

Exploring the Method of Interpretive Criticism toward Indonesian Architecture Identity in the Works of Indonesian Architects

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Abstract— In Indonesian architecture practice, the utilization of criticism as a design method had not yet been discussed much within the academic discourse. However, Indonesian architects have respected with self-subjectivity the debate on Indonesian architecture identity and reflected it through their architecture works. Criticism can be perceived in the method's categorization of evaluating the standard of quality, attempting to make a particular way of seeing, and establishing an understanding through diverse forms of explanation. This study interprets the methods of interpretive criticism of selected Indonesian architects regarding the discussion of Indonesian architecture identity. Five Indonesian architects are chosen based on their response to this discussion and their identified representation of architecture works. The study incorporating interpretive criticism methods in Indonesian architects' architecture works is still minimal, so it will fill the gap. The qualitative strategy is utilized with the tactic of in-depth interview and content analysis with the help of NVivo software to discover these architects' understanding of criticism in architecture and the methods of interpretive criticism's categorization. This study uncovers the two main tendencies of these architects. The first one determines their understanding's tendency through the component of acts and goals of criticism. These attitudes are then identified based on their subjectivity, categorized as interpretive criticism methods, and become the second finding of this study. In the end, the interpretive criticism's methods in architecture practice can be formulated, even though there is a need to investigate more in other categorizations of methods in criticism.

Keywords— Criticism in architecture's understanding, Indonesian architects, method of interpretive criticism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Criticism in architecture's understanding is closely related to a critical process incorporating the act of criticizing, judging, and interpreting qualities [1,2]. Criticism also can be seen as a behavior in the design, through a tool, method, or process [3], or even an approach that incorporates critical thinking [4]. Based on Attou [3], the method of criticism can be categorized into three major divisions. The first categorization assesses the qualities of standards or norms, namely normative criticism. The categorization of interpretive criticism incorporates a highly personal way of making us see in a particular way. Seek to be factual through various forms of explication is the last categorization, which is descriptive criticism.

As a crucial role in architecture, Indonesian architects commonly respond to the discussion of Nusantara architecture

as part of Indonesian architecture identity [5]. Some of their architecture works can be identified as their attempts representation toward this discourse [5,6,7]. This effort, however, manifests as their restlessness regarding the open-ended discussion of Indonesian architecture identity that is still in progress. As an unfavorable quality and action [2], this restlessness can be considered a criticism. However, their criticism is still not explicit, especially regarding discussing this identity. Understanding criticism in architecture and how to express it in their architecture practice become some of the issues. Therefore, Indonesian architects who are well known for concern or incorporation of Indonesian architecture identity's discourse in their architecture works are selected as this study's subjects. Based on this consideration, five Indonesian architects were selected. In addition, architects' tendency toward self-subjectivity in responding to an issue [8], especially criticism regarding Indonesian architecture identity, cannot be put aside from the embedded architects' standpoint.

The inadequacy of Indonesian architects' subjectivity of bold criticism respecting Indonesian architecture identity generates a gap in knowledge of applying criticism in architecture practice. As mentioned before, criticism can be perceived as a method in a design process or represented in architecture works that depict an unfavorable quality. Hence, the problem that needs to be investigated is the method of criticism in architecture practice concerning Indonesian architecture identity's discourse. This study focuses on methods of interpretive criticism carried out by the five Indonesian architects regarding the discussion of Indonesian architecture identity. As aforementioned, the representation of Indonesian architecture identity in architecture works has been widely discussed in past studies. On the contrary, the study incorporating method of criticism, especially interpretive criticism in architecture practice regarding that discussion, particularly in the architecture works of Indonesian architects, is still minimal. This study contributes to formulating the application of interpretive criticism as a method in architecture practice, especially concerning Indonesian architecture identity.

II. METHODOLOGY

A way to reach the objective of this study, a qualitative strategy is applied. This strategy lies in a natural setting,

accommodating the researcher in interpreting or intimate understanding of the meaning and the respondent in making sense of the circumstances through multiple tactics encompassing inductive logic [9,10]. The in-depth interview is conducted to seek more about the five Indonesian architects' methods of interpretive criticism in responding to Indonesian architecture identity's discourse and represented in their architecture works. These five architects are assigned by initials A1 to A5 for this study. The transcript of these in-depth interviews becomes the primary data of this study. In order to continue the explanation of the selection of the subjects' study, secondary data from article journals are utilized as the basis of choice verification. These article journals primarily cover the discussion on the point of view of these architects' architecture works. The scope of architecture works included in this study is residential buildings to bridge the variety of their works.

The tactic of content analysis with the help of NVivo software is applied to produce the categories and subcategories from the transcript of in-depth interviews with the five Indonesian architects. The categories and subcategories are based on their understanding of architecture's criticism and the methods of interpretive criticism's categorization derived from Attoe's methods of criticism [3]. As mentioned, these methods of interpretive criticism incorporate the discourse of Indonesian architecture identity as the bridge between the issues that the five Indonesian architects are concerned with. Then, tree maps are utilized to depict the theme and category resulting from this content analysis. The analysis between the theoretical review and this study's discussion is represented through a matrix table.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section accommodates the discussion of the five Indonesian architects' understanding of architecture's criticism and the categorization of interpretive criticism's methods. The identification of their criticism in architecture's understanding is discussed based on their lack of explicitly expressing criticism in their architecture practice, especially regarding Indonesian architecture identity. This comprehension and how these architects express their subjectivity of criticism toward Indonesian architecture identity that came out during the in-depth interviews are categorized into methods of interpretive criticism. The identification can be from their attitude, and their architecture works toward the discourse of Indonesian architecture identity.

A. Understanding of Criticism in Architecture

The variety of understanding of architecture's criticism is discovered among the five Indonesian architects. The identified distinction covers eight attitudes, i.e., criticism as a cultural process, habit, thought, partiality, refinement, wholeness, criticism in critic actors, and criticism media. Association to the cultural process, architects see that criticism needs to be utilized in every aspect of life, especially to pass knowledge from one generation to the next. Related to a habit,

architects accommodate criticism daily, including during the design process, which requires critical thinking and criticizing projects or issues. Rather than see it as a result representing an entity, architects see criticism as a thought process.

Regarding choosing a side, architects see partiality can be associated with criticism. Architects also see criticism as a way of refinement, educating, and building a better society and life, especially in thinking and producing the design. As a wholeness, architects see criticism as produced by the exchange of thought and perspective, including sensitivity to surroundings. In the not-quite different attitude in criticism, architects see a need to have a better critic in setting the standard of acceptable criticism. In practice, architects utilize architecture as media or tools to represent criticism regarding issues.

Exchange of thought during the design process and putting himself into the other perspective of seeing this process to aim for the wholeness and completion of each other thoughts are A1's understanding of architecture's criticism. He also sees that his architecture works become the representation of this criticism. These attitudes are reflected in this quotation:

"Pertukaran pikiran yang bisa melengkapi. Produk arsitektur saya atau proses mencapainya seperti dalam pemahaman itu. Saya akan berusaha melihat aspek di luar subyek yang sedang dikerjakan untuk melihatnya sebagai sebuah keutuhan."

"A complimentary exchange of thoughts. My architecture's product or the process of achieving it seems to be within that understanding. I will try to look beyond the subject matter being worked on to see it as a whole." – A1 (April 27th, 2022)

A2 has similar utilization with A1 respecting architecture as a work to criticize. Quite similar but has a different purpose than A1's understanding, A2 sees criticism as a more significant role in accommodating both sides' (one critic and the others that are criticized) refinement in thought and design. This role is part of providing a broad understanding of society. Extended of this understanding, he also sees criticism as a part of the cultural process which needs to be done continuously to accommodate insight transfer and inspiration for the next generation. These quotations below show these attitudes' reflections:

"Ya saya lebih besar ya, kedua belah pihak yang dikritik juga bisa me-refinement cara berpikinya, cara berkaryanya, juga mengedukasi masyarakat, karena itu PR kita paling besar"

"Yes, I see it bigger (the scope of criticism). Both criticized parties can also refine their way of thinking, how to make a creation, and educate the public because that is our biggest homework." – A2 (May 23rd, 2022)

A3 sees criticism in architecture as a thought, not a product of criticism. He also sees criticism as a partiality that leads to refinement. The connection is laid in the thought of choosing which one is right and allow, pro or contra. Respecting A2's criticism as a refinement's understanding, these A3's attitudes led to the bigger context, which criticism as refinement as an effort to provide a better life in the future. These attitudes can be seen from these quotations:

“Iya. Kritik itu dalam berarti misalnya tentang keberpihakan, kenapa saya nggak mau pakai marmer buatan Italia misalnya, kenapa pakai itu. Itu kan sebetulnya bentuk kritik.”

“Yes. The criticism in which understanding, for example, about partiality, why I do not want to use Italian-made marble, and why use it. That is actually a form of criticism.” – A3 (April 26th, 2022)

“Kritik bisa dimaknai sebagai upaya untuk membuat kehidupan lebih baik sebetulnya.”

“Criticism actually can have a meaning as an attempt to improve life.” – A3 (April 26th, 2022)

Not so different from A3’s criticism as thought’s understanding, but the contrast in utilization, A4 sees criticism as a critical process during his design process. This understanding also aligns with the accommodation of this criticism continuously in responding to the issue. The quotation below shows these attitudes:

“Saya hampir lakukan dari seluruh proses itu dengan fokus yang berbeda-beda, saat kita pembangunan, selama masa konstruksi sampai akhir. Jadi proses konstruksi itu memang saya kawal.”

“I almost did the whole process (incorporating criticism) with different focuses, during the construction phase to the end, when we were in the developing stage. So, I did oversee the construction process.” – A4 (March 16th, 2022)

A5 shared his attitude about the critic as a role. He explains that critics must lead and develop the civilization, especially in architecture discourse. This attitude can be associated with A2 and A3’s criticism as a refinement’s understanding, but more stressing the actor responsible for it. A5 added that no one in Indonesia could be called a critic because they mainly focus on limited knowledge and expertise. Criticism in Indonesia, especially in architecture still based on the goodness or weakness of the design. The reflection of these attitudes can be seen below:

“Kita nggak punya kritik di Indonesia menurut saya ya. Ini sangat menyedihkan ya. Kritik dalam arti, peran kritikus kan mengarahkan peradaban dengan tajam sebetulnya, harusnya begitu ya. Kritikus yang baik itu bukan cuma memuji atau melihat kelemahan karya tapi dia bisa memandu gitu sebetulnya. Dia harusnya orangnya filosofe gitu ya, dia bisa melihat, punya wawasan yang luas, tapi sekaligus juga sangat dalam dan tajam untuk melihat apa yang relevan dan kontekstual yang harus kita kerjakan saat ini sebetulnya, peran kritik itu ke arah situ.”

“In my opinion, we do not have any criticism in Indonesia, which is unfortunate. (I mean) criticism, in a sense, the critic’s role, actually is to direct civilization sharply, and that is how it should be. A good critic not only appreciates or sees the work’s weakness, but he/she is supposed to lead it. He/she should be a philosopher, he/she can grasp and have broad insight, but at the same time, he/she is very keen and sharp to see what is relevant and contextual, which we have been expected to do at this time, the role of critic goes that

way.” – A5 (March 15th, 2022)

Based on the content analysis of the in-depth interview transcript, the tendency of attitudes toward criticism in architecture’s understanding from the five Indonesian architects can be determined (Figure 1). Attitude respecting criticism as a refinement becomes the most tendency among these architects. A2, A3, and A5 represent this tendency. A2 stresses the level of society’s broad understanding, A3 emphasizes surpassing the future’s life, and A5 underlines the civilization’s development. Besides, A1 highlights criticism as wholeness, which shares the attitude of exchange of thought with A2 but with different goals. A4 stresses critical thinking as his criticism habit in the design process, which shares the attitude of thought as criticism but contrasts with A3’s employment.

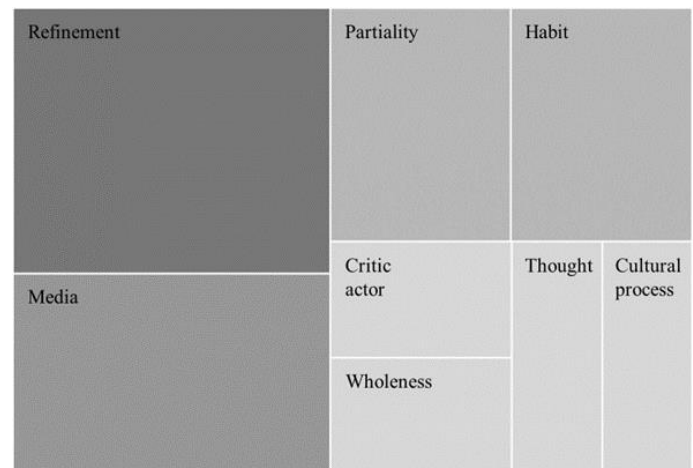


Fig. 1. NVivo analysis: Tree maps of the tendency of criticism in architecture’s understanding.

Criticism in architecture, as previously explained, can be regarded as a process that includes four main components, i.e., act, means, objects, and goals. Act of criticism can be noticeable in criticizing, judging, and interpreting. Means is tools accommodating criticism, and according to [11], these tools include talk, text, drawing, and building. Architecture becomes the object of criticism, and as an added explanation from [1], this end product or building is more tangible in applying criticism in architecture. Criticism aims at promoting a better quality of architecture, which in this case serves as the goal of criticism. These components are then compared with the five Indonesian architects’ attitudes respecting criticism in architecture’s understanding.

Table 1 shows the five Indonesian architects’ attitudes in correspondence with the aforementioned theoretical review. There is an identified inclination between most attitudes to the component of acts and goals. This discovery means that the five Indonesian architects constructed the explanation of how to criticize and the aim to be achieved in expressing their understanding of architecture’s criticism. It can be said that these architects agree to see criticism as a process to reach a target. This attitude led to tools or media of criticism employed by these architects still not that obvious to be recognized. In the end, there is no distance gap between the

scholars and the five Indonesian architects in the understanding of criticism in architecture.

TABLE 1. Comparison between components and attitudes.

	Components			
	Act	Means	Objects	Goals
A1	Exchange of thought; see from a different perspective	Architecture products	Architecture works	Wholeness
A2	Both sides' refinement in thought and design; constantly passing insight and inspire	Architecture or exhibition works		Refinement in society's understanding; next generation's provision
A3	Thought of partiality	-		Refinement in future life
A4	Continuously critical thinking as a habit	-		Construction quality
A5	Critic role	-		Refinement in civilization

B. Categorization of Interpretive Criticism's Methods

As aforementioned, three categorizations of criticism's methods by Attoe [3] are normative, interpretive, and descriptive criticism. Respecting this study's objective, the methods of interpretive criticism can be further elucidated through advocatory, evocative, and impressionistic criticism. These methods of criticism do not claim to make objectivity on evaluations nor provide what is actually there. Advocatory criticism provides a new perspective and way of seeing the building by changing the metaphor. Confronting the building by arousing similar feelings as a surrogate experience is comprised of evocative criticism. While impressionistic criticism constructs own or virtually independent work, using the building as a vehicle to criticize.

Understanding of the five Indonesian architects toward architecture's criticism has been analyzed in the previous section. As a behavior represented by the act's component of criticism, these understandings can be further analyzed into those mentioned above methods of interpretive criticism's categorization. These interpretations are portrayed in Table 2. The quotation of each architect is extracted into key phrases, mainly indicating the expression of the attitude that pictures their subjectivity of criticism toward the discourse of Indonesian architecture identity. One of them utilizes one of his architecture works as a way to express this criticism.

A1, in his disagreement with the utilization of Nusantara architecture's term, depicts his attempts to give or arouse similar feelings about the need to associate Indonesian architecture identity with more profound discovery. As one of A2's architecture works, a residential building project became his vehicle to criticize the association architecture style of upper-level housing by constructing virtually independent architecture work that looks never finished and almost falling. A3 attempts to provide a new perspective on Indonesian architecture identity, which is more relaxed, realistic, and honest in seeing rather than narrowed down into a final product. Similar but different from A3, A4 tries to change how the way Indonesian traditional architecture is perceived instead of concentrating on adapting or referencing Western

architecture. In contrast, but share the same way as A1, A5 confronts the ironic condition of foreigners' concern in uncovering locality in evoking college students.

TABLE 2. Categorization of five Indonesian architects' methods of interpretive criticism.

Architects	Key Phrases	Categories
A1	"Nusantara yang seolah-olah hanya mengambil permukaannya saja. ...Saya berusaha menukik lebih ke dalam untuk membangun pondasi pada praktek saya." "Nusantara as if cover-up only the surface. ... I try to discover more depth to construct the base of my practice."	Evocative criticism
A2	"Ya tadi yang rumah itu bagian dari kritik. Jadi itu sebetulnya kritik pada society, kritik pada masyarakat." "As I previously said, that house is part of criticism . So, actually, it is a critic to the society (especially who live surrounding the site)."	Impressionistic criticism
A3	"Identitas jangan dimaknai sebagai hasil akhir dan jangan dipahami itu sebagai solusi tunggal atas persoalan, gitu. Tapi sebenarnya lihat lah lebih rileks, lebih realistis, lebih jujur, ..." "Do not interpret identity as a final product neither grasp as a single solution of a problem. Let us be more relaxed, realistic, and honest in seeing (architecture), ... "	Advocatory criticism
A4	"...Artinya style, pengkotak-kotakan misalnya, mengenai style itu, saya hampir nggak peduli dengan itu. Jadi saya hadirkan arsitekturnya sesuai dengan saya percaya saja, ..." "... I mean the (architecture) style in the definition of segregation, for example, about that style, I almost do not care about that . So, I present contemporary architecture design as what I believe so far, ... "	Advocatory criticism
A5	"...Saya menyindir sebetulnya, kritik kepada teman-teman mahasiswa, kenapa sih kalau orang, justru yang bagus-bagus atau yang berani menggali lokalitas itu justru orang asing gitu, ..." "... I satirize actually, criticizing college students . When there is good architecture and courage to seek more about locality , the actor is a foreigner, ... "	Evocative criticism

Analyzing the five Indonesian architects' methods of interpretive criticism categorization discovers the utilization of advocatory, evocative, and impressionistic criticism. These findings regard the aforementioned theoretical review, in which this criticism encompasses a highly personal perspective, not a measured evaluation, nor seeks to be factual. It also reveals their plausibility in restlessness, disagreement, assessment, and opinion from their point of view by presenting a new way of seeing, evoking the same feeling, and constructing independent work. Even their

expression of attitude in architecture's criticism is still not entirely explicit, but the interpretation can determine their tendency in the methods of interpretive criticism. The five Indonesian architects' understanding of architecture's criticism which tends to lay in the component of acts and goals, also aligns with this interpretive criticism's inclination. This explanation means that these architects tend to be subjective in their acts of criticism and aim.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study concluded with two main findings in achieving the five Indonesian architects' methods of interpretive criticism regarding the discussion of Indonesian architecture identity's interpretation, represented in their architecture works. These architects' attitudes consider their understanding of criticism in architecture in the component of acts and goals of criticism. This first finding indicates that they tend to depict how to demonstrate and what intention to be attained in criticism. As the second discovery points out, their acts and goals have a favor to be subjective and recognized as interpretive criticism categorization. This second finding brings to light the employment of advocatory, evocative, and impressionistic criticism as the representation of their self-reference of criticism. Then, concerning architecture practice, further study can extend the investigation, not just to the method of criticism on the scope of architects' subjectivity, but to other methods of criticism, especially regarding the Indonesian architecture identity's discourse.

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