

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In full: “The Primary Health Care Team are going to be looking at the Client Record System with the Chief Pharmaceutical Officer.”

<sup>2</sup> A corpus of 11,000 text messages collected for doctoral research (e.g., Tagg 2007)

<sup>3</sup> As Crystal explains, ‘book’ is apparently used by teenagers, in texting and speaking, to mean ‘cool’ due to the fact that, when typing in ‘cool’ in a mobile phone keypad, ‘book’ is offered as the first choice by predictive texting dictionaries.

Stephen Bann (ed.), *The Coral Mind: Adrian Stokes’ Engagement with Art History, Criticism, Architecture and Psychoanalysis*

(University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007) pp. 230.

Reviewed by DANIEL MOORE

Ph.D. graduate in English Literature, University of Birmingham

This new work on the artist, art critic, historian and aesthete Adrian Stokes, part of the collection of monographs and edited books that Penn State University Press is amassing under the umbrella of their ‘Refiguring Modernism,’ is a strong addition to the critical re-awakening in the field of aesthetic history and an important contribution to a growing understanding and appreciation for a figure so often lost to modernism. Indeed, Stokes is arguably the composite specimen for this series. His often difficult prose, complicated by direct reportage of his own reactions to art and the often dense discussions of Kleinian psychoanalysis in relation to his own consciousness, is frequently passed from discipline to discipline with no one field of study really claiming him for their own. Stokes’s work has always been hard to situate; as the subtitle of this volume indicates, his work crosses disciplinary boundaries in innovative and idiosyncratic ways.

Stokes is, without a doubt, a difficult writer. His best known work, *The Quattro Cento* (1932), begins with an outline of his methodology, describing the book “not so much critical as creative, the author exploiting the device of fantasy to uncover the roots of Italian creative power.” Perhaps its ahistorical approach was the root cause of the indifferent reviews that Stokes’s best known work received. D. S. Meldrum, writing in the *Burlington Magazine* in 1932, found that the main theme in Stokes’s *The Quattro Cento* “is never defined,” and that the reader “must look nowhere for definitions.” He later writes that “[m]any of [the work’s] generalisations appear rash and some of them even ridiculous,” and that the work’s “expression, elaborate, involved, sometimes beautiful, and sometimes tortuous, does not contrive to make itself clear.” Later works, on Venice, on Rimini, on the Ballet Russes, often suffered from the same critical reception.

In one sense then, this volume reconnects with Stokes’s work at an ideological level; Stokes’s own experimentation and liminality offer the twenty-first century critical

mind new paradigms for understanding the fundamental tensions in art history, between personal experience and social significance and between the therapeutic and hermeneutic study of art. Stephen Bann's introduction here begins with Stokes' assertion that "ceaseless seas of experience construct the coral mind." The quotation is pertinent to Stokes's entire *oeuvre* – from his early work, in *The Quattro Cento* and *The Stones of Rimini* (1934), the metaphor of the interaction of water and stone is a powerful one; only where water and stone meet (as in Venice) is the perfect organic harmony of man's sculptural impulse and nature's slow destructive element maintained. In this sense, coral is the best symbol for a method of study based on the organic accretion of material which contributes to a flowering whole, and the corals of eons ago turn into those beds of limestone that Stokes spends so much time discussing in *The Stones of Rimini*.

Stokes's critical mind absorbed, accreted and expanded in the ceaseless seas of art, and the key concerns that dominated his career are all present in the essays of this collection. Alex Potts offers a strong reading of Stokes' pervasive use of architectural metaphors to describe all stonework, particularly sculpture and the bas-relief. That same obsession with architectural forms, and particularly the terminology that Stokes created to describe them, is the domain of David Hulks's contribution. Stokes saw all material art as emblematic of either the modeling principle or the carving principle, the latter being a wholly natural and organic integration of the design principles of man and the materials of nature. This is why his work so often lingers around the use of limestone as an artistic material; its organic nature, its luster and its malleability all lend themselves to the carving approach. Linked, of course, to this dyad is Stokes's ever-present interest in psychoanalysis. His analysis with Melanie Klein is detailed in Richard Read's essay, and Lyndsey Stonebridge and Janet Sayers both discuss the implications of reading Stokes's experiences of psychoanalytical discourse into his work on art. There are also interesting contributions from David Carrier and Paul Tucker on Stokes's position in a canon of art criticism, a position the former wrote on in his collection of introspective works by Ruskin, Pater and Stokes, *England and its Aesthetes* (1997).

It is perhaps the final two essays that offer the most persuasive reasons for assessing Stokes's work in the twenty-first century. Étienne Jollet discusses the concept of distance in Stokes's work, in particular how Stokes's style foreshortens centuries between his subjects and his present consciousness, and how we are induced to do the same with Stokes's work today. The problem of distance in Stokes thus becomes a plural one in art history more generally. Michael Ann Holly's essay, "Stones of Solace," engages most closely with Stokes's own attitude to the study of art. Offering a retrospective account of not only her own work in the fields of art history and aesthetics but also the story of the development of thought in those disciplines during the

twentieth century, Holly wonders whether “it is not too absurd to wonder why we do not write today as Stokes once did” (200). Holly’s methodology is interesting. She says at one point that she is “a convinced advocate of retroactive readings, that is, using the commitments of the present to engage ideas of the past, and vice versa” (200), and this strategy of awakening Stokes’ subjective, individual and internal methods serves to demonstrate that his approach has not been erased by the heavily empirical and ‘positivist’ art history that has dominated since the middle of the twentieth century.

Perhaps it is only during the last decade or so that we could arrive at this position of challenging the hierarchy of art criticism of the twentieth century with alternative epistemologies. Only in recent years, for example, have rigorous alternatives been put forward against Clement Greenberg’s notion that painting is representative of art in general, whereas Stokes’s work on the plastic arts, as we have seen, demands critical categories that exist beyond the scope of an analysis of painting. Furthermore, the developments towards understanding what we might call ‘aesthetic history,’ a mode of writing about past art, literature and architecture that very self-consciously pushes forward the receiving consciousness of the critic as a legitimate locus for the study of art, is even more important. These ideas, again, are being freshly considered in work on figures such as Stokes. Indeed, two of the more self-conscious commentators on art history working today are Stephen Bann and Michael Ann Holly, and both might be best understood as thinkers in the tradition of Ruskin, Pater and Stokes.

The vitality of *The Coral Mind*, therefore, stems largely from strong contributions that not only engage with Stokes’ ideas about art and form, but embrace them as an alternative methodological apparatus for getting to grips with art and the history of styles. This study is a welcome and vibrant addition to both the critical body of work about Stokes and also to the epistemological debates ongoing in art history.

Thomas E. Wartenberg and Angela Curran (eds.), *The Philosophy of Film Introductory Readings*

(Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) pp. 308.

Reviewed by LUCY E. FRASER

Ph.D. candidate in Film Studies, University of Birmingham

The central concern of *The Philosophy of Film* is the philosophical questions that support the interrogation of film as an academic field. The editors have in mind a specific, targeted audience and aim to “acquaint undergraduate students . . . with the issues and controversies that constitute the philosophy of film” (1). The increased interconnectedness between popular culture and the media it supports facilitates that