

## The Role of Indonesian Architecture and the Constellation of International Architecture

Lecture by Han Awal, 26 November 1964

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*Han Awal presented this speech for the 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gunadharma, the architecture student association at Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB), on 26 November 1964. Established on 15 November 1951, the association celebrated its anniversary annually with a programme of events, such as lectures and exhibitions of student works.*

*In the 1960s, Indonesia was undergoing massive development, and architecture played a significant role in shaping the look of its modern cities. Han Awal, who had returned to Indonesia four years prior, was invited to contribute his views on “The Role of Indonesian Architecture and the Constellation of International Architecture”, particularly as a witness of architectural developments abroad. In his talk, Han briefly describes the industrial development that changed architecture in the West, pinpoints his generation’s position in that development, and shares his insights on Indonesian architecture and its future.*

*The text was translated by Adelia Andani for the project Dipl.-Ing Arsitek: German-trained Indonesian Architects from the 1960s and edited by Eduard Kögel and Moritz Henning with Alisa Kotmair. Footnotes are by the translator and editors.*

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Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed lecturers, and notable audiences,

When the committee came up with the topic “The Role of Indonesian Architecture and the Constellation of International Architecture” and asked me to speak tonight, I was inevitably worried and confused. The topic you provided raised a lot of questions.

Did you mean the contribution of our architecture today to the international arena? If this is what you meant, then my answer will be short and firm – though with envy, somewhat regretful. I can say here that a significant contribution of our architecture to the international realm has yet to emerge, as far as I know.

Indeed, the visit of the Dutch architect Berlage to Indonesia in the 1930s provided him with more or less new inspiration, which might have led to a clarification of his arguments that enabled him to contribute as one of the pioneers of modern architecture at that time.<sup>1</sup> But Indonesian architecture back then could not be said to have a specific style, with direct influences closer to none.

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<sup>1</sup> Hendrik Petrus Berlage (1856–1934) was a prominent Dutch architect and a pioneer of modern architecture in the Netherlands. He was famous for his rational and critical approach toward traditional elements in architecture. He visited the Netherlands East Indies in 1923, spending three months traveling around Java, Bali, and Sumatra, then poured his observation and contemplation into a book, *Mijn Indische Reis* (My Journey to the Indies), published in 1931.

Regarding the absence of such a contribution, I believe you all pretty much agree with me, and this is also not a new statement, which would mean the debate would be over for tonight.

Or maybe what you meant was: views on the role of Indonesian architecture and the current climate of international architecture? When and what are the possibilities for Indonesian architecture to play a role in the international arena of architectural development?

But tonight, ladies and gentlemen, I do not intend to carry on prolonged and digressed hypotheses or prophecies that will make you leave this room with more questions and confusion. Also, I do not plan to give a scientific analysis of the above developments, which I would leave – this is just a suggestion – to an architectural historian or seasoned architectural critic. No, ladies and gentlemen. What I want to say tonight is only a glimpse of the architectural development in our country and the world, just a brief introduction after which we can freely exchange ideas later on.

### **On Our Role**

As I said earlier, our contribution to the outside so far is practically non-existent. Actually, this is quite contrary to our nation's role in the international political arena today. Maybe this is because we are still in the early stages of development, in a phase of inward consolidation. And maybe because architecture at the moment (i.e., building with tangible materials) is different from more abstract and dishonest tasks that deviate from the principles we are working on together.

Formulating an Indonesian architecture at this time seems premature and arduous. This is a matter of history; more than that, we are still in the early stage and consolidation. Maybe this problem will haunt you for life because due to its essence – the arrangement of space in the broadest sense – architecture is undying. Architecture is a reflection of a rationale, a cultural basis, a fundamental way of life, a primary structure of a society, and then a reflection of the greatness of a nation.

### **On Spatial Order**

Only the sequences in a spatial arrangement, its sizes, comparisons, and then the harmony of the composition can reflect the contents to the fullest, including the desired characteristics. However, is the harmonic sequence the only thing that determines the characteristics? I don't think so. Everything relates to each other; the content of these sequences is influenced by history, heritage, the development of the surrounding community, technological progress, and the tensions that exist in an architect's heart. What is important in all this is that we must never forget that the most essential element is the people.

It is clearly impossible for an architect to distance himself from these factors. As a result of his sketches, an architect determines – consciously or not – spaces for certain living conditions. He is not only a scribe or registrar of situations to be implemented. Instead, he determines the coming conditions, creating – desired or not – society's future conditions. So, ladies and gentlemen, back to the main theme: we don't have to worry about not having an architecture that expresses our identity. I believe – also after seeing your exhibition – that your sense of devotion is very strong, so you will be able to face future problems heroically. Of course, because there are physical interactions, an amount of osmosis occurs. In a situation where we are a legacy of architectural developments in the world, I must briefly

explain the concept of international, and the meaning of this term is very different from anti-national.

It has been recognized, also by critics, that in this global development, the distinctive features of a national architecture are not simply erased. In fact, this characteristic leads to further developments. Architecture in England is very different from that in France; in Germany it is different from Sweden; in Czech it is different from Brazil, etc., even though they basically use the same language. This is understandable because architecture is a reflection and a game changer, a wish, and a constellation of a society, a nation, and its own culture.

International architecture was a true revolution at the beginning of this century, the result of the so-called social, technical, and cultural revolution. In Europe at that time, there was an uproar over new discoveries that led to rapid industrialization, both positive and negative, in which the state of human dignity was so deplorable that revolution after revolution occurred. Art movements, extreme or not, have emerged and been kept secret until now. Leaving the false eclecticism that thrived in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, Henry van de Velde – a first-generation pioneer – came up with new concepts, especially in metalwork.<sup>2</sup> Then Gropius and Le Corbusier came along as exponents of that generation, setting a new balance between technique, industrialization, and social conditions, a new arrangement in the haze of disintegration and rampant individualism.<sup>3</sup> The Dada style of art rejected absolutely everything related to historical legacy, erasing cultural heritage, burning libraries and museums, conducting demonstrations, and even erasing all languages and replacing them with Dada.<sup>4</sup> Their protest against the traditions only hindered the development of the Dada movement and led to many bans in different places, although they resurfaced in a more subtle form. But the effect of this Dada pushed pioneers of that time on a path that had never been walked before.

In the second generation – the generation of Alvar Aalto<sup>5</sup> and Breuer<sup>6</sup> et al. – groups such as de Stijl,<sup>7</sup> Bauhaus,<sup>8</sup> and CIAM<sup>9</sup> long echoed the arguments we still experience today.

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<sup>2</sup> Henry van de Velde (1863–1957) was a Belgian painter turned architect and designer and was one of the pioneers of Belgian Art Nouveau. In 1907, van de Velde established, designed, and directed the Weimar School of Arts and Crafts in Germany.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Gropius (1883–1969) and Le Corbusier (1887–1965) were pioneers in the Modern movement in architecture. Their advocacy for modernism began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Le Corbusier (together with French painter Amédée Ozenfant) published *Après le Cubism* in 1918, which laid out their ideas on Purism. Gropius succeeded van de Velde and founded the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany in 1919 by merging the School of Arts and Crafts there with the Academy of Fine Art. In 1928, CIAM (Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne) was founded by Le Corbusier and Berlage, among others. Gropius and Alvar Aalto became members later on. The congress disbanded in 1959.

<sup>4</sup> Dada was an art movement said to be co-founded by the writer Hugo Ball in 1916 in reaction to the horror of the First World War. Beginning in Zurich, it spread to New York, Berlin, and Paris. The art produced by Dada artists is often satirical and nonsensical.

<sup>5</sup> Alvar Aalto (1898–1976) was a Finnish architect and designer. Earlier in his career, he was influenced by the work of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. He joined CIAM after attending the 1929 congress in Frankfurt and the 1933 congress in Athens.

<sup>6</sup> Marcel Breuer (1902–1981) was a Hungarian-born architect, a Bauhaus alumnus, and a student of Gropius. He was known as an influential exponent of the International Style.

<sup>7</sup> De Stijl – which means “style” in Dutch – began as a periodical launched by Dutch artists Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg, then developed into an avant-garde group of artists based in the Netherlands. The body of works span from 1917 to 1932, covering essays, paintings, sculpture, furniture, architecture, and graphic design. It was based on the artistic philosophy of Neoplasticism, characterized by straight lines and geometric shapes, using only black, white, and primary colours.

The *Athens Charter* called for a concept for the whole city (1933), considering work, housing, traffic, and recreation.<sup>10</sup> These patrons, ladies and gentlemen, are still alive now. In the third generation, the boundaries stretched even further to Japan, Brazil, and Sweden. This generation includes Arne Jacobsen<sup>11</sup>, Tange,<sup>12</sup> Candela,<sup>13</sup> etc. The hallmark of this generation is its reaction to the sterility of Mies van der Rohe, such as the total perfection of Arne Jacobsen, while the world faced broader problems with new inventions like the atomic bomb, industrialization of buildings, advances in concrete engineering, etc. The fourth generation, of which we are also a part, can be said to have begun with the invention of Sputnik by the Soviet Union, in which attention to a much wider space began to surface.<sup>14</sup> It was the dawn of space exploration. In Helsinki in 1958, the “Blue Square” [*Le Carré Bleu* journal]<sup>15</sup> was founded as a child of functionalist architecture. It was preceded by the Group d’Étude d’Architecture Mobile, abbreviated as GEAM,<sup>16</sup> which studied the possibilities of using simple and lightweight construction modules with extensive possibilities. Meanwhile, the “blue square” group moved to Paris in 1962, developing fundamental principles and discussing form and function. They sought to formulate new concepts to address the world’s increasingly dense population in cities with terms such as megalopolis, macropolis, etc. Mumford’s polis, which generally took a negative view, was surpassed by placing the expansion of the city above the existing one, *en masse* and integrated.<sup>17</sup> If this can be realized, maybe it has started in several places like Tokyo with the construction of its space above the water.<sup>18</sup> In this generation, Candilis<sup>19</sup>, Mayekawa<sup>20</sup>, Frei Otto<sup>21</sup>, Yona

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<sup>8</sup> See note 7.

<sup>9</sup> See note 3.

<sup>10</sup> *The Athens Charter* is a document reporting the fourth congress of CIAM in 1933 held on the S.S. Patris bound for Athens, Greece, from Marseilles, with the theme “The Functional City”. Following the third congress in Brussels in 1930 on “Rational Land Development”, this meeting focused on the wider scale of modern urban planning.

<sup>11</sup> Arne Jacobsen (1902–1971) was a Danish architect. He pursued the idea of total design (*Gesamtkunst*) in his works, designing everything from buildings, interiors, furniture, and tableware to fabric and wallpaper.

<sup>12</sup> Kenzo Tange (1913–2005) was a distinguished Japanese architect. He displayed a huge interest in urban development and imminent traditional Japanese quality in his works. Tange took part in the 1951 CIAM congress in Hoddesdon, England.

<sup>13</sup> Félix Candela (1910–1997) was a Spanish-Mexican architect. He made significant contributions to the development of reinforced concrete in the form of thin shells.

<sup>14</sup> Sputnik 1 was the first artificial Earth satellite launched by the Soviet Union on 4 October 1957.

<sup>15</sup> The *Le Carré Bleu* – literally “the blue square” – is an international architecture periodical founded in Finland in 1958 by members of CIAM Helsinki.

<sup>16</sup> Groupe d’Études d’Architecture Mobile (GEAM) was a group of architects who developed an alternative to contemporary urban development by imagining a city above the existing one, hung in flexible structures, where occupants could determine and design their own dwellings. The group was initiated by the Hungarian-born French architect Yona Friedman in 1957 and dissolved in 1962. Friedman first presented this idea at the 1956’s CIAM congress in Dubrovnik as a manifesto titled *Mobile Architecture (Manifesto de l’Architecture Mobile)*.

<sup>17</sup> In his book *The City in History* (1961), Lewis Mumford described how the development of a city (polis) ends with its destruction and abandonment.

<sup>18</sup> Kenzo Tange’s “Plan for Tokyo 1960” received worldwide attention for proposing to build over the city’s bay.

<sup>19</sup> Georges Candilis (1913–1995) was a Greek-born architect working in France who, in the Candilis-Josic-Woods consortium, won the 1963 competition for the Humanities Institute of the Free University in Berlin, built between 1967 and 1973. The building is an important reference of structuralism in architecture.

<sup>20</sup> Also Maekawa Kunio (1905–1986), worked in Paris with Le Corbusier in the late 1920s and returned to Japan in 1930. After the war, he became one of the most influential Japanese architects.

<sup>21</sup> Frei Otto (1925–2015) was a German architect who studied at the Technical University of Berlin in the early 1950s and later became known for his lightweight buildings with cable nets, lattice girders and tensile structures.

Friedman<sup>22</sup>, Fuller<sup>23</sup>, also have to be mentioned. In fact, Frei Otto even provided concepts for the pneumatic exploration of outer space in his recent essay, *Zugbeanspruchte Konstruktionen* [Tensile Structures].<sup>24</sup> Will international architecture become interplanetary architecture in the future?

Ladies and gentlemen, if we summarize the aforementioned state of international architecture concerning the development of our architecture, then we can follow these developments from afar, even though just for a little while. The situation may differ for each country, but they face similar problems.

Regarding our contribution in the future, it won't hurt for us to start thinking about these things in advance, preparing for situations that will challenge us further, fully realizing that our generation of architects, even at this consolidation stage, are in excellent quantity and quality to work on specific concepts together.

### **Summary:**

- The role of Indonesian architecture for us is to provide an atmosphere in which Indonesian society and culture can develop freely;
- The development of Indonesian architecture should not only depend on nostalgia for ancient and regional forms. Most importantly, in exploring the meaning of these surviving forms, we must reactivate them with contemporary technological practices according to the social/political/cultural factors that exist in our country;
- By realizing these things each time, the efforts of organizing or arranging the sequences of space by itself will form one of the cores of national architecture if the order is undeniably for our nation;
- The concept of international architecture should not be equated with being anti-national;
- If national architecture contains contents and meanings that are acceptable, then it will hold a particular role on its own;
- Indonesian architecture has its own possibilities, far beyond so-called tropical architecture. With the revolution, new dynamic energy and talents will provide the desired creativity combined with legacies from past cultures and the progress that international architecture has achieved;
- The task of Indonesian architecture in this revolution is to pioneer ways of life and atmosphere in our country;
- Parallel to cultural progress, the development of Indonesian architecture at this stage should have a solid framework even though its form cannot yet be realized;
- Indonesian architecture must be able to answer the challenges of the growing industry quickly;
- Mass development of modular architecture is a solution to the need for housing in our country at this time;

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In Berlin, Otto studied with Gerhard Jobst, among others, who had worked as an urban planner and architect in Jakarta in the 1920s.

<sup>22</sup> Yona Friedman (1923–2019) was a French architect who became known for his drawing projects on space cities and bridge cities.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983) was a US architect and visionary whose geodesic domes allowed for new spatial constructions.

<sup>24</sup> *Zugbeanspruchte Konstruktionen* (Tensile Structures) was a book by Frei Otto (1925–2015) published in 1963. This book followed Otto's involvement with GEAM, in which he was a key member. His first tensile structure was a bandstand in Kassel in 1955.

- We must dare to abandon conventional methods, if necessary, even though this is an experiment that must be accounted for;
- For the development of Indonesian architecture, opportunities are needed, such as the Indonesian Architects Association (consolidation), architectural magazines (communication), documentation, and competitions for projects of a national nature, in a relatively systematic, respectful, and accountable manner, as well as personal discipline as the cornerstone of the architect's code of honour;
- Last but not least, we should pay attention to international/interplanetary architecture without abandoning the characteristics of our identity. The door is open for a renaissance of Indonesian architecture.

**Conclusion:**

Ladies and gentlemen, in closing, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to see you on this occasion, the 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the association. Hopefully, with your passion, you can cultivate a sense of devotion that will determine the outcome of your work in the future.

Hopefully, soon you can strengthen all of us in this field as dependable architects, not only as "skilled drafters and fast sketchers" but especially as pioneers of revolution.

For my comment on the exhibition and comparison with overseas, I am sure that after this stage of consolidation and framing, not only will we catch up fast but also be able to point out new paths to the problems we face. We are indeed on the threshold of what might be called a glorious renaissance in Indonesian architecture. Be lucky and grateful that we all have this opportunity. Maybe soon, we will not only turn our attention to international architecture but will be facing the beginning of interplanetary architecture without abandoning its international character (its world) and, last but not least, the characteristics of its identity.

Thank you.

Jakarta, 20 November 1964