



***AESTHETIC AND WORLD POLITICS BY ROLAND BLEIKER.***  
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Aesthetic approach to politics is not really something considered as a novelty. Immanuel Kant has described the aesthetic relationship with rationality way back in the 17th century, as well as Friedrich Nietzsche and Jaques Rancier as a more contemporary counterpart. In the field of international relations, the study of aesthetics has been raised by a number of reviewers – from James Der Derian, Costas Constantinou, David Campbell, to Anthony Burke – who began to lay aesthetics as a foothold in approaching various phenomena. Roland Bleiker is one of the most consistent among them. In an essay entitled "The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory", Bleiker opened the discourse to establish aesthetics as one of the paradigms in international political theory. His essay is published in 2001, contrasts with the majority of international political theories that always try to "catch the world as it is". Bleiker assumes that there is always a distance between representation and what it represents. Through aesthetics, he criticizes approaches that fill this theoretical gap with mimetic ideas. He emphasizes that aesthetic studies do not try to mimic the reality, but it is trying to recognize the various emotions and sensibilities in the formation of a certain representation. The great role of "emotion" in politics is further explained by Bleiker through an essay entitled "Fear No More: Emotions and World Politics", published seven years after.

These two essays are the introduction to Bleiker's next work, "Aesthetic and World Politics". The book composed of nine chapters that will be unfamiliar to political theorists in general because more than half of this book talk about poetry. Therefore, it is advisable for the reader not to miss the introduction because, in this section, Bleiker reveals how aesthetic studies can broaden the view of world politics. Various phenomena such as global terrorism, for example, can be reviewed through photography, literature, architecture, and also through music. This conceptual study tries

to recognize the emotions of society that shape perceptions of terrorism in society and ultimately gives effect to the policy-making process. In the introduction, Bleiker also explains why he choose the imagination of poetry as a focus in his aesthetic studies – rather than photography or film that is perceived to be closer to present representation and has more popular influence. Through poetry, he tries to disclose the essence of the ultimate reality-shaper: the language. Within this context, language functions not merely as a means of communication, but as a result of the process formation of perceptions toward its surrounding. There is no neutrality in language, it always contains values that represent the framework of the human imagination of its world, including political imagination. Thus, as an art of language crystallization, poetry can sum up the most profound knowledge of how an imagination of the world is formed.

In shaping the aesthetic approach to world politics, Bleiker refers to the postmodernism perspectives which he elaborated earlier in his previous essay, “The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory”. Postmodern gives way to the understanding of "knowledge formation" beyond rigid and empirical methods. The stream of postmodernism in International Relations itself has been introduced by James Der Derian, that gave way to aesthetics "understanding" and "experience" to find their place in the study of world politics. Strengthened by the conceptualization of "aesthetic politics" put forward by Jaques Ranciere, Bleiker tries to unravel the power relations of sensibility movement in society. This footing reinforces the argument that facts and data are not everything – since, through different perceptions, society can perceive different meanings. However, Bleiker realizes that the aesthetic study in world politics remains at risk. First, the tendency to examine the aesthetics only in the term of popular art will make the study of aesthetics losing its ontological footing and lead to another branch of theory that is cultural studies. Secondly, there is also a tendency to approach aesthetic study as political objectives, whereas aesthetics turn merely as an ideological instrument. The Nazis are one extreme example how ideas of beauty and harmony are aestheticized into an authoritarian social model. By admitting these risks, Bleiker emphasizes that the ethical significance embodied in aesthetic understanding, is not about how society perceive good and bad, but on how aesthetic can distribute sensibilities, either in daily life or in political policy-making.

The chapters in this book examine the aesthetic span of world politics extensively. Bleiker begins with a contemporary study of global security perceptions summarized in the various art reactions post 9/11 incident. A number of novels as well as films based on the 9/11 settings have been crucial in capturing the "aftershocks", which, according to Immanuel Kant, manifest as the core of emotional motion of society. From the aesthetic point of view, global terrorism is understood in the form of multiple perceptions and not only from the security perspective. A review on sublimity is presented by Bleiker in the next chapter. Bleiker uses the idea of sublimity to the extent the aesthetic studies as an approach to world politics. By understanding sublimity, people will be able to reflect clearly on various emotionally draining phenomena, such as terrorism. Sublimity can also penetrate various political excesses and peeling layers of political interests so that political phenomena can be perceived clearly. The clarity of this viewpoint is the strength of the aesthetic study. In the later chapters, Bleiker describes various examples of sublimity through poetry in various phenomena – this poetic approach is called a "micro-study", a way of understanding political issues by sensing its emotional essence. Paul Celan's poems are Bleiker's first example. Celan who wrote in the post-world war era became one of the keys to understanding the various social problems and the remaining fears left by Hitler's regime. The next example is a collection East Germany anthology of poetry in the 1980s. The anthology voiced the void in social life, became the impetus for the social protests that led to the demolition of the Berlin Wall in the end of the decade. An intriguing association of how poets can be an inspiration for significant changes in the international system.

Aesthetic practice in world politics is described by Bleiker in the elaborate chapter on Pablo Neruda. Neruda is a diplomat and poet at once, who speaks persistently about the problem of social injustice. Bleiker's discussion of Neruda gives us an idea of how poetry can influence the policy-making process and voices protest against injustice. The further impact of Neruda's work is how he transform poetry into a living language in the community. Neruda, like Rendra in Indonesia, considered as a vanguard in opposing the social injustice. Poems by Anna Akhmatova are the next to analyze in Bleiker's catalog of poetry. Akhmatova is a Russian poet who plays a critical study of historical memories. Akhmatova's poem speaks out and convinces the reader that history is not merely a chronological memory, but also an emotional memory. Through poetry,

Akhmatova shows how rhymes are functioned as a process of reminding – which in some ways is more reliable than data that can be distorted by political interests. In the final chapter, Bleiker picked up the work of Ko Un, a poet from South Korea. Bleiker's choice of Ko Un is crucial to show the extent of the aesthetic range in world politics because poetry can also tangle with identity problems. Ko Un's poem grapples with the problem of identity – a reflection of how the South Korean society rebuilds its culture as a nation amid war and world politics.

Making aesthetics as an approach to understanding world politics, as this book tries to convey, is surely challenging. In the previous review of this book, Monica Ingber highlighted the criticism of Bleiker's ideas presented by Gerald Holden (*In-Spire Journal of Law, Politics and Societies* Vol 5, No. 1, 2010). One of them is the limitations of aesthetic studies in international relations studies that realistically, will only be able to be used by limited circles. Bleiker also acknowledged this challenge, so at the end of the book, he concluded that writing and thinking of world politics from the point of aesthetics is not an easy thing. The world politics always require quick answers, such as "how to end the war?", it does not seem to provide a place for aesthetic studies to flourish. However, the vast development of discourse and theorist, providing a breath of fresh air on the study of aesthetic in world politics. Thus, while changing the practice and paradigm is a long process, the awareness of how aesthetics can bring significant influence to the study of world politics, should continue to be instituted.