

## Après-Coup Psychoanalytic Association: On Cartels

“Lacan tried to get away from the polar opposition between the individual and the social, starting from the statement, “the collective is nothing but the subject of the individual.” This does not mean that the collective should be taken as a whole, and analyzed in the same way as an individual. The proposition says that the subject (the subject of the unconscious) emerges from a collective dynamic of individuals as a punctual and evanescent result of this dynamic. The introduction of a third term, ‘the subject’, distinct from the I (an imaginary formation), allows the introduction of a trinary dimension in the individual/collective binary system. For that, the temporal determination of the subject's constitution has to be taken into account. On this basis, Lacan proposed some original communitarian procedures, the cartel and the pass. In generalizing the idea of the social link with the writing of the discourses, he proposes to orient oneself in relation to the structure of desire and not only, as with Freud, according to the identification which binds the crowd together.” [ E. Porge, in *L'évolution psychiatrique*, vol 66. 2001].

### What is a Cartel?

A Cartel is a modality of working together proposed by Lacan at the Ecole Freudienne de Paris. It was the primary mode of participation to the work of the Ecole.

How to avoid the destructive tendencies identified by Freud in group dynamics, which can become so mortifying in psychoanalytic institutions? How to break the horizontal identifications that foment imaginary projections and rivalries, as well as the vertical identifications that locate the leader in the place of the ego-ideal? The cartel, as a psychoanalytic invention, proposes a new way of working which aims to dissipate these identifications and to sustain the specificity of each person's research and his/her way to evolve in it. In contrast to an academic relation to knowledge dependent on the instruction of the master, and as distinct from reassuring and misleading empathic relations to peers, a cartel sustains a person's subjective responsibility towards his/her research and the development of a singular transferential relation to the text.

### 3 to 5 + One

For the creation of a cartel Lacan proposed **three** people as a minimum, **five** maximum, with **four** being the ‘right measure’. The reasons for the numbers 3, 4, 5, +1 are grounded on Lacan's understanding of logical time and the role of the collective in the emergence of the subject of the assertion, as well as on his writing of the Borromean knot. The +1 which Lacan places at the base of this collective, corresponds to the operation of subtracting any one ring from the Borromean knot to free all the others. The +1 is what allows the rings to keep together. If a member of the cartel withdraws, the cartel falls apart. Even though the + 1 is a logical function that applies to each member of the collective, Lacan thought that for a cartel to work this function should be embodied by a specific person.

### Plus One

At the beginning of a cartel, *when each member declares his/her topic of research and the title of the cartel is defined*, the cartel selects a person of its choice who will occupy the position of the Plus-One. This person will be contacted and, upon his or her approval, become available to the cartel as reference. His/her function is crucial to support the work of each cartel member with tact, to address possible difficulties in the development of one's own research or in the working of the cartel. S/he will help maintain a perspective on the relation between knowledge and truth.

The Plus-One is usually called upon a few times in the course of the cartel, when researches start developing and questions or impasses arise. S/he addresses the members in the cartel setting.

### **Declaration of a Cartel**

A person who wishes to create a cartel on a particular theme may propose it to Après-Coup. If the members of the cartel have not already been established, then an announcement of the proposed theme is forwarded to the Après-Coup community of members and participants.

When the cartel is decided, its title defined and the Plus-One selected, the cartel is declared to the Association. Along with the date of its beginning and possible end, its existence is made known on the Après-Coup website.

### **Duration**

A cartel lasts one or two years maximum. Its necessary conclusion allows for the avoidance of the inertia that characterizes some working groups, while sustaining the emergence of a new knowledge for the subject. The conclusion of the cartel marks a scansion.

### **The Meetings of a Cartel and its Conclusion**

Meetings happen in a rhythm that is decided by the cartel members. At each cartel meeting, every person relates the state of his or her individual research, expressing her/his finding, questions and impasses. There are no readings in common as in a reading group – even though everyone can refer to the same texts for elaborating one's own singular research and writing.

At each advanced meeting of the cartel, the cartel will decide when the Plus-One will be invited to share the cartel's questions or issues.

By the end of the cartel each member will produce his/her own work, a written text - or a similar production- which will be presented to Après-Coup community at a set time.

