

Chasing the Wind

A Comment on Dr. Carlo Strenger's: *Of Potholes and Bends: A meditation on Psychoanalysis and Motorcycle Riding.*

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Rightly, I believe, does Dr. Strenger focus on the need, in life and in psychoanalysis, to look forward not backward, to trust that mother earth and mother/father teachers will hold us until we can hold ourselves. That holding of course, as Strenger makes clear, comes from a depth of caring for those who come to us for therapeutic care, just as the neophyte comes to his or her motorcycle coach for didactic care. Who one selects as a coach, or analyst, is crucial – in motorcycling one trusts one's very life to the teacher riding just ahead on the road. Rightly does Strenger relate this capacity to Winnicott's, and I might add Erikson's, understanding of trust rooted in one's earliest relationships. In a cursory yet instructive way, the author takes us through the developmental stages, as it were, in learning to master the motorcycle.

Unquestioningly one has to "lift one's gaze" – in life, and life on the road, in order to see what is ahead but is, as yet, beyond our vision. Who helps us see beyond our vision? A caring, competent, non self-preoccupied teacher is Strenger's answer. Hubris or arrogance, overrides following basic procedures, respecting both bike and road, by keeping the driver occupied with his or her performance instead of chasing the wind.

Only a quiet acceptance of the unknown, which lies just around the corner can a rider, an analyst, or a patient, negotiate life. Unconsciously, so to speak, tensing up on the bike, just like obsessive rumination or anxiety, will exert forces on the bike, as well as the psyche, that hinders one “gliding over potholes” – literally and figuratively. Strenger addresses these points well, even if in a somewhat labored way. He understands that fear locks a rider, as well as a patient, in repetitive confusion.

How does one position their bodies, their bikes, as well as their minds to take whatever turns the road brings? “Lifting one’s gaze” is Strenger’s response; ultimately one has to be able to take the turn, avoid the pothole, glide with the bike even at very high speeds, before we get to the apex of a turn. One has to spend hundreds of hours in practice, following our teacher, literally and figuratively, until the apex of the turn, so to speak, *comes to the driver* rather than the rider just coming upon it. A student rider needs both a maternal trust in his or her instructor (or analyst) as well as a paternal acceptance of his or her guidance. But if one is going to take the turn *before* one gets there, (the great race car driver Senna was famous for this), one has to experience a different mind-place than linear thinking allows.

Winnicott knew of this place – this area where we are not burdened with knowing exactly, where one starts, and stops, so to speak. This transitional area is, for him, the bedrock of culture, that in-between place of creativity where we are allowed to merge with and the merging

augments our autonomy rather than decreases it. Listening to great music or looking at art are possible moments are echoes of the earliest mother/child moments of encountering that me/not me place of life. Such a place is child and teddy bears interact is not a distraction from the tasks of life but the foundation for their eventual accomplishment. Is motorcycling a new encounter with this transitional place? Yes, I believe this is what Strenger is about. Only when one has mastered the bike enough can one forget and, paradoxically must they forget, everything they have struggled to learn. How else can the apex of a turn come to a rider? On the bike and/or in the office – one has to find that special nowhere place of the me and not me, where the burden of memory is lifted and the thrust of self-conscious desire is put aside, its then that one can follow and chase the wind. It is at such times that the wind, so to speak, as well as the road, is one's own creation. It is from such moments as these that a rider creates him or herself as a motorcyclist. And, as we know, it is within such a place, in therapy, that any lasting personal meaning, for negotiating one's life, can come. Strenger has highlighted some of the basics in learning motorcycling, not only in the task of mastering the bike but, in so doing, to stay alive. But *alive* in the deepest human meaning is, as Strenger knows well, more than that. It is not only to find life worth living, but creative, enjoyable and self-transcending. Chasing the wind is one way of experiencing that.