

# Report of the APPI Clinical Seminar with Dr. Olga Cox Cameron on Mulholland Drive and the Real Unconscious.

Dublin 21<sup>st</sup> March 2015

**Dr. Olga Cox Cameron is a psychoanalyst in private practice in Dublin for the past twenty seven years. She lectured in Psychoanalytic Theory and in Psychoanalysis and Literature at St. Vincent's University Hospital and Trinity College from 1991 to 2013 and has published numerous articles in national and international journals. She is the founder of the annual Psychoanalysis and Cinema Festival, now in its seventh year.**

In 1 Merrion Square, the childhood home of Oscar Wilde, currently home to American College Dublin, a group of nearly 40 people from various psychoanalytic disciplines gathered to listen to Dr. Olga Cox Cameron speak about dream interpretation through the lens of David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001). Its intriguing, convoluted yet disjointed narrative provokes uneasy, lasting effects.

Dr. Cox Cameron set the scene before the screening. She reminded us of clinical techniques that are often taken for granted, such as Freud's notion of 'free floating attention'. She wondered if there is a difficulty in both understanding what this might actually be and in how to apply it in the clinic. She took us through the movement of Lacan's thought about the unconscious, outlining how in his early work the unconscious is marked by a space that comes to be occupied by a lie. This is the dream material that overwrites the latent content where the kernel of truth about our desire is left to be deciphered in the manifest content. The second movement she highlighted was from the middle part of Lacan's work where the unconscious is marked by a discontinuity. This, she said, can be noticed when there is a swerve in the narrative of a session or when there is an interruption and a blank appears in the middle of a sentence. The third movement came from Lacan's later work where the focus shifts from what is said to the saying. Rather than focusing on the meaning of the sentence, the listener is asked to focus on *how* the sentence is said. This also marks a shift from a clinic of 'deciphering the latent meaning' to one where the saying is *jouissance*-laden and is manifest between what is cipherable and uncipherable. All three of these 'marks of the unconscious' make up something of the art that is psychoanalytic practice. Dr. Cox Cameron rightly reminded us that we will be forever students in this regard as we are naturally attuned to listen to the *meaning* of what is being said and can therefore miss the blanks, the discontinuities and the *saying* that marks the detours of the unconscious.

After watching the movie Dr. Cox Cameron discussed the moments where the shifts that highlight the effect of the unconscious on the narrative became visible. She drew analogies to Freud's celebrated dream of *Irma's Injection*, highlighting that whereas Freud insisted on treating the dream as a wish fulfillment, Lacan shifted the focus to the underlying trauma. The points of high anxiety in a dream are where the subject can no longer 'say' and the 'I' vanishes. Dr. Cox Cameron commented that at these points we encounter absurdity and she pointed out these moments of rupture in *Mulholland Drive*. They can be read as moments when the main subject 'Diane' is annihilated in her subjectivity and has to disappear. These moments of the film were likened to the opening and closing of the unconscious in the clinic where a swerve is introduced in the narrative by the subject at a point of danger.

She reminded people that what Freud demonstrated in the *Traumdeutung* (1900) was that the non-sense we encounter in a dream is never random. The absurdity indicates that something is strongly felt by the subject. In the movie we notice this at moments when Diane is overcome by humiliation and she loses herself in a shift of emotion from the scene to an insignificant element. An example is the play of the coffee cup in a number of scenes in the movie. The coffee cup represents the hook and the insignificant element to which the unbearable humiliation that Diane is subject to is attached. It is a point where the 'I' has to vanish.

Dr. Cox Cameron led us to encounter the moments when the unconscious appears as *jouissance*-laden. This can occur when the dreamer is no longer in charge in the dream. In the movie, Diane is the agent in the dream, to the point where she can declare her love for Rita. However, from that moment on, she is no longer in charge. From then on, she is being led by Rita and the movement is along a path towards death. The heavy weight of *jouissance* is in play. Here the o-object occupies the place of the conscious 'I' and the subject is no longer in charge. In the clinic we see this when the subject is annihilated by the *jouissance* of the drive and we realise that something else is in control through the repetition compulsion.

The morning concluded with a lively discussion of elements of the movie in an attempt to understand. One theme emphasised how practitioners speak of the need for 'attuned listening' to the discontinuities and ruptures that mark the unconscious but revert to our 'natural attunement' of trying to make meaning and sense. Both Lacan and Freud as practitioners of the unconscious were at pains to tell us to stop making sense. The art of our clinic is in privileging *the saying* above the said. Dr. Cox Cameron concluded her lecture by reminding us that our work occurs in the split that opens between the meaning of the sentence and how it was said.

Alan Corcoran