
CONVERSATION ABOUT FERNAND DELIGNY AND THE ARACHNIAN

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ABSTRACT

I met Researcher Marlon Miguel in Paris, during my post-doctoral program. He is a Brazilian who researches the thinking of Fernand Deligny (1913---1996). We discussed the importance of this author for studies in education. And, we also observed that in Brazil there was not any or there was very little access to studies regarding his work. We conceived this interview as a trigger to some ideas of this author, still scarcely studied in the researches in Brazil. Currently, Marlon Miguel has been researching philosophy, art, education, clinical practice and anthropology as a FCT Researcher (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia) at the Center for Philosophy of Sciences of the University of Lisbon (CFCUL).

KEYWORDS: Deligny. Difference. Autism. Education.

RESUMO

Conheci o Pesquisador e Professor Marlon Miguel, em Paris, durante o meu pós-doutoramento. Um brasileiro pesquisador do pensamento de Fernand Deligny (1913-1996). Falávamos da importância deste autor para os estudos em educação. E, também comentávamos que no Brasil, não tínhamos ou pouco temos acesso aos estudos dele. Pensamos esta entrevista como um disparador de algumas ideias do autor, ainda pouco estudado nas pesquisas brasileiras. Atualmente, o Professor Marlon é pesquisador do FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia no Centro de Filosofia das Ciências da Universidade de Lisboa (CFCUL) e tem se dedicado com pesquisas entre a filosofia, a arte, a educação, a clínica e a antropologia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Deligny. Diferença. Autismo. Educação.

RESUMEN

Conocí al investigador y al profesor Marlon Miguel, en París, durante mi posdoctorado. Un brasileño que investiga el pensamiento de Fernand Deligny (1913-1996). Hablábamos de la importancia de este autor para los estudios en educación. Y, también comentábamos que, en Brasil, no teníamos o poco tenemos acceso a sus estudios. Pensamos esta entrevista como un disparador de algunas ideas del autor, todavía poco estudiado en las encuestas en Brasil. Actualmente, el Profesor Marlon, se ha dedicado con investigaciones entre la filosofía, el arte, la educación, la clínica y la antropología. El es investigador FCT (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia) en el Center for Philosophy of Sciences of the University of Lisbon (CFCUL).

PALAVRAS-CLAVE: Deligny. Diferencia. Autismo. Educación.

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While in Paris, one of these winters, I met the researcher Marlon Miguel, a Brazilian researching the work of French educator and thinker Fernand Deligny (1913-1996). In this meeting, we talked about the importance of this author for studies on the subject of education. We also observed that in Brazil, we have had little or hardly any access to his studies. We thought of this interview as a trigger for some ideas from the author, who is still little studied in the Brazilian research.

Marlon currently devotes himself to researches on philosophy, art, education, clinical practice and anthropology at Université Paris 8 and, since January 2020, at the Center for Philosophy of Sciences of the University of Lisbon (CFCUL) and is a former fellow of the Institute for Cultural Inquiry (ICI) in Berlin. We conceived this interview as a political and intellectual fighting force against the more conservative and reactionary forms, which often still invest autism with the identity of some kind of handicap.

In this interview, we approach the figure of Deligny, who liked to be referred to as a "writer and ethologist". He produced unclassifiable work, in the intersection of fields such as philosophy, education, art, cinema, and literature. His work is composed of drawings, photos, films, videos, poems, diaries, articles, books, letters, fragments of texts, interviews, and maps. He dedicated his life to working with deviant, autistic children and juvenile offenders, that provided him with an extract of an autistic life experience.

The interview consists of three parts: "Three lines of Deligny's work", "Writing", and "Education."

Part I: Three lines of Deligny's work

Sonia – Can you tell us how you came to know the thought of Fernand Deligny?

Marlon – I first got in touch with Deligny's thinking during my master's degree, more precisely when I was in a reading group that emerged in France in 2009. We had formed a self-generated group of activists and researchers called "Emancipation" after the Reform Project for the Universities' autonomy (LRU). We organized a meeting about Deligny at a time when we were addressing issues related to popular education in more detail. One participant, Flavie Lupi, who was doing her master's degree with Professor Bertrand Ogilvie³ of the University Paris 8, introduced Deligny to us. We discussed Deligny from the elements

³ Psychoanalyst, professor and researcher at the Philosophy Department - *Université Paris 8 Vincennes Saint-Denis*. He has written many texts about Deligny.

she brought and from movie excerpts, in particular from *Ce gamin, là*⁴. So, my first contact with Deligny was through images, the movies. It was really impressive to witness the relationship established with the autistic children. At that time, 2008-2009, his work, the work in the Cevennes region⁵, was still completely unknown. It was as if being mesmerized by Deligny through those images, and it wasn't until many years later that I really began to study his work seriously, to read the texts, to search for the few samples of critical bibliography that existed, and to study his thought. However, my first contact was through the images, especially through the film *Ce gamin, là*.

Sonia - How did Deligny's work become a topic of investigation in your doctoral dissertation entitled *À La marge et hors-champ: l'humain dans la pensée de Fernand Deligny?* (MIGUEL, 2016)

Marlon – I first developed a project on Deleuze, Guattari, Guimarães Rosa and more specifically on the concept of "minor language". But since I knew Deligny's work from the film *Ce gamin, là*, I was encouraged by my supervisor, Catherine Perret⁶, and by the research group of my *École doctorale* at Paris 8 (Ecole Doctorale Esthétique, Sciences et Technologies des Arts) to take on this author's work in the doctoral dissertation instead of working with the already well-known authors – or, unknown in France, such as the Brazilian writer Guimarães Rosa (1908-1967). Then I began to read, to explore his texts more, and I realized that it would be indeed the opportunity to work with this concept of "minor language" in a specific author. This thinker actually constructed a very particular language, one that generates some kind of breach in language.

Sônia – From what I have read in the introduction of your dissertation, it seems that the material in Deligny's archive was kind of dispersed. You write, at the beginning of your text, about the process of getting in touch with Deligny's material. It is important to tell us, researchers, how you have managed to get in touch with these archives. And, today, where is this material? Can you also talk about Deligny's archive and the relationship with the Cevennes group? Why is the archive labeled "Deligny", as if his thinking was at the center of it? The reason I ask you this is because we know that all of the Cevennes production is that of a group, is it not? This group, I would say, used to work and still works as a groupuscle⁷.

⁴ This movie from Fernand Deligny, directed by Renaud Victor, was first presented in 1976 at the movie theater *Saint-André-des-Arts*. The movie, a documentary, shows seven years of a real attempt to an intervention along with the autists. (DELIGNY, 2007)

⁵ A mountain region located in south-central France, covering part of the departments of *Gard*, *Lozère*, *Ardeche* and *Haute-Loire*. The region is home to the *Cevennes* National Park, founded in 1970.

⁶ Professor at *Université Paris 8 Vincennes Saint-Denis*. She investigates art, philosophy and aesthetics.

⁷ Guattari (1987).

So therefore, in the archive, there are materials and documents of a group experience, and not exclusively from this author. Can you tell us about the tension that goes on when we set the identity of the archive on what was happening in Cevennes only to Deligny?

Marlon – I first started reading Deligny, in fact, with the book *L'Arachnéen et autres textes*⁸. This is exactly the book that was published in Brazil (and USA) in 2015. I think it is actually a very difficult and complicated text to begin with, and it is not the best entry to this author. This book contains more conceptual texts from 1978-1980. In spite of being complicated and rather mysterious, considering the more practical aspect of Deligny's work – I was delighted with the texts in this book; they present a really strong and conceptual work, as well as a very well-defined thinking system. Afterwards, I bought the other available book, Fernand Deligny's *Œuvres*⁹. This book covers Deligny's entire body of work, starting from the first texts written in 1938 until almost his last text, written in 1993. It allowed me to have an overview of a substantial part of his works. Later, I had the opportunity to go to Cevennes. The initial goal of the trip was to finish the organization and the classification of Deligny's archive.

The first phase of the organization had already been completed by Jacques Allaire¹⁰, between 1998 and 2007, but this was done in a very superficial way. At that time, some unpublished texts were found and included in the *Œuvres* – which are, in fact, incomplete works. It is important to mention that much of what is in the *Œuvres* are texts that had already been published; there are only a few that had never been previously published. The really important editing work done by Sandra Alvarez de Toledo, from the *L'Arachnéen*¹¹ publishing house, took advantage of certain findings from this first organization. But it mainly consisted of an edition that, for the first time, made visible and connected the entirety of Deligny's work.

My task when I arrived in Cevennes, together with another Brazilian researcher, Noelle Resende¹², was to finish the organization of the materials. Our intention was to select the unpublished and already published texts, to find a method of classification, etc. The documents we could find in the archive were composed of many letters, of preparatory work for many texts, including different versions of texts and several unpublished full texts. Our task was then to finish the organization of this material and to send it to the *Institut*

⁸ Deligny (2008). *The Arachnean and Other Texts* (Univocal, 2015).

⁹ Deligny (2007). Several of these texts are available here, at the Encontro Internacional Fernand Deligny website: <https://deligny.jur.puc-rio.br/index.php/livros-e-publicacoes/>

¹⁰ President of the *Association Aires-Lien*, the association hosting the autistic children.

¹¹ *Éditions L'Arachnéen*, 109-111 rue des Dames. 75017 Paris, 01 45 22 13 77, Sandra Alvarez de Toledo e Anaïs Masson. Site : <http://www.editions-arachneen.fr/>. editions.arachneen@free.fr

¹² PhD in law from PUC-Rio with a doctoral dissertation on Deligny

Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC)¹³. The collected and organized documents are now available for public consultation in the institute.

Noelle and I arrived in Cevennes for the first time in September 2014 and we encountered an extensive number of archival documents, but in a completely chaotic state. Around thirty boxes had already been sent to IMEC, but there were around thirty more boxes left to organize. And there were not only texts: we also found drawings, pictures, photographs, maps and letters. There were many documents, some of which had remained untouched since Deligny's death in 1996. We went to Cevennes six times to organize the documents into archives and to try to find an internal logic for the organization of the texts. We decided on a chronological and thematic division. The archive that is now available at IMEC still requires further organization and the second phase of this project is happening at the moment. In partnership with another researcher, Marina Vidal Naquet¹⁴, I am finishing the final organization of this material, bringing together the two archival depositions¹⁵ that were made.

During the organization of these materials, we quickly realized that although it was Deligny who had written the texts, what was relevant was the possibility to apprehend, inside these texts, all the voices of those people who also lived in Cevennes. The texts and materials, which were produced over almost thirty years, are part of the lives of autistic children and other "close presences" (the caregivers). This is a crucial point in understanding Deligny's work and writing. There is a danger to put it all just under Deligny's name, but we had to bring all these voices together. We discovered this danger quickly when we were reading all the series of texts and documents where Deligny himself reported his concerns about it. In several texts, he expresses his worry regarding the unification of the voices and the production that was happening in Cevennes. I am speaking, particularly, about a text that was unpublished until very recently, and was first published here in Brazil in the journal 'Ao Largo', and also published in the second edition of the *Œuvres* in France at the end of 2017: *L'homme sans convictions* (The man without convictions¹⁶). In this text, Deligny rightly criticizes the name and the proper name in the signature of the work and the production of this extensive "arachnidan" material. This is a concern he expresses by saying that he is not

¹³ Institut de Mémoires de l'édition Contemporaine. Site : <http://www.imec-archives.com/>

¹⁴ PhD student in cinema at *Université Paris Nanterre*.

¹⁵ This second phase of the organization work at IMEC was completed in June 2018.

¹⁶ Revista Ao Largo, number 5: <https://www.maxwell.vrac.puc-rio.br/32086/32086.PDFXXvmi=GTCwRU6ad5fiJBspU3Zvbbh3Ca3k00nHU0fNVmxareshQWBL0AicMBgpMjKMj9tfaJ3772hzgLK7ImTJxdWLOdbBwWoR6T8gEbnLdGkur6DatxUrLRdB5pdDmCvswEKbQ9x5PiAhpdsTLomxgA9m1m1n0wQwcCl3LH8B0ITqWnkJMli4jrrkPslP1Amdc6gxOpAO9ug7TCRGkaLECdZsHliliiGWvNeuCE6rNBjVulNcGxZlBck4U4nDm5BTSPovu> (DELIGNY, 2017)

the representative of all these voices that make up the Network and, also, that he did not want them – the voices – to be absorbed according to or under the proper name "Deligny".

Sonia – He did not want to be a ‘major’ name.

Marlon – He did not want to become a major name, a sort of entity with a capital letter such as Justice, Democracy, Freedom, as he claims in this text, *The man without convictions*. But, in some way, the name "Deligny" should somehow fulfill this "common body" of people working in an "arachnid" operation.

He used to write every morning in Cevennes, in his small house. He was constantly in touch with several figures, not only the close presences, but also with editors, psychoanalysts, philosophers, sociologists, filmmakers and intellectuals of the time. Many of them talked to Deligny and they discussed his work with him. There are many different characters inside Deligny’s writing; in fact, they all play a crucial role. For example, Isaac Joseph¹⁷, who is a sociologist; later there is Jean-Michel Chaumont¹⁸, who is a philosopher; also there is one of his editors, Émile Copfermann¹⁹; all these people are talking and working directly with Deligny in the construction of the texts. They create, for example, the disposal of paragraphs of the texts; sometimes they edit his texts. They ask questions and raise problems, or challenge Deligny on certain points, in order for him to work on them. In sum, all of them – the close presences, the intellectuals and the different interlocutors – are crucial to the development of these materials and texts. They are as crucial as the author Deligny. So, I think that the institutionalization of the archives under the name “Deligny” comes from the fact that he is a true author with a very strong writing style. But one must always remember: he was completely contaminated by those figures who used to live around him and who inhabit his texts.

Some of his books managed to demonstrate this position very clearly. For example, the *Cahiers de l’immuable* and *Nous et l’innocent* (1975), but above all the three numbers of the *Cahiers de l’immuable* (1975-1976). They are a synthesis of several sources: texts by Deligny, but also by those called ‘neighbors’ or ‘passers-by’, as well as texts, maps, photos and diaries from the "close presences", or even from other people outside Cevennes, as militant psychoanalysts and philosophers. The *Cahiers* are a synthesis of what was happening in Cevennes. At that moment, there was a strong controversy concerning the authorship of the

¹⁷ He organized books such as *Nous et l’Innocent*, *Le croire et le craindre* and *Les cahiers de l’immuable*.

¹⁸ Researcher, philosopher and sociologist of the *Université Catholique de Louvain*, Belgium. He organized books such as *Les détours de l’agir ou le moindre geste*, *Traces d’être et bâtisse d’ombre*, *Singulière Ethnie et Traces d’I*.

¹⁹ Writer, literary critic and French publisher, who worked at Maspero and Hachette publishing houses, responsible for several Deligny’s books.

material. At the time the *Cahiers* was published, there was a conflict over this. The *Cahiers* was edited by Félix Guattari at the *Revue Recherches* and he wanted the name of Deligny stamped on the cover as the author. Deligny did not want his name to appear on the cover, but, in the end, his name was the one that appeared on it.

Sônia – So there was some kind of tension?

Marlon – There was already a tension that is very interesting. And it is obvious why they wanted Deligny's name on the cover. He already had an important trajectory, he was already a well-known figure and the publication would get more visibility and attention with his name on it. This conflict reveals the tension between the absorption of the 'collective' in Deligny's own name and the really collective production taking place in Cevennes.

Sônia – I think this tension is important, and I am speaking as a researcher who investigates Deligny's thinking. I find it important to always stress the "collective under the proper name of Deligny and the really collective production taking place in Cevennes". I see this as an element that should always be emphasized when we think about Deligny and the productions of the close presences or the passers-by, am I right?

Marlon – The question of authorship has to be problematized, take the maps as an example. No map was ever made by Deligny. The maps are traced by all those who lived there with him, and who still live in Cevennes – by the so-called "close presences". Not even the photographs and films were made by Deligny. If there is some sort of authorship by Deligny in these materials, it is rather because he is the "*dispositif* proposer"; and then, concerning the authorship of the texts, which are undoubtedly very rich and have a very strong style, we must also take into consideration that they are equally a work on and stemming from all these materials that are not produced by Deligny.

Sônia – Deligny's own production is a rhizome²⁰ operation; a rhizome operation such as the work in Cevennes cannot be centralized in just one person. This tension...

Marlon – ...is the network. Noelle and I have found an unpublished text, which would perhaps be for a fourth *Cahier de l'immuable*, which was never finished, and in which he accepts the "coincidence", the resonance between "network" and "rhizome" (*réseau* and *rhizome*). But there is an intellectual conflict between Deleuze & Guattari and Deligny that is far from simple. That is why we must be careful with these associations; we must be rigorous when considering the conceptual approaches that exist between these authors.

²⁰ See Deleuze and Guattari (1995). The word comes from botany. It is described as a horizontal stem, usually underground, whose roots spread and are on the surface.

Sônia – Well, going back to your doctoral dissertation. You broke down Deligny's work into three movements. Can you talk about them? How and why did you separate them?

Marlon – There are actually three parts in my doctoral dissertation – a more historical-socio-political part; a part about the practices in Cevennes; and a part on the philosophical thought of Deligny. Regarding the movements of Deligny's trajectory, I think that he himself recognized two great moments in his life, one that would be inside the institutional apparatus and another in which there is a movement towards the outside of the Institution. I see these two movements unfold in three very clear periods:

1. A first period that is rather institutional, in the sense that Deligny is working within the Institution and even within the main institutions of the State responsible for the problem of the "maladjusted childhood", as this group segment started to be called since 1943 during the Occupation of Vichy²¹, and with whom he had worked with since the late 1930s. This is the period, before war, when he works in schools – in special classes. Afterwards, he starts to work in a psychiatric asylum – The Armentières²², near Lille, where he works, particularly in the Pavilion 3, with children and youths considered 'maladjusted'. At the end of the war, he becomes the director of a "Center for Observation and Triage" (COT), which used to be the center for social reintegration. Young people were sent to the Centre, most of them with an offender background. They remained in this Center for a certain period, a few weeks, a few months, before a final decision by the court concerning their fate. In this period, Deligny has an undoubtably ambiguous relationship with the Institution. He is working directly inside the Institution, but he is always trying to somehow create breaches, to disrupt the inner functioning of these institutions – almost as if he wanted to boycott or sabotage them. He is, at this moment, very close to several questions, various problems posed by popular education or methods of modern pedagogy, in resonance with figures such as Célestin Freinet²³ (1886-1986). He wants kids to do activities outside the school. The same thing happens in the asylum: he wants to go out with the patients, to do activities with the young people outside the psychiatric spaces, to create workshops for sewing and handcraft. All this is happening in the 1940's, can you imagine that? It is the beginning of it all! It is similar to what was happening at the same time in Saint-Alban²⁴, who is the great pioneer institution for the institutional psychotherapy. He attempts to dismantle the traditional functioning of the asylum. But what is different about Deligny was that he did not want to make his work in the asylum a program, as was the case with Saint-Alban, whose

²¹ The Vichy regime took over the French government during World War II, from 1940 to 1944, during the occupation of Nazi Germany.

²² Armentières is a French commune in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region in the *Nord* Department.

²³ French Pedagogue and important reference of the modern pedagogy.

²⁴ French city located in the Department of Haute-Garonne, in the Occitan region, where there was a psychiatric hospital that can be considered the precursor of the institutional psychotherapy.

aim was to create experiments for a real and modern antipsychiatry program, for a institutional psychotherapy. In this period, he is very clear about his work in the asylum. His work is not part of a program; he makes "attempts".²⁵ Later, he will define these experiences as attempts of institutional "breaches", that is to say, of disrupting how the institution functioned at the time. For him, the attempt of institutional deconstruction could not become a model for a new type of institution. This positioning of Deligny's work will intensify later on, from a place outside of or 'marginal' to the Institution.

2. After the attempt at Lille's Center of Observation and of Triage, what I call the second period of his trajectory would begin, that of the La Grande Cordée network. "Cordée" relates to a mountaineering term designating the connection between several climbers by a rope. It is a network mainly made up by young offenders. Deligny and names such as Henri Wallon²⁶ (1879-1962) and Louis Le Guillant²⁷ (1900-1968) establish this network with the support of the French Communist Party. They were trying to find possibilities for young people to survive, to find again some pleasure in life and to do something with their lives. And La Grande Cordée itself has two moments. The first one, between 1948 and 1952/1953 has a more crystallized institutional form. They hang on services linked to the State, depend on French social security, receive social security money to be able to pay for internships with the adolescents. And there is a second moment, starting in 1953, when they lose all public benefits and have to leave Paris. They start a period *de facto* outside the Institution. They no longer have the benefits of the State and so they enter a sort of nomadic process. They travel through France, in a small group with the young offenders, organizing different forms of work, such as organizing film clubs and screenings, rebuilding and renovating houses, shooting films, raising goats, and producing milk, cheese, bread, etc. They are already getting close to what will happen later in Cevennes. The period of La Grande Cordée is that of a transition.

Already at this point Deligny has a suspicion regarding work – and in particular the whole work morality –, as well as the so-called "reintegration" institutions. Over the years, the La Grande Cordée network will progressively move away from the State.

The end of La Grande Cordée will mark the discontinuity of Deligny's work. After the shooting of *Le moindre geste* (1962-1965), Deligny goes to La Borde clinic and there he will meet the autistic boy who he started to call by the name of Janmari²⁸.

²⁵ *Tentative*, in French. This is a concept forged by Deligny to talk about his experimentations.

²⁶ Professor at *Collège de France*, materialist psychologist, doctor and author, among other publications, of *De l'acte à la pensée* (1942)

²⁷ French communist psychiatrist of childhood and youth.

²⁸ Jean-Marie Jonquet.

3. Tired from the work done at La Borde, he decides to leave and then begins the third and last great period of his trajectory. He settles in Cevennes, in 1967, for the attempt with the mute autistic children.

These are three periods in Deligny's trajectory that we were able to identify. And two movements: one, inside and another, towards the outside the Institution. It is in the third period, in Cevennes, outside the institution, that his production will be the object of an important intellectual and theoretical transformation; a new style will appear in his texts. And his contact with autism is crucial to this: the moment he meets Janmari or, or if we want to go back to the beginning of his concerns with language, right when he meets Yves, who is the main character in the first film, *Le moindre geste*.

But anyway, it is mainly his contact with Janmari that is determinant and that reveals a dilemma within the language, forcing him to look for a new type of language capable of taking into account, of acknowledging the experience of the muteness, the absence of language, the non-verbal experience. In a letter to François Truffaut²⁹ (1932-1984), Deligny says that Janmari was his real *maître à penser*. From 1967, there is a huge transformation in Deligny's texts, in their style. There are the texts that have been translated into Portuguese (and English), for example, the book *The Arachnean and Other Texts* (2015) and *Os vagabundos eficazes/ The efficient vagabonds* (2018), but also there are the previous texts from the early 70's. Anyway, in this book we can see this language functioning, we could call it a "minor language"; it is a very peculiar language, with aberrant syntactic and grammatical transformations, if compared to the standardized and official French.

Sonia – This one that you are referring to is not a periodization but experimentations that move different lines of Deligny's thought. Is the thinking through 'attempts' productive?

Marlon – Yes, sure! His experimentation is related to language, but, even more, it is also related to the Institution, and to all the encounters he will have throughout the three periods. I mean, we have to take the idea of encounter very seriously. His encounter with Janmari is very significant for his intellectual and theoretical production. It is the contact with this mute boy that is going to force a reorganization of his writings and thought.

But there is one thing I have said about Deligny's trajectory, about the inside and the outside of the Institution, which I would like to make clearer. His movement from inside towards outside is related to the French and European historical context at the time. Deligny was working inside the Institution, and he also believed that a different functioning of institutions was possible. What happens after 1943 (during fascist Vichy), after 1945 (the

²⁹ French filmmaker, known for being part of the *Nouvelle Vague* film movement. Deligny was an important collaborator of his film *400 blows*.

end of the war and the new division of power during the Liberation) and finally in 1948 (when the communists lose a lot of space in the division of power), will reorient his position. We must remember that in 1943 he is in the middle of Vichy's fascist government. It is during that time that all the major institutional reforms begin to take place regarding childhood and the so-called "maladjusted", and they will be further elaborated after the end of the war, in 1945 and starting from 1948. There is an important paradigm transformation when the concept of "maladjusted childhood" emerges. There is a transformation in the institutions that will increasingly start to work with rather an inclusive model and no longer with the exclusion model. However, the inclusion is conceived in an extremely violent way, as "efficient" recycle of labor. For Deligny, this restructuring is a form of operation that makes the work in the Institution unviable. One will force the inclusion of these "maladjusted ones" taking only into consideration their ability to produce effective results for society, that is, to produce good results in school, in work, in short, to produce a gentle and effective working class.

Therefore, the only thing that matters is the "efficacy" of these young people in a capitalist society. A deeper work concerning the "maladjustment, with their psychic and emotional suffering is not part of the project concerning their inclusion. And the combat led by figures like Deligny, Le Guillant, Wallon, the Communists, who were trying to associate problems related to maladjustment to a social critique, will be lost. This historical transformation will gradually push Deligny out of the Institution. The notion of 'efficacy', the intensification of liberal capitalism dictating institutional policies, is the major problem preventing him from working within the Institution.

Part II: Writing

Sônia – You started to talk about the language issue. About the language and the encounter with the autistic experience. This experience drives Deligny to change his writing process; and also to come across another process, another form of researching language. How does this language relate to what he calls "tracing"?

Marlon – When Deligny meets Janmari, in 1966, more precisely at the time he was at the La Borde clinic, he had never had such a close experience with autism. He had treated children with psychotic traces, but he had never had contact with such a severe degree of autism. Janmari is 12 years old at that moment, he is mute, has very strong and self-destructive stereotypies. This produces in him a sort of wonder; I think "wonder" would be the right word, for Deligny. This wonder will force him somehow to embrace the work with severe autism. And, obviously, this work could not be based on words, since verbal language is completely non-existent in this type of autism. That is the crucial point. For Janmari, verbal language is non-existent. Its use is not effective and it is even harmful to this type of autistic

child. So, I think this encounter with the autistic experience makes him want to pursue other tracks. At this point, he writes a very interesting text called "A non-verbal language", published in the *Cahiers de la Fgéri*³⁰.

However, the question is not simple. When it comes to language, there is an ambiguity in Deligny's texts. He always writes that autistic children do not have access to words, that they live in the vacancy of language. "Language" here means the word, the verb, the speech, what he wants to say is that these children are not inscribed in the discourse. He realizes that although they do not have access to speech, there are other forms of language that appear amongst them, such as tracing, for example. Autistic children trace. Janmari can spend days, weeks, months, tracing, indefinitely, the nearly identical circles. Therefore, there is some indication of what seems to be a language. There is in Deligny's writings this ambiguity, because often he firmly rejects the term "language." Sometimes, he seems to accept that there is some kind of language, at other times, he does not. However, tracing is certainly a type of language.

There are two important things: on one hand, he will develop a work, an observation on the tracing, on what kind of language it is, and what function this tracing has for autistic children. Then, on the other hand, he tries to search for some kind of writing that also incorporates this dimension. This is the reason why he writes so much. When we arrived at the archives in Cevennes, we found an absurd number of texts. He used to write and rewrite endlessly the same texts, with micro variations, or he would simply copy the same texts over again. His production is incessant, colossal, and we realize how he incorporates a little bit of this dimension of tracing. He writes for the sake of writing. He writes even without having something to say, he simply keeps writing, as if writing were a vital necessity. It is like the autistic individual who traces.

And that happens to the point where, as I said in the beginning, the interlocutors, the editors, become important since this huge production demands someone to come, step in and organize these writings in order for them to be published. Jean-Michel Chaumont, who worked on and edited some books by Deligny, told me exactly this, that Deligny wrote like an open tap, it was like water, a stream, that kept running, until someone would come and close it. There is something quite obsessive in the way he writes and that in some way is related to this writing-tracing.

I think the main point is that, when it comes to language and the critique of language, Deligny begins to mistrust progressively this language that is simply a vehicle for communication. As if there was some kind of incision or barrier between two subjects and

³⁰ Notebook published in 1968, see *Œuvres* (2007).

as if language, simply linked as information, did not allow the passage between these two (or more) subjects. Then, to be able to deal with the autistic experience, he has to start looking for other forms of language – that is, poetic language or a language that is capable of producing twists within language itself and this could help him, somehow, to transmit the experience of what it meant to live in Cevennes along with the autistic people. I can tell you an interesting anecdote here. It concerns the film *Ce gamin, là*, which was co-produced by Truffaut. The first montage of the film had no text; it did not have Deligny's off-voice. Truffaut asks Deligny to write a text that should be a narration and a sort of explanation of the film. The director wanted a "didactic" film about the Cevennes attempt. Deligny accepts only partially his recommendation. Instead of making an explanatory or narrative text, as Truffaut had wished for, he writes a poetic text, which, no doubt, has a connection with the images, however, without explaining them. That is to say that Deligny accepts the request to write the text, but, at the same time, he dodges it, in the sense that the text is not in the film to explain what is happening in the images.

I think this is what Deligny believes in, that only this other form of language can somehow convey what happens in the *aires de séjour*³¹. So, I think the investigation of his language has to do with a search for transmission of experience. Nevertheless, the place of transmission happens right where ordinary language breaks down.

Sônia – Let's keep talking about language and "another type of semiotics"... Deleuze and Guattari, especially in the book *A thousand plateaus* (1995), mention Deligny and the experience of creating the maps. In Guattari's book *Lignes de fuite* (1995), the concept of rhizomatic semiotics and the question of structuralism are explicit. Can you bring this concept into Deligny's work and the question of language?

Marlon – I think so. We can say that the writing Deligny has invented is part of another semiotics, which is not necessarily a semiotics of signification or even of information in *stricto sensu*. So, yes, the comparison between the notions is completely possible. First, it is important to understand how his writing was made based on other materials. As I said before, materials that are not created by him. It is a writing traversed by materials, which come, for example, if we were to use a philosophical vocabulary, from an 'outside'. It is a writing traversed by materials that are, first of all, the cartographies traced by the 'close presences'. But there are also the so-called 'journals of the customary', which are several journals that were brought to Deligny, and were written by the close presences in the different living areas; or also the photos, movies, images from the movies. That is to say, there are all these materials that are not his, but that become part of his writing and are the

³¹ "Living areas", the expression used by Deligny to designate the places where the autistic children live with the close presences.

basis for his reflection and writing. They are obviously absorbed and transformed according to his style, but this is what makes it a networked writing – I avoid using the word "rhizomatic" to safeguard the singularity of this practice and because of a certain tension that exists between Deligny and Deleuze-Guattari, but it is for sure a rhizomatic mode of writing.

In any case, it is a networked writing in the sense that it brings together and connects these different produced materials; and that this writing would not be possible without them, without the connections they have with one another. So, he is actually creating another semiotic. The maps are also an essential part. Maps are a way to present, to show, to *expose* – this is the word (*exposer*, in French) I have constantly used in my doctoral dissertation and it seems to me like a fair word. The maps aim at revealing these children's movements: the movements, the paths, the gestures, the attitudes, the displacements of these children in a territory. When I say to *expose*, I mean like setting up an exhibition, like displaying a painting; and the maps are not to be seen as representations. In the maps, there is a search for a semiotics that is not representative, because to represent a child as a subject is to put oneself in her/his position, it is speaking *for* her/him. That is exactly what he does not want; it is the central problem of language for Deligny. To represent means to assimilate or, in other words, to colonize the other, to speak for the other. The maps somehow try to display, to show, to express. We can use a variety of words, but only the ones that hold the idea of not trying to impute meaning or to interpret the movement of these children, their gestures, their attitudes – that is to say words that are not trying to signify what they are doing precisely because these children do not find themselves in a discursive register. If they – the autistic children – do not inhabit a world with words, if they are not structured by speech then they are not in a signifying register. The definition of 'gestures for nothing' (*gestes pour rien*) or 'paths for nothing' carries this important idea of 'for nothing' because autistic children are not, necessarily speaking, signifying. Or, in any case, they do not signify in the same way that speaking subjects do. So, the maps have the purpose of *exposing* without giving meaning, without interpretation. Deligny's writing will somehow attempt to mimize this "function" of the maps; it will also expose the attitudes, but without ever interpreting them – and here, undoubtedly, the observations of Deleuze and Guattari go precisely to the point: when it comes to Deligny, it is never a question of an interpretative language. There is nothing more distant from Deligny's language than interpretation. Therefore, we can enter another type of relationship with these productions: it is a constructive or constructivist relationship; not the interpretation of these gestures, these attitudes, these behaviors, these displacements, but their *presentation*, the attempt to make them visible and to do something *with* them. Therefore the maps of the close presences and Deligny's writing show how these children are interacting with the territory or with the 'milieu' – a very important word for Deligny. And from there, the question will

be about how to modify this 'milieu' so that it becomes possible to work with these kids. I think that this stand changes everything. We are no longer saying what we should do for the children, neither we are speaking for them. But we are observing how they interact with each other, with a certain "us", with a given territory. What can we do with them? Both the maps and the writings of Deligny try to incite an initiative to do something with them and in this way, in fact, we are not anymore in the register of representation, of communication, etc. I think that is the essential element concerning this other semiotic.

You had also asked me about structuralism. Deligny's relationship with structuralism is equally delicate and ambiguous. He has an important interlocution with Jacques Lacan, for example; he takes from Lacan several terms: "symbolic", "real" and others. But, mainly, symbolic and real. And particularly, he will think of his writings, this language as trying to create a 'real' – even if this is something impossible in a way and this is what the whole discussion is all about. When writing, it is impossible to get completely away from the symbolic, but perhaps it is possible to produce something that shows the 'real' – the real being that which cannot be assimilated, the 'unassimilable', the 'unassimilable thing', as Freud said. So Deligny's relationship with structuralism comes from Lacan and, on the other hand, with Claude Lévi-Strauss, who is the author he really reads and who was as one of his fundamental theoretical references; and then there is Louis Althusser who was also important to him and with whom he corresponds. The other reference authors would be Wallon, André Leroi-Gourhan (1911-1986)³² and, much later, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wallon, Lévi-Strauss and Leroi-Gourhan are actually the three main theoretical sources for Deligny. From structuralism, he imports an entire reflection on the *structure* which is as much the structure of a subject as it is the "other" structure ; he calls it "another structure," "another gravity," which is a non-significant, arachnidan structure.

Sônia – I am very curious about the idea of this other gravity. I understand that another gravity is no longer a structure for him, am I correct?

Marlon – I do not know. That is a good question.

Sonia – The writings of Deligny are not classified into genres or types of texts. His book *Essi & Copeaux* (2005) is comprised of aphorisms and fragments. I relate his form of writing to a style that is not structured by signifiers.

Marlon – This problem of the structuralism is an open debate. Open inside Deligny's own text. He is contradictory: he sometimes asserts that we never leave the symbolic structure

³² Ethnologist, archaeologist, historian, specialist in prehistory and author of, among others, *Le geste et la parole* (1964)

and that this is the whole drama of the subject – of the "subject-who-we-are", as he speaks of the "man-who-we-are." There would then be a total, absolute fissure between us, subjects of language, and these children who are not structured by language. In other texts, however, he states that this gap is sometimes overcome and that there is a kind of 'common body' that arises. The *common* is in fact the sharing, a common experience between these beings that are not structured by language and the other beings, 'us', structured by language.

There is an ambiguity in the texts of Deligny, they are contradictory, and it is as if he had not reached a conclusion, mainly because he does not want to reach any conclusion. What exists is what he calls, in some texts, a 'symbiosis' or a 'bi-polarity' (a two poles structure). Perhaps this is the great innovation in relation to structuralism and post-structuralism. In other words, we always remain structured beings (symbolically, socially, culturally, etc., etc.), but we are also, already and at the same time, always unstructured. There is always something that escapes this structure, something beyond it or beneath it – and the poetic writing is the great proof of that. The writing he creates means that there is something that breaks, that completely explodes the structures. I think this point is what I have absorbed from the more complex part of his theorizations and which brings something new to the whole debate on structuralism and post-structuralism. There is always the coexistence of a very strong structure with something that disrupts it.

Part III: Education

Sônia – Is there any other topic you would like to talk about? In this interview, you are leaving traces for us to follow in our researches... I feel like this conversation can encourage new perspectives for research.

Marlon: Maybe there is a topic I would be able to refine more deeply. It is regarding education. Deligny had been forgotten for a long time in the French context. He fell into a certain oblivion from the late '70s on. It is precisely the period of the majority of the theoretical and speculative texts. However, he continued to be studied in the education milieu, particularly in the special education milieu. And this is up until today... Here in France, Deligny is an important reference for special education, mainly because of his first texts, such as *Graine de crapule*³³ and *Les vagabonds efficaces*³⁴. He has become a reference in the most progressive and alternative education milieus, such as the Centre d'Entraînement aux Méthodes d'Éducation Active (CEMÉA), which are linked to all these

³³ Book published in 1945 and republished in the Œuvres. Also available here: <https://deligny.jur.puc-rio.br/index.php/livros-e-publicacoes/>

³⁴ *Idem*. Book that I translated into Portuguese and was published in 2018 by n-1.

practices of active, popular education and modern pedagogy. He really became a central reference there, for education, together with other well-known names such as Célestin Freinet, for example. Now he is being rediscovered by the arts, philosophy, anthropology, where he had been, for a long time, forgotten. Perhaps those who studied Deleuze and Guattari would be able to recall him as a reference, but Deligny had fallen into oblivion and only now he is being rediscovered.

In Brazil, Deligny was not a well-known author, not even in education. He brings reflections to education that are very stimulating and that are still present even in his later texts. Perhaps these texts bring reflections to education that are even more remarkable than the texts of the 1940s. Anyway, I do not know if they are more interesting, but, in any case, they are complementary to those earlier ones. It is curious that in France, currently, no one in education reads Deligny's later texts.

Deligny continues to reflect upon the clinical and educational experiences, as well as those in the different social institutions throughout all the three major periods of his trajectory. They continue to be central even to his late thinking. He keeps coming back to them, so the reflection upon education does not stop. Moreover, he gives a definition which I find very interesting, regarding the educator as a creator of circumstances. Finally, I think Deligny brings a very contemporary critique of education when it comes to its relationship to the idea of efficacy. How does the education system function when grounded on a concept of efficacy? Efficacy in producing good school results, in the social reintegration, in the students' capabilities and qualifications... Efficacy does not interest him. What interests him is to find the circumstances that are positive to the student, so that she/he can somehow develop her/his power, her/his own normativity, even if it does not coincide with the level of production requested by the school. There is, in Deligny, a thought that can be explored by teachers on how to create ways that allow the student to value her or his uniqueness. Thus, we get into another great word: *singularity*. The idea of singularity (or individuality) is very present in his thought, but it is a singularity that always depends on a certain milieu and a certain collectivity or 'common body'. Collectivity is a word that will, over the years, progressively disappear from his vocabulary and will be replaced by 'common'. In any case, singularity is valued inside a certain set of circumstances, because of how it is 'activated' by these circumstances, or even as to how it is a part of a certain common body, a certain collective. Unfortunately, nowadays, when one talks about the capabilities of the individual or the subject, what is emphasized is the possibilities of this individual *per se* as if he was an isolated being, and we forget that his activity is part of a broader collective. Here we have a point to be explored: it is important to state that the educator is not in the institution to regularize the learning, to normalize the student, to make her/him more effective, but the educator is there to value the singularity in relation to a possible common body.

The power of imagination, for example, so well elaborated by Deligny in the text *Les enfants ont des oreilles* (1949/2007), is always a power that could be explored between the educator and the 'child collective', never in a subject-subject relationship (educator-student). The great danger of imagination, says Deligny in this text, is for the student to begin to imagine his history alone, away from the collectivity.

So here it is this interesting reference for the education field, this beautiful text written in 1949, *Les enfant ont des oreilles*, which I wish someday we will be able to translate into Portuguese. This insistence on the capacity to create a sort of imaginary seems very valuable, but it only works if it is a collective imaginary. The question of collectivity is essential; it is what allows the power of this singularity; it is upon this tension between singularity and collectivity that an interesting pedagogical work can be done. Because, for Deligny, there is no singularity without a collectivity; the activation of this imagination, of this power of the singular imagination only exists through the collective which, in this case, is the 'child collective'. There is still so much here to talk about, anyway... We will save it for some other time, but there would still be Deligny's crucial relationship to the soviet thinking of Anton Makarenko (1888-1939)³⁵, in which there is no empowerment of the individual without their correlation with the collective, without their learning of a certain sensibility which is in fact collective and I think these are crucial points concerning education nowadays for us to elaborate on.

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³⁵ Russian pedagogue, author of, among others, *The pedagogical poem/ The road to life* (1933).

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