

## A Proposal for Membership: The Website of the School

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*The following paper was delivered before the membership of the Freudian School of Melbourne, School of Lacanian Psychoanalysis, on the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2019. Its aim was to interrogate the vexed relationship the School had maintained with its online presence for many years, and to raise the question of the function of the website more broadly, particularly as that function concerns a School of psychoanalysis. The proposal has since led to the construction of a new website which continues to pursue an ongoing formation. This has included the development of a new digital platform for the School's online organ of publication – *Écritique* – in which the present article has found a very suitable home for itself.*

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*“The School – as the place of the transference of work – has, without compromising its position in psychoanalysis, followed the direction of the psychoanalytic discovery carried out by Freud and Lacan. However, it is in our own difficulties, impasses and hesitations, that we can make any possible claim to a legacy that will be ours, only if we are prepared to do the work that this legacy demands.”<sup>2</sup>*

The website of the Freudian School of Melbourne has been the object of considerable debate for some time now. It is a debate which seems to waver between extremes: vexation on the one hand, and disinterest on the other. What is the basis for the movement between these two extremes, the coexistence of which has since resulted in outsourcing the website to a third party? This move, which was no doubt necessary under the circumstances, has not necessarily had the desired effect of putting the question of the website to rest. Indeed, to the extent that we might suppose this question to be resolved, might it not come to announce itself more forcefully still – even, perhaps, with a vengeance?

Why have a website of the School at all? And further, can the website even be said to be “of the School” if responsibility for it no longer lies within the purview of the membership?

This dismemberment of the website, if I can put it this way, has thus not freed the membership from the vengeance of the question – on the contrary, it hangs off the body of the School like a phantom limb. But perhaps not unlike an untimely spectre which speaks more of the future than the past, it comes to tell us that, so long as we believe that dismemberment is our only way out – well, of course: we become complicit in the realisation of the very fate we were trying to avoid: that of capturing the School in the Web as an inert, disembodied and digestible image.

Perhaps it could be said, then, that so long as the Freudian School of Melbourne remains caught in the Web, it is not apparent how – in the context of its presence online – the School might come to weave a web for itself. The apparition of what is non-apparent might nevertheless insist, however, and provoke

us to question the very status of appearance itself – namely, with respect to the generalised image which the School, with a resistance singular to itself, may or may not feel itself obliged to assume with respect to the public. The impossibility of ever reconciling this singular resistance with the obligation to generalise does not, however, permit us to put the question to rest – on the contrary, it might provoke us to take up the question even further as a trajectory of work to pursue.

For might we not also feel ourselves obliged, in general, to remain indifferent, disinterested in the question of the website on the basis of the fact that its potential value beyond the level of the image is not apparent? And yet is it not precisely that which remains non-apparent, on the level of the School's online presence, that may stand a chance of becoming the site for something singular beyond the image, the appearance it may or may not assume there?

This question, which has certainly not been absent from discussions amongst the School's membership, and which gave impetus to the most recent renovations of the website, still persists. Moreover, one of the major solutions proposed in the context of these discussions – the outsourcing of responsibility for the website to a member of the public – was not insignificant, insofar as it may now present an opportunity to interrogate whether this dismemberment has proven effective in addressing the problem of how the School assumes a stance in relation to the public, insofar as that relation does not exist.

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In a 2016 paper delivered to a public audience at an art gallery in Queenscliff, David Pereira discussed the difficulty faced by the artist who, standing before the canvas, must confront the risk of making his most private practices visible to the public. At this intersection between the private and the public, David draws our attention to a shift in the status of that intersection which renders permeable the line separating these two milieus – giving rise to an anguish which the presenter himself, in making his address before a public audience, is not indifferent to:

“The drawing of this line is of fundamental importance in anyone's life, most commonly dividing one's private practices from those which are available to the public. In this context, consider the risk, the anguish, of the artist whose most private practices are shown, made available to the public. The artist is always engaged by the question of how to draw this line.”<sup>3</sup>

For David, it is clear that an important obstacle faced by the artist in precipitating a linear event at this intersection is the canvas itself – which, in already being populated by the “clichés” of a common sense or general knowledge, “is far from being a virginal white surface”:

“A whole category of things which could be termed clichés already fills the canvas before the painter begins. Now, this category of things exists precisely as categorical; this is to say, as able to be catalogued and categorised, fixed to the canvas like insects in a collection – inert.”<sup>4</sup>

The question then posed, is how the artist might come to address the public, the common population,<sup>5</sup> with something that isn't already common knowledge. For, insofar as the canvas is already populated before the artist begins, the challenge concerns how his work may become something other than a tracing, how a stroke might come to slip outside of the lines, so to speak – those lines that “tell us about a world and a reality which we already know” – in order to “give rise to something which exerts greater presence” in “rendering visible forces which do violence to the clichéd images.”

Now, this question of how to draw the line differently has been resounding through various discussions within the School in recent times – namely, through the debates around the possible dissolution of the Homage – the School's public conference, whose inaccessibility to the public has been raised as a concern. Not to mention the renovations around the Foundations of Psychoanalysis Seminar and the division of the Seminar of the School – agitations which in large part aimed to render porous the membrane that had built up around the group, to the exclusion of newcomers.

Thus the debate concerning the way in which the School comes to draw this line between itself and other fields rages on multiple fronts, and concerns the School's website as much as it does the artist's canvas – to the extent that the former, in its relation to the latter, ensnares us in the very same problems associated with what is coded, scripted, programmed in advance. And insofar as the School appears to be increasingly questioning its place, its topic in relation to a public, an opportunity may present itself to interrogate the function of the website beyond a medium for representation, as well as the nature of the line that is drawn when responsibility for the website is outsourced to a party without an association to the School.

For it may be that in delegating its online presence to a member of the public, a categorical line is being drawn in relation to which the private life of the School itself thus remains offline, separated from its online, and thus public life – a public, furthermore, which thus now subsumes the School's website itself, as dismembered.

Perhaps the question, however, is not simply how to bring the website back into the purview of the membership. For this, as has been reflected in the pervasive disinterest in the website even when it was in the charge of members, would be merely to risk taking it offline again – its capture in the Web notwithstanding. The question, rather, might be how in the between of this off-line and on-line, a line – unprejudiced by the categoricalness of pre-position – may come to be drawn there: how the School's

presence on the Web may pursue a course beyond re-presence, or how it might be worked and woven in the manner of a presentation.

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The problematics of this intersection were worked in another of David's papers, *To Speak of Enjoyment*, where he speaks of the presenting symptom of one of his patients, a symptom which overcomes the latter with a certain anguish precisely at the intersection between his home life and his work life:

"In certain moments his heart starts to race, he begins to sweat profusely, he feels weak at the knees, he thinks he is going to die, he loses consciousness and collapses. When are these certain moments? He describes them as encounters between his work life and his home life. They are moments when two fields intersect, when their discreet boundary becomes permeable."<sup>6</sup>

We may hear at this point a similar anguish to that which seizes the artist before the canvas, or the analyst before the audience – at the intersection, that is, between the public and private that threatens to dissolve their categorical boundary – “where their discreet boundary becomes permeable.”

As David goes on to say in this paper, his patient's presenting symptom, particularly to the extent that a sexual meaning might be imputed to it – catalogued in reference to a sexual meaning – this symptom in turn maintains a categorical separation between two fields “in response to their potential collapse”:

“The presenting symptom attempts to maintain the sexual relation as existent and meaningful, paradoxically, by effecting a separation...”<sup>7</sup>

The problems of the *Homage*, the *Seminar of the School* and those of the website, while not necessarily equivalent, may nevertheless each come to play host to a presenting symptom – that is, a symptom which speaks of the anguish of presentation, in the face of this intersection between the work of the School and its presentation to the public.

Could we say, then, that the presenting symptom, to the extent that it finds a host in the website, similarly attempts to maintain a sexual relation as existent and meaningful, by effecting a separation, a dismemberment, between the School and the public?

As it is raised in this paper, entitled *To Speak of Enjoyment*, the question becomes how a non-separation may be effected, a knotting between two fields, which gives body to – embodies – the truth of the inexistence of this relation:

“This moment which is located as a point of non-separation between his home life and his work life, may be a moment of intersection, a knotting between the symbolic of the home and the real of work which presents itself as the possibility of the work of the symptom.”<sup>8</sup>

This knotting or splicing which is referred to, after Lacan, as the work of the symptom, thus bears on the question of how to draw the line differently, to produce the linear event of a non-separation between the School and the public, between the offline and the online; the question of how to actively knot, splice, and weave the Web together, rather than remaining passively captured within it – a crucial question for psychoanalysis.

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Thus, if there has been hesitation around taking on the task of the website, perhaps it is to the extent that this task proposes an inherent impossibility: how to assume a stance in relation to the public in a way that does not come to depend on a mediation, a principle of separation to be taken as representational, categorical, in populating – I almost wrote copulating – the space between the School and other fields, and which would come to define the School in general.

As mentioned above, the website's latest renovations composed a movement which gave due consideration to the threat of the School becoming captured in an immobilising form or image – the stasis of a representational monument to the School, adorned with its relevant attributes and apparel – and which was addressed in the proposition to have the website undergo ongoing transformations in terms of its imagery, a weaving that might have avoided the common traps, the trappings, that tend to characterise the function of the Web as a repository for digestible information.

Nevertheless, something is not currently working with respect to the website on this point, and the creative momentum which led to its renovation has since run out of steam, becoming immobilised in what is merely apparent once again – the inertia of David's captured, catalogued insect, which offers us some food for thought, no doubt, but not much by way of action.

This critique, with respect to outsourcing the website to a member of the public, is directed at the problem of how it has come to reinforce a certain inertia – that is, on the fact that thus far, the outsourcing of this “know-how” may be depriving the School of a possibility of a work of the symptom, its presentation, which, as Oscar Zentner has put it, may otherwise stand to become a knowing-what-to-do-with it.<sup>9</sup>

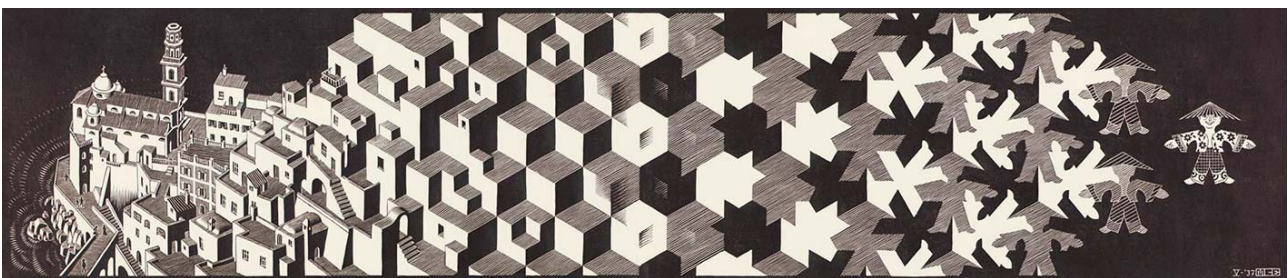
The line which is perhaps being drawn here, then – the line which, armed with a certain know-how, amputates the limb from the body, is one which in turn disables the carrying out of the work which is demanded of those who partake in the legacy of the School – getting in the way of what it may otherwise become capable of presenting for itself, in a new field, beyond a representation of itself.

This question of representation brings to light the fact that the School's peculiar relationship to its public image has a theoretical interest particular to psychoanalysis and the work of the School, and for that reason the grid-lock, the inertia of the website may find an agitation in having responsibility for it taken on by a member of the School with an interest in it – the crux of the present proposal.<sup>10</sup>

For my part, as a member of the School with some interest in the website and its relation to the current problems and questions faced by the School, such a shift may come to loosen us from our capture in the Web through assuming the task of actively weaving it. Which, to cite Lacan's fascination with the ingenuity of spiders, may help us to re-evaluate the web as a site of writing – a field for the proliferation of the work of the School that pursues an ongoing formation.

Now, while on the one hand I put forward this argument in proposing myself to take on the tasks of maintaining and developing the website: that is, performing the duties pertaining to the regular updating of information and events, a possible reconsideration of its design, and ongoing renovations of that design which might move with the currents of the work of the School – I want to say also that this proposal is directed toward an opening up of what the website may become capable of, as well as an opening for the possibility for others to take up the questions the website poses in a way that is of theoretical and practical consequence. That is to the extent that such an interrogation, as it's taken up within the discourse of the School and of psychoanalysis, may come to effectuate transformations in the very consistency of the website's function and interface. A faceless interface that, beyond any dismemberment, becomes the site for the embodiment of an intersexion.

It is my argument that the problematics of this intersection, as well as the resistance which accompanies it, are not separable from the problematics of transference. And for this reason, an interrogation of the website capable of producing a work might have to take place on the basis of a transferential investment to the School, and engage the problematics of its intersection with the public with the public. Such an investment, moreover, may generate some interest in the question of how the website itself could become the site for a further working of the permeability of this intersection in a particularly psychoanalytic way.



*MC Escher: Metamorphosis I*<sup>11</sup>

Finally, speaking of the importance of this transference investment and the legacy it generates, I will conclude with a few remarks in homage to Freud, taken from that paper on technique entitled Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through, where the transference is invoked as this medium which renders a permeability between the isolated enclosure of the symptom on the one hand and the “real” world on the other, via the activation of a work of the symptom that plays out in the real of the analysis:

“The transference thus creates an intermediate region between illness and real life through which the transition from one to the other is made.”<sup>12</sup>

It is then perhaps only through the transition, the transmission made possible within a transference, that the website itself may properly address this presenting symptom of the psychoanalytic group – a symptom which otherwise subjects it to a repeated dis-memberment, or disembodiment in the face of the “real” – by becoming, if not re-membered as Freud puts it, then perhaps membered, embodied, for the first time. Such a transition may be akin to a working-through of that categorical boundary between the public and the private, and which might be put into effect within the transference of the work of the website itself from a member of the public to a member of the School.

## References

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- <sup>1</sup> Member of the Freudian School of Melbourne, School of Lacanian Psychoanalysis
- <sup>2</sup> Zentner, O. ‘Freud – Sit Venia Verbo’, *Papers of the Freudian School of Melbourne*, 11, 1990, p. 4.
- <sup>3</sup> Pereira, D. ‘The Art of Interpretation – Drawing a Line’, in *Papers of the Freudian School of Melbourne*, 24, 2012, p. 221
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 223.
- <sup>5</sup> Perhaps “nine-tenths of the nation” or “ninety-five percent of people” as Francis Bacon estimates – see *ibid*, p. 223.
- <sup>6</sup> Pereira, D. ‘To Speak of Enjoyment’, *Papers of the Freudian School of Melbourne*, 23, 2007, p. 206.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 211
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 212
- <sup>9</sup> See Zentner, O. ‘Of Psychoanalysis – What is Transmitted is not Taught’, *Papers of the Freudian School of Melbourne*, 13, 1992, p. 57
- <sup>10</sup> I say this with the fact in mind that, while a member of the School may necessarily also be a member of the public, the reverse is not necessarily the case.
- <sup>11</sup> The first of MC Escher’s *Metamorphoses* – a series of works which could be said to engage the permeability of the line in transition.
- <sup>12</sup> Freud, S. ‘Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through’, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol XII. Anna Freud and James Strachey (Eds). J Strachey (Trans). London: Hogarth Press, 1911, p. 154.