

[A reflection on cartel work examining COVID-19](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12727) by Julia Evans on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2020 or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12727)

A reflection on cartel work examining COVID-19

This end note of my work in a cartel on ‘Pandemic & being Lacanian’<sup>i</sup>, is being written three months after the actual end of the cartel. My topic was, *Between THE PANDEMIC & a pandemic – an exploration*. This summary has been brought together after reading Jacques Lacan’s statement ‘And as I said, the real will win out, as always. And we’ll be as fucked as we ever were’ (21st November 1974)<sup>ii</sup> So how does, the winning real relate to ‘THE PANDEMIC & a pandemic?’

#### THE PANDEMIC

The Pandemic defines COVID-19 as controllable. It is a discrete entity. The form of control at government level is by the use of SCIENCE, described in *The Other that Does Not Exist and Its Scientific Committees* by Éric Laurent<sup>iii</sup> (23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020) In the UK, or more particularly England – Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have different strategies – the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE)<sup>iv</sup> advises the British Government. There is now a gap between British Government action & SAGE advice. This is compounded by the Government’s inability to put an adequate testing regime and ‘track and trace’ system in place, so there is no evidence. A further group has emerged, Independent SAGE, <https://www.independentsage.org> which is a group of scientists, working together to provide independent scientific advice on how to minimise deaths and support Britain’s recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. So there are differences between responses to this unknown – one which assumes total mastery and puts in place centrally-driven, rule based restrictions, which match reported initiation rites at public boarding schools - and the two SAGE groups who form hypotheses from within their scientific framework which make sense of their data and predict the best way forward.

In July I presented to this cartel, ‘the UK’s level of infection or disease is quite high, although it looks a small number. Lockdown restrictions are being lifted haphazardly.’ As a consequence of this, I asked, ‘the virus is attacking in seemingly random ways – or is it?’ It may be possible to approximate an approach given the availability of reliable evidence, but total mastery is not possible. THE Pandemic with graspable boundaries does not exist.

#### A Pandemic

In this section, I have examined 3 cases: Nelson Feldman<sup>v</sup>, Jean-Daniel Matet<sup>vi</sup> & a West Bromwich Albion football fan, Peter.<sup>vii</sup> All three cases are male & two are curarised that is they have no control over their body/muscles and a machine breathes for them. Close friends/family are not physically present at the bedside. At best, they are on a screen held by hospital staff. All 3 survived & the process of survival is described in words by Feldman & Matet. Peter is by a third party. In all three cases, telling those close what has happened, possibly a making-sense, is a priority as they regain their bodies.

My question is what can a Lacanian contribute to why the treatment succeeded. This is a theoretical construction as I am working from these writings

In Seminar IV 30<sup>th</sup> January 1957<sup>viii</sup>, Jacques Lacan describes an oscillation between two poles of the primitive imaginary relation, which are irreconcilable. The analysts’ intervention to make the subject perceive their alternation and to introduce the symbolic distance needed with the introduction of the third. This Lacan links to a position reproduced in fantasy “which is that of a forced immobilisation, [which] is sometimes expressed as the bondage of the subject, which actually and really did take place.” In a further case, which Lacan quotes,

a child actually forcibly immobilised assumes this position “with all the rage and anger which you might suppose”.

So in forcing the body back to this primitive layer with in two cases immobilising it and breathing by machine, the question is how to introduce symbolic distance. Matet describes a process of stitching together a series of assertions, a delusion rather than a dream, as the relation to his body as the place of psychic and subjective experience. So the delusion was trying to create a way through when he was artificially deprived of a body. Matet states ‘Unable to stabilize a response to this emergence of perplexity until I awoke, I have the clear conviction that this delusion is what allowed me to maintain a kind of psychic unity, which might otherwise have exploded.’

Peter who is also artificially deprived of a body with a ventilator breathing for him, shows no signs of recovery, and his vital organs began to fail. His wife had constructed a tape of his team’s songs sung at all matches. It was held to his ear, and his legs started to kick. The relation to his body had been restored. The familiarity of the songs & I suspect the body-memory of singing them at matches restored his relation to his ‘psychic unity’ which had indeed imploded.

Feldman has rage and anger against those who have contributed to his being in this position – organisers of a conference, those on flights not wearing masks & himself for not recognising the risks, landing him on his back in a hospital ward. Feldman was not on a ventilator, however he reports long nights of listening to another’s breathing. ‘I felt like I was transforming into a suffering body and reducing myself to it.’ He asks ‘Does life hang by such a slender thread? What does it depend on?’ Feldman is accompanied by an other’s breathing ‘each other in our own way, each with our own noises and sighs. I could hear his difficulties breathing, his coughs and groans. At night, when I could hear him struggling, I worried that I might not hear any noise at all.’ He finishes his account by referring to ‘links that matter’.

All three men survived being forced back to a primitive immobilisation, though they used different ways of so doing. Each puts a context in place outside of the cocoon in which they are kept. Matet invents a way through based in a delusion, piecing together what is happening to his body. Peter connects with his body via the imposition of football anthems & Feldman hears another’s breathing which he compares with his. Each manages to put something unique in place in response to having their body taken from them by a real invasion or an invasion of the real.

Defining it as THE Pandemic, ignores the subjective response which it appears has to come into place. Further, the relation between a subject and their body, cannot be standardised. Whichever, THE or a, the real is there & wins.

## **Related Texts**

On pandemic/coronavirus/plague [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=729) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=729>

[An Extimate Experience : 25th July 2020 : Ganesh Anantharaman](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12722) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12722)

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[Jacques Lacan’s sayings on or near ‘pandemic’](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12721) by [Julia Evans](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12721) on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020, or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12721)

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[Encounter with the Coronavirus : we, analysts, are mortal : 10th May 2020 : Nelson Feldman](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12576)

or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12576) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12576>

[THE PANDEMIC versus a pandemic – Cartel Opening Statement](#) by [Julia Evans](#) on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2020 or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12588) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12588>  
[Summoned! : 17th April 2020](#) : [Jean-Daniel Matet](#) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12595) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12595>  
[Coronavirus as Metaphor : 6th April 2020](#) : [Gözde Kilic](#) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12587) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12587>  
[We shall build up again... : 31st March 2020](#) : [Jorge Assef](#) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12557) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12557>  
[Life Over Death : 26th March 2020](#) : [Thomas Svolos](#) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12589) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12589>  
[The Other that Does Not Exist and Its Scientific Committees : 23rd March 2020](#) : [Éric Laurent](#) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12530) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12530>  
[Coronavirus and the Hole in the Big Other : 14th March 2020](#) : [Thomas Svolos](#) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12505) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12505>  
[The Zombie Epidemic: Hypermodern Version of the Apocalypse : 25th September 2013:](#)  
[New York: Jorge Assef](#) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1129) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1129>

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<sup>i</sup> *New Lacanian School of Psychoanalysis cartel* (<http://www.amp-nls.org/page/gb/33/catalogue-des-cartels>), *Cartel 35 - Pandemic & being Lacanian, a Flash Cartel (from April until July 2020), Last meeting, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2020.*

*Members and their topic were :* [Ganesh Anantharaman](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=740) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=740> - *To examine what the 'new normal' of social distancing means for how we engage with the world inside and outside of us. :* [Gözde Kilic](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=727) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=727> - *To inquire into how we can position the coronavirus vis-à-vis the Symbolic and the Real? :* [Julia Evans](#) - *Between THE PANDEMIC & a pandemic – an exploration. :* *Paul Melia* - *How to practice that attentional stance Freud refers to as 'evenly-suspended' with few or no appointments during Covid-19? :* [Josephine Rostron](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=741) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=741> - *To consider the nature and impact of the virus and to elaborate on the presence of the body within Lacan's structure of the psyche.*

<sup>ii</sup> p20-21 of David Broder's translation : [Freud Forever – An Interview with Panorama : 21<sup>st</sup> November 1974 \(Rome\) : Jacques Lacan with Emilia Granzotto](#) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=11930) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=11930>, See [here](https://www.freud2lacan.com/docs/Lacan_Interview_Nov21_1974.pdf) [https://www.freud2lacan.com/docs/Lacan\\_Interview\\_Nov21\\_1974.pdf](https://www.freud2lacan.com/docs/Lacan_Interview_Nov21_1974.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> : Information [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12530) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12530> : *The Other that Does Not Exist and Its Scientific Committees : 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020* : [Éric Laurent](#), Published at Lacanian Review Online LRO : See [www.thelacanianreviews.com](http://www.thelacanianreviews.com), Available [here](http://www.thelacanianreviews.com/the-other/) <http://www.thelacanianreviews.com/the-other/>

Also circulated **From:** NLS-Messenger (New Lacanian School/Messenger **Subject:** [\[nls-messenger\] 3380.en/ Lacanian Review Online: The Other that Does Not Exist and Its Scientific Committees](#) **Date:** 27 March 2020 at 17:49:46 GMT : See <http://www.amp-nls.org/page/gb/49/nls-messenger>

Available with Julia Evans' notes at [www.LacanianWorksExchange.net](http://www.LacanianWorksExchange.net) /[éric laurent](#) or authors by date

<sup>iv</sup> The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) is a British Government advisory body that advises central government in emergencies. It is usually chaired by the United Kingdom's Chief Scientific Adviser. Specialists from academia and industry, along with experts from within government make up the participation, which will vary depending on the emergency.

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<sup>v</sup> See [Encounter with the Coronavirus : we, analysts, are mortal : 10th May 2020 : Nelson Feldman](#) or [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12576](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12576)

<sup>vi</sup> [Summoned! : 17th April 2020 : Jean-Daniel Matet](#) or [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12595](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12595)

<sup>vii</sup> Football's family values by Adrian Chiles, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020, The Tablet - <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/18136/football-s-family-values>

<sup>viii</sup> For publication see [Seminar IV : The Object Relation & Freudian Structures 1956-1957 : begins 21st November 1956 : Jacques Lacan](#) or [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=11980](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=11980) Translation by Earl's Court Collective, : Alma Buholzer, [Greg Hynds](#), <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=739> [Jesse Cohn](#), [Julia Evans](#) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12365>