BALCONY AS SYMBOL OF PROSPECT AND REFUGE IN APARTMENT BUILDINGS
Cases: Apartments in Jakarta, Indonesia

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Abstract

Apartment living is a new trend for Jakarta, Indonesia. Therefore, apartment building can be included as a modern architecture that develops within the last decades in Jakarta.

In this paper, the author tries to look at the characteristics of apartment in Jakarta. One of the ever-present architectural elements of an apartment in Jakarta is the balcony. In terms of the concept of Prospect and Refuge of Appleton (1975) the real physical function and the symbolical content of a balcony of an apartment is discussed in this paper.

Finally, in the paper it is concluded that the balcony of the apartment in Jakarta is actually a symbol of Prospect and Refuge rather a functional element of architecture.

Keywords: Prospect, Refuge, apartment, balcony.

A. Introduction

The apartment is not an indigenous living space in Indonesia. Historically and traditionally, Indonesian always lives in a landed house. However due to the increasing urbanization and the rising land prices in urban areas such as Jakarta, apartment living is increasing and gradually has become a trend for most urban inhabitants. An apartment is a modern architectural edifice for Indonesia. Therefore, the author considered it is appropriate to include the discussion on apartment for this seminar.

Study on apartment and other housing types mostly concentrate on either its economic values or the management of its function and activities (Furuta, 1992; Meno and Harashima, 1993; Tanaka, 1991). Others also study about the relationship between life styles and physical form of an apartment. However, none have study the symbolical content of and apartment which according to Jung as something that contains meaning other than its physical one. This paper will discuss balcony as a symbol of the classical concept of Prospect and Refuge of Appleton (1975) that exist in most apartment building in Jakarta Indonesia.

Prospect and Refuge is a concept stated by Appleton in his classic book titled as “The Experience of Landscape (1975). Prospect is a condition where something that needed and has or ‘sensed as to have the probability to be reached. Refuge is conditions where ones can feel save out from danger and a term considered by Appleton called as Hazard.

According to Appleton, man is very fond with the condition where both concepts (Prospect and Refuge) are in a balance.
B. Symbol of Prospect and Refuge

According to Appleton, several architectural elements can contain the meaning of Prospect and Refuge. A tower is one element that acts as landmark and contains the meaning of Prospect and Refuge. Up above a tower ones can feel save and secure while he still can look at the Prospect below (Figure 1).

Overhang or a cantilever is another architectural element that contains the meaning of Prospect and Refuge. On an overhang we can see the scenery below on a save place above (Figure 2).

Figure 1. A Tower as a Symbol of Prospect and Refuge (Agus Budi Purnomo, 2004).

Figure 2. An Overhang as a Symbol of Prospect and Refuge (Agus Budi Purnomo, 2004).

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The characteristics of both elements describe above to a certain degree contained by the balcony. On a balcony ones can seen the spectator below while feeling save on a place above (Figure 3).

Figure 3. A Balcony as a Symbol of Prospect and Refuge (Agus Budi Purnomo, 2004).

C. Balcony Apartment in Jakarta

In terms of its location and dimensions, we can safely say that a balcony on an apartment is not a functional architectural element anymore (Photo 1). Therefore, balcony had become a mere symbolical architectural element where according to Jung an element that contains a meaning that goes beyond its physical functions.

Photo 1. The Location and size of a Balcony (Agus Budi Purnomo, 2004).

In this paper, the author will discuss the characteristics of apartment's balcony as a symbol of Prospect and Refuge.

Most apartments in Jakarta are high-rise buildings (Figure 4). Like a tower, the height of the tower itself symbolizes the concept of Prospect. However, tower with out place for viewing does not contains the symbol of Refuge. Therefore mere tower awe
human but does not give a balanced feeling between Prospect and Refuge that according to Appleton is more preferred by human.

Figure 4. Apartment in Jakarta, Casablanca Apartment (PT Surya Prawira, 2004).

Whether consciously designed or not, most apartment in Jakarta contains a balcony. However, after looking at most cases in Jakarta, the size of balcony betray its practical function as a place for viewing. At average the width of the balcony is only 1.55 meters, which is too narrow for any sitting much less for viewing. As an example, the balcony in Apartment (Figure 5) is only 1 meter in its width. Compare to the height of the apartment the width of the balcony at Apartment Adiratna Puri Jati Padang is quite narrow. The floor plan shown in Figure 4 is located at the third and fourth floor that in terms of the concept of Prospect and Refuge is still capable to be utilized for the viewing in good shielded condition and thus have a balanced Prospect and Refuge. However, the size and especially the width of balcony on the apartment dose not give a comfortable place for viewing.
Similar balcony width can be seen at Pallazo Apartment also in Jakarta (Figure 6). The difference between the balcony of Adiratna Puri Jati Padang apartment and the Pallazo Apartment is in terms of the building height where the balcony is located. The number of floor of the Pallazo Apartment is 22 along with the windy and polluted condition of Jakarta's sky; it is pointless to do any viewing on the narrow balcony.

Two other extreme examples of viewing place can be seen at Figure 7 and Figure 8. First at Alson Apartment, we could not find any balcony. However, we still can see trace of balcony in the form of protruding viewing window at the Dining Room. This protruding window is very similar like the protruding cantilever structure mentioned on previous section of this paper. Second example shows an apartment with balcony of considerable dimension. The balcony at Tropik Apartment shown at Figure 8 unlike the previous example is large and spacious. However again, the height where the balcony exist prevent viewer at the balcony to have the feeling of real balanced Prospect and Refuge.

D. Balcony as a Symbol for Prospect and Refuge

According to the classic book of Eco (A Theory Of Semiotics, 1979), the meaning behind a symbol does not always coherent with physical form of the symbol itself. The relation between a symbol and the concept behind it is arbitrary. Therefore, a balcony which supposedly function as a viewing place and thus functionally present ones with the probability to have a balanced feeling of Prospect and Refuge and in reality it does not have to supply us with such functions. In Pericic triangle the sides of the triangle do not have to be straight or obvious. Especially the side that relates the signifier and the signified.
Figure 6. Balcony of Pallazo Apartment (Palazzo, 2004).

Figure 7. Balcony of Alson Apartment (Alson.Residence, 2004).
Figure 8. Balcony of Tropik Apartment (2004).

Appleton’s statement about balanced feeling of Prospect and Refuge does not always have to be applied physically (1975). According to Appleton, a painting that gives us the perception of the existence of a balanced Prospect and Refuge is enough for human being to grasp the beauty of such painting. So ones does not have to be in the painting to get the feeling of a balanced Prospect and Refuge that is emanated by the painting. After all, in accord with the statement of Appleton, the preference for a balanced Prospect and Refuge is a remnant of our ancestors feeling where man still have to stalks his prey for dinner where he should be able to see the prospect of the game while he himself can not be seen by his prey. Even now when we modern man does not have to hunt for dinner we still have such feeling that Appleton abstracted as the concept of a balanced Prospect and Refuge.

Back to the apartment, we can also see the discrepancy between real physical function and the feeling of Prospect and Refuge. As it was described previously in this paper the height of the apartment tower and the width of the balcony is unsuitable for comfortable viewing and much less for real Prospect and Refuge. Why does Architects still incorporate a balcony for an apartment? The answer to the questions only lies on the domain of symbol where meaning does not always connect or related to the physical (Jung, 1968; also see Broadbent and Jencks, 1980). The balcony in most apartments in Jakarta is only a symbol and not for real physical functions. The balcony in those apartments is too narrow and located in too high places on the top of a tower. Thus, the balcony in most apartments in Jakarta only symbolizes Prospect and Refuge. As a symbol, the balcony does not always to be appreciated from within but also from the outside.
The height of the apartment emanates the feeling of Prospect. The openings of apartment walls emanate the feeling of Refuge. The Balcony itself emanates the balance between both concepts. Thus by using the balcony an apartment, unlike the landed house, the balcony emanates the feeling of balanced Prospect and Refuge. In Appleton’s words, it is the balance between Prospect and Refuge that exist in the scenery is the cause why the painting is considered as beautiful by human being. Therefore, in similar arguments, the existence of balcony in an apartment is what made the apartment emanate the sense of beauty both from within or out side. That is why architects keep on giving balcony to an apartment.

E. Conclusions

As the conclusion for this paper, it can be said that balcony is an architectural element that characterized apartment in Jakarta. Almost all apartment studied by the author to a certain way comprises a balcony. The balcony however does not have sufficient dimension and suitable location for physical experience of Prospect and Refuge. Therefore, it can also be concluded that the existence of balcony in apartment in Jakarta is more symbolical than physical.

Finally, in the end of this paper the author concluded that the ever-present balcony in apartment in Jakarta, Indonesia, consciously or not, is a way for the architect to give a sense of beauty that Appleton deftly said as the balance between Prospect and Refuge.

Literatures


