese Gamelan is an integral and inseparable part of their lives. Gamelan is always present and holds meaning in their lives, becoming an essential part of their identities. Javanese Gamelan emerges as a set of values and ideologies that bind their lives and shape their musical identity. This musical identity is born from the lived experiences with Javanese Gamelan, resulting in aesthetic consciousness. Aesthetic perception is evident in the way the subjects think and represent Javanese Gamelan in their lives.

3.2 Aesthetic Perception

In Sharman's perspective (1997), aesthetic perception involves assigning value and meaning to sensory experiences of objects or events. The attribution of value to objects is closely related to the cognitive process of qualitative sensory perception.

The cognitive process involved in this attribution of value is closely related to intuition. Intuition refers to Kant's idea in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that intuition is the means by which knowledge is connected to objects. This viewpoint aligns with Mikel Dufrenne's distinction between artworks and aesthetic objects. Dufrenne argues that artworks are creations produced by artists in any form. While others may see and appreciate a work as an artwork, it does not necessarily mean they can enjoy it as an aesthetic object. According to Dufrenne, an aesthetic object is a work of art that is appreciated through understanding. It is this understanding that transforms a work of art into an aesthetic object through the attribution of value (Suryajaya, 2016).

The interpretation of experiences related to Javanese Gamelan is also reflected in the testimonies of each interviewed subject in this study. The three subjects have their own perceptions of the aesthetic experiences related to Javanese Gamelan. In their lives, Javanese Gamelan consistently influences and impacts their considerations and decision-making processes. The process of attribution is subjective because each individual has their own unique experiences. However, these subjective experiences still reflect a truth about aesthetic perception. Thus, aesthetic perception can be considered universal in cognitive reasoning (Sharman, 1997). This universal nature of aesthetic perception is also influenced by the social context surrounding an object or event. Specific social environments can affect how individuals qualitatively and emotionally respond to objects or events. The social context, in its influence, contributes to the aesthetic perception of aesthetic objects.

3.3 Presence

The three subjects in this study have a close relationship with Javanese Gamelan in their lives. This closeness to Javanese Gamelan is evident through the accounts of each subject when explaining the process they went through to become professional pengrawit. Based on the interviews conducted by the researcher, it was revealed that all three subjects come from artistic families. The family background provides advantages and privileges for the subjects in experiencing phenomena related to Javanese Gamelan. Their early exposure to Javanese Gamelan since childhood greatly supports the sensory experiences of the subjects. These sensory experiences are gained through physical interaction with Javanese Gamelan instruments, auditory experiences of listening to live performances or recordings, and visual experiences through various performances and demonstrations by pengrawit that they have witnessed.

Physically, the three subjects have been learning to play Javanese Gamelan since childhood. Suwito Radyo revealed that he started playing several Javanese Gamelan instruments fluently at the age of 6. In fact, Sukisno has been participating in and winning karawitan competitions since his early childhood. Sito Mardowo also shared a similar experience from his childhood,

where he would always wait for his father to come home so he could learn to play. This early exposure greatly impacts the subjects' level of expertise as it has a significant influence on the psychomotor aspect of playing Javanese Gamelan. Another sensory aspect that plays a role in the subjects' experiences is their approach to Javanese Gamelan through audio-visual media. This demonstrates that the internal supporting factors within the subjects are manifestations of their aesthetic yearning for Javanese Gamelan. The subjects make various efforts to fulfill their inner needs through Javanese Gamelan. These efforts can be seen in each subject's active listening to recordings and attending live performances. Additionally, the subjects actively participate in various Javanese Gamelan art activities in their surroundings, driven by personal willingness or influenced by the environment. This participation allows for interaction between the subjects and more skilled or senior pengrawit. These various experiences tend to impact the subjects' emotional aspects, shaping their affective responses. The subjects not only possess the skill to play but also enjoy, understand, and assign value to Javanese Gamelan. The values they attribute are still influenced by the social context in which the subjects learn and grow. This leads the subjects to a form of aesthetic perception influenced by specific social systems, such as the style of Javanese Gamelan playing in a particular region.

Through these sensory experiences, the psychomotor and affective aspects can be observed in the subjects' aesthetic process.. This aesthetic process leads to the cognitive aspect of the subjects, which in turn influences their perception of the object. At this stage, the subjects have developed their own understanding of the beauty within Javanese Gamelan. This concept of beauty initially depends heavily on the aesthetic system within the social environment in which the subjects learn and become acquainted with Javanese Gamelan. The aesthetic process to generate understanding and meaning demands the presence of aesthetic objects in the subjects' bodily experiences. The presence of aesthetic objects within the body is something immanent, through which meaning can emerge. Meaning can be apprehended through feelings or articulated through reflection, but only if it begins with a receptive body (Dufrenne, 1973). When meaning is present, imagination follows, directing the subject's consciousness towards the representation of the aesthetic object they experience.

3.4 Representation

The encounter between the subject and the aesthetic object, namely Javanese Gamelan, will give rise to meaning in the subject's mind. For instance, if an individual has tasted and experienced sugar, they will know that sugar is sweet, and this memory will have an impact on their perception. Consequently, when the individual encounters sugar without tasting it on another occasion, they will immediately associate it with sweetness. Imagination plays a significant role in generating such perceptions. Dufrenne (in Milhorim & Telles, 2018) explains that imagination can manifest in

two aspects: empirical and transcendental. The empirical aspect allows the object to acquire meaning and enriches it with various possibilities. The transcendental aspect occurs when the power of visibility enables the object to emerge as a phenomenon experienced by the subject.

The study found that the three pengrawit, in their experiences, always contemplate the sounds of Javanese Gamelan. Javanese Gamelan constantly occupies their thoughts whenever and wherever they are. During one of the interview sessions, Suwito Radyo revealed that he always hears Javanese Gamelan in his mind. The researcher also observed firsthand that during idle moments in the interview, such as when the researcher was taking notes or examining various Javanese Gamelan scores, Suwito Radyo would hum and sing Javanese Gamelan melodies.

In another case, Sito Mardowo's experiences demonstrate that imagination regarding Javanese Gamelan occurs not only consciously but also unconsciously. This is evident in Sito Mardowo's account of frequently waking up from sleep due to the emergence of sound ideas that can be transformed into artistic creations. For Sito Mardowo, what he experiences is an aesthetic struggle. Therefore, he has developed a habit of writing down the ideas that arise in his mind to remember them later when he is ready to create.

Imagination also plays a significant role in Sukisno's creative experiences. He often engages with artistic work that demands the fusion of artistic elements from different cultural backgrounds. Sukisno frequently experiments with sounds and attempts to incorporate styles and idioms from various traditional music traditions outside of Javanese Gamelan. These demands make Sukisno more confident and prepared to face various challenges in his artistic endeavors. One of his many experiences includes being asked to train the Gamelan Soepra team in Semarang. At that time, Sukisno was both surprised and challenged to explore Gamelan Soepra, which has a different tonal system compared to classical Javanese Gamelan. He recalls instances where he received requests to arrange songs composed by teachers at Loyola College High School, Semarang (SMA Kolese Loyola Semarang). Imagination enables Sukisno to think quickly and create arrangements in response to these requests.

It is evident from the experiences of the three pengrawit who participated as subjects in this study that imagination plays a significant role in the creative process. Imagination serves as a phase where ideas and sensory elements are processed, allowing for the abstraction of embodied experiences. This process extends beyond mere playing skills and competence, as it also enables the subjects to generate creative ideas that can be transformed into artistic works. Imagination empowers the subjects to explore and understand the vast array of possibilities within their artistic practice

3.5 Reflection

The sensory experiences that continue into imagination at the cognitive level demand the emergence of feelings and emotions

towards the aesthetic object. In this study, Javanese Gamelan gains meaning as the subjects begin to infuse their feelings and emotions into the various creative ideas that arise. In this phase of meaning-making, the three subjects enter a phase of reflection on Javanese Gamelan. They reach a deep level of interpretation regarding the performance and every event associated with Javanese Gamelan.

Suwito Radyo's experience, where he sees Javanese Gamelan as everything he needs in life, exemplifies a high level of aesthetic understanding and meaning-making. Suwito Radyo explicitly states that Javanese Gamelan is a gift from God for him to live. Various events in Suwito Radyo's life are always directed towards Javanese Gamelan. For example, when Suwito Radyo is sick, his thoughts are focused solely on Javanese Gamelan as a means to offer prayers for recovery. Javanese Gamelan not only fulfills his aesthetic needs but also shifts various interests and priorities in his life. Javanese Gamelan becomes a being and lives within Suwito Radyo's experiences.

Sukisno reflects on Javanese Gamelan by connecting it to his life experiences. For Sukisno, Javanese Gamelan has equipped him with leadership skills and abilities. His experience as a kendang player, who regulates the rhythm in the journey of Javanese Gamelan compositions, is rich in values that he can apply in his life. He derives various meanings for his life from the techniques of playing, rhythms, and messages conveyed in the lyrics. These reflections blend with his emotions, leading to personal interpretations of Javanese Gamelan.

Sito Mardowo shares a similar reflection with Sukisno when it comes to assigning meaning to Javanese Gamelan. According to Sito Mardowo, Javanese Gamelan has significantly shaped his character, making him patient and calm. This perception stems from Sito Mardowo's understanding of the values embodied in Javanese Gamelan that successfully resonate with his emotions. In his experience of playing Javanese Gamelan, Sito Mardowo always focuses on the aesthetic goal of creating a pleasant experience during performances. This sense of pleasure is related to the beauty and satisfaction derived from the performance, experienced by the musicians, audience, and everyone involved. It is evident that Sito Mardowo's inclination is for others to also have the same experience he has.

Table 1. Aesthetic Perception of the Three Pengrawit

Pengrawit	Aesthetic Perception
Suwito Radyo	Suwito Radyo perceives Javanese Gamelan and his life as interconnected and indivisible. Consequently, his artistic creations are heavily influenced by the events and experiences he encounters in his life. Various life events and occurrences in his surroundings serve as sources of inspiration and ideas for his creative endeavors.

Sukisno	Sukisno believes that all his needs can be fulfilled through Javanese Gamelan. He learns to socialize, lead, and play various roles in society through Javanese Gamelan. His artistic creations often focus on composing pieces that incorporate elements of traditional Indonesian music as well as Western music.
Sito Mardowo	Sito Mardowo states that Javanese Gamelan has shaped his character to be a patient person. In his artistic pursuits, Sito Mardowo prioritizes collective interests over his personal idealism as an artist. He only seeks for a sense of enjoyment, which is the aesthetic satisfaction in his works that can be experienced by everyone.

4. CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the aesthetic perception of Javanese Gamelan pengrawit is influenced by four aspects: social, personal, musical, and psychological. These four aspects shape the perspectives of the three subjects in experiencing sensory phenomena related to Javanese Gamelan. Each sensory experience triggers the emergence of imagination, which serves as a foundation for the musicians to generate creative ideas related to Javanese Gamelan. When executed effectively, these imaginations materialize into new artistic works. The interpretation of various events related to Javanese Gamelan leads to reflections that depict Javanese Gamelan as an aesthetic object reflecting the world of the artists themselves.

Javanese Gamelan, as a traditional art form, intersects with other art forms, showcasing the versatility and adaptability of the musicians involved. The three pengrawit in this study not only skillful in playing Javanese Gamelan but also demonstrate their creativity in other art forms such as wayang, dance, and diverse musical genres. Their willingness to explore and embrace new values and artistic expressions reflects their openness to different possibilities in their creative endeavors. The pursuit of beauty and truth in art is not confined to a singular form or perspective. Each individual's aesthetic perception is unique and subjective, resulting in diverse interpretations and meanings attributed to aesthetic objects and events. The musicians in this study exemplify this notion by integrating their personal experiences, emotions, and cultural backgrounds into their artistic creations. The study highlights the interconnectedness of Javanese Gamelan with the musicians' lives and the broader artistic landscape. It emphasizes the importance of context, social influences, and personal experiences in shaping aesthetic perceptions and the meaning attributed to artistic expressions. The musicians' dedication to their craft and their desire to evoke a sense of satisfaction and aesthetic pleasure in others further exemplify their commitment to the art form and its broader societal impact. Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the aesthetic perceptions of Javanese Gamelan pengrawit and emphasizes the significance of their artistic contributions within the cultural and artistic context of Gamelan Jawa.

These findings demonstrate that Javanese Gamelan, as an aesthetic object, encapsulates the world of the artists themselves. However, in reaching this conclusion, several aspects that underlie one's journey as a pengrawit needs to be considered. If there are similarities with the experiences of the three subjects in this study, there is a possibility that the results of this research can be applied to other pengrawit.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Pieter Very Setiawan made substantial contributions to the formulation of the research design, selection of informants, data collection, and data analysis until completion in the form of research report. Aton Rustandi Mulyana provided invaluable guidance and advice in developing the conceptual framework of this study. Timbul Haryono offered valuable recommendations that greatly facilitated the progress of the research and provided assistance in the academic writing process.

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