

PARERGON AND INDONESIAN MODERN AESTHETICS

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Abstract—Indonesian modern aesthetics in commercialization of mass media shows art as consumed object rather than as aesthetic understanding. From language, literature, to music, there is always the not-beautiful-one as something abandoned by the-beautiful-one. That perspective is referred to Jacques Derrida's criticism to Immanuel Kant on parergon ignored by ergon. Derrida said in deconstruction that parergon as periphery is not just complement for ergon as core, but parergon itself has its own aesthetic view. From that criticism, is it possible for parergon to be seen as beautiful in itself? Is it possible for the not-beautiful-one to be seen as beautiful too? By using descriptive qualitative method, this paper aims to explain Derrida's deconstruction to sharpened binary opposition between ergon and parergon, as aesthetics is dominated by mass media and is used to measure others through modern values. For another alternative, there is aesthetic experience which enables human beings to understand art in wider perspectives beside merely consumes what is seen empirically in mass media. There is no single universal value for all aesthetic art as any not-beautiful statement may be only object of aesthetic domination. Aesthetic is actually contextual since it includes both art consumption and production of meaning based on cultural experience. In conclusion, Derrida's deconstruction strategy is to shift focus to those ignored by modern aesthetics. There is no such universal, total, or even definitive value for all art. Similarly, Indonesian modern aesthetics is not totally dominated by mass media consumption but also enriched by cultural and contextual experience.

Keywords—aesthetics; commercialization of art; deconstruction; ergon; parergon

I. BACKGROUND

Aesthetics are interpreted not only in the context of objects of art but also by subjects who understand matter of the work of art in inner space of their culture [1, p. 5]. The beauty of Indonesia, for example, is not just how objects are beautifully sensed by Indonesian people but also on how beauty is conceptually discussed. Both the beautiful object and the subject that says it is beautiful are two aspects that label each other through certain values [2, p. 36]. On the one hand, the beauty of nature and culture, for example, is beautiful empirically by itself without being said to be beautiful. On the other hand, only when the subject captures the object phenomenologically then the beauty is understood. This beauty not only dwells on the empirical subject but also conceptual so that realism can be surpassed to surrealism. The subject judges the artwork and the object of art provides itself to be seen.

Indonesian aesthetics is not only about nature and culture as tourist objects but also the dominance of the core (*ergon*) as stated in Jacques Derrida's criticism of Immanuel Kant. Commercial mass media certainly plays an important role in framing beauty labels ranging from motion art, performances, to music [3, p. 22]. Starting from musicians on television with certain good looks and beauty, performing arts with frenzy motion of lights in the presentation of sexuality, paid spectators who scream as if they understand rhythms and tones, to electronic cinema with story plots without direction and accidental coincidence, all show framing art and

beauty towards a certain direction [4, p. 180]. Aesthetics in the mass media is like *a la carte*; ready to be served, clearly beautiful, and flawless so that the audience can just watch it without thinking anymore.

The above conditions are beauty that is constantly consumed by Indonesian people. The essence of beauty is in fact so massive with the consumption of commerciality that is built by eliminating the not beautiful (*parergon*). A question arises; is it possible that what is not considered beautiful (*parergon*) by the beauty of the core (*ergon*) is actually beautiful in itself? Could the label that is considered not beautiful really be beautiful in another meaning? Mass media is such as legitimate power who governs beauty through the domination of conceptual visualization. The extent of beauty is discussed in this article through a different view of the core and periphery of Indonesian aesthetics.

II. THE MIDDLE WAY IN AESTHETIC JUDGMENT

Looking at aesthetics, Kant in the Critique of Judgment views the middle way (*Mittelglied*) as the basis of judgment (*Ur-teil*) [5, p. 412]. This middle ground is between the theoretical and the practical, between the constitutive and the regulative, between the subject and the object, and between the principles and the tastes. Aesthetics cannot be separated from what is 'truly beautiful' and 'preferably beautiful' because it is between reason and reality at once. Aesthetic judgment is not entirely *a priori* or *a posteriori* but is in both. *Mittelglied*, according to Kant, is a critique of aesthetics that goes beyond pure reason or practical reason in the form of judgment [5, p. 413]. Aesthetics frees the view of the pure and the practical. That's exactly what Kant wanted to target. Through his third criticism, Kant saw what was certain and changing in aesthetics and he wanted to build such universal aesthetic certainty in his philosophy [7, p. 5]. Of course aesthetics for Kant is a view of the discussion of art through several theoretical and empirical indicators in

which a middle ground assessment as well as judgment is listed.

Kant divides art in three forms; mechanical art about realizing art from existing concepts, aesthetic art as a form of pleasure, and fine art as a form of understanding of the conceptual [5, p. 23]. These three things are judgments about art both about formal, material, and beyond both. The mechanical form of art is only theoretical application into the real one while the aesthetic is only used as an empirical pleasure. Beyond both, judgment, for Kant, is about neutral harmony between freedom of imagination and conceptual understanding [1, p. 120]. This harmony is considered good for all humans but still must be pure so that the goal is getting clear. Kant calls it a judgment of indeterminate conceptual sensation; a synthesis of conceptual and empirical ones [5, p. 20].

For Kant, aesthetics is constructive; building a complete view so that you can judge art correctly. At this point, what Kant imagined was true duality of humans as subjects of art who viewed a work as an object of art. He also distinguished philosophy of art and art itself. Kant saw that there must be a purity of the theoretical and practical about art itself. That can only happen if binary opposition between right and wrong is built into the view of art. So, what Kant saw was not about art itself but rather the view of art. For example, Kant did not see painting as an art but saw how to build a view of a painting to become artistic. He viewed art not in itself but from the view of its subject. Art cannot explain itself. Kant sees art in the subject's whole labeling view of art and not vice versa. An artistic work of art for Kant is in a whole from the middle way of the judgment itself. The implication of Kant's thinking is ambiguity in binary opposition, namely that aesthetics should be able to separate how the right is distinguished from the wrong. If the artwork is intact, then it is true and universal for everything in it. This implication is loudly criticized by Derrida.

Kant's view above shows a contradiction according to Derrida. Derrida asks how is it possible to explain a situation that is not a combination of the two extremes above or even a bridge for both? [5, p. 414] On the

aesthetic side, the attachment as a principle of beauty is metaphysical beyond the view of a work of art. On the practical side, aesthetics shows detachment from the metaphysical to the individual experience. Of course, on this side, the subject got a special place as a judge of the label of art in Kant's thinking. If both aspects are present in synthesis, then there will only be dominance rather than the view between the two. This dominance is a criticism of Derrida against Kant. There can be no middle value from pure and practical especially in the scale of integrity that is well organized. Likewise with metaphysics that is different from experience; metaphysics sees the basis of all art views while experience relies more on what is faced directly [5, p. 415]. This contradiction is dominative because in fact Kant views aesthetics in a priori as the purity that he intended to initiate. For Derrida, Kant's view in Third Critique between the two poles is a form of an empty concept and that is inevitably subjective but relies on a universal objective [5, p. 415]. The empty concept was too glorified by Kant as an aesthetic view. According to Derrida, it is still universal metaphysics for all works of art like Apollonian works which are used to measure Dionysian's work [1, p. 14]. Even though it was formed from the *Mittelglied*, Kant's view still showed the objectivity that was intended. To the extent that a subject is able to interpret works of art, for Kant, he must remain based on the possibility of objective judgments.

Art judgment is an intention to enigma that will never be completed [2, p. 39]. The enigma is a form of possibilities about the beautiful ones that cannot be defined by subjective concepts or empirical facts. It is actually an infinite puzzle and should not be answered in a rigid definition. For Derrida, enigma is ambiguous openness that invites people to interpret it beyond formalism [1, p. 103]. Different from Derrida, the enigma for Kant is transcendental which remains spaced from art. The existence of distance is inevitably giving a gap to objectivity in aesthetics. If the aesthetic view is about transcendental, Kant's view cannot be separated from the idea of a priori or a posteriori that always judge art in a fixed corridor.

In other words, Kant's judgment of aesthetics still leads to the representation and autonomy of the subject in seeing artwork. Kant's assessment is not about artwork in itself but the ability of the subject to be intact as well as autonomous in looking at art. Of course the subject is a human being who is considered by Kant to always be objective and getting more objective with the middle way judgment above. Objectivity is proven by the assessment of the middle way that is formed not from the way itself but firstly from the subjective or objective view [5, p. 417]. In other words, the principle of the middle way is indeed reflective but still deductive or inductive to achieve finality. The *Mittelglied* is the illusion of the middle way which still has the presupposition that humans are objective subjects. For Derrida, the final truth is non-existent and if there is then it is infinite banality. Just as endless chasm, objectivity really will never find its legitimate basis in looking at things. Only if art is seen in infinity, Derrida explains, that aesthetics and works of art can interpret each other.

In analogy to building architecture, Kant's view of aesthetics still starts from the foundation first then leads to the entire building. The middle way that Kant intended was not to ignore all aspects of the building. As explained above, this is a view of buildings which presupposes the ability of humans to be able to see the whole building as a whole. This ability was then intended to seek purity as an intuition to look at other buildings. However, Kant still emphasized the existence of indicators for a work of art to be said to be beautiful or not. This indicator is purely objective in order to understand the building of art and to enrich it. The existence of this core is a whole building that is firm and detailed but still in view as a building. This is the weakness of Kant's thought, that the existence of a pure measure of art makes all things must be seen in the context of mere art buildings. The building is the core, so everything must be directed there without such exception. No matter how detail the building was

described, it will never be separated from the construction of buildings that are on a certain foundation and soaring to a certain height. On the one hand, this view shows the whole being able to enrich the essence of the work of art. The richer the artwork is, the better, because the meaning in it is also more perfect. On the other hand, insofar as it only enriches the core, then there will be an aspect that is forgotten in its essence as only intended for the core. This is the implication of the objectification made by the subject who made judgment of art. The more the subject seeks purity in the view of art, the more he focuses on a paradigm that ignores things that actually enrich the core of the work.

III. PARERGON FOR DERRIDA

For Kant, the most important thing in aesthetic judgment is the intrinsic aspect of the artwork itself while the others are only extrinsic as only complement to the main work [5, p. 419]. It could be that the extrinsic (*parergon*) is seen as important but only to the extent that it supports the intrinsic (*ergon*) and not as an area that can be interpreted alone. Thus, the outside exists only to the extent as an additional ornament (*parerga*) for the whole intrinsic object. All of these things for Kant are indeed beautiful but of course they are still not as beautiful as the main artwork.

Different from Kant, Derrida asked, "could it be that the beautiful one is the frame Kant ignored?" According to Derrida, the *parergon* has its own beauty label that it is outside of *ergon*, so it is said to be not beautiful. The outer region is also a beauty, but it is considered by Kant only as an instrument for the core region. For Kant, *parergon* is a quasi; an addition, a statement, a surplus, a supplement, which can be predicted and understood with existing concepts as a structure of the main concept [5, p. 420-421]. Thus, the process for the core is marginalization, separation, and elimination through negation labeling for those on the periphery. In many times, the quasi is the number two through comparison of number one. The exterior of the *parergon* is

called by Derrida with *hors-d'œuvres*; decoration for the main work or clothes for the body. The analogy of clothes for the body is the existence of *parergon* for *ergon*, especially when clothes are only used as an extra for the body. Then what if the main work is the bareness itself? Is there still *parergon*? Is there a *parergon* in *parergon*?

Beyond supplements or additions, Derrida sees *parergon* as a mystery in the form of aesthetic re-appropriation [5, p. 412]. This mystery is a complete enigma and is open to meaning for itself without needing to be determined by the concept at the center. He is not just a frame for expensive paintings that are used as extras, but it is the world that is needed by the lack of *ergon* itself [5, p. 423]. Derrida reversed Kant's statement. Derrida looked at Kant using arguments about *parergon* just to support *ergon*. If Kant sees *ergon* as good, then so should *parergon*. In fact, *parergon* may be considered to damage *ergon* just to justify *ergon*. This is the context of the differentiation that Kant ignored but considered important by Derrida. Kant attaches great importance to the labeling of beauty between *parergon* and *ergon*, but Derrida opposes the binary opposition by reversing it with a deconstruction strategy [6, p. 70].

Parergon for Derrida has a measure of its own beauty in itself. It is not measured in certain metaphysics in general but in view of its own intrinsic ideas. It cannot be said that the existence of *parergon* is only a supplement to *ergon*. Although the word *parergon* is rooted in the antonym of *ergon* that is *para-ergon*, *parergon* is a world of its own with *ergon* supporting one another as a whole. It could be if the *parergon* is *ergon*, then *parergon* has its own *parergon* in itself. This is because there is a connection that continues to occur without heading to a certain final truth. Each *parergon* has *ergon* in itself, and vice versa and so on. Thus, *ergon* and *parergon* can be exchanged without showing the hierarchy of one to the other. Both of them live on different labels, but not in interactions to negate or to dominate each other. The relationship with each other is a relationship that in fact empowering each

other, not objectifying each other as Kant thought. That a work of art is different from other works of art is appropriate, but using an aesthetic measure for all works of art is impossible.

IV. *PARERGON* AND INDONESIAN MODERN AESTHETICS

Derrida's statement about *parergon* is related to post-structural deconstruction, especially regarding the language of rationality which is very dominant to the aesthetic realm [6, p. 69]. Derrida opposes the intrinsic structure proposed by Kant by proposing arguments about *parergon*. Derrida argues that all things have meaning for the essence and also stand alone as an aesthetic narration. Both what is stated in the label as the main and the additional, actually Derrida is seen as two things that have their own beauty. When popular, mass, and commercial culture in Indonesia spread, in fact on that side it also marginalized the independent and non-commercial sides of the people [3, p. 24]. With Derrida's strategy, the neglected one is reappointed by showing his peculiarities especially by going beyond labeling to intrinsic beauty in its own ideas.

Derrida's thinking actually does not discuss the artwork itself but on aesthetic strategies as a form of counter-claims of the ignored ones. He does not give an indicator in seeing artwork but encourages the subject to interpret beautiful in itself without any measure from the others. He did not give a view on how an art should be but proposed an alternative to aesthetics [7, p. 112]. *Parergon*, which was ignored by Kant, was also beautiful in Derrida's view. Derrida put forward a deconstruction strategy for art so that aesthetics no longer dwell on one thing that has morality and cognitive background but extends itself to what is considered as low [5, p. 375]. Thus, Derrida's strategy in presenting views about *parergon* is not a definitive review of the meaning but rather a deepening of meaning that is open to any whoever subject.

In broader aspects, Kant and Derrida's views dwell on Western rationality. Kant tends to see aesthetics in duality between subject and object. Derrida prefers to focus on the side ignored by

Kant in duality, which is considered number two and removed from philosophy [8, p. 66]. Derrida argues that there should not be one core measure for all things including those on the periphery. Both Kant and Derrida focus on two subjects and objects. Furthermore, the duality also enters Indonesia through modernity in the commercial world that separates the two sides and reduces it only to a simple side [4, p. 117]. Sexuality for example, is highlighted by dressing music as if only a complement without any intact beauty.

Both the duality of the subject and the object and the commercialization of it are different from the works of art outside the West, especially in the East, namely in Indonesia, which in fact does not distinguish between the two worlds. This can be an alternative to aesthetic beyond the modern [4, p. 123]. An example is temples in Indonesia that cannot be separated from the reliefs at once. Both the relief and the building of the temple are a unit that is complementary, even in the Borobudur temple combining the spiritual and the profane. Both can be separated to be understood differently but nothing is more dominant than the others. Likewise with the temple gate to the main building and where the foundation was erected, everything is an aesthetic unity. This is because the symbol is more interpreted in seeing the work of art than rational thinking which is full of differentiation between one and another. This side also transcends the label of art that turns out that something is rich of beauty in itself without the need to be compared with other things outside of itself.

In the duality of *parergon* and *ergon*, *parergon* has its own beauty structure that does not have to be determined by *ergon* because even *ergon* cannot live without *parergon*. This also has implications for how the subject should see artwork and object that appears to him [8, p. 67]. Artwork is not merely a product but a part of thinking and cultured activities of the subject itself [9, p. 6]. At this point, an understanding of art cannot be merely a distance from a middle way view, but it must also reach the side of experience that is related to tradition and even the deconstruction of the subject as the center itself. Indonesian people often see artwork only as a product rather than part of their life experience.

Thus, art is only a pleasure without needing to be thought about, interpreted, even evaluated. What is called beautiful and sexy, for example, is very easy to display rather than fat and ugly, and the audience is silent and happy about it. In reality, life is never always totally dominant because what really happens is a dialogue between good and bad at the same time.

If Derrida's statement is drawn up to the limit, the social aspect becomes part of the aesthetic labeling language. Often aesthetics are considered to have a hierarchy of others. The language between *ergon* and *parergon* is about core-periphery, inside-out, positive-negative, loved-ignored, subject-object, first-second, inside-outside, same-other, interior-exterior, main-supplement, necessary-unneeded, pure-artificial, good-weird, to normal-exception. All those languages indicate the existence of one main and dominant structure; 'what is outside' is different from 'what is inside', so the real beauty is contextual in aesthetics [7, p. 62]. Aesthetics is not just related to the act of consuming art but also the production of meaning that can be done according to the experience of each subject. There is no standard and definitive value for all works of art. There is also no part of culture that is high and low in aesthetics. Derrida's deconstruction strategy is to shift the focus to unilaterally ignored by modern systems.

For example, the language of distinction is between broadcast news-talk show-football shows, box office films-historical films-documentary films, ordinary writing-novels-literary works, jazz music-death metal music-EDM (Electronic Dance Music), qualified paintings-graffiti and murals-rough scribbling, to fine art-installation art-architectural art shows the hierarchical labeling of works of art. Art is often measured by the size of market language, certain art standards, to power by exclusion of art that is not in accordance with that measurement. Often there are certain standards for all works of art; "Art should be like this by highlighting concepts and reality, not something like that". These language of criteria have made a difference in high and low culture even to the appearance of elite art and popular art. In fact, each aspect has its

own beauty that cannot measure each other with its own dimensions. Both theoretical views and tastes cannot be separated from the experience of the subject of a work of art as also seen on the view of life as well.

Basically, art consumption is not solely because of the market, but also because audience and artists have their own dialogues on a particular work. The dialogue is actually very open but becomes very closed because of its fixed existence which remains in capitalistic system. The existence of *parergon* paved the way that there were other things outside the system as other choices in aesthetics. This side is a creative and critical form in art, especially when aesthetic experiences are also responsible for the existence of artwork as a product [9, p. 157]. Through experience, various choices emerge and make aesthetic views become plural without being dictated by the market. For example in Indonesia, death metal music cannot be considered lower than jazz and *dangdut* music because those have their own complexity. Likewise with the audience, all of them have certain experiences that cannot be measured universally and unilaterally. What happens is that mass media music is considered the best and is used as a standard for other music. This is obviously impossible because beauty is not limited to how art works are formed but also how it is understood by the subject as the judge of art. Thus, the subject is a cultural subject that chooses one from another in Derrida's aesthetics, not just being able to distinguish, but also paying attention to what is ignored by structure.

V. CONCLUSION

Understanding aesthetics is not only about distinguishing the beautiful from the not beautiful but also looking at how the beautiful often dominates the beautiful ones unilaterally. This also happens in the labeling of Indonesian

aesthetics, especially when the mass media very easily displays the beautiful ones and ignored others. Derrida criticized Kant in this aspect with his statement that *parergon* was only considered to be a peripheral by *ergon* even though what was ignored was also beautiful in itself. Only if humans do not dominate but respect each other can beauty be understood more broadly, not only what is displayed in the mass media but also what is actually known and understood through experience.

VI. REFERENCES

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