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## Introduction

Just when the issue was sent out for publishing, we were saddened by the news of David Lynch's passing away. With profound sorrow and admiration for his unique perspective on art and life, we would like to dedicate this issue of *Giornale di Filosofia* to his memory.

David Lynch is not just one of the most distinctive contemporary filmmakers, he is above all an all-rounded artist who has always strived to investigate the expressive limits of representation and narrative, especially with regards to how the world is shaped by unconscious desires. This volume collects papers addressing – with cutting-edge perspective and theoretical accuracy – Lynch's enigmatic innovations in respect to this issue, that brings together the (media-)philosophical, psychoanalytical, and narratological traditions.

Psychoanalysis has often crossed paths with narrative; since Paul Ricœur's innovative narrative interpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis<sup>1</sup>, a number of important contributions have developed and strengthened the bond between the two, in theory as well as in therapeutic practice<sup>2</sup>. The "restriction to language" inherent in the "talking cure" of the psychoanalytic practice may be highlighting desire's "semantic dimension"<sup>3</sup>, as Ricœur notes, but also its intersubjective and communicative nature. Speaking particularly about the decisive role of transference in psychoanalysis (involving the relationship between analyst

<sup>1</sup> See P. Ricœur, *De l'Interpretation: Essai sur Freud*. Fayard, Paris 1965; P. Ricœur, *The Question of Proof in Freud's Psychoanalytic Writings*, in "Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association" Vol. 25, No. 4, 1977, pp. 835-872; and also P. Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis: Writings and Lectures Vol. 1*. Polity press, Cambridge 2012.

<sup>2</sup> See among others: A. Ferro, *Psychoanalysis as Therapy and Storytelling*. Routledge, London and New York 2012; J. László, *The Science of Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Psychology*. Routledge, London and New York 2008; P. L. Rudnytsky, Peter L., and R. Charon (Eds.), *Psychoanalysis and Narrative Medicine*. State University of New York Press, New York 2008.; R. Schafer, *Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue*, in "Critical Inquiry", Vol. 7, No. 1, 1980, pp. 29-53; D. P. Spence, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis*. WW Norton & Company, New York 1984.

<sup>3</sup> Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, cit., p. 13.

and analysand), Ricœur notes how it forms a “playground”, in Freud’s terms, which acts as an “intermediate region”<sup>4</sup> where desire can be expressed; “not only is it able to be spoken, to be brought to language, but it is also addressed to another”.

Arts and media narratives can also be thought in these terms; as constituting playgrounds and spaces in-between reality and inner mental life, expressing desires that are always addressed to another (and thus introducing a communicative interplay with each member of the audience and the audience as a collective). In this expressive and communicative act lies narrative’s “therapeutic” potential.

Narrative as a process of “telling”, in the sense of making something narratable, corresponds to a process of temporalizing, making meaning and being able to communicate something that has so far been ineffable, undisclosed, sometimes not even accessible to consciousness and realized by the person. Siri Hustvedt argues that “involuntary and traumatic memories that are sensorimotor, affective replays of an event, are not codified in language, and cannot be located in a subjective time or space”<sup>5</sup>, but fiction and narrative creativity, which she deems equivalent to dreaming and remembering, is a process of “dreamlike reconfigurations of emotional meanings that take place unconsciously”<sup>6</sup>.

This observation offers a refreshingly direct association of narrative not necessarily with a symbolic (and language-based) quest of the mind for meaning-making, a “mode of reasoning” as Jerome Bruner called it, even if this mode contrasts and complements the “paradigmatic”, “logico-scientific mode”<sup>7</sup>, but with a more direct expression of the unconscious, akin to dreaming. There could hardly be a more accurate description of Lynch’s narratives than that of a “dreamlike reconfiguration” of unconscious emotions and desires.

The peculiarity in Lynch is that this reconfiguration retains in its form and aesthetics, but also in its affect, the dreamlike character which other products of imagination in their artistic incarnations do not necessarily have. Here we could think of the immense interest that the Lynchian universe, unique and distinguishable in its bizarre character, and for that reason, attractive, has inspired in academic and popular discourse, and the special place it occupies in the landscape of contemporary filmmaking.

<sup>4</sup> S. Freud, quoted in Ricœur, Ivi, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> S. Hustvedt, *Three Emotional Stories: Reflections on Memory, the Imagination, Narrative, and the Self*, in “Neuropsychanalysis”, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2011, pp. 187-196, p. 187.

<sup>6</sup> Ivi.

<sup>7</sup> J. Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1986, pp. 12-13.

It should be pointed out that for psychoanalysis all sorts of artistic creativity can be thought to some extent as dreamlike. Freud considered creativity to be equivalent to dreaming, to the extent that it constitutes an expression of unconscious desires of the creator(s). In the case of Lynch, a special characteristic of his “ars poetica”<sup>8</sup> is making dreams – and, more often, nightmares – enjoyable instead of repulsive for viewers. Freud suggested that art can have a healing effect, as a form of tension-release. As he writes for poetry in particular: “our actual enjoyment of an imaginative work proceeds from a liberation of tensions in our minds. It may even be that not a little of this effect is due to the writer’s enabling us thenceforward to enjoy our own day-dreams without self-reproach or shame”<sup>9</sup>. Ricœur’s re-interpretation of the therapeutic potential of narrative, as already broached, is that this potential does not just lie with “tension release”, but with intersubjective communication with someone – who becomes, at least temporarily, a substitute object of desire (taking the place of the “lost object”)<sup>10</sup>.

The therapeutic potentialities of Lynch’s narratives, through their intersubjective and dreamlike qualities, will be put under scrutiny in this issue. Lynchian stories have often been discussed as non-linear, fragmented, and dreamlike, following the dreams’ “royal road to the unconscious”<sup>11</sup> rather than the beaten path of classical Aristotelean drama; but they are still communicating, affectively, preconsciously, and through atmosphere, meanings lying beneath the surface of conscious awareness. They are playgrounds, or “miniature artificial stages”<sup>12</sup>, where audiences connect in collective dreaming. This is something that, to some extent self-reflexively, Lynch himself acknowledges by naming his multimedia platform and YouTube channel “David Lynch Theater” – an intermediate playground or stage where he does not lose chance to communicate with fans through a playful use of the screen (see the “interface” metaphor through which Geli Mademli addresses his work in this issue). The screen of David Lynch’s theater might be seen as an interface ultimately abolishing the division between outside and inside, as well as a meeting place, permeable and playful.

As for the therapeutic potential of David Lynch’s theater (which might be thought as encompassing all his multifaceted work with various media and different art forms), this can be assumed from his cult following and from various comments on his work in the popular press, academic

<sup>8</sup> S. Freud, *Creative Writers and Day-dreaming*, in *Collected Papers Vol. 4*, Basic Books, London 1908, pp. 419-428.

<sup>9</sup> Ivi.

<sup>10</sup> Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, cit., p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> In Freud’s famous expression from *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900).

<sup>12</sup> Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, cit., p. 16.

scholarship as well as coming from his anonymous fanbase. For example, it becomes apparent from users' comments under the videos he regularly posts on his platform, that his audience is deliberately watching Lynch's films, videos, as well as listening to his music, in order to address their psychic desire (as indicated by the frequent use of terms such as "love") and take part in a potentially therapeutic dreamlike experience. As a commenter recently posted under the promo video "David Lynch Theater presents: The Moon's Glow" (part of a series of humorous amateur-like videos Lynch makes dubbing old Hollywood movies with new and mostly nonsensical dialogues) "[...] something so deeply unsettling about how that whole exchange feels. Love that I can't even put the feeling into words, it's like some confused, troubling dream you had but can't put into words."<sup>13</sup> And another comment reads: "I don't always understand what I see with David Lynch, but I strangely always love it"<sup>14</sup>.

What "cannot be put in words" becomes a special kind of feeling, distinct and recognizable in its affect, and being communicated and shared in the playground that the director himself has set up on his virtual "stage".

The term "theater" in Lynch's use but also in its appropriation in the present issue is not coincidental. As Bernard Baars observes in his book *In the Theater of Consciousness: The Workspace of the Mind*, the term has been used in various occasions and contexts as a metaphor for the mind and conscious experience, from ancient Vedantic philosophy to Plato's allegory of the cave<sup>15</sup>, until contemporary brain science: "all unified theories of cognition today are theater models"<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, the cinematic theater and its set up, central for what has been theorised as the "cinematic apparatus" in the 1970s through the so-called "Apparatus theory" by the likes of Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz, has also embodied a metaphor for subjective consciousness and its distortions. Drawing as well on Plato's allegory of the cave and its alignment with the cinematic theater<sup>17</sup> – setting up a play of light and shadow, hiding

<sup>13</sup> Comment by an anonymous user under video *David Lynch Theater presents: The Moon's Glow*. In *David Lynch Theater*, YouTube, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1sg\\_fCi\\_wc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1sg_fCi_wc), August 2024 (access 10 September 2024).

<sup>14</sup> Comment by another anonymous user under the same video, August 2024 (access 10 September 2024).

<sup>15</sup> B. J. Baars, *In the Theater of Consciousness: The Workspace of the Mind*. Oxford University Press, New York 1997, pp. 5-6.

<sup>16</sup> Ivi, p. ix. Baars also defends the theater model as a "productive metaphor for thinking about the brain" despite the erroneous "Cartesian theater fallacy" as criticized by Daniel Dennett (*Ivi*).

<sup>17</sup> See J-L Baudry, *The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema*, in P. Rosen (Ed.) *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, New York, Columbia University Press 1986, pp. 299-318.

and revealing – apparatus theory focused on the way film experience is shaped by unconscious processes of projection and identification. It also applied psychoanalysis to cinematic spectatorship, considering film viewing a state of consciousness akin to dreaming. As a “screen” between the unconscious and the conscious, the dream speaks the language of the primary process, translating unconscious desires into forms that, distorted and unrecognizable, reach conscious awareness as memories of things that used to make perfect sense in the dream, but are now, in the conscious realm, seeming incomprehensible. They do however carry with them the sense of meaning they once had in another realm of experience – a meaning inaccessible and, if not narratively reworked and reimagined, forever forgotten. David Lynch’s work consists in a theater, different from Plato’s cave – in that it stages and “reconfigures” these incomprehensible memories, rather than trying to conceal them. And the aim of this volume is to shed light (or cast, indeed, a spotlight), on Lynch’s unique talent and remarkable ability to do so, that is to “stage” and “tell” what remains unseen, unattended, and ineffable.

Telling the untold certainly recalls the Lacanian concept of the “Real” as that which is unspeakable but produces effects, a concept that has become a fundamental tool of Lacanian-inspired cinematographic criticism such as that of Joan Copjec<sup>18</sup>. For example, Slavoj Žižek used the Lacanian concepts of “Real” and “fundamental fantasy” to interpret Lynch’s cinema in *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime. On David Lynch’s Lost Highway*<sup>19</sup>. But not only (Lacanian or Freudian) psychoanalysis can offer approaches to the “ineffable” in Lynch, or the link between his work and what can be largely called “unconscious”. For example, the phenomenological tradition has cultivated a concept of the unconscious as “background” or indeed “atmosphere” (see Hven’s paper in this issue) colouring every perception. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes that “This unconscious is to be sought not at the bottom of ourselves, behind the back of our ‘consciousness’, but in front of us, as articulations of our field. It is ‘unconscious’ by the fact that it is not an *object*, but it that through which objects are possible”<sup>20</sup>. This phenomenological conception of the unconscious is compatible with its theatrical metaphor popular in the neuroscience of consciousness (as previously seen through Baars), as encompassing all that stays in the

<sup>18</sup> See J. Copjec, *The Orthopsychic Subject: Film theory and the Reception of Lacan*, in “October”, Vol. 49, 1989, pp. 53-71.

<sup>19</sup> S. Žižek, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch’s Lost Highway*. Walter Chapin Simpson Center for the Humanities, University of Washington, Seattle 2000.

<sup>20</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston IL 1968, p. 180.

periphery rather than the “spotlight” of attention, but still influencing everything that is attended to and thus rising to conscious awareness. In this vein, telling the untold for Lynch, is, for example, to show what Mark Fisher calls *weird* and *eerie*, situations expressing “a preoccupation with the strange”<sup>21</sup>, which Lynch evokes with showing nothing where it should be something, or, in reverse, something where it should be nothing. In both cases what is perceived is perceived as such because of what is not perceived, through a contrast created between what is in the “spotlight” and what in the periphery of consciousness.

The use of the term “telling” in this issue does not mean to reinstate a dualistic relationship between verbal and nonverbal, cognition and emotion, mind and body. Telling here rather extends beyond language alone, to involve “showing” as well<sup>22</sup>, addressing the whole of artistic creation that renders it an embodied experience – as well as narrative as an embodied experiential process<sup>23</sup>. Hence the “theater” as a non-linguistic, embodied metaphor for Lynch’s art as a whole.

The articles contained in the present issue highlight Lynch’s “telling the untold” in different ways.

The issues starts from a paradoxically, perhaps, optimistic perspective on Lynch’s darkest stories and their therapeutic power. In his article “Genealogy of Evil in David Lynch’s Films”, psychoanalyst Athanasios Alexandridis suggests a longitudinal analysis of (or rather, approach to) the work of Lynch, through the evolvement of the concept of Evil in it – defined as the forces of life’s disintegration and the subject’s traumatic knowledge of death. He observes that Evil takes different forms and progresses in Lynch’s work, from a radical, fairytale-like evil projected onto evil characters, to one that is less one-dimensional and more complex. Pointing out various salient “evil” narrative elements across Lynch’s filmography and ascribing them psychoanalytical meaning, Alexandridis ultimately finds in *Inland Empire* the culmination of Lynch’s uncanny stories and the paradoxically therapeutic power of their evil elements. He particularly argues that they create “liminal” illusory worlds filled in with the contents of the unconscious where the Self experiences a state of not being, which however happens in a “safe” environment, ultimately alleviating one’s traumatic encounter with death.

<sup>21</sup> M. Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*. Repeater, London 2016.

<sup>22</sup> See R. Schafer, *Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue*, in “Critical inquiry”, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1980, pp. 29-53, p. 38

<sup>23</sup> As explored for example, by Aaron Mishara (A. L. Mishara, *Narrative and Psychotherapy – The Phenomenology of Healing*, in “American Journal of Psychotherapy”, Vol. 49, No. 2, 1995, pp. 180-195.

Continuing with another broad consideration of Lynch's filmography and its potential for catharsis, the article "Circularity as Interminable Analysis in Lynch's Cinema" by Marco Stucchi focuses on a peculiar characteristic of Lynch's narrative structures, and argues that the circularity in them can be understood through a Freudian lens, as mimicking the unresolved, repetitive nature of the unconscious. Freud's idea of "interminable analysis" is used as a framework to understand the lack of resolution or growth in Lynch's characters. In psychoanalysis, the failure to bring unconscious desires to consciousness in a timely manner can result in a perpetual state of analysis, much like the circular or stagnant narratives in Lynch's films. Freud posits that the unconscious mind is atemporal, and this atemporality leads to difficulties in distinguishing past from present, reality from fantasy – issues that are central to narratives in Lynch's work. In Aristotle's terms, catharsis involves emotional purification, often through the resolution of a narrative. According to Stucchi, Lynch's films frequently lack such resolution, leaving characters and viewers in a state of ambiguity or unresolved tension. This is evident in films like *Mulholland Drive* and *Lost Highway*, where attempts at resolution fail, reflecting the interminable nature of the narrative.

The next article particularly focuses on *Lost Highway*, one of the most discussed but still enigmatic narratives told by Lynch. While much of the scholarly focus has been on the male protagonists Fred and Pete, in "‘You'll never have me’. Re-framing *Lost Highway* from a Renee/Alice's Perspective" Diego Chece offers an original interpretation, proposing that the film can be reinterpreted through the lens of the female characters, Renee and Alice. In this reading, the two characters are not merely archetypal femme fatales but central figures in a narrative exploring the fluid nature of desire and identity. Renee/Alice embodies desire not as a lack but as a dynamic force. Her statement, "You'll never have me," when understood as a collective assertion, shifts the narrative focus to the broader exploration of desire as an ongoing process rather than a quest for a missing object. Reinterpreting *Lost Highway* through Renee/Alice allows us to view the film not as a puzzle to be solved but as a "producer of sense." Drawing on the philosophical ideas of Deleuze and Guattari, particularly their concepts from *Anti-Oedipus*, Chece shows how the film's narrative, with its fragmented identities and non-linear structure, generates sense immanently, through the film's ongoing process, rather than by concealing a deeper, hidden meaning awaiting to be discovered.

Also drawing on Gilles Deleuze (*The Logic of Sensation*) to find an interpretative key for approaching Lynch's work, Antonio Ricciardi in his article "Il trittico Lynchiano e l'arte della frantumazione: una ontologia della visione" explores an essential aspect of Lynch's poetics, the link between his visions and the work of the painter Francis Bacon. Ric-

ciardi focuses particularly on three films by the director (in the writer's opinion his masterpieces), *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire*. Ricciardi argues that, just like with Bacon, what seems to interest Lynch the most is "to present the actions of invisible forces upon bodies, rendered in a preintellectual sensation of intensities", as the director declares, and as can already be deduced from his pictorial work.

Expanding on the affective potential of Lynch's work, in the following article "David Lynch. L'arte tra paticità e metafisica" Marco Palladino addresses the director's propensity to stage in his cinema feelings and emotions such as anguish, amazement, horror, essential engines for performing the power of the unconscious and its primacy over *Ego*. The theoretical starting points necessary for the understanding and analysis of Lynch's work are for Palladino the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud, of course, but also the phenomenology of Henri Bergson, Martin Heidegger, Max Scheler, Luigi Pareyson, as well as American pragmatism by William James and Charles Sanders Peirce. This network of references therefore places the director's work within a nexus that includes the most significant theoretical approaches of a good half of the twentieth century – through the expressionist aesthetics Lynch is inspired by since the beginning of his career.

The next paper also draws less obvious connections between Lynch's work and the legacies of Freud as well as of American psychologist (as well as pragmatist philosopher as mentioned in the previous article) William James. In "Diving in the Ocean of Consciousness: Altered states, Psychoanalysis and Transcendental Aesthetics in David Lynch", Maria Poulaki focuses on the director's preoccupation with the practice of meditation, through his own accounts of his meditative experience as a feeling of "diving in the ocean of consciousness". Poulaki traces the psychoanalytical lineage of this concept in Freud's accounts of transcendental experience, as well as in the American psychologists' – almost contemporary to Freud's – theorization of altered states of consciousness. She then approaches the aesthetics of such "oceanic" feeling in two titles of Lynch's filmography, *Eraserhead* (also discussed by Alexandridis) and *Straight Story*, claiming that they represent the opposite ends of a spectrum of profound challenges to "Ego-based identity". Through techniques of "emptying and voiding attention", Lynch's work is thus portrayed as a creative quest to arrive at a blissful (rather than frightening) feeling of self-dispersion.

Setting off from a childhood memory of NYC subway Lynch has narrated in an interview, in "Lynchian Atmospheres and the Optical Unconscious" Steffen Hven investigates Lynch's particular method of creating atmospheres and thus transmitting to viewers his peculiar and eerie worlds. Hven goes back to Benjamin's concept of the optical unconscious to demonstrate how "more than representing the themes of psychoanalysis in cinematic form, [Lynch] locates the uncanniness, the repressed,



and the unconscious in the operations of the medium itself” – and thus externalizes the unconscious “onto the material world and the sensorial environment”. Hven’s article, returning to the theorist who approached the therapeutic value of cinema, poses a challenge, (in a way echoing Alexandridis), to think in what ways Lynch’s cinema can be conceived as both a warning as well as a protective shield for human subjectivity to endure the trauma and terror of being lost in an endless loop of technological communication.

In the same vein with Hven’s investigation of the mediality of the unconscious in Lynch, Geli Mademli in her article “Desktop Lynch: Archiving the Ghosts in the Machine” suggests a refreshing analysis of the director’s work, shifting focus to his performative “desktop” practices. Against Lacanian readings of unconscious aspects in Lynchian narratives, Mademli brings to the fore, drawing on Jean Louis Comolli among others, the “technological” unconscious in them. She also sees the semi-visible network of technologies and the media archive they form as a lingering spectral presence in Lynch’s performative videos (his “Weather Reports” series uploaded on “David Lynch Theater”), as well as his serial narratives (*Twin Peaks*), which blurs the boundaries between presence and absence, actual and virtual. Mademli also interestingly brings up the notion of the “theater of the mind” referring not to the brain, as mentioned previously from the perspective of neuroscience, but to media technologies (its use traditionally referring to the radio), as ultimately addressing one’s capacities for imagination, which has been inextricably entangled with the theater metaphor and its multiple remediations (from radio to online performances). Although Mademli does not focus on Lynch’s filmography, her analysis provokes new “desktop” readings of Lynch’s films as well, and an investigation of their performative (and) archival practices and aesthetics.

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