

INTRODUCTION

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Ever since Richard Wollheim's *Image in Form* fell out of print, so well-thumbed that its acid-soaked Penguin leaves have long ago disintegrated, there has been a need for some sort of taster or introduction for new students to the work of Adrian Stokes. Adrian Durham Stokes (1902-1972) was an "English aesthete" in the tradition of Ruskin and Pater,ⁱ and, like others in that rare tradition, highly individual and idiosyncratic in his approach and writing style. As a philosopher of art more than an art critic, his writing appealed to practising artists to an unusual extent; he was himself a painter and many of his pictures are held by the Tate. His earlier writings were explorations of aesthetic experience founded on architecture and landscape, in particular that of Italy, then expanded to include sculpture and, subsequently, the art of painting. Although his focus moved on, his vision of the fundamental mind-feeding experience offered by all these subjects never changed. But it did develop conceptually, and the most significant factor in this was his psychoanalytical experience, which

ⁱ See David Carrier, *The English Aesthetes* (1997).

began in earnest in 1930 when he commenced a seven-year personal analysis with Melanie Klein.ⁱⁱ As a result, Stokes (as Donald Meltzer has said) built a bridge between art and psychoanalysis “that will stand for generations”, adding that although Stokes himself did not expound his aesthetic theory in a final form, Wollheim’s selection nonetheless “pulled it together” for readers (Meltzer, 1974): that is, it demonstrates its shape, consistency and evolution in publications that spanned more than four decades. Subsequent scholars have always been impressed by the integrity of Stokes’ aesthetic-psychanalytic worldview, which was innate in him, whilst finding an answering echo and confirmation in Kleinian psychoanalytic theory as it was developing during the last century. As Wollheim observed, there seemed already to have been a “place reserved” in Stokes’ mind for Mrs Klein’s ideas, hence it was a natural gravitation; and through the Imago Societyⁱⁱⁱ and other friendships, Stokes kept closely in touch with the subsequent evolution of these ideas.

The collection of extracts in this book is less comprehensive than Wollheim’s, and it does not attempt to encompass, or even to dip into, the full range of Stokes’ interests. Nor can this brief introduction offer an overview of the body of Stokes scholarship, which bears witness to an increasing appreciation of his methodology and vision and includes new editions of some

ii With regard to Stokes’ approach to psychoanalysis, Eric Rhode has written (personal communication): “In his early twenties he went to Italy with his parents and the beauty of Liguria awoke a passion in him for the beauty of the visual arts. In those days travel around Italy was not easy, but this did not discourage the young Stokes from visiting remote sites and rediscovering great paintings in inaccessible farmhouses. He was enchanted by Urbino. The Sitwells, Ezra Pound and D. H. Lawrence in turn befriended him and encouraged his writing. He entered a state of depression in part but only in part stimulated by the death of Lawrence, and a friend who was in psychoanalysis suggested he should seek out Ernest Jones who at that time had encouraged Melanie Klein to come to London to analyse his son. Jones referred Stokes to Mrs Klein who had a practice in Notting Hill Gate.”

iii Co-founded with the musician Robert Still in 1950; members included Richard Wollheim, Donald Meltzer, Wilfred Bion, Roger Money-Kyrle, John Oulton Wisdom, and Stuart Hampshire (see Meltzer, 1974 [below, Appendix 1]; Glover, 2009, p. 86.)

works. The relatively restricted intention here is to convey the quality of Stokes' vision of the linkage between aesthetic experience and psychoanalysis: meaning not just psychoanalytic theory, but an awareness of unconscious emotional patterns and resolutions manifest in art-forms that is heightened or clarified by psychoanalytic experience – sometimes, indeed, in spite of psychoanalytic theory, at least in its original reductive approach to art and the artist. In particular, the aim is to make accessible Stokes' personal model of engaging with what the poets call “the idea of the beautiful”, and to bring out its psychoanalytic relevance; for his best writing has a poetic aura and, as always in poetry, his personal way of “close looking” is both idiosyncratic and universal.

It is in Stokes' later writings (the Tavistock series of books) that we find his most deliberate moves toward formulating a deeply psychoanalytic theory of aesthetic experience, especially in relation to his establishment of the parallels between the two Kleinian “positions” (“paranoid-schizoid” and “depressive”) and the two approaches to art (“carving” and “modelling”) which apply to artist and art-viewer alike: the depressive entailing an acceptance of the object's otherness and the self's dependence upon it for mental sustenance; the paranoid-schizoid representing a more primitive desire to possess, control and merge with the object. For through his knowledge of Kleinian object-relations theory, as Nicky Glover writes:

Stokes became well equipped to address the interplay between the artist and his medium, together with the relationship between the spectator-critic and the artwork. Indeed, in his approach, Stokes saw no essential difference in the relationship between artist and medium, and spectator and artwork, for, according to Kleinian theory, the same intrapsychic processes are at work in *all* object relationships. (Glover, 2009, p. 87)

Stokes himself said there was no essential (psychic) difference between the artist and the art-appreciator; he was interested in aesthetic response in the widest sense of the human need to have meaningful experiences by means of the outer world of “objects”

which could then contribute to inner-world structure – to the development of mind and personality. It was natural to him to fuse his personal, innate vision of beauty with the Kleinian model of the mind in which, for the infant, the mother is the world, arousing ambivalent emotions of love and hate which are only resolvable through an attempt to get to know the aesthetic object (its inside as well as its outside), not intrusively but respecting its otherness: this being the only real means of seeking self-knowledge and proceeding with psychic development.

The Kleinian, or post-Kleinian, implications of this view were later clarified theoretically by Meltzer (1988) in his formulation of the “aesthetic conflict” that occurs in relation to the tension between the visible external beauty of the object, and the object’s unknown internal qualities, space or intentions which cannot be sensuously apprehended: thus two ways of knowing are brought into conflict. The prototypal external reality of the mother is echoed in the ambivalent emotional impact with which the self initially confronts a new idea, whose potential “beauty” arouses fear and apprehension as well as attraction. As the art philosopher Susanne Langer suggested:^{iv}

Aesthetic attraction, mysterious fear, are probably the first manifestations of that mental function which in many becomes a peculiar tendency to see reality symbolically, and which issues in the power of conception, and the lifelong habit of speech.
(Langer, 1942, p. 110)

The tension between contrary emotions stimulates the need to find a symbol that contains the meaning.

For Stokes, the ultimate aesthetic object that arouses our sense of awe and wonder is the world itself; and the initial aesthetic object is the mother, in both the emotional and the bodily sense, initially in the part-object form of the breast. The relationship with the breast is the foundation for the quest for self-knowledge, and art is one of the supreme modes of exploring and modelling this quest. As he describes in his autobiography *Inside Out*, and as may be seen from his other writings,

^{iv} Stokes refers to Langer’s *Feeling and Form* in *Michelangelo* (1955), n. 275.

the “good mother” held in his childhood preconceptions became realized or actualized on his first encounter with the world of the Mediterranean – its landscape, its art, its lifestyle, and even its geological prehistory; all of which contribute to the fantasy of the qualities of the internal object – its richness, capaciousness, stability. This contrasted with his picture of a deprived mother, vulnerable to schizoid attacks – a “real” fantasy depicted through observations or memories of life in London’s Hyde Park. David Carrier, in his introduction to the narrative, explains:

Stokes is telling his life story by redescribing the contrast, presented in his 1930s books about fourteenth-century Italian sculpture, between modelled works which reveal tension and that ideal carved art which is atemporal . . . Going to Italy, he develops in ways Klein gave him the vocabulary to understand.
(Carrier, 1997, p. 14)

Indeed if we follow Stokes’ own emphasis on unconscious thinking, we can say that in terms of mental structure he already “understood”, but then found a verbal congruence in the ideas of psychoanalysis.

The concept of the restoration of the good mother is the foundation for Stokes’ declaration that successful art is a representation of “sanity”, and that likewise, sanity is “an aesthetic achievement”. He defines the “essence of sanity” as the power to communicate and receive communications. Sanity – health, wholeness – is the artist’s goal in approaching the innate but hidden object-potentialities of his material. The insistence on the idea of “sanity” countmands the too-frequent psychoanalytic assumption that art is significant for its revelation of the artist’s personal psychoses and that herein lies its interest for psychoanalysis. In Stokes’s view, by contrast, immersion in an artwork may well put the artist (or viewer) in touch with their psychosis, since elements of aggression must be activated in order to start moving out of inchoateness; and these elements always remain visible within the finished work. But if the work is successful then it *must* present an image of sanity – in which all these destructive or hateful elements encounter not denial but rather,

transformation, under the greater aegis of the “good object”. As the sculptor Louise Bourgeois engraved on the lintel of one of her installations (*Precious Liquids*): “Art is a guarantee of sanity.” It is not the psychosis that is interesting, but the integration of psychoses and compulsions within the greater art-symbol.

All underlying form is “of the body”, writes Stokes: whether the subject under consideration be nature, the manmade environment, art or architecture. This is the basis of our human perception and provides the meaning which we attribute to the outer world. We see “the body” in nature as much as in the manmade environment and its contents. Stokes initially talked of “the emblematic”, then later came to call this complex compositional network “the image in form”, directing attention to the *underlying form* of the artwork which has an organized meaning of its own, as distinct from its *content* or apparent subject: a meaning which the artist may only realize (consciously or unconsciously) as the work nears completion. With regard to “the image in form”, Eric Rhode writes:

[Stokes] thought that the contemplation of art encourages the spectator to recognize the “total configuration as a symbol” through the structure of what he called “the image in form”. And he believed that the contemplation of art, even more than the contemplation of landscape, could bring the spectator to an intuitive understanding of how the often inchoate self might identify with those internal figures that psychoanalysts call “good objects”. (Rhode, 1973, p. 4)

The “image in form” is equivalent to Langer’s definition of the “underlying idea” of a work, or the “art-symbol” – that is, the overall symbol, not the various subsidiary symbols which may be featured like signage within the composition. The overall symbol is not a reference but a container, comprised of all the significant formal elements such as composition, colour, texture, media handling, etc. As Stokes explains in his essay on “Primary process, thinking and art”:

The shapes at which [a person] looks, whatever the object of his immediate attention, are bound to encounter the inner

landscape. I have not in mind here the perception of a phallic symbol, say, in a tree, but the impingement of the total configuration as a symbol, an aspect of symbolization *vis-à-vis* the outside world at large to which psychoanalysts are not inclined to pay prolonged attention even when attending to matters of art. (Stokes, 1973, p. 116)

This recognition of underlying form (in literary studies known as “deep grammar”) melts down the rigidity of the classical psychoanalytic contrast between primary (unconscious) and secondary (conscious) processes, which becomes of far less relevance once the art-process is recognized as one of unconscious thinking finding symbolization in a way that is communicable to others. In the same paper Stokes makes use of recent psychoanalytic and philosophical ideas to fortify the view that unconscious and non-verbal fantasies may be highly sophisticated in their structure, to a degree that is not only deeper than purely intellectual formulation, but also in greater contact with the underlying good mother or object, and less the instrument of childish omnipotence.

The search for underlying form by means of immersion in the outwardness and corporeality of the artmaking process is carried out by projective and introjective identifications (in psychoanalytic terms), through which the inner object relates to the outer object or artwork. Stokes notes the dialectical structure of all philosophical quests: two basic principles or positions are required, which need first to be distinguished, and then integrated. Making use of his psychoanalytic knowledge, he expanded existing aesthetic theories of carving and modelling, and of identity-in-difference, by adding in the concept of identification. He applied this to the two fundamental modes of object-relationship operating in aesthetic experience: otherness and fusion, separateness and possession, the whole-object and the part-object viewpoints. On this basis he could vividly observe and describe the interaction of different psychic approaches to art, and the way in which they paralleled the child’s complex bonding processes with its mother, “working-out” (in his loaded term) the often disturbing and conflictual beginnings of aesthetic absorption.

Stokes' lifelong preoccupation with the dialectical modes increased in complexity over the span of his writings. Initially the terms carving and modelling had referred to the difference between stone- and bronze-sculpting, insofar as these represent different ways of attempting reparation of the aesthetic object that is inevitably damaged the instant its surface is disturbed by the sculptor. Where carving, after its initial attack, supremely avows the independent otherness of the object, entailing relinquishment and respect for its inviolacy or privacy, modelling gives play to primitive types of fusion and part-object projections into the object, together with the infantile temptation of the self to believe it is an omnipotent creator in full control of its productions.

In his early works, Stokes used the term "Quattro Cento" to epitomize the quintessential carving approach, since he associated or discovered it through the stone carved-out sculpture of the Quattrocento. He distinguished it from building-up (modelling) methods of reparation of the object, as used in other types of sculpting and which are also typical of the medium of painting. When he became interested in expanding his aesthetic from the realm of sculpting to that of painting, he incorporated "identity in difference" into his vocabulary, since he needed to find a way to describe the painter's equivalent to the sculptor's carving during the search for a "total configuration" – an overall symbol not just a part-object symbol. Identity in difference encompassed colour, shape and composition, and the relation of parts to the whole on a flat surface, not just a three-dimensional one. As a result of this expansion in his focus, the artist's mental orientation was no longer tied or confined to any particular medium but became, as Glover puts it, more "existential": concerned with abstract modes of being that are applicable to any activity or situation in the outside world.

For a long time, Stokes maintained the "Quattro Cento" or carving was his "preferred" mode. Gradually however, as his scope and knowledge-base widened, he came emphatically to assert that both orientations are present in all aesthetic

experience, and are indeed necessary and complementary: carving does not negate or devalue modelling but rather, subsumes it. He saw the rhythm of attack and reparation, and the oscillation of paranoid–schizoid and depressive orientations, as part of the life instinct, fundamental both to artistic creativity and to psychic development. The self-sufficient object was modified – and ultimately enriched – by acknowledging the usefulness of “envelopment” and the intermingling of minds. Pursuing this theme more closely, it became apparent that this intermingling could take on either aggressive or enquiring qualities, in a way that the post-Kleinian theory of Bion and Meltzer has categorized as a distinction between “intrusive projective identification” and “communicative projective identification”. Bion indeed saw the latter as alternating between “patience” (a stressful state) and “security” (a momentary glimpse of truth); and to indicate this oscillation he coined the symbol Ps<→>D, a psychoanalytical equivalent to the alternation of modelling and carving modes in artistic process; while by contrast, intrusive identification results in a cynical state of mind which is out of touch with emotion and represents a tyrannical attack on the link between self and object. Bion’s theory of the positive emotional links between love, hate and knowledge, as distinct from non-emotional, cynical or negative links, allowed for the pre-Kleinian pain-pleasure principle to be superseded, along with the view of art as the sublimation of repressed guilt-ridden desires. Instead it is a quest for sanity through symbolizing the interaction of identifications, marking out the route toward self-knowledge.

For the artist, all these identifications are captured and displayed in the underlying bodily form of the artwork, whose final equilibrium contains and manifests the processes of its composition. The achievement of formal unity or harmony – “the image in form” – corresponds to the depressive acceptance of the otherness of the aesthetic object, an acceptance which is only gained after an initial carving attack on the medium and a sequence of modelling moves aimed at establishing not omnipotent restitution but communicative links. So the artwork is

to the viewer – and indeed to the artist, who is the servant not the master of his own creativity – a symbolic container for the emotional turbulence, though not in the sense of a comforter (as the multi-functional external mother may be); rather, as Keats describes it in the “Grecian Urn”, the aesthetic object regains an inviolate psychic distance after the incursions of the child: an enriched wholeness after projection and introjection have achieved a fine balance.

To conclude on a personal note: I first became acquainted with the writings of Adrian Stokes at a time when I was searching for an aesthetic theory which could encompass the notion of literary criticism as an art form, and was feeling impatient and disillusioned with the reductionist theories in fashion during the 1980s, including many of those which purported to be psychoanalytic. I was heartened and inspired by reading Stokes’ magnificent study of Turner, which seemed to offer a genuine interdisciplinary bridge, not just in discursive terms but in the poetic language of a lived experience attained through finding a “symbolic congruence” with the aesthetic object. At that time I wrote:

We are looking for an approach to the body of art – the Urn – which expresses a congruence with the tensions and directives of its underlying Idea, its commanding form: an approach which is the opposite of reductive, and which in a sense partakes of the art-symbol’s integrity and echoes its world-of-its-own. On one level, Stokes gives a “Kleinian interpretation” of art; but it is not one which is founded principally on categorizing art’s phantasy contents, still less on the evaluation of psychopathology (which he regarded as a sad travesty of the “transcendent” or “effervescent” or “widely significant” psychoanalytic spirit). Nor does he rely solely on the other critical favourite, on tracing the motif of “reparation” – the Kleinian restatement of the traditional theme of innocence beyond experience – though he is indeed continuously aware of the rhythm of attack and reparation, and of the artist’s anxiety at confrontation with a blank sheet of paper where the first step in creation is violation. But Stokes’ major stance for investigation is his architectural sense of worlds within

worlds, of three-dimensional structures, spatial volumes and lines of force, which he recognizes as dramatizing psychic tensions. In particular he focuses on the resonance between inside and outside, where the dual functions of envelopment and incorporation – the essence of aesthetic appreciation – takes place. Thus he describes simultaneously both the reconstitution of the “independent, self-sufficient, outside good object”, and our relationship with it as it evolves through “contemplating and following out” its formal network of directions: the way in which we become “in touch with a process that seems to be happening on our looking, a process to which we are joined as if to an alternation of part-objects.” (Williams, 1988, pp. 187-188)^v

The “aesthetic criticism” that Stokes here demonstrates so vividly is the closest that criticism comes to the transference conditions of psychoanalysis, modelling the most intimate and essential of analogies between the two disciplines. As Wollheim has observed, Stokes – like Ruskin – has “a precision not of description, but rather of presentation, as though the critic’s task was to offer up, along with the object, those associations and sentiments which determine its place in our understanding or appreciation” (Wollheim, 1972, p. 30). Stokes’ prose, at its best, is indeed a “presentational form”, in the sense formulated by Susanne Langer; its meaning is in its deep grammar, not in the lexical sign-language of its phraseology. It demands that we become enveloped in a way analogous to his own envelopment by his theme: that is, it works by initiating identifications, not by dictate. Lawrence Gowing said that the experience of reading Stokes was very close to looking at art – and he saw this as an unusual feature, unlike most art criticism. And it is perhaps an illusion that we can read for ourselves: we are always hand in hand like Dante with Virgil, whether with internal or external objects, attempting to fit our minds to the experience on offer. Symbolic congruence is a generative mode, based on inspiration rather than imitation: by its means a potentially infinite series of transformations may be transmitted between

^v An internet version of this paper, “A post-Kleinian model of aesthetic criticism”, is available on www.psyartjournal.com.

reader-subject and landscape- or artwork-object, in a way analogous to Meltzer's description of the psychoanalytic process as a "conversation between internal objects". It is what enables psychoanalysis to join the ranks of the art-forms in what Stokes calls the spirit of "brotherliness", rather than pronouncing judgement on the working of artists.

Through his distinctive prose style we see Stokes discovering his own emotional experience as he looks-and-writes, communicating in minute detail the struggles of creativity. By "working-out" in this way (to use his own phrase) he models for the reader his personal explorations into the truth of beauty, "travelling in the realms of gold" as Keats put it. Although this type of acutely observed immersion in the aesthetic object is generally unknown to most psychoanalytic writers on the arts, it is quintessentially psychoanalytic. In fact this ultimately provides the most vital link between Stokes' ideas and those of psychoanalysis: the translation of an inside-outside dialogue into a verbal art-form which then demands from the reader a generative response of symbolic congruence – not colonizing but internalizing.

With this in mind, the selections in this book are arranged not chronologically, but with a view to first establishing Stokes' philosophical and psychoanalytic theoretical viewpoint, using shorter extracts, and ending with longer passages that demonstrate the power of his capacity for close observation and description. Subtitles for each excerpt are taken from Stokes' own words, with the exception of "catastrophic change" for the *Giorgione* (Stokes' term is "interchange"), as his description fits so well the classical term which was adopted by Bion to express the ambivalent qualities of imminent psychic change.

Chapter One, "The quest for sanity", establishes the general sense in which the underlying desire for reparation of the mother is equivalent to the development of sanity, something which Stokes considers "an aesthetic achievement". It is dependent on the establishment of communication between self and internal object. The kind of "communion" searched for entails more than one mode and transcends the simplistic division of

conscious-unconscious, secondary-primary; it entails learning to read depth arguments and symbols, not just surface ones. Hence the special quality of “contemplative states” which are both inward and outward-looking.

Chapter Two, “Art and the inner world”, explores these themes in more detail, emphasizing the Kleinian view of the concreteness of the inner world and how it is mirrored in the outer world, not in the sense of the pathetic fallacy, but in the sense of how we attribute meaning to the actuality that we perceive – indeed how our perceptions are created in tandem with these inner (Platonic) pre-conceptions. This chapter and the previous one include extracts from a dialogue with Donald Meltzer on what art shows us about the nature of the inner world; the role of the artist in society is considered and the idea of the “bad object” is clarified as being a projection of bad parts of the self; and the essential psychic similarity between the artist and the art-appreciator is established.

Chapter Three, “Modes of art and modes of being”, collects some of Stokes’ clearest statements not just on carving and modelling but on the general need for a dialectical approach to analysing art, especially when we take into account *experience* of art, for both artist and viewer. The focus is on “lines of equivalence”, or as Bion would put it, the “caesura” or linkages between vertices or viewpoints, such as classical-romantic, and internal-external realities – the place where contraries meet and a new dimension opens out. The concept of identity in difference allows for the carving potential of colour. Stokes’ ultimate formulation of “the invitation in art”, in which the “enveloping pull” makes the object’s otherness “more poignantly grasped”, is probably his nearest approach to establishing a theory of aesthetic experience.

Chapter Four, “Mother art”, documents Stokes’ homage to architecture and the architectural arts as the fount and origin of his own personality development – the source of his discovery that behind all other perceptions lay the idea of the mother’s body; architecture is both mother of the arts and the route by means of which art-as-mother becomes manifest. As Stephen

Kite has written, in Stokes' "architectonic" sensibility, this fluid area of response is one in which "The wall plane becomes the zone of personal encounter between our inner feelings and their outer transposition" (Kite, 2008, p. 2). The architectural qualities of nature, emerging over time, find an answering response in man's agricultural and landscape-shaping endeavours; the sustaining of life and creating a harmonious worked environment are a single concern not separate matters. These extracts make Stokes' innate congruence with Kleinian thinking abundantly clear.

Chapter Five, "Close looking", shows Stokes' principles in action as he "works-out" the symbolic congruence between his experience and that of the artist, whose inner investigations take the form not of didacticism but of "deep-laid symbol". It is the equivalent of "close reading" in literary criticism which pays minute attention to poetic diction and the sensuous impact of deep grammar. In each case the critic or aesthete is not concerned with proving a point but is engaged on a journey of discovery, "following in the steps of the Author" as Keats put it. The description of Piero della Francesca demonstrates painting-as-carving through a "chromatic sense of form" and a sense of "the family of things"; Giorgione's mysterious *Tempesta* shows the "principle of interchange" lying behind the aesthetic conflict between calm and storm; Turner's development defines the quest for "beneficence in space", the ultimate architectural achievement in painting. This last is a supreme example of aesthetic conflict successfully resolved, since it shows the author tackling his established hatreds or aesthetic dis-taste, seeking for the classical within the romantic, sticking to the disturbing line of equivalence, and working the "diaphragm" into a "receiving-screen" (Bion): that is, converting hate into love – a theme with which Stokes is much preoccupied, and here presents not just theoretically but practically.

Chapter Six, "Construction of the good mother", includes a large part of the autobiographical sketch *Inside Out* in which Stokes with hindsight reviews his preconception of

“Mediterranean” values and their ultimate conceptualization. His life’s quest for the aesthetic in all things could be said to have begun with his child’s wail that so mystified the adults: “I want it all right!” As Carrier has pointed out, it was after composing this “self-constructed myth” of his childhood (a continuation of his self-analysis) that Stokes was able to tackle his ambivalence towards the “modelling” modes of art he had previously marginalized.

I have included in this chapter the “Envoi” from *Venice: An Aspect of Art* which, as a statement of his principles, could really apply to all Stokes’ writings.

Two tributes by personal friends (Donald Meltzer and Eric Rhode), written shortly after Stokes’ death, are reprinted as appendices.

In this edition I have omitted longer footnotes, amplified some references, and occasionally made minor changes to punctuation. Where possible, references have been given both to the original editions and to the three-volume *Critical Writings* edited by Lawrence Gowing.

The painting reproduced on the book cover, *West Penwith Moor*, dates from the end of Stokes’ analysis, and testifies to his affection for Cornwall where, he said, he experienced “a sense of home”.