

Present without a body: absence, lack, & loss in the work of a cartel

by Ganesh Anantharaman

We are meant to be a cartel of 3+1 and are registered as such. In actuality we have only met as a cartel of 3 in the 7 meetings we've had thus far. One cartel member has not been present for six meetings in a row, caught as he is in a web of personal circumstances that have kept him away. Presciently and appositely enough, the title of the cartel we agreed upon is 'Being a body versus having a body'. This presentation, an outcome of result of our work in the latest meeting of the cartel on what it means to have a member recurrently absent, is an attempt to reckon with the actuality of the absence of a speaking body by acknowledging the void (should I say lack?) effected thereby, without necessarily converting it into a loss.

What constitutes membership of a cartel? Does a member who has been consistently absent continue to belong to the cartel? Who decides the membership of a cartel? Is it the role of the plus one to take a managerial decision to strike an absent member off from the cartel when the concerned member has himself not asked for it and his name remains inscribed on the cartel declaration? Can other cartel members determine the way a member's desire to belong to a cartel ought to be demonstrated?

Even more importantly, going back to the title of the cartel, we asked ourselves: is there a way of proceeding with the work of the cartel by encountering the loss of a speaking body; by giving absence its due place? Does absence constitute lack, and necessarily translate into loss for the cartel?

In her paper "The Body in the Teaching of Jacques Lacan" Colette Soler writes:

"As subjects of the signifier, we are disjunct from the body, as you can see from the fact that the subject is the one who is spoken about before he speaks. The subject, indeed, is there, in speech, before he has a body, before he is born, to put it bluntly. And he is still there, even when he no longer has a body, that is to say, after he is dead."

Can we extend that to say that in the context of the cartel's work, the subject speaks even when he is absent? That he is there in speech even though his body is not present? That his absence is a 'body event' for the other cartel members, and that they can put it to work for pursuing their own question / topic? Florencia Shanahan, during a webinar reading of *Civilization and its Discontents*, remarked that "psychoanalysis is in the business of making loss

count". The question for this cartel then could well be: how do we make the loss of the 4th member count for our work?

In his paper "The Realism of the Cartel: Some Reflections on Lacan's Religions and the Real and Eric Laurent's The Real and the Group"ⁱⁱ Rik Loose writes:

"... The 'realism' that Lacan refers to is not one of adapting the subject to the environment but allowing the subject to develop tools to struggle against the death-drive present in our culture. This real of the drive is not just present in our culture but also within each of us. Laurent lists what can happen as a defence against this realⁱⁱⁱ: "...there are people who do not come as soon as there is a cartel..." and so forth. Bion asserted that when you form small groups you invite trouble. With groups come crises and these crises must be allowed to surface so they can be interpreted. So Bion articulated Lacan's idea that the group is treatable like the subject; "... what is true at the collective level is also true at the individual level"^{iv}.

"...there is, as Laurent says, a pragmatic quest for homogeneity in a group. So, it is crucial not to understand this homogeneity as 'we are all the same'. The homogeneity is in relation to the task to be done but for each under her name and in relation to her own questions. The latter also implies the real of the death-drive which requires the 'realism' of the cartel. The 'realism' of the cartel is predominantly related to the following aspects: The real of the death-drive of the individual cartelisand; the imaginary or defensive reaction against the collective, and the emphasising of the individual task or trait. But, no cartel without crisis, no psychoanalytic School without crisis".

Going back to this absent member's chosen topic, I wondered whether we could read into it an early indication of the crisis that this cartel has had to face: Treating anorexia as a body event. Anorexia, considered to be situated in the absence of the oral drive, and again, a condition where a body wishes that it were not.

ⁱ The Body in the Teaching of Jacque Lacan, Colette Soler, May 1984, Published Jcfa Vol 6 p6-38 Winter 1995 (Journal of the Centre of Freudian Analysis & Research)

ⁱⁱ The Realism of the Cartel: Some Reflections on Lacan's Religions and the Real and Eric Laurent's The Real and the Group, Rik Loose, published in 4+one (The NLS Cartels' Newsletter)– n°1 – December 2016

ⁱⁱⁱ Laurent, E, (2000), The Real and the Group, in Psychoanalytical Notebooks, issue 4 (trans. V. Voruz). p. 36

^{iv} Lacan, J. (1960-1961), The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VIII, Transference (est. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink), Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015, p. 395.