

# The Cartel of Lacan's School

*For the execution of the work, we shall adopt the principle of an elaboration sustained in a small group.*

(Lacan, Act of Foundation, June 1964)

## The concept of the cartel

When he created his School in 1964, Lacan invented for his students an original social relation through work. He created a precise working device that he called the cartel. It is based on the principle of the work of several persons in a small group and which was to become the basic unit at each important moment of his School. This device is a practical consequence derived from the elements of his teaching which allow him to refine and formalise it in 1980, at the time of the dissolution of his School. We can notice that this device is structured around the plus-one function which is an essential determinant of Lacan's teaching. This function constitutes a theoretical *a priori* that is indispensable for the creation of a cartel because for the Lacan, it is indissociable from the dimension of the group. For him, this plus-one function was to be placed at the centre of the question raised by the creation of a School conceived for the training of analysts and the transmission of analytical knowledge. In 1964, when he created his School, he implemented this plus-one function on the level of what he calls the small work group, the cartel.

He repeated this formulation in August 1975 in a debate with his pupils during the cartel conferences of the École freudienne de Paris (1) in which he himself did not hesitate to occupy the place of a plus-one, stimulating his pupils to an elaboration of knowledge about what a cartel is.

Finally, in the precise context of the dissolution, he refined its formalisation in his text *Écolage* of 11 March 1980 (2). This constant re-working of the formulation of the plus-one function is consubstantial with the advances of the psychoanalytical discourse. The School of the Freudian Cause has incessantly updated it, particularly working from Jacques-Alain Miller's text "The Cartel in the World (3)", where he invited us to re-read the Act of Foundation of 1964.

By founding the World Psychoanalytical Association in 1992, and then by initiating debate on the creation of the School One (*École Une*), Jacques-Alain Miller indicated that the 1964 Act of Foundation was the veritable birth certificate of the Lacanian orientation, allowing the founding of a School along the lines of the device inspired from the cartel and the plus-one function.

If Lacan in 1975 vehemently remarked that in his School, there had never been any sort of true realisation of the cartel, at the moment of the dissolution of the school in 1980, he brought an answer "through group pragmatics" to those who wanted to follow him in his work inside the School he had just adopted: the restoration of the cartel as a means of action on the Real of the group, capable of practical applications concerning analytical knowledge.

In this aim he restored, for those who had not yet completed their work of grieving for his former School, the basic organ taken from his Act of Foundation. He thus intended to create a

field where each one would have the venue to demonstrate what he does with the knowledge that experience deposits. So he offered a cartel whose use concerns analytical knowledge linked to the analytical experience.

*Here is the formalisation of the cartel of 11 March 1980 (4) :*

With them, without delay, I inaugurate the Freudian Cause and restore in their favour the basic organ taken from the foundation of the School, that is to say the cartel, of which, having tested it, I refine the formalisation.

Firstly, Four people choose each other to pursue a work which must have its product. I specify: a product proper to each one and not collective.

Secondly, The conjunction of four is accomplished around a plus-one who, if he is anyone must be someone. On him falls the burden to watch over the the internal effects of the enterprise, and to stimulate its elaboration.

Thirdly, To prevent the glue effect, there must be permutation at the end, set at one year, maximum two.

Fourthly, No progress is to be expected, other than from periodically bringing the results to the open as working crises.

Fifthly, The drawing of lots will ensure the regular renewal of the bearings created in order to vectorise the whole.

The Freudian cause is not a School but a field where each one will have a chance to demonstrate what he does with the knowledge that experience deposits.

### **Permutation**

In 1964, in his Act of Foundation, Lacan invited those who would come to this School to commit themselves to fulfill a working task subjected to an internal and an external control. He proposed a work objective which is inseparable from training, to be dispensed in the movement of reconquest of the Freudian Field.

Lacan wanted to restore in the field that Freud opened the "cutting edge of the truth which brings back the original praxis he instituted under the name of psychoanalysis, in the duty that is incumbent to it, in the world which, by an assiduous critique, denounces its deviations and the compromises which deaden its progress by degrading its usages".

Thus, Lacan defined the work of his School in 1964, and to carry out the work, in 1980, he formalised the cartel in a very precise manner. For him, the work must be accomplished in a cartel. In 1964 he wanted, as Jacques-Alain Miller indicated, to combat the corporate bodies of didacticians, the "silent blessed".

He wanted to establish a circular, permuting organisation which would enable "the collaboration, in the Cause, of anyone with anyone else (6)".

Lacan's conception is that the analyst would not be there in the School, presenting a work as a "I think that..." , but as part of a unit, of a group of four or five. Thus, he suggested that people

work in small groups, inviting them to work together on an egalitarian basis (7). For Lacan, the cartel is an anti-narcissistic operator linked to the fundamental principle of his School, the One by One principle through a generalized permutation (8).

**Work in small groups sets up a tension between the One and the Whole, the One and the multiple.**

Jacques-Alain Miller remarked (9) that, when Lacan created his School, the idea of work in small groups had already been instituted at the Sorbonne by humanities students as a means of opposing the lectures and a way of working on an egalitarian basis with teachers. That was part of an anti authoritarian movement. But Lacan was also inspired, as his text, *English Psychiatry and War* of 1947 (10) testifies, by the work of Bion and Rychman. These two authors had noticed the importance of the function of the doctor in the setting up of the small group permitting soldiers, disoriented by the war, to leave a position of anxiety and inertia. Lacan remarked that around this function given to the doctor, the small groups of soldiers became aware of the difficulties of its existence as a group. In this text, Lacan brings to the fore, following Freud and his collective psychology, a process of identification to one's fellow.

For Jacques-Alain Miller, Lacan's cartel embodies a thesis of group theory. In fact, Lacan noticed that, in a group, it was pointless to deny the existence of a leader, but the latter could be reduced to a minimum by making a function of him. We saw in the introduction that, in his Act of Foundation, Lacan introduces the cartel thus : "For the execution of the work, we shall adopt the principle of an elaboration sustained in a small group". The cartel is thus a means to execute the work that Lacan wanted to see carried out in his School.

"The group is composed of at least three persons -five at most - though four is the right measure. Plus One, charged with the accomplishing, the discussion, the end to be reserved for the work of each one (11).

At the heart of this device, Lacan situates permutation. Thus, the task of the plus-one is not a stepping-stone towards obtaining an authoritarian or a hierarchical position in his School. Once his function is over, the plus-one returns to the ranks of grass roots work. The plus-one must watch over the internal effects of the enterprise, but he must also stimulate its elaboration. It is from this elaboration which, according to Lacan, cannot be obtained in a large group that Lacan expected "a real progress on the effects of analysis."

### **Plus One**

In 1975, during the work conferences on cartels, Lacan specified the binding function of the plus one for the cartel small work group. This plus-one, if it can be anyone, must be someone, that is to say it must be embodied. That is what gives the cartel its analytical style.

For Lacan, in order for there to be a desire for work in cartels, it is necessary that there be one who has the burden of assuming the subjective division. Jacques-Alain Miller proposed to see in Socrates the model of a plus-one, for the elaborations he incites in his interlocutors.

**He must be there, present, with his question marks, the image he gave was to make holes in heads (12).**

As a member of the cartel, the plus-one also has to work, and in that sense, he has the responsibility of inserting the effect of the subject in the cartel, that is, assuming the subjective division. If the cartel has an analytical style, it should not function according to the

mode of free association. Each cartel asserts its work link to the School by making a declaration where each member of the cartel is then identified by his work subject. " Each member aims to obtain a product from his work, a product proper to each one and which bears the mark of his enunciation. Each member works from his own insignia, from his work subject and not from his lack of being."

It is up to the plus-one to obtain the emergence of a subjective effect in the cartel, and also to make each member the equivalent of a master signifier. For Lacan, it is master signifiers that are at work and that is what Lacan wanted to obtain from the cartel of the School. Whence the importance of the function of the plus-one. The plus-one must see to it that in the small work group "each member of the cartel has his unique trait, for that is what makes a team (14)".

The cartel of Lacan's School allows each cartel member to accomplish work that will produce knowledge. The cartel becomes this place, a basic unit of the School where is verified in act the link between transmission and a certain analytical truth.

That is what Lacan questioned in April 1975, specifying that what he wished to obtain by means of the cartel, regarding the analytical group, was "identification with the group. Lacan speaks of the group, remarking that human beings cannot do otherwise than identify with a group (15)".

He does not specify "what aspect of the group they have to identify with". However, his intention may be deduced from studying his later teachings...

The important thing is the hole of the Borromean knot, the hole that allows the binding of the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Lacan thus propounds an identification with the hole, the conjunction of the four around the plus-one being accomplished with regards to this hole.

The structure of discourse that best corresponds to the experience of the cartel is that of the discourse of the hysteric. That is why Miller specifies that it is appropriate to place a divided subject in the position of plus-one, so as to obtain the elaborations induced to this hole in knowledge. The plus-one must know how to lead the questionings and make them materialize. In the cartel of a clinical case, the cartel as a whole can fulfil the function of a plus-one to examine the case expounded.

## **TRANS-INDIVIDUAL**

*Trans-individual means that it is unthinkable on the level of the subject alone. It is necessary to include the Other (16).*

In the same way, in a reading cartel, it is a matter of obtaining a subjective effect to determine the outcome of an impasse on the level of knowledge. A reading of an utterance can be criticised, oriented in a new way. The cartel thus becomes the place of elaboration, of re-elaboration, or even "a trans-individual mode of elaboration".

It is the place where each person, one by one, can come and have his work acknowledged by consenting to a transindividual elaboration that will lead him to produce a product which, even if it is proper to each one, will bear the mark of the elaboration of several as such, something unknown before the experience of the School.

That is why Lacan remarked that analysts should notice that in a group there is always a plus-one, and they should fix their attention on it.

The cartel, as a principle of elaboration sustained in a small group leads each one, in his orientation towards a certain analytical truth, to verify this plus-one function and this trans-individual mode of setting to work.

This necessary Other can be the cartel on the condition that the cartel is linked to the School,

whence the necessity of declaring a cartel to the School which, as a nomination, installs the hole at the heart of the cartel. This is what differentiates the cartel from other work groups.

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**NOTES :**

- (1) Journées des cartels, avril 1975, *Lettres de l'Ecole freudienne de Paris* n° 18, avril 1976, p. 217-259.
- (2) *D'Ecolage*, 11 mars 1980, taken from the 1982 address book of the École de la Cause freudienne.
- (3) Jacques Alain Miller, "Le Cartel dans le monde", *Lettre mensuelle* n°134 de l'Ecole de la Cause freudienne, décembre 1994.
- (4) cf note 2.
- (5) *Acte et Fondations*, 1964, 1982 address book of the Ecole de la Cause freudienne.
- (6) "Monsieur A." 18 mars 1980, 1982 address book of the Ecole de la Cause freudienne.
- (7) Jacques Alain Miller, *Conversation de Paris II*, novembre 1997, p.65.
- (8) Jacques Alain Miller, *Conversation de Paris II*, novembre 1997, p.66.
- (9) cf note 3.
- (10) Jacques Alain Miller, *La Psychiatrie Anglaise et la guerre*, Paris, Editions Navarin.
- (11) cf note 5.
- (12) Jacques Alain Miller, "Cinq variations sur le thème de l'élaboration provoquée", in *Lettre mensuelle* n°61, juillet 1987.
- (13) cf note 12.
- (14) Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire RSI*, lesson of 15 April 1975.
- (15) Jacques Alain Miller, *Conversation de Paris II*.
- (16) Jacques Alain Miller, "L'acte en intention et conséquence", *La Cause freudienne* n°42 p.10.

To learn more about cartels, please consult the site ["Cartel"](#)

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