Characters in Search of a Theatre

Organization as Theatre for the Drama of Childhood and the Drama at Work

Burkard Sievers
Bergische Universität Wuppertal

Adress:
Prof. Dr. Burkard Sievers
Professor of Organization Development
Bergische Universität Wuppertal
Gaußstr. 20
D-42097 Wuppertal
Tel. +49-202-439 2585/2548
Fax +49-202-439 3852
e-mail: sievers@uni-wuppertal.de

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Abstract

Organizations are seen as theatres in which potentially two dramas are enacted simultaneously: the drama of one's childhood and the drama at work. Performance in either of these dramas is related to an experience of suffering. If this suffering becomes pathogenic, both people's health and performance at work deteriorates. Organizations have, however, the possibility of creating a setting in which this suffering can be creatively transcended.

Luigi Pirandello's play 'Six Characters in Search of an Author' serves as a metaphor to expand on both the interrelatedness of these two dramas and the possibility for creative transformation of the suffering involved.

Two case vignettes from organizations will be presented in which pathogenic suffering might be creatively transcended by exploring and reframing the conflictious situations they describe. They also demonstrate that unless people in organizations claim authorship and authority for the organizational roles in which they find themselves, they remain but 'characters' who tend to repeat their own drama of childhood, rather than of attempting to transcend it in a creative way.

Dr. Burkard Sievers is professor of organization development at the Department of Business Administration and Economics of Bergische University in Wuppertal/Germany. (Mittelsudberg 52, D-5600 Wuppertal 12; Tel. 0202/473628)
"We carry in us a story of terrible anguish."
Luigi Pirandello

Introduction

The play 'Six Characters in Search of an Author' has not only made Luigi Pirandello famous as a playwright, but has also become one of the most significant innovations in modern theatre. When Pirandello began writing the play, he was just coming out of more than a decade of pure hell: His wife had mentally collapsed under the strain caused by the bankruptcy of the family-owned sulphur mines in Sicily (cf. Sciascia (1988), 66 ff.), and she was committed to a mental asylum in 1918. Pirandello had been forced into the marriage by his family in order to merge the two parental businesses and did not love his wife (cf. Rauhut (1964), 50 f.). What already had been part of the drama of his childhood, i.e. his father's greed to build an empire, had thus become part of his own family drama (cf. Bosetti (1971); Zappi (1928)).

Although Pirandello did not write in an autobiographic style, he occasionally assumes the role of author in his own plays. The destruction of theatrical illusion weakens the dividing line between the theatrical world and that of everyday-life. In Pirandello's later plays both the characters and the author himself carry in them "a story of terrible anguish" (Pirandello (1991), 8), in which the reality of his inner world and that of the theatre merge. Traumatic deprivation seems, as Bentley ((1972), 134) writes, "to be at the heart of things for Pirandello, and that is one reason why his work is dramatic. Theatre is shock because life is shock".

In 'Six Characters', a family of six mysterious figures enters the stage during a rehearsal of Pirandello's 'The Rules of the Game'. "Imagined but uncompleted characters burst into reality from an author's creative mind with an explosive, dynamic power" (Linstrum (1979), V). They bring their own story of anguish and, in search of an author, they force the producer together with his actors to
put their family life on stage "with its disruption, adultery, prostitution, illegitimacy, nudity and potential incest" (ibid., V f.). In the beginning of the play Pirandello shows "us a group of easily recognized conventional Actors from the world of life faced with a group of Characters from the World of Art. The Actors are challenged to represent The Characters in a play on the stage, but by the end of Pirandello's examination the images have become reversed" (ibid., VI). "It seems that in this ongoing deliberate confusion between phantasy world and stage reality, life and illusion totally change roles the very moment the boy who is supposed to play his suicide actually shoots himself dead. This goes too far for the producer; he angrily sends the six characters away because they have robbed him of the whole morning's rehearsal. The characters leave; their attempt at gaining life on the stage failed. The performance of their failed attempt is the drama" (Huffnagel (1988), 528).

That family dramas are the stuff theatre drama is made of is not Pirandello's invention. It has been a constituent part of drama since its very beginning. "The classic preoccupation of the playwright has been with the family" (Bentley (1972), 158; cf. Simon (1988)). Oedipus Rex or Antigone are expressions of family anguish just as most of Shakespeare's, Ibsen's, Shaw's, Dürrenmatt's or Pinter's dramas are unimaginable without it. Often enough theatrical drama is the artistic narrative of a family drama. Although the story is often set centuries or even millenia ago, identification with the drama on stage is possible because family patterns of anguish apparently have not greatly changed since the beginning of civilization. The family still makes up, as Bentley ((1972), 36) writes, "the original cast of characters in the drama of life, a drama that we keep on reviving later with more and more people cast for the same few parts." Death and murder of a parent, a spouse or a child, marriage decisions, adultery, mésalliances and the dynamics of inheritance and succession are only some of the experience people have gone through either themselves or in others since the beginning of mankind.

Similar to the saga, myth and the fairy-tale, the written and performed drama offers every family member (and the child in particular (cf. Bettelheim (1976)) a relativization of the dramatic experience as a family member. His anguish in the
family is shown not to be primarily an accident, a damnation or a unique
catastrophe but, despite its pain and suffering, a 'normal' experience. Drama in
its poetic and theatrical form is, from this point of view, both an artistic trans-
cendence of the tragic (and comic) experience of the family drama and an
encouragement and confirmation that one is not alone in the experience of pain
and anguish of the family. It is an important function of the theatre to mediate
and reconfirm for the audience that life is not exclusively a love story and that
family life does not only take place in paradise.

Enterprises and other institutions in which people work are characterized by a
less rigid and less clear discrimination of roles than in the theatre. In their
everyday reality, organizations usually allow quite a degree of role-rotation in
the sense that those who were part of the audience in one scene may well be
actors, the playwright himself or the producers in the next one. To the extent
that our adult world is rooted in our infancy (Klein (1959)), our dramatic
competence and expression in the theatre of everyday life is influenced by the
dramas we have been through in our families of origin.

The drama of childhood and the drama at work

Despite the fact that psychoanalysis has developed and offers a 'methodology'
for studying and understanding the rootedness of our adult world in our
childhood and infancy (cf. e.g. Lyman and Scott (1975), 101 ff.), the exploration
of the relationship and interrelatedness between our adult world in
organizations and our primary socialization in the family of origin is still quite
rare and what has been undertaken is often very limited in scope. Although
some attempts have been made to elaborate the relationship between the
child's experience and the (unconscious) structure of work in organizations (cf.
e.g. Kets de Vries and Miller (1986), Lawrence (1982), Pedersen-Krag (1951),
Ulrich, David N. and Harry P. Dunne (1986), Volmerg ((1988) (1990)), the
meaning and influence of the family as a system with its own history and drama
is still widely ignored.
The notion of family-of-origin influence has in the context of family therapy gained wide acceptance; but as Weinberg and Mauksch ((1991), 233) state - "considerably less attention (has been) given to extending this theory" to what is "occurring in the work environment". Unfortunately, the result of these two authors' examination of family-of-origin influences on life at work remains for me strangely sterile and almost mechanical: "Patterns of interaction to which people become accustomed in their families of origin often play largely unacknowledged roles in their lives at work and can contribute to unwanted pressures and stress on the job" (ibid.). What strikes me is the very limitedness of the metaphor these authors use; they refer to patterns of interaction which the child has become accustomed to and which, as an adult, it carries over into work situations. Reducing the drama of childhood and that of the family, in particular, into patterns of interaction is for me like comparing the Apocalyptic Horses to brewery horses: the fascination, the threat, the excitement and the scare are gone; patterns of interaction, like brewery horses, exclude tragedy, failure, anger and despair.

In my own consulting work, especially in 'Organizational Role Analysis and Consultation' (cf. Auer-Hunzinger and Sievers (1991); Berry and Tate (1988); Reed (1976); Weigand and Sievers (1985)) I am becoming more and more pointedly aware of the fact that the complicated way in which people are entangled in work episodes or in the organizational system itself and the way in which they get involved in conflict with colleagues (and/or clients) is not only dramatic, but cannot really be understood (and disentangled or dissolved) without relying on the working hypothesis that the main actors are actually working on at least two different dramatic levels, i.e. that the drama in the work situation - unconsciously and in a critical amount of the actors taking part - often invites and encourages regression into an earlier dramatic experience that is deeply embedded in the family of origin.

Often enough the combination of the family drama and the drama at work of each individual involved in the situation evolves into a competitive struggle as to which of the (hidden) plots will be accepted as the dominant one, who will be the producer and who will be allowed to assume the role of leading actress or
actor. The competition and collusion between the various actors and characters is particularly intense (and threatening) if the majority of people working in an institution (unconsciously) experienced a certain degree of similarity in their family dramas with respect to the dramaturgy, the role distribution and the tragedy enacted therein.

This is comparatively often the case in social, non-profit making institutions in which staff and clients often have comparable biographical backgrounds. Such a similarity may exist regardless of whether the institution is, for example, a self-help group for HIV-infected, a prison, or a convent of nuns caring for 'lost girls' (cf. Sievers (1992)).

**Case: Child-abuse**

The impact the re-production of the family drama has on the drama at work recently became evident to me again during my work with a group of social workers, each of whom had a managerial role for a particular area in the general social service of a city. A man in his early thirties began to present a case episode in which he had a conflict with an older woman within the group of social workers he led. The drama at work was based on the serious accusation made by the group leader that his older colleague had irresponsibly misbehaved in a case of severe parental child abuse towards an infant by his parents.

When we began to explore the episode it appeared quite obvious that the older colleague (who did not take part in the group I was working with) was 'guilty'; her incorrect conduct was supposedly 'explained' by the 'fact' that she was a well-known hardship case among the social workers in the city. It was considered more or less impossible to dismiss her, but nobody wanted to work with her. Without any prompting, however, another member of the working group, a woman of about the same age as the 'accused', began relating in extensive detail the biography and professional career of the accused. To me, it sounded as if she was reading from a public prosecutor's file, both in order to confirm the charge made against her colleague and to convince me that the
original presenter of the case must be exonerated. I myself was not yet satisfied by the quick and one-sided acquittal and went on to ask the presenter of the case about his own biographic background. (This was within the frame of consultancy we had negotiated before starting work together.) We all, including the presenter, were struck by the similarity and reciprocity between what he told about himself and what had been reported about his colleague.

It became evident that the group leader had been caught in a kind of overidentification with the infant in the case of child maltreatment because at the time the conflict had escalated his own first child was only a few weeks old. Moreover, the main ‘data’ of the two protagonists’ family dramas enabled us to perceive the conflict from an entirely different perspective. Despite the obvious differences in age and sex between the two people, it seemed as if both of them had almost exactly the same role in one and the same family plot, only that it had been performed at different times on different stages by different producers. Both of them were first-borns in their family of origin and had had to replace both their parents in the care of their younger brothers and sisters after father and mother in both cases had left the scene due to divorce, (natural) death or suicide. The enormous responsibility they had assumed for their younger siblings meant great sacrifice and gave rise to the feeling that too much was demanded of them and to a sense of inadequacy and despair. All this doubtlessly had an enormous influence on their decision to become professional helpers.

It also emerged that the older woman was forced by her colleagues into the role of an ‘eternal spinster’, a role which was collaborated and reinforced by a physical disablement she had since birth, the fact that she was still unmarried and that, not without considerable self-sacrifice, she was still caring for a younger severely anorectic sister and for her father (to whom she drove every weekend although he lived several hundred kilometers away).

This made it easier for the group leader to force his own family drama on her, leaving her no other role than that of the sacrifice. Only after this psycho-social collusion, which was not just limited to the two main protagonists, had been
uncovered could the male social worker admit to his emotional
overidentification and overreaction and to renounce it, thus opening the
possibility for him and his colleague of finding a way of coping with and possibly
solving the conflict in a more mature way.

As a consultant during this process I again and again felt much more
challenged, moved and encouraged than I assume one would be by simply
elaborating patterns of interaction. Occasionally I felt like the producer of a new,
third drama, in which the main protagonist we were working with was sent on a
journey through his life from the immediate past into its darker parts and back
again into the present (cf. Bruner (1956), 464 f.).

**Pathogenic and creative suffering**

My experience with organizational role analysis and consultation has been
guided and enriched by two very different ideas which have helped me to
reframe organizations as a theatre where the drama of one's childhood and
family is acted out in an interplay with the production process and the overall
structure of the drama acted out at work. I first became really acquainted with
the idea that what is happening at work (in the context of organizations) is a
drama by reading Dejours (1990). At the same time I myself had begun to look
on organizational reality as a mutual quarrel about meaning, maturity and
immortality among managers and workers (Sievers (1985), (1986), (1989),
(1993)). To perceive one's family of origin as a family drama (which often
extends far beyond the two generations represented by parents and children)
was a lession I learnt by working with people in family owned businesses which
in some cases went back more than four generations (cf. e.g. Calogeras
(1987)). This is a perspective I was later able to expand using genograms in the
same way these are increasingly used in family assessment and therapy (cf.
Heinel (1988); McGoldrick and Gerson (1985); Roedel (1990)). When I first
read 'The Drama of the Gifted Child' (Miller (1981)) I began to compare the
vicious circle of contempt between parents and children with the drama of the
gifted worker who, like his counterpart, the manager or the entrepreneur, is
equally caught up in the organization drama, thus repeatedly performing the
hopeless attempt to overcome the mutuality of contempt both sides are damned to perpetuate endlessly.

In his attempt to develop a new discipline of work-psycho-pathology Dejours (1990) not only bridges the theatre of childhood and the theatre at work, he also traces the development of the actors in the organizational drama into a pathological or, alternatively, into a creative environment. Working on the assumption that pleasure derived from work is a product of suffering (ibid., 696), he interrelates the suffering experienced during childhood with the experience of suffering at work (cf. Gabriel (1984)). Despite its attempts to struggle against the suffering of its parents, the child eventually shares its parents’ suffering and anxieties, carrying these as an enigma into its own later adult life. In his attempt to transpose the former scenario of suffering into the theatre at work, where his partners are no longer his parents but fellow workers in a production-oriented environment, the young adult experiences ambiguity. On the one hand he feels tempted to reenact a scenario of suffering similar to his original one, on the other hand the new social reality makes new demands on his imagination and creativity.

Dejours ((1990), 693) calls this productive ambiguity ‘symbolic resonance’; it subsists in the tension between the theatre of work and the theatre of psychic suffering. This area between the socio-historic context of the former and the psycho-historic context of the latter lends at least three aspects to the symbolic resonance that ensues: the choice of profession, the fact and the extent to which one actively can take part in the conception of a task (instead of merely executing it) and the ability to exchange the partners of sublimation in the sense that criticism and recognition of achievement is no longer derived from the members of a private world but from those in a social context.

Hidden in every worker is a suffering based on the desire to perform his or her work well. If this suffering is not resolved in a creative way, the individual will be caught in the vicious circle of pathogenic suffering, thus causing damage to his own health and diminishing the overall productivity of the enterprise. The psychic repression caused by permanent pathogenic suffering at work
influences the economy of emotion in the family. The parent's transfer of his own paralysis of psychic disfunctionality to his children thus affects the theatre of childhood of the next generation, too; his children in their turn establish their own equilibrium by identifying with their working parents and the psychic economy they experience in the family (ibid., 699). The dynamics of this process show that "family life in advanced capitalistic society is psychotic" (Kovel (1984), 115).

Dejours mainly emphasizes the discrimination and interrelatedness of the drama of one's childhood and the drama at work, and almost completely neglects the surrounding context of the larger organization or enterprise. However, true to the metaphor used here, the organization can be perceived as a theatre (an institution with its building and ensemble), which has an identity and a history all of its own. These, together with many other factors, have an important impact on the way in which the drama at work is performed in any particular organization. In a more general way, it also influences the way in which the drama at work interferes (or even colludes) with the drama of childhood. The culture of an organization shapes the performance of the drama at work and has a decisive influence on whether this drama constitutes a primarily creative attempt to overcome and sublimate the suffering or whether it itself is no more than an ongoing performance of pathogenic suffering. Thus, the impact an organization and its culture have on the drama at work is comparable to the impact a theatre and its respective tradition have on its performance of a plot.

Pirandello's 'Six Characters' as a metaphor

Pirandello's play 'Six Characters' seems to me to offer a valuable metaphoric frame (a second-level metaphor; the theatre itself is its first-level counterpart; cf. Alvesson (1991)) in which the interrelatedness and potential quarrel between the psychic drama of one's childhood and the social drama at work can be represented.
As they rehearse another one of Pirandello's plays, the actors and producer on stage stand for the drama at work, whereas the six characters pressing onto the stage stand for their own family drama, which they want performed instead. Although the producer first tries to prevent the six characters from disturbing his own rehearsal of 'The Rules of the Game'(!), he and his troupe eventually get involved in the rehearsal of the family drama forced upon them. As it suddenly gets too serious for him through the death of two of the children, the producer breaks things off.

The attempt of the family to have their drama performed has failed and the hopelessness of their pathogenic suffering has reached its climax in the death of the two children. By adjourning the rehearsal at the end of the play, the producer draws on the frame in which he and his colleagues can maintain their roles and the characters left are sent back to their roles as mere trouble-makers. In the drama at work, represented by the former, death "has no symbolic value" (Baudrillard (1982), 261), it is exclusively a matter for the family drama. The former has won a victory over the latter. The four surviving characters are left alone in their grievance and despair and will have no future in the next rehearsal of 'The Rules of the Game'. The family drama on the stage is the performance of the futile attempt to find an author who will transform their story of terrible anguish into an art form which would relieve them of their pathogenic suffering. "The drama of their failed attempt is performed with all its tragic instead because these six characters have been rejected" (Pirandello (1930), 12).

The characters demonstrate very different ways of coping with this tragic. Whereas the two children die by accident and suicide, the son negates the drama intended to turn him into a character (ibid., 21). The stepdaughter runs out of the auditorium in a manic fit of laughter just before the last curtain falls. The drama of the mother is "the fact, not to know that she is a character (which) does not release her to be one" (ibid., 17). "But the father ... suffers the drama, he is not creative, he suffers it like an inexplicable undoing of himself and like a situation against which he rebels with all his force and which he wants to get in order" (ibid., 14).
Whereas reality on the stage is dominated by the hopelessness of the characters' suffering, the play itself symbolizes a creative suffering which overcomes the hopeless collusion between the family drama and the drama at work as seen from the reality level of the play. The discrimination between characters and actors is no longer valid and all roles are characters played by actors. In the end, after the last curtain, they all stand in front of the audience as actors, irrespective of the role they played during the performance. The play is a creative act giving the hopeless suffering on stage meaning and making sublimation possible. The pain and the fate of the characters are used by Pirandello to turn suffering into art. His "theatre represents not just life, but life mirrored through the reflection upon life" (Melchinger (1991), 104).

Pirandello as author appears in three different roles of his play: Like Alfred Hitchcock who liked to appear in short unimportant scenes of his films, Pirandello appears as author of 'The Rules of the Game' which is being rehearsed on the stage. As artist he thus uses his own previous art to create art (cf. Spitz (1991), 241 f.; Rank (1968), 7). He is also the author of the family drama, a character who himself does not appear, but is being searched for. "By making himself into such a character ... the author himself is carried away from his own reality. He no longer is Luigi Pirandello. He transcends reality" (Melchinger (1991), 101). Finally, he is the author of the play which forms a third level of reality, "a level at which a new 'reality' is created, i.e. that of art" (ibid., 103).

The drama of the failed search for an author is also an expression of the fact that the characters did not succeed in authorizing themselves individually or collectively. The father, who is the 'character in search of an author', is totally unable creatively to transcend the suffering from the drama (cf. Pirandello (1930), 14). The story of the characters' terrible anguish is all he is able to imagine. He is deeply caught in this anguish with his stepdaughter.

Since the characters are unable themselves to become actors on the stage because they cannot find an author, they also deny the authority of the producer and his troupe and deprive these of the ability to play their lives
realistically. They resemble the neurotic in Rank's ((1925), 51) sense, who is so deeply caught in his own drama of childhood that he has to repeat it endlessly without the ability to take part in any other social reality (and drama) in which the rules of the game differ from the ones he himself has learned. Their own drama is the only one they can imagine, their pathogenic suffering is filled with despair and thus totally excludes any possibility for creative transcendence. Instead of liberating themselves from their history, they only repeat it (cf. Matthaei (1965), 346).

The actors and the theatre staff make an attempt to provide some kind of authorship for the drama of the family, but they ultimately fail because they do not realize that the drama is, in fact, a life-and-death struggle. The very moment death really does occur on the stage they lose all sense of compassion and interest and withdraw to the safer role of actors whose whole day's rehearsal has simply been spoiled. They live their drama exclusively at work, totally cut off from their characters' drama and from their own personal dramas of childhood, only committed to the task the producer sets them, i.e. to qualify for the production of Pirandello's 'The Rules of the Game'. Consequently, the characters the actors play as well as their drama have an author. They may have started the morning's rehearsal with an attempt at creative suffering, but they did not succeed.

The characters and the actors in their respective ways represent failed attempts at creatively transcending their own pathogenic suffering. They would ultimately have been lost in it, if the performance on the stage was the only reality. The fact that their performance of the dramas does actually attain the quality of creativity and art is only due to Pirandello, as the author of the play, and the 'real' producer of the performance. As the producer of 'Six Characters' - in comparison to the man on the stage attempting to produce 'The Rules of the Game' - he symbolizes and deputizes the authorship for the performance. It is this authorship which, on the stage, guarantees both characters and actors the possibility of acting either the search of an author or the failure of its attempt. The author is thus the guarantor that his play becomes the symbolic representation of creative transcendence.
As the integrator of both the family drama and the drama at work the author, on a metaphoric level, shows that the performance of a drama which in itself is a failed attempt can nevertheless be a creative act. A story of terrible anguish which people bring from their drama of childhood into the drama at work can be transcended by suffering, if that suffering is not self-destructive. The suffering individual can himself assume authorship or acknowledge such authorship in someone else, i.e. in a 'producer' or an 'author' of a 'play' in which he is actively taking part. Both the acceptance of one's own and the acknowledgement of another's authorship presupposes a sufficiently high degree of authority on the part of the 'actor'. To mobilize one's own authority in order to authorize oneself or another to be the author of a 'drama' expresses the hope and the confidence that suffering can be contained and transcended creatively; it will, however, also involve the risk that the attempt may fail.

'Six Characters' as a metaphor is not only a good example of how authorship and authority necessarily must be perceived as interrelated; it is also 'proof' that a productive attempt to overcome creatively the drama of suffering is more often than not a collective one: the authorship of 'Six Characters' (delegated to its producer) is a precondition for the members of the ensemble to have the necessary authority to act either as actors or characters. They know full well that the dramatic performance on the stage cannot be solved by calling for the police, but only by the strong belief that they will be individually and collectively capable of performing the paradox: the performance of the successful drama about the performance of the failed search for an author.

The risk entailed in this kind of play of paradoxes was impressively demonstrated on the opening night of 'Six Characters' on the 10th of May, 1921 in the Teatro Valle in Rome, which ended in a disaster - "Pirandello was jeered at and even assaulted by an angry crowd outside the stage-door as he tried to leave the theatre with his daughter" (Linstrom (1979), VI).

The interrelatedness of authority and authorship which 'Six Characters' elaborates both for the actor and/or the author also serves, on a metaphorical
level, to explore the often complex and at the same time improbable context in which the management of one's own role takes place. In order to manage oneself creatively in a certain role it is necessary to become the author (or, at least the producer) of that role, otherwise one will get lost either in the nightmare of childhood or in the pain and humiliation of the drama at work. The ability to manage oneself creatively in one's role (Lawrence (1979)) presupposes a certain knowledge and awareness about the painful character of the two different dramas as well as a sense of challenge not to be destroyed by either of them. Whereas this is a necessary skill both of every actor and of every manager, the author in his capacity as playwright or producer has to have this creative capacity in a double sense. He must 'contain' (in Bion's (1984) sense) the hope and confidence that, at least 'in principle', the members of his troupe will not 'fail' to get their act together and put it on the road and that they will confirm the confidence the producer invests in them. The capacity to hold this kind of hope and confidence includes the conviction that both he himself as 'author' and the majority of 'the managers' in his 'ensemble' are prepared to suffer (and in a certain, non-masochistic sense are even challenged by) the pain and privation which the accomplishment of their work task to which their roles are related often requires of them.

As sketched so far, Pirandello's 'Six Characters' may well be taken as a metaphor to elaborate the interrelatedness of both authorship and authority as well as the links between the drama of childhood and the drama at work. Of course like any other metaphor it has its limits and its one-sidedness; every way of seeing is a way of not-seeing (cf. Morgan (1986)).

This became particularly obvious to me as I tried to think through the implications of the assumption that not only a part of an organization's members are characters (like in the play 'Six Characters' or in the case of the social workers described above), but that all members are, at least potentially, characters. With organizations in which there is either no 'author' or no 'plot' the members more or less deliberately tend to switch from 'characters' to 'actors' and vice versa. These organizations often resemble a mad-house in which a discrimination between inmates and wardens is not always congruent with that
of madness and sanity (cf. Luske (1990)). Especially in non-profit making organizations I have often had the impression that, in a metaphoric sense, all members had at some stage handed up their role as actors and become characters instead. They are often so deeply caught in their own dramas of childhood that they actually go a step behind the search for an author to the search for parental figures.

**Case: Foster-families**

This was apparently the case with a public institution caring for families with foster-children in a city. Working in organizational role analysis with the psychologist in charge, it very soon became obvious that he and his colleagues (a larger group of social workers led by a female and a male director) had almost forgotten their original primary task.

The formal primary task of the institution was to help both 'normal' and 'professional' foster-families to get along. Meanwhile, however, a hidden primary task had gained the upper hand. This second focus regarded the foster-children as its object rather than the foster-families. What at the beginning of our analysis first appeared to be only a slight deviation on the organization's original course later turned out to have an enormous impact on the psycho-social dynamics of the institution and its main interface with its client systems.

It soon emerged that the prevailing identification of the staff with the foster-children could, with a certain degree of probability, be traced back to the assumption that several members of the staff themselves came from foster (or foster-like) families-of-origin (e.g. step-parents or situations in which for various reasons at least one parent was absent). Although in the limited frame of the organizational role analysis with the psychologist this hypothesis could not be definitely proven, the evidence we gathered clearly spoke in favour of this. After he had helped 'collect the data' on the biographical backgrounds of his colleagues, the psychologist was very astonished at the result. He became aware, for the first time, of how his own individual drama of childhood and his
broader biography were interrelated with his professional choice of career as well as with the critical episode he wanted to work on in this consultation.

The personal part of the picture I had asked him to paint at the very beginning of our work mirrored a cobweb of foster-like family relations of which he himself had been a part. A grave indicated the tragic loss of his mother who had died when he, the firstborn, was twelve years old. The woman he had painted next to his father was crossed off; she represented the step-mother whom the father had married a year later, but with whom neither the psychologist nor his younger brother got along very well. From what he had painted, it also became evident that in his first marriage he had been a step-father himself to a girl whom he still loved.

I was not too surprised when some time later, after we had finished working on his case, he approached me to tell me that he had since then discovered further evidence that his choice to work in the field of foster-care was not coincidental. He remembered that his own father had lost his mother at the age of two, after which he had been brought up by his grand-parents. The realization that the fate of an incomplete family went beyond his own generation finally helped him to sympathize with his father and to begin to re-interpret crucial parts of the drama of his childhood.

More significant in the context of the thought developed here is, however, the perspective we approached with respect to the institution. Going on the assumption that a significant number of the staff members came from a foster-family-like background themselves, and that this was the reason for their preference for the hidden primary task of caring for the foster-children, it seems clear that they were in danger of being overcome by the temptation to act as 'characters', i.e. to become 'foster-children' themselves. This meant that the members of the institution were likely to repeat their own private early histories in order to free themselves of the memory of traumatic pain.

Once we were able to think along these lines and to look at the case from this perspective we realized that the psychologist and the social workers in their
predominant identification with the foster-children maintained an unconscious alliance among themselves (as foster-children) with the 'real' foster-children they were dealing with in the drama at work. As members of a public institution, these people were very much isolated; they had more or less set their own individual tasks independently of those of the institution, and they avoided either challenging or criticizing one another. It seemed as if in their suffering they were reconfirming what Kundera ((1990), 249), the poet, called the 'haute école d'égocentrisme': "In the suffering the world disappears and each one of us is left to himself." Their own daily experience as consultants and supervisors of the foster-parents was often filled with feelings of inadequacy, inferiority and failure, an experience which, as long as it came from the regressive position of themselves being foster-children, could only be avoided by projection.

The result was that foster-parents were often regarded by the social workers as not being good enough parents, a projective identification which was very much in line with their own previous experience of their 'foster-parents'. Interestingly, the male and female directors were turned into an idealized pair of parents. They were highly respected by the social workers, one can only assume because they allowed them to pursue the hidden primary task instead of the formal one, thus seeming to save the social workers from suffering the drama at work which the care of foster-families necessarily would have involved for them.

Although on a first view it seemed as if the identification with the foster-children and the change of the primary task made the work much easier and more enjoyable for most of the members of staff, it became evident on a more detailed analysis of the psychologist's role that the staff members were involved in a vicious collusion with the foster-children and that the joy of work and the lives of the people involved as well as the quality of the institution's work were severely diminished.

Taking Pirandello's 'Six Characters' as a metaphor for this case, we can say that the characters' search for their parents is simultaneously acted out on two different stages. On the stage of a normal foster-family, i.e. parents who in
addition to their own children have one or two foster-children, there is always a high danger that the foster-child temporarily or continuously ends up as a 'character' vis-a-vis the 'real', 'natural' children, who are the 'actors'. Disappointed or angered by the specific dynamics of his foster-family, a foster-child almost always seems to have the narrow choice between either he himself not really being the object of his foster-parents' anger or idealizing his real parents, whom he looks forward longingly to be with instead. Just as the troupe of actors and the producer in Pirandello's play are not really good enough for the characters to transform their story of terrible anguish into a piece of art, foster-parents often seem to be convicted by their foster-children of not being good enough parents, because their parenthood is always questioned at critical moments. Whereas with 'normal' growing-ups it is more and more a constant experience of parents that their authority is questioned and that their children cast doubt on them, it seems that the same phenomena are much more difficult to bear in foster-relationships.

What happens on the stage of the foster-family seems to be repeated and elaborated on the institutional stage. In keeping with the predominant identification with their role in their dramas of childhood, the majority of staff work somehow below the level at which they should be professionally operating, while the directors are almost forced to show above-human competence in order to prove that they really are reliable foster-parents. There is good reason to assume that the decision to install a heterosexual directorship was itself only superficially guided by a principle of equality of gender. The fact that it unconsciously provokes all kinds of phantasies of parental and childlike identification was presumably neglected, as was the question of whether a triadic directorate including the psychologist might not have been a better 'solution'. The identification of the directors as an idealized pair of parents maintained and perpetuated a culture of dependency (cf. Lawrence (1982)) and in the case of a critical majority of the members of staff encouraged revitalization of their previous foster(-like) child-experiences.

Regressing into the respective emotional state helps to reactivate the past in the present, to become overwhelmed by feelings of loss, discrimination and
privation, finally, to get caught up in the drama of childhood. This experience reinforces the staff members in their roles as civil servants, who regard themselves underprivileged in comparison to their colleagues in other public institutions of the city. Although the belief that they are underprivileged in comparison to other employees may be a general part of a social worker's self-identification, in this particular case it strengthens a feeling of self-sorrow and self-pity.

Instead of feeling pity and compassion with the foster-parents in their client systems and using this as a basis for mobilizing more mature skills to support the foster-families in their daily struggles, the social workers thus, both personally and professionally, tend to set themselves up as 'characters'. They do not take responsibility for their own ineffectivity, but instead accuse the foster-parents and find them guilty (cf. Gruen (1992), 286). By getting entangled in their own stories of anguish from the drama of childhood, they reduce or even lose their professional capacity to help the foster-families to cope with their own stories. Unconsciously, and pathogenically caught in the suffering of the drama of their childhood, the members of staff decrease their capacity and authority to help the foster-families to transcend the pathogenic suffering in the foster-family-dramas which, as a matter of fact, are the foster-parents' dramas at work.

The more this kind of psycho-social dynamic becomes predominant, the less likely it becomes that staff members or foster-parents can creatively transcend the suffering of their drama at work. The vicious circle makes it even more difficult for the foster-parents to keep their own self-esteem and to assume the authorship and authority which such a role requires if it is to provide children during the most important phases of their lives with security, a home and a 'family'. It would seem likely that if foster-parents cannot live their roles actively, they themselves will end up as 'characters'. Although such a dynamic must not necessarily end in the same tragic way as in 'Six Characters', Pirandello indicated that, of all the characters, 'foster-children' are the ones likely to suffer and to lose most: the girl and the boy in the play are dead at the end of the drama and the stepdaughter leaves in mania.
Because of the limited frame and time of this particular organizational role analysis we were not able to explore the case too much further. As this was also true for any reframing of the case and in particular of the primary task, it can only be hypothesized here what an attempt might have triggered off. It was obvious from a very early stage that the original formal primary task according to which the public institution and its members care for the foster-families in the city had to be reinstituted. Such a re-institutionalization could well be accompanied by a remythologization of the institution, which would consist of recapitulating and exploring which metaphors and myths originally inspired the institution and guided its initial founding process. The aim here would be to examine which of its basic values and energies might be revitalized (cf. McWhinney and Batista (1988)).

Reframing of this kind is the precondition for organizational processes of open discourse and exploration (cf. Dejours (1990), 704 ff.) that might enable all members of the institution to become more aware of their mainly pathogenic suffering, its relatedness to their dramas of childhood and of the damaging impact it has on the quality of both their work and that of the foster-parents. Such a process can be the beginning of a sublimation, of a creative transcendence of the suffering. It can only be initiated by the psychologist or the two directors, but cannot be prescribed or administered. Only if a critical mass of the members are prepared and able to manage this conversion in their professional roles will they be able to overcome their self-chosen 'characterness' and become 'actors', 'producers', and 'authors' both of their own work and the work they support in their client systems.

The more they accomplish this the more they will discover that the suffering from their own dramas of childhood can be an additional source, instead of a trap, from which they can draw competence and authority in their professional role of protecting the foster-families from getting hopelessly lost in the stories of anguish they are subjected to both from the foster-parents dramas of childhood and from the family drama of which they, their real and their foster-children, are part of. As former foster-children, these social workers may 'use' the affects and emotions provoked in them in their work in a mature sense. Their daily work
experience may thus even enable them to experience foster care as a 'scandal' even if their role requires them to look on it as it is 'normal' or 'professional' (cf. Parin (1983), 66). The revitalization of the experience of their own conflicts from childhood and adolescence thus becomes a precondition for social and political involvement if the original suffering can be transcended.

Conclusion

The idea described here is that the search of characters for an author is not limited to Pirandello's play. Through overemphasizing the scars, wounds, and pains from the suffering of our dramas of childhood we all run the risk of not being able to perform any differently to characters carrying a story of terrible anguish full of resentment, rage and self-sorrow, and desperately in search of the parent, author or producer we cannot find in ourselves; characters who end in a hell of pathogenic suffering that even surmounts death.

The only hope often seems to be to find a stage on which the performance of one's drama may convince others to act it out and to take over authorship for it instead. And as the chances for most of us are pretty low that these stages will be in a real theatre, we often have no other choice than to revert to the organizations we work in instead. As 'characters' we walk into the rehearsal or the performance of the play performed at work, in which there is only space for the 'actors' provided in the official script. We thus get caught between two dramas, the one of childhood dominated by its 'games' and the one at work dominated by rules and rational economics.

There is no reason to assume that this kind of pathogenic interrelatedness and collusion of the dramas is limited to social, non-profit making organizations. The fact that the two case vignettes were taken from there is simply explained by the fact that these institutions, in comparison to enterprises, hardly allow any other conclusion and are often so conspicuous that the point is easier to grasp. The collusion in social organizations would seem to be so plaintively obvious because they do not have 'products' around which people in other work contexts interrelate. Although, as Herbst ((1974), 212 ff.) convincingly argues, it
is generally true of organizations, in social organizations, it becomes more evident that "the product of work is people". It also can be assumed that people working in industrial enterprises are less sensitive to remember previous suffering (Wedekind (1988), 69, 126) and are more used to cut off their childhood needs for warmth and love (Gruen (1992), 282).

Whether these people, however, will mainly be caught in an endless Damnation of pathogenic suffering or whether they will be able creatively to transcend the unavoidable suffering at work ultimately depends on whether they are prepared and able to become authors of their own work, i.e. managers of themselves in their roles.

My description of the interrelatedness between the two dramas in the theatre of organizations necessarily has to remain a sketch in view of the wider dramaturgic range of constellations and dynamics this interrelatedness can have. What has been particularly neglected due to the limited available space is the fact that the organization as the theatre in which most of the dramas at work occur is neither a closed system nor an ahistorical entity. Just as the drama of childhood cannot be imagined without the surrounding family, its fate and its genogram, the drama at work is influenced by the organizational culture and the organizational genogram. The latter of these includes two different but equally important aspects for the suffering at work and the possibility of its creative transcendence: the history of the particular enterprise (which may, for example, have been moulded by several generations) and the history of labour which has given rise to different forms of institutionalization depending, for example, on the branches of industry and regional and political influences. It can thus be of enormous significance to determine whether labour, true to its original etymological meaning, still includes the experience of pain and suffering or whether it has been so drastically degraded into mere routine and monotony that makes almost any experience at all at work unlikely.

Family-owned businesses of small or medium size are often especially good examples for the very extended complexity and tragic overlapping of dramatic realities and performances. It is sometimes impossible in these theatres to
discriminate who or what belongs to which drama or to decide whether the characters or the actors are the intruders of the rehearsal taking place on the stage. If the family drama dominates in an enterprise, the 'actors', i.e. the managers who don't belong to the owning family, might even get the impression that they are interrupting a family reunion (cf. Eliot (1964)) in which they as non-relatives have no authority, but are mere 'characters'.

Even in less extreme cases it often seems as if in addition to the family drama and the drama at work a third drama is put on scene dealing with inheritance and succession (cf. Sievers (1989a); Kappler and Laske (1990)). Although from the outside it may appear as a play in which only the nobility, kings and crown-princes are involved, it often dominates the whole royal 'court' and preoccupies everyone in the organizational theatre over an extensive time-span.

We can easily guess how difficult it will be in such an enterprise to successfully attempt any form of creative transcendence over the suffering of work, since the enterprise itself is crowded with characters who "are acting out the life stories behind them" (Bentley (1972), 59). Torn between characters of the owning family, the director of the enterprise and the crown-prince as the potential successor, it must seem almost impossible to take over the role of manager, i.e. to use one's own authorship and authority as a source for the role one is acting in the common attempt to achieve a creative form of transcendence.

There are many less complicated and less difficult constellations in organizations which still do not allow the kind of reflexivity over the meaning of work in organizations that Melchinger ((1991), 104) formulates for the meaning of life in Pirandello's theatre: it "represents not just life but life mirrored through the reflection upon life". For an enterprise or an organization to represent work creatively this would mean that work in it will be mirrored through the reflection upon work. It has to be acknowledged that the creativity of work, like that of art, is "deeply rooted in suffering" (Rank (1925), 48; cf. Kainer (1984)). This presupposes that a critical mass of the people working in an enterprise are, because of the work they are doing, not caught in the repetition of either their
own private traumatic dramas of childhood or in those of the drama at work with its respective history.

In comparison to the theatre which is, as Wilshire ((1982), 238, 243) states, primarily "a metaphor for life" suffering and death in the metaphoric frame of the theatre applied to organizations and enterprises do not remain an illusion or a fiction. Organizations "promise us life and death" (Mangham and Overington (1987), 26). Unlike the theatre, suffering and ultimately death are facts of life in organizations and an unrenounceable prerequisite to creativity. Suffering and death can only be endured and transcended if a critical mass of people working in an enterprise become 'actors' who are capable of relating the meaning of the work they are doing to the pain they are suffering and its potential transcendence. If this can be realized in an organization we can well speak of it having a spirit. The spirit of an enterprise obviously cannot be grasped without this deeper insight.
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