Practically bringing into existence a desire-led organization: a Lacanian approach to alternative organizing in two engaged therapeutic institutions

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Abstract

This paper engages with the growing literature on alternative organizing, in particular concerned with organizations fostering autonomy and subjective expression, and with offering spaces of emancipation for workers. We offer to contribute to this literature by drawing on a critical psychodynamics approaches, in particular those inspired by Jacques Lacan and post-Lacanian scholars. We base our study on two cases of therapeutic institutions (named Antenne 110 and Le Courtil) that host and provide care for children diagnosed as autistic and psychotic. Our choice of theoretical lens is also empirically-driven, since both institutions are located in Belgium and are part of a common network of practitioners inspired by Lacan's ideas and ethics, in particular regarding the necessity of allowing for subjects' Desire to guide work and for subjective difference to be expressed in relationship. We therefore interpret these cases are exemplars of desire-driven organizing, and discuss the implications for alternative organizational practices.

Keywords: Alternative organizations ; Lacan ; Desire ; Jouissance ; Critical Management Studies.

Introduction

Alternative organizations have garnered increasing attention from management and organization scholars, and in particular within the critical management studies tradition (Land & King, 2014; M. Parker, Cheney, Fournier, & Land, 2014). In this stream, researchers have sought to highlight the diversity of both historical and contemporary experiences of working, organizing and living, and therefore to stress the diversity of choices and possibilities available beyond "market managerialism" (M. Parker, Fournier, & Reedy, 2007, p. xii).

The very diversity of this field makes the notion of alternative organizing notoriously hard to define and marked by recurring tensions (Dorion, 2017). Nevertheless, we would like to start with the notion of alternativeness as prefiguration (Farias, 2016) of what may be thought of as "post capitalist imaginaries" (Zanoni, Contu, Healy, & Mir, 2017). Such imaginaries may not only be characterized by an anti-capitalist stance (Barin-Cruz, Alves, & Delbridge, 2017), but also an anti-bureaucratic project, facilitating autonomy as well as the struggle for emancipation (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992).

In particular autonomy can here refer to a way to reinvent a relationship to time and to the content of one's work, as well as to ways to assess its value (Kokkinidis, 2015). It also entails new perspectives on the relationship between members of a collective (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979) on the meaning of cooperation and the means of coordination, for example through challenging hierarchical and vertical power structures (Jaumier, 2017; Sutherland, Land, & Böhm, 2014), or in channelling new social imaginaries and identities (Ouahab, 2019). In sum, we understand alternative organizations as ongoing, in-practice experiences for rethinking value, performance but also practices of exercising power and shaping identities.

But the preoccupation for issues related to possibilities for breaking from alienating work and management practices have also been considered outside of alter-organizing scholarship. Namely they have been explored in the tradition of critical organizational psychoanalysis (Arnaud & Vidaillet, 2018), although such stream has thus far mostly approached the tensions around identification processes (Kenny, 2012), or subjects' relationships to social and political imaginaries (Contu, 2008; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Fotaki, 2009) through "dark side" cases of mainstream management practices rather than through the study of alternatives.

Yet, we suggest that it may be fruitful to consider some of the tensions of alternative organizing through a psychodynamics lens. Notably, there may be risks for such organizations to become ideological spaces, as collectivist imaginaries become collective fantasies (Lok & Willmott,

2014). This may then echo some studies of neo-participative management or post-heroic leadership that highlight the return of pathological tendencies within these horizontal and seemingly less oppressive spaces (Picard & Islam, 2019).

Our goal with this ongoing research project is thus to further investigate the heuristic potential of the Lacanian psychoanalytical framework for the study of alternative organizing. In particular, we aim to consider the potentialities for less-ideological and emancipatory practices of organizing in the case of two alternative therapeutic institutions located in Belgium, which host and work with children and teenagers diagnosed as psychotic or autistic, and were founded by Lacanian psychoanalysts and psychiatrists. Hence, our choice of using a Lacanian framework is both theory-driven, as we believe it will provide a much-needed psychodynamics perspective to the study of alter-organizations, and empirically-driven, as an organizational psychoanalysis lens may help us in "translating", i.e. making sense of the practices experimented in such unfamiliar (to M.O.S. scholars) contexts.

To study these institutions, respectively called Antenne 110 and Le Courtil, we use in-depth qualitative research methods, particularly drawing on a rich set of archival data (self-published books and newsletters of prominent members, founders, educators and therapists) and exploratory interviews.

These cases present a singular interest, as they feature alternativeness at two levels. On the one hand, Antenne 110 and Le Courtil are non-capitalist alternatives to psychiatric institutions, as its status is a not-for-profit association and as the care and educational practices developed for children are rooted in psychoanalytical approaches, contrasting with mainstream cognitive psychology therapies focused on applying "proven methods" to obtain "measurable results" (Miller & Milner, 2004).

On the other hand, the role of directors or "managers" is reshaped in this organization, as great attention is paid to prevent the imposition by the founders of shared ideals of education on the different educators, and to de-emphasize the primacy of professional expertise and knowledge. Collective elaboration and participation is promoted as a way to share experiences and to provide space for daily inventions, in relation to the children residents' desire.

In this paper, we therefore propose to bridge both research traditions of the study of alternative organizations and of organizational psychoanalysis, and we ask: how can a Lacanian approach inform our understanding of alternative organizations as emancipatory and non-alienating?

We show how this approach to organizing, which respects subjective difference, in turn fosters more respectful and emancipatory care for the children hosted. Specifically, we shed light, through the cases of Antenne 110 and Le Courtil, on a singular set of alternative organizing practices that may be – in Lacanian terms – *desire-led* rather than *jouissance-led.* We also underline how such experiences may contribute to alternative organizations literature by exploring practices of fostering autonomous invention (including on the part of marginalized people such as "psychotic" children) and de-centering from the centrality of expert knowledge and managerial power to allow the creation of a space where desire for work can be elaborated and concretely managed in organizations (Arnaud & Vidaillet, 2018, p. 14).

Following, the paper is structured in four parts. First, we review existing literature in alternative organizations as a framework to think about emancipatory organizing and work, and we sketch out ways in which this literature could benefit from insights of psychodynamics studies. Then, we outline the main dimensions of Lacanian thought and ethics that will be useful in our analysis. We follow with a presentation of our methodology and cases, before turning to our findings. Finally, we discuss the meaning of the cases and their implications for the study of alternative organizations through an organizational psychoanalysis lens.

Literature analysis: bringing alternative organizations in dialogue with organizational psychoanalysis

Alternative organizations: a framework to think about emancipatory organizing practices

On the one hand, we highlight how alternative organizations are defined as places to foster autonomy, and to favour the subjective expression of workers. On the other hand, we explore how alternative organizing moves away from centralized, hierarchical and vertical power structures and towards collective decision-making and renewed, shared imaginaries.

First of all, autonomy is understood as a key goal and result of alternative organizing (Dorion, 2017; M. Parker et al., 2014, p. 625), in contrast with "the dominant form of capitalist entreprise [which is seen] as repressing autonomous human development" (Land & King, 2014, p. 923). In particular, the emphasis is placed on empowering members to gain control and agency over their lives, while also promoting cooperation between members seen as equal in pursuing these goals. Specifically, authors stress the contrast with the managerialist co-optation of the notions

of autonomy and freedom (Böhm, Dinerstein, & Spicer, 2010; see Carney & Getz, 2009; Hamel, 2011) that argue for autonomous work from the perspective of its assumed "efficiency" for innovation. In alternative organizations, autonomy is a means towards a political transformation of society (Land & King, 2014, p. 627).

Therefore the literature on alternative organizations highlights some conditions and practices for autonomous, creative, and emancipatory organizing. In his study of self-managed workers cooperatives, Kokkinidis (2015) identifies a link between the organizing principles of consensus-based decision making and the collective dimension of autonomy, as he notes the shift from "'rule-creating' [to] 'rule- following' subjectivities". In other words, the construction of workers' subjectivities outside of capitalist organizing that 'exploits' autonomy goes hand in hand with reconstructing collective practices. Reedy, King & Coupland study processes of individuation in social movement organizations, where participants share the goal "to achieve collective aims without compromising the autonomy or happiness of participants" (2016, p. 1561). Such articulation of autonomous self-realization with collective action is for instance fostered through sharing moments of conviviality, building trust and mutual aid while also facilitating members' expression of a plurality of personal affiliations, subjective priorities and interests. Nevertheless, these authors also note that living alternatively came with intense emotional and psycho-affective costs, and question whether the members' pursuit of individuation and autonomy were always "worth" the anxiety and insecurity associated with living "off-grid" (Reedy et al., 2016, p. 1569).

Secondly, and relatedly, a central preoccupation for alternative organizations is to challenge existing power structures, in order to support both this pursuit of self-management and to facilitate collaboration towards collective aims. Essentially, alternative organizing is closely linked to the contestation of centralized and hierarchical power, and to the adoption of radical direct rather than representative forms of democracy (Land & King, 2014; Sutherland et al., 2014). This also comes with destabilizing authority roles, for instance by mocking and undermining those who may attempt to reintroduce some kind of hierarchy through claiming expertise, responsibility or experience (Jaumier, 2017). This also frequently comes with the adoption of deliberative and consensus-based processes of decision-making, notably inspired by anarchist principles (Land & King, 2014; Maeckelbergh, 2012; Reedy et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the latter point has been contested, particularly by feminist researchers (Dorion, 2017, pp. 150–151) who highlight that consensus may have a repressive side, as it tends to

favour collective harmony at the expense of the (conflictual) expression of difference and dissent.

Introducing a psychoanalytical lens: can alternative organizations offer responses to pathological psychodynamics of contemporary organizations?

Our above review also shows that alter-organizations researchers do not shy away from evoking some tensions that arise in such movements, and in particular some of the emotional and psycho-affective costs of organizing and living alternatively (Reedy et al., 2016). Notably, some of the studies reviewed above underline some aspects that may be problematic or even pathological from a psychodynamics and psychoanalytical standpoint – that is to say, from a perspective that takes a specific interest into unconscious and conscious emotional processes, and seeks to interpret them beyond the individual, as part of "the ways in which power is exercised and contested" (Clancy, Vince, & Gabriel, 2012, p. 521). For instance, Eslen-Ziya and Erhardt (2015), in their study of post-heroic leadership in the social protests of Gezi Park, analyse how the shaping of a collective identity and of the same values and goals across the group occurs in the absence of identifiable leaders, and how this leads to intense processes of identification for members. Here we would like to acknowledge how such ideological leadership may be useful in putting forward post-capitalist or radically democratic agendas. Yet their implications for intra-organizational psychodynamics and subjective experiences of work, creativity and emancipation may be questioned. Indeed the struggle to promote alternative social imaginaries and have them be shared across the organization may in turn constrain the possibility for expressing dissent and/or subjective difference.

Due to the scarcity of alter-organizations research drawing on psychodynamic approaches, these dimensions seem to be seldom addressed in-depth. We would like to suggest to turn to critical organizational psychoanalysis, in particular inspired by the work of Jacques Lacan where it is "used as a basis for discussing and calling into question the functioning of organizations in an ultra-liberal capitalistic society" (Arnaud & Vidaillet, 2018, p. 78), for instance questioning the meaning of resistance (Fleming & Spicer, 2003), or uncovering mechanisms of control in contemporary organizations (Roberts, 2005).

Of particular interest for our project, there has been growing interest in the psychodynamics linked to processes of change in organizations, including when tied to alternative social imaginaries. Two lines of arguments can be noted here, one dealing with dynamics of

identifications and the tensions of strengthened (imaginary or symbolic) identifications with possible emancipatory or resistance struggles; and another dealing with the intensification of collective fantasy in new organizations, that occurs at the expense of the subject.

First, we can draw on critical psychoanalytical research such as the study by Lok & Willmott (2014) that revisits a case study of identity dynamics in an organizational change context (Brown & Humphreys, 2006). Using the post-Lacanian reading of hegemony by Laclau and Mouffe (2001), they interpret the construction and crispation of opposing identity groups, in the case between two groups of teaching staff ('ex-Beta' and 'ex-Gamma') and one 'managerial' group, as dynamics of identifications to their pre-merger status but also of dis-identification, through denigration or demonization, from the other groups. These dynamics of identifications are furthered by the propagation of fantasies about the other vilified groups, and lead to a state of "deadlock" where differences are seen as irreconcilable, and nostalgic fantasies of a better, more communal past dominate. What this creates, from a critical point of view, is an incapacity for the 'ex-Beta' and 'ex-Gamma' groups of teachers to create solidarity and "weakened any capacity, to mobilize support for transformative change" and to resist the managerially-driven reorganization (Lok & Willmott, 2014, p. 221). In the context of (alternative) organizations, concerns over the strength of identifications to collectively shared meanings, ideologies, or social imaginaries may thus be interpreted through such a lens.

More specifically, critical psychoanalysis papers have explored the case of managerial innovations and radical participative practices, and have questioned their potential dark sides (Costas & Taheri, 2012; Picard & Islam, 2019). Echoing the research on alter-leadership by Eslen-Ziya and Erhardt (2015), Picard and Islam look at post-heroic leadership – in that case inspired by "liberating leadership" (Getz, 2009) – to highlight the ambivalent dynamics around the leader's postulate that his absence will be "liberating" and allow for employees' (followers') emancipation through their active involvement in decision-making and entrepreneurial projects. This new organization leads to an intense attachment of followers to an ideal (fantasy) of fulfilled harmony among peers, and of self-mastery. These two dynamics, in a context of weakened symbolic authority (via the absent leader), lead to a heightened enjoyment (*jouissance* in Lacanian terms) whereby followers feel that they are "free to do what [they] want". Pathological consequences ensue, most notably with the scapegoating of a 'misfit' member who does not share the same identifications, but also in members expressing anxiety and guilt that they can never do "enough" – dynamics which are coherent with an overbearing

culture of enjoyment that leaves no place to lack, and to the expression of subjective desire (Vidaillet & Gamot, 2015; Žižek, 1989).

We now turn to Lacanian theory to elucidate these phenomena of identification, anxiety, guilt and *jouissance.*

Theoretical framework: Lacanian ethics and the dynamics of desire and jouissance

This anxiety and guilt that one can never do "enough" are also to be found in many contemporary organizations. For example, Bicknell and Liefooghe (2010) show how this attempt to complete the client's expectation sustains a jouissance driven relationship to work in prestigious restaurants. The same process can be observed in the relentless attempt to be "professional" (Kosmala & Herrbach, 2006), "employable" (Cremin, 2010), or "an ideal employee" (Hoedemaekers, 2010). All these references to an ideal that cannot be attained are expressions of the superego that gives injunctions to enjoy in a limitless process. We propose to label these processes as "*jouissance*-driven". The idea of *jouissance* (a French word introduced in psychoanalysis by Lacan, which may be translated as enjoyment) derives from a mythical time whereby the subject as a baby was entirely satisfied and felt completeness in its relationship to its feeding mother. As this completeness cannot be obtained, *jouissance* is the bittersweet pleasure of nearly attaining it. It is a passionate relationship to work whereby one tries to completely fulfil expectations.

This movement of full satisfaction is illusory and impossible to obtain. This is why Lacan theorizes the subject and the social environment as organized by language, called the Symbolic, as fundamentally lacking. A subject is never fully determined by the Symbolic, and the Symbolic itself is not a closed system. One way of denying this lack is to obey the superego injunction to *jouissance* as we have described it. Another is to build fantasmatic imaginary scenarios that tend to cover this lack. The Tavistock institute tradition shows how collective anxieties lead to imaginary scenarios that block action or make the teams repeat wrong decisions (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984; Pratt & Crosina, 2016). Vanheule et al. (2003) and Vanheule and Verhaeghe (2004) show that these imaginary constructions allow no space for lack. They hinder some of the educators they interviewed to identify and understand the limitations and impossibilities of their activity. This "imaginary collage" to one's work (Arnaud & Vidaillet, 2018, p. 75) leads to burnout. On the other side, educators who accept to take into

account the Symbolic determinations of their work tend to work at more reasonable distance of their duty and in a less stressful way. They tend to engage their desire into their work (Arnaud & Vanheule, 2007).

The ethics of psychoanalysis is then to acknowledge this lack and to live according to one's desire. Desire is different from jouissance because it creatively builds around lack without denying it. This is why desire, and especially desire for work can never be fully satisfied (Arnaud & Guinchard, 2008) "The question is therefore no longer about how to have satisfied employees but to figure out how to create a space for elaborating this desire for work in organizations" (Arnaud & Guinchard, 2011; Arnaud & Vidaillet, 2018, p. 74). Some researchers have created discursive spaces in their research through which lack could be acknowledged and amplified to allow a desire to emerge (Driver, 2008, 2009, 2015; Harding, 2007). However, Arnaud & Vidaillet (2018, p. 76) point to the fact that "those studies do not specify what form those spaces should take in practice [in organizations], nor how these could be supervised to contain the anxiety experienced by subjects in the face of the 'nothingness' of self, work, and organization, when their imaginary constructions are disrupted".

This is what we try to investigate in two organization that claim to organize around a "central void" that is, discursive spaces where desire can emerge and be elaborated. We try to show how these "central voids" or spaces that allow the elaboration of desire-based work are shaped in practice and supervised so that anxiety and guilt are avoided. We also try to show how this avoids scapegoating and imaginary identifications that are typical of organizations with absent leadership.

Methods Section

Research design: case study

For this research, we draw on an interpretive approach to conduct an in-depth case study of two different sites (institutions) belonging to the same network. The case study method is well-inscribed within the psychoanalytic tradition, given the well-established tradition of using clinical cases both in Freud's classic seminal studies (e.g. Little Hans, Wolf Man, Rat Man) and in psychoanalytic organizational research (Arnaud, 2002; Picard & Islam, 2019; Vidaillet & Gamot, 2015). In this perspective, the choice of an in-depth qualitative approach is particularly apt since it contributes to an effort of "singulariz[ing] the research gaze [with] case-by-case

examinations of the organizing principles [and] the particularities of their effects on the subject within the organization" (Owens, 2010, p. 187).

It is also in keeping with the continued interest, in research on alternative organizations, with in-depth qualitative studies of emergent and ongoing initiatives. In this tradition, researchers have used a variety of methods, for instance favouring ethnographic methods (Dorion, 2017, 2018; Jaumier, 2017), participative action research (Land & King, 2014), and other methods of in-depth qualitative inquiry, 'based on close contact with the everyday life of the studied society or group over a fairly long period of time' (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000, p. 45 cited by Reedy et al., 2016). The aim is to cultivate closeness and develop an empathetic understanding of participants, as well as facilitate the diffusion of otherwise marginalized experiences and voices (Jaumier et al., 2019; Reedy et al., 2016, p. 1559).

Presentation of the cases

In this paper, we consider a specific kind of alternative organization in the form of (two) "therapeutic and medico-educational institutions" that offer care and treatments for children and teenagers experiencing psychic difficulties (autism, psychosis): Antenne 110 and Le Courtil.

The two organizations, which are not-for profit and from the same network (RI^3), are all inspired by Lacanian psychoanalytical ideas. Their founders-leaders have attempted to resist to current demands upon care institutions to "adapt" to individualist, neoliberal ideology (Le Theule, Lambert, & Morales, 2018) taking the form of performance evaluation and (experimentally) "evidence-based" methods – such as cognitive therapies that, from a Lacanian perspective are seen to normalize people rather than help the children and teenagers to build their lives based on their own desire.

In pursuit of a Lacanian-inspired approach, bureaucratic and top-down organizing practices are resisted and minimized. Notably the idea of leaders shaping the collective vision is rejected and the primacy of the therapist's expert knowledge is denied. The 'educators' are also encouraged to rely on their personal desire, rather than common ideals, in ways that allows space for the children's desire be expressed in playful or creative interactions.

Data collection and ongoing fieldwork

Our data collection is still ongoing and will continue into the first semester of 2020 (see Table 1 for a summary). In a first phase, we worked on the large amount of secondary data produced by members of the institutions considered, as we collected a number of key textual and archival sources, namely two books from both institutions (de Halleux, 2010; Otero & Brémond, 2013) and 17 issues of a self-published journal (*Préliminaires*). In these books, both the educators and the therapeutic directors of the organizations explain how they work with the people they take care of and how the teams of educators are organized and work with management. Importantly, we can also note that this written production is also partially "theorized", as it is a collective production by practitioners who have been trained in various disciplines (psychology, education...) and share common references to clinical Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Once we had confirmed the interest of these cases (through reading and discussing our first interpretations with colleagues and peers), we decided that a second phase of collecting primary data was needed. To gain access, one of the authors started by attending public conferences held in Paris by directors and prominent members of the institutions and approached them to conduct exploratory interviews. One such interview was conducted in early January of 2020, while later ones are scheduled in February. Later on, we are planning to negotiate visits on site, so as to encounter members holding different functions (educators, administrative or cooking staff, as well as residents) so as include various perspectives and give space to otherwise marginalized voices (such as that of the residents, i.e. the children diagnosed as psychotic or autistic).

Description	**Type of document / Length**	**Institution**
Phase 1: Secondary data		
de Halleux, B. (ed.). (2010). *Quelque chose à dire à l'enfant autiste* [transl.: 'Something to say to the autistic child'], Paris: Michele – collection Je est un autre.	Book, 302 pages Coded QCAD in the finding section	Antenne 110
Otero, M. & Brémond, M. (2013). *A ciel ouvert, entretiens : Le Courtil, l'invention au quotidien* [transl.: In the open air, interviews: Le Courtil, inventing the everyday], Paris: Buddy Movies.	Book, 127 pages	Le Courtil
Préliminaire [transl.: Preliminary]	Periodic journal (10 issues available online; others were consulted in the Lacanian library of Paris); about 130 pages per issue	RI3 network / Antenne 110
Phase 2: Primary data		
Observation of several conferences held in Paris, at the CERA (Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur l'Autisme): - October 12, 2019: J.-P. Rouillon, director of the Nonette center, part of the network	Research notes and audio recording	RI3 network / Le Courtil

of psychoanalytical institutions specialized on autism; - November 9; 2019: D. Holvoet, director of Le Courtil		
Interview with D. Holvoet (director of Le Courtil), January 6th 2020	Research notes and audio recording (will be transcribed)	Le Courtil

Table 1. Data collection

Our approach to coding and interpreting these texts is very inductive, and is still a work-in-progress. We are noting the recurring features of each experience and what they have in common, and then we discuss together, as a team, what these excerpts may mean from an alter organizing point of view. As our fieldwork progresses, we will of course enrich our interpretations. Still, in the next section we present our preliminary findings, mainly based on the secondary data collected (books and journals) as well as some elements of primary data (notes taken in the conferences observed, and the first interview conducted in January 2020).

Findings: Towards a desire-based organization

The following finding section relies on what actors say they do, in publications, conferences and interviews. To make an explicit link with our literature review, we first give here their theorisation of what they do. We then further investigate how this can happen in practice.

The displayed theoretical and organizational principles: organizing around lack to allow desire

Antenne 110 and Le Courtil host children and young people who have trouble in their behaviour or have difficulties in establishing social relationships. They often have been diagnosed as autistic or psychotic. These institutions aim to support them so that find their way in their social environment and in the world. The way to do it is to help them to live according to their desire so that they can handle social relationships and find a place in the world. The staff thus tries to establish a "desiring atmosphere" in the institutions. This atmosphere is also established for the staff: " *what mobilizes and collectivizes is a desire*" (D. Holvoet, interview). This collective dynamic does not relate to a shared ideal: "*one thing our network of institutions attempts is to work on the collective on the side of identifications' drop and to avoid imaginary glue. A shared ideal is a glue in which one tangles up."*(*D. Holvoet, interview).*

This construction of a collective without a shared ideal allows each intervenor to elaborate upon his own desire. This way of doing things makes every staff member elaborate a way of working that is unique to him. *"We build the collective around what everyone can do in the team building*

on his own loneliness. It ends up in a very colourful collective without identification to a same ideal" (D. Holvoet, interview) This allows a range of "*good encounters*" between the different members of staff and each resident. "*A good encounter: this is the aim of each of the members of staff in our institutions. A good encounter between an adults' desire and (…) children*" and even between a series of desiring adults and a specific child. This general approach makes the question of a desire-led institution crucial.

To reach this goal, the directors of Antenne 110 and Le Courtil claim that they set out their organizations work around a central void. This central void is the space for elaboration of desire for which Arnaud and Vidaillet (2018) call for further research.

The directors of Antenne 110 and Le Courtil prefer this "central void" to identification to the master the director would be, or identification to a group in which everyone would be equal. They state this void is not a void that unifies the team, on the contrary, each member of staff is encouraged to cultivate his unique desire. The solidarity that stems from this is a solidarity that fosters the diversity of desires:

> *"The One of the vacuum is not a single one, but each one, one by one. The several ones are not united vertically by identification with the One who is the master, but they show solidarity with the each person's questioning of his/her own Cause [of desire]. Horizontally, thus, we have no imaginary "everyone is equal" because each person is unique in his/her relationship with his Cause." (B. De Halleux, QCAD).*

We aim in the following parts to explain how this "central void" is built in relation to knowledge and rules, in the ordinary run of things and how exceptional situations are dealt with.

Relationship to knowledge

D. Holvoet insists on the fact that "knowledge in not on our side, instead it is first on the children's side". This assertion is shared by the founder of Antenne 110. He mentions this is an important condition for the children to accept a relationship with the staff members / educators.

> *"This question of the localisation of knowledge has been one of the decisive aspects of the foundation of Antenne 110 by Antonio Di Ciacca. He noticed indeed that these children addressed rather the cleaning lady, the cooker, that is persons who were not involved in clinical work et whose task dealt with very basic needs." (V. De Baio, QCAD)*

It is thus important to take into account the residents' knowledge on themselves, not to stifle the expression of it by a closed expert knowledge. However, he says:

> *"the theoretical corpus is enormous, we have a lot of references. But precisely there is something by Freud and Lacan that does not seal off. When reading Lacan, you get the feeling that he is running after something, you try to catch the thing with him, and the lecture ends, et you haven't caught the thing. (…) What Lacan runs after is precisely what cannot be said, what cannot be inscribed in a linguistic production"* (D. Holvoet, interview)

What is at stake is to maintain this empty space at the heart of the dispositive. To do this, it is important " *not to handle a closed knowledge*" (D. Holvoet, interview) although each member of staff is trained 4 hours each week – knowledge is shared among staff members without giving certainties about the way to work. This is why the directors at Le Courtil don't aim to elaborate a method that would be adaptable to different children. They insist that their undertaking keeps being an experiment. To allow this, the staff members have to be open to the residents' knowledge and to let them jostle their routines. B. de Halleux testifies of this orientation:

> *"These are my first days at l'Antenne.*
> ***I'm fresh out of college with a knowledge that feels certain and secured.***
> *I am meeting with the therapeutic director, who asks in passing if everything is going well.*
> ***Why yes, I say, everything is fine, thank you!***
> ***He's already turned around when he replies: too bad!***
> *I am left dumbfounded, everything was turned upside down, my semblance of certainty had suddenly left me. Why reply in this way?*
> *This was my first encounter with the therapeutic director. »*
> *Bruno de Halleux préliminaire (n° anniversaire)*

In this case, the therapeutic director aims to point to the fact that the intervenors have to take into account what surprises them, what goes beyond their expert knowledge. He aims to put the young intervenor in a position of questioning what is happening, far from being secured by the knowledge he has acquired in college.

Similarly, nowadays, when recruiting staff at Le Courtil, D. Holvoet also pays attention to the candidate's openness to the expression of the residents' knowledge. He would not hire a young educator who would think he "knows" how to perform the work thanks to a "satisfying "training that would have given him all the answers he needs. He would hire candidates who "raise

questions, who wish to discover new things, and first of all who don't aim to discover our knowledge, but a knowledge they assume from the children" (D. Holvoet, interview).

This approach of knowledge – necessary as long as it does not provide answers but helps to raise questions – is a first way to build a space where subjective elaboration of desire can take place. The point is not to refuse knowledge, but to refuse a closed expert knowledge. Power related to knowledge is shared among members who are all knowledgeable, but this power is further undermined because questions keep being open. A similar process happens with rules.

Role of Law / rituals

Le Courtil's director states that in 1982 when Le Courtil began its activities, the model for organizing was self-management. The aim was to have as few rules as possible. Afterwards, the institution evolved: the choice was made to institute a minimum of rules for common life so that they can be bypassed. These rules keep being flexible and minimalistic so that rituals, that is rules infused by each intervenor's desire, can also organize the collective life. In other words, there are few rules, and they don't organize everything. A space is given to the intervenors to infuse the way they do their work not by orders they have received, but according to what seems important to them, so that they can transmit it to the children.

> *"We prefer rituals to internal rules. In rituals, there is a supplementary dimension. It is not only a simple method to set up, but it is also about involving the desire of the one who sets up. Let's take the example of the time of meals, that is very often very complicated. In all groups, we try to set up rituals. This intervenor brings napkins of different colours, that one pays attention to glasses as really made out of glass."* (B. de Halleux, QCAD)

The choice of the kind of workshop to be held for the children is another example of this double movement at Le Courtil: to have the children involved in the workshop, the educator needs to be emotionaly involved in it, to build on his own desire to propose something to the children :

> *"From the beginning on, we had this idea that the content of the workshops shouldn't be decided by the management but rather depending on the children's areas of interest. But it is also very important to have the intervenor's desire involved in the workshop he will lead. A child's commitment to a task is intimately linked to the interest an intervenor has in the workshop. This intervenor, perhaps because he's gone through such training, he's got such personal background, is more interested in art history, that other intervenor is perhaps more interested in painting, etc…"* (B. Seynhaeve, A ciel ouvert.)

This approach is shared by Antenne 110:

> *"Everyone is supported in his desiring position, in his project, in the signifiers he proposes to the children: one will propose to pick mushrooms, another will share his passion for afro-asian music, and me, at the kitchen, I prepare green tagliatelles"* (V. Baio, QCAD)

Though, minimal rules are established. When Le Courtil was created, every morning the team met to establish the program of the day. Mainly, the choice of the day's workshop was discussed. D. Holvoet then proposed that a weekly planning of the workshops be established. To have the possibility to arrange rules or to creatively build around rules, minimal rules are needed. As for workshop, changes are always possible when the intervenors want or need it. This is a way to establish a symbolic framework in the institution, including in its incomplete nature: the rules don't organize everything, and they can be bypassed.

This approach of minimalistic rules and subsequent arrangements according to each intervenor's desire is guaranteed by two functions, namely the two directors for each subsection of Le Courtil and or the Antenne 110. One is the "house director" the other the "therapeutic director".

Dual functions of directions: house director / therapeutic director

In both Antenne 110 and Le Courtil, we can find a "therapeutic director" and a "house director" who have different roles. D. Holvoet says that implementing a duo for direction is a way to reduce each one's authority: "if you have two bosses, you have no boss: nobody holds complete power on the staff".

The house director gives a law, and solves every logistic question. "*This function gives the house a framework, a rule, a law. This function gives order, enables everyone to understand its task, and to carry it on. Without this fiction, the institution would not be framed, limited, organized; the house would be like a playground without any referee or rule."* (B. de Halleux Préliminaires) His role is also to solve every organizational issue so that the staff meeting can be focused on dealing with and discussing only the residents' clinical matters. He thus has intensive relationships with all members of staff to establish a program that respects everyone's desire.

The therapeutic director animates the team and gives an orientation to the clinical work. He allows taking into account is beyond the law (i.e. beyond the program the house director establishes and upholds):

> *"At a first stance, let's say that the therapeutic director allows to take into account what can't be foreseen, what escapes the program, what is outside meaning in the institution, what escapes the totalitarian system that any institution structurally requires. (…) He manages to create an empty space within the institution, a space that allows the structure to be incomplete and produce a desire."*. (B. de Halleux, Préliminaires)

Therefore, we can highlight how this therapeutic director's role is made simultaneously of presence and absence.

Presence is manifested in the way the director supports each intervenor's desire, and can sometimes give an orientation as for the strategy to follow with a child:

> *"A desiring position of each educator is the prerequisite for our work (…). The director pays attention to sustain this position whereby the educators are actually working through the issues that arise. He sustains it in two ways. On one side, every member of the team is sustained from the point he stands by, and on the other side, the director can, occasionally, give a strategy to answer a child's question."* (V. Baio, QCAD)

Absence, in turn, is characteristic of the rarity of such interventions. In the everyday work, his presence is more symbolic than an actual presence with the teams.

> *" For example, at the occasion of a fight between two children, an educator is called; he puts the object of the fight in a chain by himself calling another educator, and sometime, when he doesn't make it through, he calls the house director or the therapeutic director. But they are often called without being disturbed – it a question of calling a third person – by a note put on their desk, by a letter, by addressing the issue during the meeting we have at the beginning of the evening; or he brings the issue forward at the staff weekly meeting*." (B. de Halleux, Préliminaires)

This presence and absence of the director constitutes a tension in the organization that supports the desiring position of the educators and at the same time lets them develop this position autonomously. In the everyday work, the therapeutic director tries to guarantee the possibility for this desire-based work. He also does so in the weekly meetings.

Collective practice: weekly meetings and "pratique à plusieurs"

As every intervenor's desire is unique, the collective is built on the responsibility of each intervenor in his practice. In meetings, each speaker is responsible for what he/she says.

> *"The clinical meetings are considered by each of us as the focal point of our work with the children. (…) The meeting produces an unquestionable effect. It is a place where everyone, whatever their position in the center, has to speak. But the words they say commit them in their position and their responsibility. Their words enrich the debate or stimulate a different point of view, they are "full" because they have the value of a motive for our clinical reflection, which, once the word is spoken, is transformed."* (B. de Halleux, QCAD)

Promoting full speech goes hand in hand with promoting creativity. Knowledge is built from the formulation of hypotheses, whereby each intervenor contributes without tacked expert knowledge. The point is to elaborate tailor-made analysis of what the resident brings, says D. Holvoet. The approach is the same at Antenne 110:

> *" During our clinical meetings, the logic and the structural markers of the children in question [l'enfant dont on parle] can be inferred little by little thanks to the subtlety and the diversity of our operations and also thanks to the employees' inventions."* (B. de Halleux, QCAD)

As knowledge is on the side of the residents, le Courtil organizes "clinical interviews" in which the child gives a testimony of his/her experience in the institution. This allows the team to elaborate a knowledge that is rooted in this testimony and to build a support that fits him/her.

Building from these collective elaborations, each intervenor will develop answers that are unique to them: « *This response [to the children] is unique to each person and each occasion. »* (B. De Halleux, QCAD). The Director's role is to fight against any identification that would make the intervenors develop the same answers. This work is not always easy: "*Yet in the community of an institution, it is not always easy to escape from phenomena of identification that play out between speakers*.". (B. de Halleux, QCAD).

This work of fighting against identification processes is difficult in day-to-day, mundane work. It is all the more difficult when extraordinary bad events happen.

Extraordinary events: preventing anxiety

As stated, the therapeutic director can *occasionally* give a hint about the strategy to follow. He does give the strategy when the team is overwhelmed by anxiety or stir that inhibits action. D. Holvoet reports that a youngster at Le Courtil tried to commit suicide several times.

This created a great turmoil in the team and some educators expressed the wish to send this youngster to the psychiatric hospital to avoid dealing with this anxiety-provoking situation. As stated earlier, collective anxieties lead to imaginary scenarios that block action or make the teams repeat bad decision. Furthermore, this leads to burnout and prevents staff members to creatively build upon lack.

So in extreme cases like this, when anxiety was invading the teams, the director chose to intervene in a sharp way. First, he fought against the illusion of self mastery of the team that had been seriously eroded and "*took upon [himself] that an accident could happen*" (D. Holvoet, interview). Fighting any imaginary representation of an all-powerful team of educators, he stated that:

> *"At the end of the day, we cannot totally prevent someone to terminate his life. We can't say that all means are possible to prevent someone to terminate his life. At one point, the decision belongs to the despaired subject."* (D. Holvoet, interview)

By saying that, he reintroduced lack, and lowered the responsibility of the team to a responsibility to do all they can, not a responsibility for the subject's decision. "*Of course, we have to protect him from it, of course we have to contain things etc*", he said, but he added that scapegoating this resident by sending him to the psychiatric hospital was in that case not the best solution : "*Saying "we don't take any responsibility for this, we send him to the hospital" is very accurate in some cases, but in other cases, it is only red herring* » and he added that it would be a repeat of a former mistake, which he wanted to avoid : if sent to the hospital, the youngster could commit suicide and Le Courtil would have a responsibility in "*what happens here […] So I went to them, to give them a speech… as peaceful as possible and at the same time very rough… to… while saying I take this upon me. To lower anxiety."*

At this time, the Director was very present to take upon him collective anxiety phenomena provoked by an extreme situation that roughly showed the absence of self-mastery of the team. He gave a therapeutic strategy that wasn't a red herring because of this anxiety. He was very present, in a way that involved his responsibility rather than blind authority.

Blind authority would have been to look for mistakes in the way the team had worked with this youngster. But this is not the way clinical deadlocks are handled at Le Courtil. As we develop below, deadlocks are rather seen as an opportunity to keep inventing new ways of working with the residents.

An experiment: inventing dispositives for each resident

In less anxious situations, as far as children and youngsters are concerned, there is also a great attention paid to their differences and to what is unique to each of them. The team aims to support each child or adolescent, according to their specificities.

> *"What we are trying to do is to help the child in developing what they are looking for, from a position that I would describe as* ***"not-everything", this undecided dimension*** *[…] it is about,* ***within the institution, setting up an institution per subject****. In other words, we are not for an adaptation of subjects to the institution that would be a kind of "model" of the world [outside], but we are rather here to adapt the institution to subjects so as to allow them to organize themselves in the world, from the starting point of an institution fitted to them."* (A. Stevens, A ciel ouvert).

This case by case approach drives the day-to-day support, but also the institutional dynamic. D. Holvoet mentions that among newcomers, some create such problems, put the support in such a deadlock, appear as such an enigma that they strive the team to move forward: "*The absolute singularity of each case makes us move forward*" (D. Holvoet, interview).

Concretely at an organizational level, a hosted youngster – Eric - has such difficulties that the dispositive of in town studios with a light social support is not adapted. He cannot either adapt to the collective accommodations that are offered. "*Building from this, we invented the "in town room" with collective meals but a relative autonomy in the room*" (D. Holvoet, interview). This youngster, who can't live on his own, and can't live in a collective, was a source of inspiration for a dispositive that could afterward be proposed to other residents. The team is thus working in a dynamic of permanent experimentation, which builds from clinical puzzles and deadlocks.

Conclusive discussion

The literature defines alternative organizations as the search for alternatives to capitalist and bureaucratic organizations, and towards shared power among an organization's members. However, the search for consensus-based decision-making is potentially "repressive" because

they can mask individual differences (Dorion, 2017). Experiences relying on the leaders' withdrawal showed that a detrimental dynamic might ensue: collective imaginary constructions appear, and impose even more powerful requirements for individuals (Picard & Islam, 2019). Phenomena of identification among sub-groups can end up in important conflicts (Lok & Willmott, 2014), and anxiety and scapegoating effects can be observed (Reedy et al, 2016; Picard & Islam, 2019).

We study institutions that prioritize the possibility for staff members to base their work on their own desire, in order to host children and adolescents in grave difficulties. Because of these psychic difficulties, it is important that a "*desiring atmosphere*" (D. Holvoet, interview) prevails in the institutions. Organization and management practices are thus developed to achieve this goal. Even if the aim is not to emancipate workers, but instead to work the best way possible with hosted children and youngsters, what is at stake is to build an organization where "*imaginary glue*" (D. Holvoet, interview) phenomena are avoided as well as identification processes that can be observed in "liberated companies".

The aim is to build an organization in which "*what fosters mobilization and collectives is desire*" (D. Holvoet, interview). Arnaud and Vidaillet (2018) call for future research on organizations that maintain and foster "desire for work" as opposed to dynamics relying on jouissance and on extracting employees' efforts towards an ideal. Based on our case studies, we outline here a few possible solutions to make that kind of organization happen.

First of all, participants mention their organizations are built around a "central void". This notion is difficult to understand, so we illustrate it through tensions in the relationship to Law and to knowledge.

In these organizations, one can find a Law, a symbolic order. But this symbolic order is « poked at » – it can be adapted, and it lets enough space for each intervenor to embody it according to his desire. For example, at meal times, one is careful about the glasses being in actual glass rather than plastic. Another will choose to conduct a workshop on green tagliatelles he particularly likes.

Similarly, the theoretical (Lacanian) corpus on which the interventions rely is extremely significant, but this theoretical corpus is not to be reduced to a method that would provide an answer to every situation. On the contrary, these organizations are permanent experimentations, a bet, a test of hypotheses that are to be implemented if fieldwork shows their accuracy. This

knowledge is thus “poked at”. In the recruitment process and in working with newcomers, the directors foster a permanent learning dynamic based on what the hosted children and youngsters let them know about their daily experience of the institution.

These organization attach the greatest value to day-to-day work, and great attention is paid to the residents’ sayings. Exchanges between staff members are organized around their social and pedagogical practice, and staff meetings deal with “cases” only, that is the clinic of each resident. Meetings are organized where these children and youngster testify to the team how they feel and live in the institution. Other meetings are organized where staff members exchange about what they have observed and what they have been said. In these meetings, “full” speech is encouraged, that is what is said is a commitment of each member of staff: empty speech is avoided as well as identification phenomena. Each intervenor focuses on her specific contribution.

These three elements – relationship to the Law, to knowledge, and priority given to clinic –, are carefully safeguarded by the directors. Their intervention does not consist primarily in enforcing rules or a doctrine, but rather in allowing a dialectic to subsist so that a “*desiring atmosphere*” (D. Holvoet, interview) can develop while respecting each individuality. This position is a position of responsibility rather than authority.

To make this obvious, two functions have been created: the “house director” and the “therapeutic director”. The “house director” handles the administrative and logistic questions and is the guarantor of a symbolic order. The “therapeutic director” does not lead therapies as one could think but is instead in charge of organizing exchanges between practitioners without identification processes nor collective imaginary constructions.

The distinction between these two roles is a first break in the authority: if there are two bosses, there is no all-powerful boss. The role of the therapeutic director is further divided between presence and absence: he is present, for example to release the team from anxiety phenomena, and absent because he is not present for day-to-day work, and can be referred to without being disturbed. For example, when two children fight, these children are told the director has been asked to intervene. He has, through a note put on his desk that does not require direct intervention.

These four elements – the relationship to law, and to knowledge as “poked at” or incomplete, the relationship to real work, and the presence-absence of management – are the first

dimensions that we interpret as characteristic of an organization that seeks to prioritize desire over jouissance. As for Dorion (2017) in feminist organizations, we notice dialectical tensions. In the organizations we study, these dialectical tensions pertain to the presence-absence of Law, to the relationship to knowledge, and to the ways in which management and clinical deadlocks allow to constitute a "central void" from which everyone's desire can express herself. As Jaumier (2016) observes in anarchist organizations, the relationship to law and authority is subverted – here by organizational choices – but a symbolic order does exist, with the possibility to subvert it, without developing collective *jouissance* identification phenomena that Picard and Islam observe in organizations in which the leadership claims he is absent (2019).

Reedy et al. (2016) and Picard and Islam (2019) also identify that autonomous work can lead to anxiety. For Reedy et al. this may be due to precarious material life, and Picard and Islam connect it more directly to the autonomy in work itself, when rules are absent. Research has shown that anxiety leads to deadlocks in action and wrong decisions (Pratt & Crosina, 2016; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984). When such collective anxiety grows in the organizations we study, the management intervenes sharply to lower anxiety and allow the staff members to re-establish a desire-led relationship to the residents. This is not meant not involve that the management will impose working methods nor an established knowledge that would deny the intervenors' experience and knowledge. In our future research, we will investigate these potential limits – whether (and how) management is responsible for having fruitful dialectics live through the teams is in a precarious equilibrium. Further fieldwork will help us elucidate whether the permanent experimentation dynamic that is claimed for stems from innovations promoted by the teams, and how this is experienced from the point of view of educators, other staff members, as well as resident children and teenagers.

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