



# Coexistence of particularity in the universality of musical sensation

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## ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the debate about the issue of the universality of music. The question to be answered is, at what level does this aspect of musical universality emerge? This question is asked because, at a material level, it is clear that every piece of music is different and cannot be said to be the same, but at the same time, people tend to be able to enjoy music even if they don't know the type or language of the music they are listening to, intuitively, unlike verbal language. Efforts to answer these questions bring this research under the qualitative umbrella with a phenomenological approach. In the context of this research, the issue of music is examined through the experience of musical sensations and reviewed using Deleuze's theory of sensation. Data on musical sensation experiences was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with five musicians from different genres, namely classical, jazz, pop, experimental and traditional. The research results show that the universality aspect of music is at the level of sensation, not sound material. In this case, sensation is only possible through empirical experience when people intensively encounter sound material. This also shows that the term musical universality is not merely a metaphorical expression, but rather explains the existence of a coexistence relationship between musical material and sensation. So this finding can contribute to the need for the musician to think about performance strategies if they want to produce a universal sensation experience.



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## 1. Introduction

It is said that music is a universal language [1], a type of non-verbal language that everyone can understand without the need for translation or translation like verbal language. Interestingly, this statement seems to be a dictum for most people to 'talk' about aspects of people's connectedness when it comes to music. Recent research in the educational context, for example, through the use of music, teachers can instill values in students with diverse backgrounds [2]. In the context of treatment, one of the reasons people use music as a therapeutic medium is because of its universality aspect [3]. Even in the context of artists, one of the things that forms the basis of creativity for artists is the goal of developing more universal values [4]. Phenomena like this indirectly show that music seems to be an element that can be accepted universally by everyone, even in different cultures. Music is considered a universal language in the sense that it can evoke emotions without the need for cognitive objects, namely objects or ideas that are processed consciously [5]. In other words, this kind of idea tends to position musical experience as a reality that can be understood intuitively. However, the idea of the universality of music immediately attracted a lot of debate and criticism, and this is confirmed by research that is currently developing. Meyer refuted the idea of universal meaning. For him, the languages and dialects of music are many [6]. First, if we look at the material aspects that make up music, then every piece of music has different sound materials;

each instrument has a different timbre [7] (*gamelan* timbre is certainly not the same as orchestra timbre). Second, if we look at the mediation aspect between music and listeners, then deaf people will not respond to music as well as people with normal hearing [8]. Third, even within the same musical material, the way composers ornament these materials is different. Serial music, for example, even though it uses the same chromatic pitch material as tonal music, has different compositional rules [9]. Finally, even within the paradigm of sound materiality analysis, we recognize two major paradigms for viewing music: musicologically and ethnomusicologically [10]. In contrast to previous phenomena, these various phenomena, on the contrary, actually show that music is not universal, but particular. In this context, many ethnomusicologists and anthropologists argue that musical meaning is influenced by culture and historical aspects, at least on a practical or material level [11].

Quoting the statement that art "wants to create the finite that restores the infinite" [9, p.14] which means roughly that art tries to create something that is limited but can present infinite experiences, so it can. It is said that people's experience of being offended by music does not only stop at the material level. On the contrary, the material aspect is only an entry point for an infinite number of experiences: through the sound material identified by the ear, one can feel the presence of various experiences that go beyond the materiality of sound. Borrowing Deleuze's term, the essence of art is ultimately intended to present sensations, whatever the form and material of the art [10, p. 223]. It is in this sense of 'the presence of sensation' that people's contact with art can be said to be universal (general): everyone can experience the sensation of the art they are facing, not on a material level, but on an experience level that is 'beyond' materiality. Whatever the art form, whatever the material, whatever the language or conventions used to organize it, artistic products (in this case music) are intended to present a sensation to the audience or listener. What is interesting is that sensation, as a universal source towards which artistic products are directed, exists as a particular form of experience, is purely immanent and goes beyond the subjectivity of each individual. This means that subjective and objective reality is still tied to empirical experience, while immanent experience is a type of experience that departs from empirical reality but moves beyond it [13].

This means that each person experiences a different sensation from the other from being offended by the art object they are facing. In this regard, Deleuze explains that what is general about the experience of sensation is the back-and-forth condition between the two tendencies of perception and memory; everyone experiences this condition. On the other hand, what is particular is that each person has a certain interest in the specific aspects that he perceives and also certain memories that are collected in his consciousness: because of this, each person experiences different forms of sensation [11, p. 49]. This theoretical fact then became the starting point for this research. If indeed the relationship between particular and general aspects of sensational experience can be explained in this way, then in the context of music, what is the concrete phenomenon like? Isn't there a lot of parameters in musical materiality that can be perceived? Then, even within the same materiality, many genres require different material organizing languages, including the factor that each player has very different background information stored in their memory. It is hoped that efforts to answer this question can contribute an alternative perspective for readers in general and music practitioners in particular (both practitioners and academics) in the debate surrounding the meaning of the universality aspect of music so that it does not only elaborate musicologically or anthropologically, but philosophically. Moreover, this new perspective in understanding the universality aspect of music can inform the musician to think about performance strategies in the need to produce a universal experience that can be communicated to the audience.

## 2. Method

This qualitative research uses a phenomenological approach in the sense that it seeks to reveal phenomena in their purest ontological reality: "to the things themselves" [12, p. 35]. Theoretically, for this to be achieved, first, we must carry out transcendental reduction, namely holding back various preconceptions, ontological beliefs and theories to make room for direct and pure investigation. When assumptions like this can be suppressed, researchers will be able

to observe the pure phenomena they are looking for. Second, carry out eidetic reduction, namely reducing a specific phenomenon to its essential features. This stage requires what is called "free imaginative variation" to determine which properties of the object are designated as essential features or merely accidental. In this way, we can construct "constitutive phenomenology", in the form of conclusions about how objects develop within themselves before we look at them using various assumptions that we believe in [13, p. 581].

In practice, theoretical ideas related to the phenomenological approach were applied in this research by conducting semi-structured interviews with five sources. The five sources interviewed were music practitioners (musicians or composers) from five different genres (jazz, classical, pop, experimental and traditional). The speakers in question are Ary Sutedja (classical pianist), Koko Harsoe (jazz guitarist), Adi Dharmawan (bassist), Iqbal Lubis (experimental music performer), and Maspon (*saluang* player). The criteria for determining the five sources include extensive experience, breadth of repertoire coverage, ability to in-depth analysis of the repertoire, ability to explain their musical experiences in a structured and well manner, and interest in this research topic. The interview process was carried out via Zoom for sources who live outside Jogja (Ary, Koko, Maspon, Adi), and in person for those who live in Jogja (Iqbal). Technical interviews were carried out by asking open questions about various sensations experienced when playing music. This open question was asked to provide space for the interviewee to share his experiences as freely as possible without being limited by the parameters proposed in the question [17], [18]. The interview data was then transcribed verbatim in text form [19]. This verbatim transcription is read several times to find statements that are considered meaningful and then quoted. To clarify the meaning of a quotation, four types of changes are made: addition (addition of words or punctuation marks), deletion (removal of words), substitution (replacement of terms), and relocation (rearrangement of sentences) [20]. The quotation results are then coded in two stages: (1) categorizing similar data; (2) building patterns from the categorized data to develop a more general theme or proposition [21]. In the chart diagram, the line of inquiry can be seen in Fig. 1.

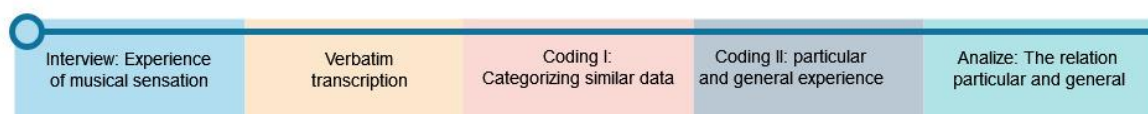


Fig. 1. The line of inquiry

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Particular experience

Various stories of musical sensation experiences were told differently by the five speakers. Each person has their own experiences, along with the elements that stimulate these various experiences. Koko Harsoe revealed that the strongest sensation he felt when he reached the top of the game was the experience of orgasm. He felt an extraordinary surge of energy that made his body always feel fit, even for the next two or three days, even though he didn't get enough sleep. This orgasmic sensation occurs when there are groove stimuli (feel swing) and chord voicing (arrangement of notes in a certain order) that match the musical preferences. In line with what Koko said, pianist Ary Sutedja also expressed the sensation of euphoria which results in an explosion of energy in the body when you reach the top of your game. For him, this kind of experience can be achieved if the game is not too interrupted by thoughts. He said 'Your action must be louder than your mind'. What Ary said indirectly represents Koko's statement that improvisation 'must be intuitive'. Intuitive here means, we don't play music analytically. The analytical process is carried out during training. For Koko, improvisation will not be optimal if it 'still involves cognitive'. For Ary, the game will not flow if it is still 'interrupted by thoughts'. In contrast to the two musicians, the *saluang* player, Maspon, said that when the peak of musical experience was reached, he experienced the sensation of the presence of images: the presence of various images of past memories in current events. He feels the contraction of past memories which influence his current perception. This kind of sensation finally made him experience 'lost time'.

The sensation in the form of the presence of an image from a past memory that disrupts consciousness of time, in Maspon's experience, is not stimulated by a musical element, but rather by an extra-musical element, namely the moment. In the story that is told, the moment that can stimulate the presence of such a sensation is when he experiences longing: a feeling of nostalgia for his hometown. Apart from Maspon's experience of forgetting time, it was also expressed by Iqbal Lubis. He shared his experience when watching a sound and laser performance by Robert Henke. His visual and auditory senses were bombarded continuously for three hours, leaving him between conscious and unconscious states. In this condition, Iqbal felt himself entering the sound he was perceiving. He didn't even realize that three hours had passed. He just said 'rasane mlebu (it feels like coming in)'. This statement seems to be trying to say that Iqbal is experiencing the reality of losing the boundary between object and subject. He is experiencing becoming. He gets into the music or the music gets into him. In another story, Iqbal also expressed an experience similar to what Maspon said, namely the presence of past memories in current perceptions. However, the memory that Iqbal talks about is not only brain memory but also body memory. For him, sensations in the form of body memories (feeling tired, the experience of falling into a mud puddle, the experience of falling into a river) will be recalled during the performance, when the peak experience is present during the performance.

Finally, the sensation in the form of a spirit was told by Adi Darmawan. For him, the experience of musical spirit can only be found if there is chemistry between musical partners; there is a match of taste between the players. If this chemistry is built, there will be a feeling of 'clicking' between the players. In the end, what emerges is no longer my music or your music, but our music. In other words, through the chemistry that builds between the players, Adi can blend, and combine with music that is outside of himself; with music played by his playing partner. The experience described by Adi is similar to the statement made by Ary Sutedja. If Adi said, that to click, chemistry must be built, then Ary said, that to be able to flow, people must be ego-less. In other words, in these two experience stories, for people to experience the sensation of a peak experience, people must be able to get out of their ego, to meet a new reality that was previously unimaginable.

### 3.2. General (universal) experience

Even though they are expressed in different stories, all the narratives conveyed by these sources show the same condition, namely a shift in the state of consciousness between what is currently perceived, and the presence of something beyond perception. In Koko's case, there was a shift in consciousness from her perception of chord voicings and rhythmic grooves to the sensation of orgasm. In Ary's case, there was a shift from the conscious perception of intuitive play (play that is predominantly guided by the body) to the sensation of an overflow of energy in the body. In the case of Maspon and Iqbal, there was a shift in consciousness from the moment that prompted him to blow the *saluang* or the perception of the sound that was present to the sensation of forgetting time and the presence of past images or body memories. Finally, in Adi's case, there was a shift from his perception of social relationships with his playing partners to the presence of a sense of spirit in music.

In other words, the various stories of experience conveyed by these sources show the reality of a shift from something that can initially be experienced sensorily, to another reality that is still experienced directly, but goes beyond the sensory; not just sensory. Koko's experience, for example, stems from her perception of musical elements (sounds) such as chords and rhythm. These two elements are elements that can only be identified by the sense of hearing because they are present in the form of auditory stimuli, not visual or kinesthetic. However, this auditive reality then allows Koko to experience bodily experiences (orgasms) which are no longer auditive, but kinesthetic. In this sense, what Koko tells can be considered as a form of a shift in reality from what was initially a sensory experience (auditive and heard by the ears) to an experience that goes beyond the senses (auditive but no longer only responded to by the ears, but also responded kinesthetically by the body). Similar but not the same, in Ary Sutedja's story we also find this kind of shifting experience. Starting from his perception of bodily sensations when playing the piano, he focuses all his awareness and energy on executing the piano repertoire being played as fully as possible. But when this perceptual awareness begins to move to a type of experience that goes beyond the senses, this effort to release energy through



focusing on playing music does not make him run out of energy but makes him feel an extraordinary surge of energy; a feeling of euphoria. In the case of Iqbal and Maspon, it can be found that his perception of sound (the sense of hearing) made him experience a shift in consciousness and experience various realities that were no longer limited to the auditory aspect: in Iqbal's case, he experienced bodily sensations, while in Maspon's case, he experienced sensations. images of the past. This is also the case with the experience expressed by Adi Darmawan. His perception of music (through the sense of the ear) which is present through the chemistry between players makes him experience a reality that is no longer limited to auditory responses by the ear but moves to an emotional/spiritual experience (feel the spirit of the music).

### 3.3. Relation of general and particular

Deleuze, in his essay entitled Bergson's Conception of Difference [19, p. 43] explains two ways of talking about colour. First, we can talk about colour in a way that highlights certain aspects of a particular colour that differentiate it from other colours. For example, red can be called that because it has certain features (certain pigment conditions) that differentiate it from green, blue, or black. In this way, we distinguish red as a colour that is externally different from colours other than red. This way of speaking boils down to categorization; and genre concepts. Through categorization, we end up not talking about the object 'red' directly, but rather the concept of 'redness' which can be used to explain the reality of the object that represents the concept of 'redness'. For this, if there were two red objects but with slightly different levels of redness, we would still describe the reality of the two objects as red objects. Only, with different levels of redness. Objects, finally, are classified via external 'difference of degree' conditions. In other words, objects and concepts are two different things. Furthermore, these two different things are not in an equal relationship, but rather the object must be subject to the concept to be represented (understood). Thus, the relation between objects and concepts is a relation of subsumption. One concept, for example, 'redness' (general) can be used to define several objects, for example, several red objects with different levels of pigment (particular).

The second way, we can talk about red as a fraction of the spectrum of white light shot through a prism [11, p. 43]. In this way, red is not seen as something different from colours other than red, but rather as a fragment of the universality of white light. If there were no red colour spectrum, white light would not be formed. On the other hand, the red colour will only appear if the universal white light is broken down into the particularities of its constituent spectrum. This perspective makes us no longer distinguish red externally from colors other than red, but rather as something different internally within the universality of white light. The colour red is no longer an object under the concept of 'redness', but rather a nuance or degree of the concept of white (universal) light itself. The relationship between the particular and the universal is no longer a relationship of subsumption, but rather a relationship of participation: the particular (red spectrum) participates in forming the universal (white light)

This second way of speaking is precisely what explains the relationship between sensory experience and the sensations described by the source, in the sense that sensations in the form of various experiences beyond the senses cannot possibly be formed (present) without the existence of sensory reality as the starting point. Indeed, there is no guarantee that every sensory experience will lead us to a sensational type of experience. Sensory experiences that do not lead us to experience sensations are said to only make us experience perceptual experiences. Theoretically, Bergson said that this kind of perceptual sensory experience only makes us collect various perceptions into memory [23]. On the other hand, perceptual sensory experiences can lead us to sensational experiences if these experiences can contract various recollections stored in memory [24]. The analogy is like this. When we listen to music, our consciousness will collect various musical features and we incorporate them into consciousness. From this practice, we can identify the nature or character of the music we are listening to. Armed with this awareness, we can predict whether the next moment will appear similar (a repetition of the previous moment) or different (in the form of a development of previous material or whether it is completely new). This means that when we listen to a moment that appears shortly after the current moment, our perceptual awareness already involves awareness of the memory that we embed as a measure for assessing the new moment that

appears. Even if the new moment that appears is the same as before, our perspective on that moment is different from the previous moment because it involves the contraction of past memories to perceive the current moment. It is in conditions like this that it is said that the present (what we perceive at the moment) is interrupted by the past (memory that contracts to the present) [25]. This explains why the same material played repeatedly always produces sensational experiences that are never the same, even in the same person.

Furthermore, the contraction of past memories into current perceptions is only possible if people experience intensification. Regarding this, Bergson said that intensification is a matter of changing consciousness from spatial awareness to temporal awareness [10, p. 258]. That is, when we are in spatial awareness, our awareness is dominated by analytical awareness. We identify objects as discrete; or divided. Temporal awareness, on the other hand, makes us see objects not discretely, but as a form of flow of movement. This flow of movement occurs in our consciousness. Something that moves between perceptual awareness and memory. In this kind of temporal consciousness, what is dominant in our consciousness is not analytical consciousness, but intuitive. So, when the resource person talks about his various emphasis on particular aspects of the music being played, the speaker is trying to intensify his awareness, thus allowing him to move from spatial awareness to temporal awareness. Only with this kind of intensification can one contract one's memory to present perception to move beyond sensory experience and encounter a variety of sensations.

Thus, the sensory relationship to the experience of sensory transcendence is coexistent; not subsumption. This means that the experience of sensory transcendence is only possible if it involves sensory intensification. Without the involvement of the senses, what occurs is not sensation, but illusion. People are just hallucinating. It is in this relationship of coexistence between the particular and the general that the experience of sensation can be spoken of. Otherwise, people will only talk about sensations as something that is reviewed representatively. In this representative way of speaking, people will subsume the reality of sensation (object) into a general concept that is separate from the object itself. What is often encountered is analogizing sensations with certain realities. In this representational perspective, many people have emphasized the universality of music as mentioned in the introduction.

#### 4. Conclusion

From the discussion, it can be said that music can generate general experience. What are general lies in the back-and-forth movement between what is perceived (experienced empirically) and what stays in the memory. This is what Bergson says as temporal realism. Every musical material has the potential to generate this kind of experience, and every person can experience this realism. But, this experience can only appear if what is perceived, in this case, musical material, can stimulate the memory to contract and interrupt the present perception, and this will happen if the musician does intensification in the sense that the musician tries to snatch the focus of audience consciousness while they play the music. If this does not happen, people will still stay in the realm of musical material which is still particular and not universal. This understanding of the universality sensation of musical experience leads to further issues related to the performance strategies which need to be formulated by musicians. Music only becomes music when it is actualized through performance, and only through performance, people can experience the real sound. This reality, which is produced by musicians, can become the locus of things which can bring the new reality which is growth from the material to something beyond it. Only if people move from the materiality of sound, music will become a universal experience which lies on the sensation in people's consciousness.

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