



# Fernand Deligny

## IN PRAISE OF ASYLUM

18.11.2023 – 14.04.2024

The exhibition presents the collective, experimental attempts undertaken by Fernand Deligny (Bergues 1913–Monoblet 1996) to enable ‘maladapted’ children to live a life that involved more than being diagnosed, locked up, or re-educated. For Deligny, writing—the asylum par excellence—served as the indispensable laboratory for his practice as an educator

CRAQ OCCITANIE

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DE LA IMATGE

Ajuntament de  
Barcelona



*Cornemuse's wandering lines at Le Serret, September, 1973,*  
65 x 50 cm. Map and overlaid layers drawn by Jacques Lin with  
charcoal, pencil and Indian ink. Photograph: Anaïs Masson.  
Archives: Gisèle Durand-Ruiz.

For Fernand Deligny (1913–1996), writing was a constant activity bound up with his very existence, and which served as a laboratory for his practice as an educator. Between the aphorisms of *Graine de crapule* (Scoundrel Seed, 1945), a pamphlet against the paternalism of ‘re-education’, and *L’Enfant de citadelle* (Child of the Citadel), the never-ending autobiography he was writing up until the end of his life, he published around twenty books. Deligny’s written work is inseparable from his ‘attempts’ to enable ‘maladaptive’ children and teenagers to live a life that involved more than being diagnosed, locked up, or re-educated. The early ‘attempts’ were carried out inside institutions, but they then moved *outside*, where they found the right conditions—and above all, the space—for the invention of new living environments and the production of shared understanding. Deligny was one of the first to question the boundaries between nature and culture, the human and the non-human.

In 1983, at the height of the debate on the closure of psychiatric hospitals, Deligny wrote *Éloge de l’asile* (In Praise of Asylum), taking the word in its original sense of ‘refuge’. The book makes a call for collective action: we must provide asylum.

## Room 1

One of the paradoxes of the 'Moral Order' Vichy government in France during the Second World War was that it replaced the repressive policy then in place for the care of delinquent children with a policy of education. Deligny's early actions took place within this context, but immediately manifested a distrust of the new government's philanthropic paternalism. In the aphorisms of *Graine de crapule*, addressed to educators 'minded to cultivate' these bad seeds, Deligny warns them against the very idea of re-education, against psycho-pedagogical methods, and against professionalism, suspicious that it is society that produces delinquency, only to then claim to want to redeem it. Advocating an 'anything goes' approach, a policy of play and experimentation at all costs, Deligny writes: 'There is no such thing as an educator. There is only activity.' He adopts the point of view of the child, in all its fragility and perversity.

Deligny's defence of the asylum runs along similar lines. He was of course aware of the 'great confinement'. But his own discovery of the asylum coincided with that of his vocation as a writer, and his taste for adventure. Between 1938 and 1943, while he was a teacher and then a social worker and educator at the Armentières asylum, north of Lille, the war raged on: wards were ripped apart by bombs, doctors were called up for service, and the hierarchy fell apart. Deligny took advantage of the situation to turn the asylum into a 'living environment': he abolished punishments, improvised workshops, organized soccer matches and outings, and turned the guards into educators. He was fired.

*I loved the asylum. Take the word as you will: I loved it, probably in the same way that other people love someone and decide to spend their lives with them. It was a vast, innumerable presence but one with a manifest unity—one single body.*

Fernand Deligny, *Le Croire et le Craindre*, 1978

In 1944, Deligny founded the first delinquency prevention centres in Lille. A year later, he took charge of the first *Centre d'Observation et de Triage* (COT), once again in Lille, the city where he had grown up: he made it an open facility, adopting the same approach as in Armentières. Again, he was fired. In 1947 he published *Les Vagabonds efficaces* (Helpful Wanderers), a chronicle of his COT experience, where he wrote: 'What we want for these kids is to teach them how to live, not how to die. To help them, not to love them.'

The puppets—made later, within the Cévennes network—watch us: they take the place of the children, of the helpful wanderers, of you or us.

*Constraint achieves nothing. Go ahead and constrain them until they can't move or speak and, with that hard-won result, you'll be on your way!*

*When you've spent thirty years of your life devising subtle psycho-paediatric, medical-psychological, psychoanalytic-paedotechnical methods, just before you retire, take a load of dynamite and blow a few blocks in a slum sky-high, and in one second you'll have achieved more than you did in thirty years.*

*When everything's running smoothly, then it's time to try something else.*

Fernand Deligny, *Graine de crapule*, 1945

## Room 2

In 1947, together with Huguette Dumoulin and members of the Communist Party, Deligny founded La Grande Cordée in Paris. He received teenagers—delinquents, those with personality disorders, psychotics—backstage at a theatre, and sent them on trial stays at youth hostels or with working-class families. His work was supported by popular education networks,

although he did not share their methods, and refused the role of a French Anton Makàrenko. Two years later, in financial difficulties, La Grande Cordée left Paris.

Deligny's interest in cinema dated back to his youth in Lille. In 1955, he published «La caméra outil pédagogique» (The Camera Pedagogical Instrument), in which he described his plan to give cameras to the teenagers of La Grande Cordée so that they could record 'what they see of the life they live'.

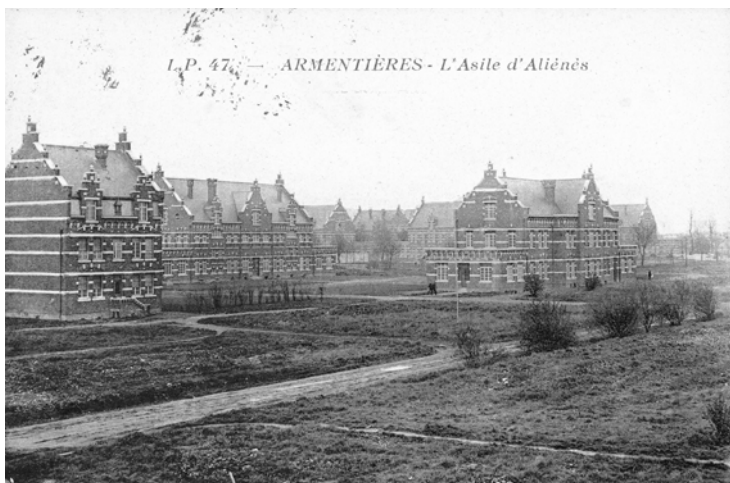
*We had to leave, and, I might say, took to the hills again, since we went to the Vercors. Seventeen socially maladjusted types, including some very special cases, left one fine evening on the night train with a big white tent, and that was it. [...] Our own little group settled much further down in the valley. They, bunches of them, stayed up there. There was no danger of our seeing each other. I was determined to write a novel that was to be published two years later. Their small team were going to organise a showing of Storm Over Asia in the tiniest village in the Vercors...*

Fernand Deligny, 'Le groupe et la demande:  
à propos de La Grande Cordée', 1967

The 'film in progress', he later wrote, was to be 'the collective conscience of La Grande Cordée'. Despite numerous attempts, the film came to nothing. He sought the help of François Truffaut—who had asked him for advice on the screenplay for *Les quatre cents coups* (The 400 Blows, 1959)—but the director's fame made him inaccessible.

When Yves Guignard joined La Grande Cordée in 1957, Deligny encouraged him to draw, and drew with him. This experiment marked his first reflections on the gap between what it means *to trace* (in the infinitive) and representation through drawing.

After a period at La Borde (1965–1967)—where he had been invited to work by Félix Guattari and Jean Oury—Deligny



The asylum of Armentières, 1930s. Old postcard. All rights reserved.

Yves Guignard, *Untitled*, February 6, 1958. Charcoal drawing, 23 x 30 cm. Archives: Caroline Deligny and Bruno de Coninck.





Yves Guignard in *Le Moindre geste*, a film by Fernand Deligny, José Manenti and Jean-Pierre Daniel, 1962-1965. Production: ISKRA.

On the set of *Le Moindre geste*, 1962-1965: Yves Guignard, José Manenti (hidden behind the camera), Guy Aubert, Fernand Deligny. Photograph and archives: Any Durand.



planned an animated film, which he mentioned to Truffaut in a letter. In 1967, he moved to Monoblet, to Guattari's property—known as 'Gourgas'—, which had been taken over by far-left militants before May '68. He kept to himself, along with Janmari—the twelve-year-old autistic child in his care—, Yves Guignard, and a group of young people none of whom had any qualifications, except for Jacques Lin, an electrician by training: Gisèle and Any Durand, Guy and Marie-Rose Aubert, and Michel Creusot. Together, they illustrated texts for the *Cahiers de la Fgéri* (*Fédération des groupes d'études et de recherches institutionnelles*, Federation of Study Groups and Institutional Research) in which Deligny described their search for a 'non-verbal language'. At the same time, he had begun to play a game: asking his acolytes to imagine their future and to draw their portraits and life trajectories on large sheets of paper. The way these drawings are created is reminiscent both of Yves's tracings, and of the *lignes d'erre* (wonder lines) that would emerge later.

### Room 3

In 1962, Huguette Dumoulin left La Grande Cordée. The association was no longer. The group, or what was left of it, moved to Thoiras in the Cévennes region. Deligny found himself at a loose end. He imagined a film in which Yves Guignard, a 'deeply retarded' twenty-five year old, would be the main character. The plot can be summed up in a few lines: Yves escapes from the asylum with Richard; while they're playing in a derelict sheep farm, Richard falls into a hole; Yves wanders the Cévennes hills, tries to get Richard out of his hole, then meets Any, the daughter of a quarryman, who, one thing leading to another, takes him back to the asylum.

The filming was improvised day by day around the Anduze area with no script, no production team, and no professionals involved. Josée Manenti filmed, Deligny directed Yves and set up the shots, Any Durand played the role of Any as well as writing the script, and Guy Aubert

was camera assistant. The camera, a 16mm Paillard, had no sound; every evening, on a tape recorder paid for—like the camera—by Josée Manenti, Deligny recorded Yves, asking him to recount the day's events. Filming ended in 1965, with the group's departure for La Borde.

After a few attempts at editing, the reels ended up in Marseille in the hands of Jean-Pierre Daniel, a young cameraman and popular education activist. Over a period of two years, without knowing anything about the filming conditions, he edited what became *Le Moindre geste*. With the help of Jean-Pierre Ruh and Aimé Agnel, he created a soundtrack to accompany Yves' monologue, which gradually desynchronizes from the image until it becomes completely autonomous. The mixing took place on the premises of SLON, the production company founded by Chris Marker, thanks to whom it was selected for Critics' Week at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1971.

*This film, Le Moindre geste, which they told me "had been listed by the Critics' Week Selection Committee and would be shown at Cannes", was very nearly left rolled up in those big white canisters that remind you of tin cans, as is so often the case with those 'abnormal' children whose fate unrolls in the places planned for them. And what can you do about it? [...]*

*That the 'deeply retarded' Yves escaped his fate, which was to remain in the only remaining place for those who remain retarded, and that this film did not remain forever as autistic as those abandoned objects rolled up in their tin cans—two sides of one and the same event.*

Fernand Deligny, 'Quand même il est des nôtres', 1971

*Le Moindre geste* was spotted by filmmakers and critics at *Cahiers du Cinéma* and screened alongside films by Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, before

disappearing until its rediscovery in the 1990s. Deligny published 'Quand même il est des nôtres' (Even So, He's One of Ours, 1971) in the magazine *Jeune Cinéma*, announcing a film project in which the protagonist would no longer be an individual, but a 'WE' asking itself 'how to be human towards severely psychotic children'. In an interview published in *La Nouvelle Critique* in 1973, filmmaker Jacques Rivette hailed *Le Moindre geste* as one of 'those films that incline toward the ritual, the ceremonial, the oratorio, the theatrical, the magical...'

## Room 4

Deligny's encounter with Janmari, a twelve-year-old autistic child, was decisive. His muteness, the agility of his gestures, his understanding of space, his continual search for the slightest trace of running water, his faultless memory, the enigma of his total lack of rapport with others, all confirmed Deligny's interest in 'non-verbal' behaviours, and he decided to deepen his research by taking in other autistic children, outside of any institutional framework. Thus began the 'Cévennes network'. Deligny would now live in the hamlet of Graniers, still in Monoblet, along with Any and Gisèle Durand and Janmari. Twenty-year-old Jacques Lin took charge of the first 'dwelling area', known as L'Île d'en bas (Down-There Island).

Françoise Dolto and Maud Mannoni, psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, and Émile Monnerot, a psychiatrist from Marseille, entrusted the first children to the network in 1969. A friend and dowser, Henri Cassanas, provided a water pump and tubs, and took some photographs. The images reveal the precariousness of the camp, crouched between low dry-stone walls and tumbledown shelters, along a stream that had almost run dry. The ground is strewn with everyday objects and 'handling objects' made by Jacques Lin. Janmari bustles around, 'as quick as a chimpanzee'—Deligny, in a letter to Truffaut—, or handles a small clay ball suspended from a wire. Cornemuse, suffering from a severely deformed spine, moves

slowly or stands still, never letting go of the club that Jacques Lin made for him. Deligny and Jacques Lin communicated via notes. The instructions were strict: 'the other' —the mute child—was not to 'be spoken'.

*The guerrilla war we have initiated obliges us to enter this area of resistance to EVERYTHING that might cause a presumedly insane child to be forced not only to stay insane but often to become so, / now, it is the 'effects of speech' that confine him. The morsels of plankton that 'those kids there' might feed on are rendered extremely few and far between / by the use of speech (which represents a certain 'order', a certain way of thinking that is foreign to them). / To say 'he' of a child without speech is to officially baptise him. / Life in our territories will only live up to its deepest raison d'être when / things are like this: / when there emerge signs of a mode of mutual understanding that are non-spoken.*

Note from Fernand Deligny to Jacques Lin,  
1 December 1969

The dwelling area was an asylum in which children were to be sheltered from speech. The aim was to find an alternative 'mode of mutual understanding' to speech, to mark the objects that the children perceived in their own way. A kind of 'museum-workshop'. The non-verbal language developed and soon took the form of the first maps, which Deligny suggested that Jacques Lin draw when the latter expressed his concern and inability to comprehend the children's behaviour.

## Room 5

Deligny's encounter with Janmari in 1966 involved an operation of reversal: rather than concentrating on what Janmari lacked, he suggested regarding Janmari's 'mode of being' as an opportunity to rethink our own, and to think about what

*we* lack; regarding his wandering and rocking as a different relationship to space and time; seeing his stereotypical movements as the beginnings of a choreography—what he calls ‘the adorned (*l’orné*)’—seeing his inopportune gestures as ‘actings’ refractory to any ‘doings’, and his silence as a kind of power. In order to bypass language, which according to Deligny only served to domesticate man, to subordinate him to the other and to lock him into the orbit of understanding, he suggested that the ‘nearby presences’—the adults in charge of the children—transcribe the children’s movements and gestures, their ‘wander lines’, as well as their own trajectories and gestures, onto large sheets of drawing paper and tracing paper. This practice, which served to describe the ‘customary’ of the ‘dwelling areas’, was soon extended to the entire network. It lasted for ten years, from 1969 to the end of the 1970s, and was accompanied by a specific vocabulary: words chosen by Deligny—who did not draw maps or move around the territories—from outside the language of psychiatry—from the lexicon of ethology, crafts, and navigation: *erre* (wander, animal tracks), *chevêtre* (joist), *repère* (mark, landmark), *simulacre* (simulacra), *orné* (adorned).

The map legends are based on the retrospective descriptions of those who drew them.

The photographs were taken by members of the network or, on rare occasions, by a visiting photojournalist, Thierry Boccon-Gibod. They depict the hillside dwelling area of Le Serret: a little world of shelters, rudimentary objects, instruments, and ritualised gestures; a ‘raft’ whose fragility and resistance stand in stark contrast to the great institutional ship upon which ‘questions’ constantly rain down—participation and consultation, according to Deligny, only serves to reproduces the institution—.

*You know how a raft is made: you have tree trunks bound together quite loosely, so that when a sheet of water hits, the water passes through the gaps between the trunks. [...] When questions hit, we don't close ranks—we don't*

*bind the trunks to make a tight, solid platform. Quite on the contrary. We retain only those elements of the project that bind us together. So you can see the primordial importance of bonds and of the mode of attachment, and that the very distance there may be between the trunks is also important. The bond must be loose enough, but without losing hold.*

Fernand Deligny, *Le Croire et le Craindre*, 1978

In 1975, Deligny published *Nous et l'Innocent* (The Innocent and Us), edited by a young philosopher, Isaac Joseph. At the heart of the book is a montage of photographs and handwritten captions that combine speculative thought and poetry. The last deals with the role of chance, staged in a 'performance': an old Cévennes sink leans against an oak tree that stands on one of Janmari's customary routes; from this oak hangs a bag containing a large wooden die with no numbers inscribed; as he walks around the tree, Janmari takes the die and throws it repeatedly into the sink... He would take a different route depending on the fictional 'result' of the roll of the die...

*the die*

*the die to decide*

*a lucky find*

*the marble*

*the zinc*

*the table*

*is a stone sink*

*placed at the foot of an oak*

*a roll of the die*

*and the choice is made*

*for that kid there*

*certified incurable*

*the choice between the things that are there*

*to do*

*nothing inscribed on this die  
which prompts us to ask what decides  
and what I said to myself, quite calmly, is  
that we will never know.*

Fernand Deligny, *Nous et l'Innocent*, 1975

## Room 6

Gisèle Durand was living in the hamlet of Graniers with her sister Any, Deligny, and Janmari when she began mapping at L'Île d'en bas. As the network developed, she would visit the dwelling areas and transcribe the movements and gestures of children and adults on the spot. For ten years she travelled by moped between the different territories, collecting maps to pass on to Deligny, whose ideas on 'tracing' she shared. She also provided 'retrospective' transcriptions, conceptualising the significance of an event or illustrating Deligny's texts, as in the three issues of *Cahiers de l'Immuable*, published in 1975 and 1976. Deligny called her the 'keeper of the maps'. He also commissioned her to illustrate his books, including the reprint of *Enfants ont des oreilles* (Children Have Ears, 1976), *Les Détours de l'agir ou le Moindre geste* (The Detours of Acting or the Slightest Gesture, 1979) and *Singulière ethnique* (Singular Tribe, 1980).

Drawing and painting became a regular, daily activity for Gisèle Durand-Ruiz—who now added the name of her mother, an exiled Spanish Republican, to her father's Protestant name—. Her painting practice began in the late 1970s, coinciding with the end of the maps. The paintings presented here explore two main registers: portraits—of Janmari, Deligny, and the autistic children, now adults—in which her experience of dance—as a professional flamenco dancer—is apparent—the expressivity of posture—; and houses with their facades removed—a technique borrowed from architectural drawings—, sometimes with their basements exposed.



## Room 7

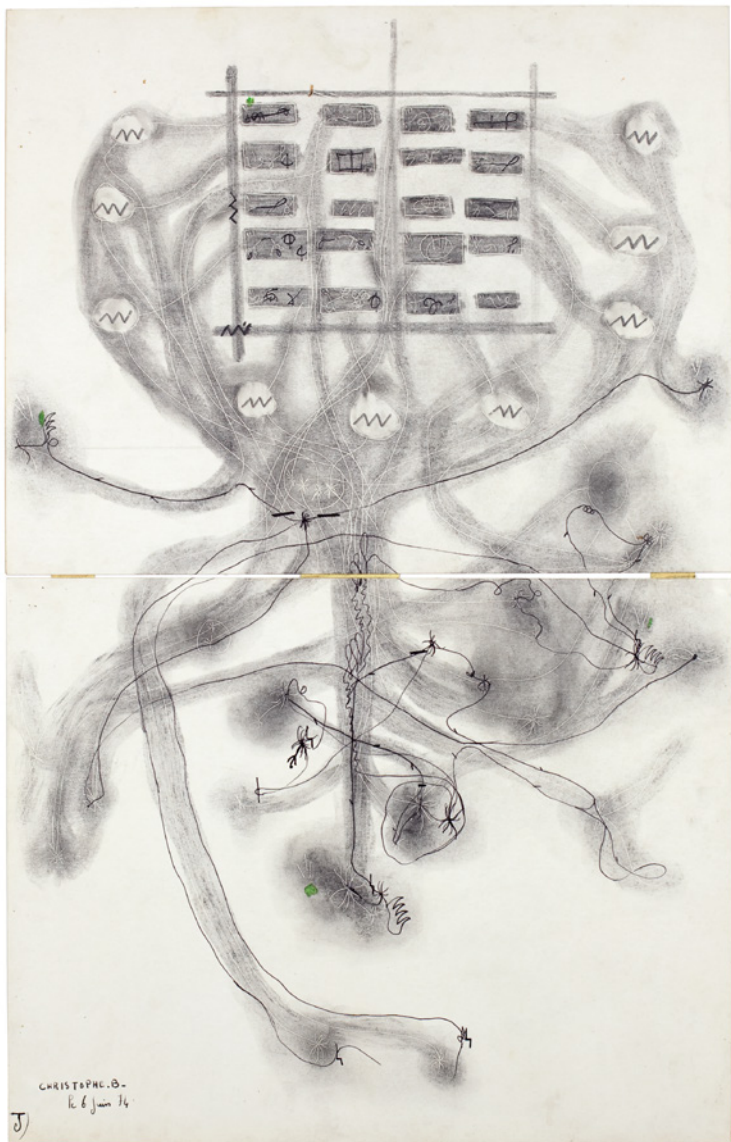
Dr. Itard's report on Victor de l'Aveyron, the 'wild child' discovered in 1797 when he was twelve years old, was republished in France in 1964. The report describes Itard's attempt to civilise the child, and his failure to do so. Deligny probably read it during his stay at the La Borde clinic, during which he met Janmari. As soon as he arrived in the Cévennes, he started planning to make a film about Janmari. At the same time, he mentioned the child to François Truffaut, who was preparing an adaptation of Itard's report.

*Madame SCHIFFMAN spent the day here yesterday and left me the script for L'ENFANT SAUVAGE, based on Itard's memoirs. And this is indeed the aim of the film: to render Itard's notes as faithfully as possible.*

*As for the Child himself... His attitudes, his reactions, his smallest gestures, are just like those of Jean-Marie J. who, with all his senses intact and acute, but without the power of speech, is something like a 'brother' to this Wild Child who had had no contact with others: their gestures are not the same as ours, their gestures speak another language, they are not complementary to words, this is clear, they are closer to those of a chimpanzee than to those of a child. It's not a matter of a deformation or a retardation: they are other because they are not driven by verbal thinking.*

Letter from Fernand Deligny to François Truffaut,  
22 November 1968

Truffaut's film *L'Enfant sauvage* (The Wild Child)—in which Truffaut himself plays Itard—was released in 1970. In a letter dated March 1972, Deligny wrote of Janmari: 'Ever since he was born he has existed "outside speech"—that speech, all-important in our world, which makes us its subjects from the outset. The question is whether we might not be its slaves.' Janmari may have been a similar case to Victor, but Deligny was



*Christophe's wandering lines at Le Serret, June 6, 1974,*  
63 x 40 cm. Charcoal and Indian ink map by Jean Lin.  
Photograph: Anaïs Masson. Archives: Gisèle Durand-Ruiz.



Gisèle Durand-Ruiz, *Janmari à la fontaine*, oil on canvas, 81 x 63 cm, 1983. Sandra Alvarez de Toledo Collection.

Gisèle Durand-Ruiz and Janmari in *Projet N*, 1979, directed by Alain Cazuc. Production: Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (INA).

not made in the image of Itard–Truffaut. Rather than teaching children to speak, to read, or to eat with a spoon, he wanted to learn from their silence, their way of finding their bearings in space, and their relationship to time and to the image. In trying to decipher Janmari’s movements, he found the analyses of ethologists—Konrad Lorenz in particular—far more useful than those of psychologists. Looking on as Janmari washed dishes and chopped wood, however, Deligny became worried about his inevitable ‘domestication’ and the boundary between ‘actings’ and ‘doings’. Renaud Victor, a self-taught filmmaker, joined the network at just the right moment: he directed *Ce gamin, là* (That Kid, There), which was produced by François Truffaut. During the editing process, embarrassed by the film’s erratic construction, Truffaut demanded that Deligny should appear onscreen and add a commentary. Refusing to give any straightforward explanation, Deligny instead delivered a poetic text with hermetic syntax and vocabulary, which he reads onscreen and in a voiceover. The enigma remained entirely intact.

Seeing these two films together, in terms of their content but also their formal construction, sheds new light on the current debate on the boundaries between nature and culture, the human and the non-human.

## Room 8

Between 1979 and 1983, Deligny published three books with Flammarion, in the ‘L’Échappée belle’ collection directed by his publisher friend Émile Copfermann: *Les Détours de l’agir ou le Moindre geste*, *Singulière ethnie*, and *Traces d’être et bâtisse d’ombre* (Traces of Being and Building Shadow). Together with *Les Enfants et le silence* (Children and Silence, 1980) and an essay entitled ‘L’Arachnéen’ (The Arachnean, 1983), these texts form the most theoretical part of his work. Quite a singular theory, though: the concepts he invents and manipulates—usually without giving any references—are borrowed

freely from philosophy, anthropology, ethology, and literature; his arguments are short, sometimes verging on the aphoristic, and are interspersed with anecdotes, either autobiographical or concerning life in the network.

*Arachnean: the word enchants me, and what a pity that on the surface of the planet we find no Arachnean islands—no islands and no mountain ranges. Apart from spiders, nothing else is Arachnean; sometimes perhaps there is a fleeting allusion to an architectural detail or a piece of embroidery, whereas it is obvious that there should exist a language that would be Arachnean, and an Arachnean people if not a civilization.*

Fernand Deligny, 'L'Arachnéen, 1983

*Singulière Ethnie* is an explicit response to anthropologist Pierre Clastres's *La Société contre l'État* (Society Against the State, 1974). Where Clastres sees the tyranny of power as a resurgence of the state of nature, Deligny rethinks the idea of *human nature* itself. Like Etienne de La Boétie in *Le Discours de la servitude volontaire* (Discourse on Voluntary Servitude, 1577), he questions when and for what reasons humans enslaved themselves to the ONE and to the state. To La Boétie's question, 'What could have happened to them, and when, for things to have turned bad—and, so to speak, for them to have turned on themselves?', Deligny answers, paraphrasing Jacques Lacan: 'the will of the other', something he associates with the 'consciousness of being' of which autistic people are fortunately deprived, and therefore with language and the social contract.

Deligny gave the network a language, a lexicon, along with the non-verbal language of the maps. Some of these maps—no longer traced but painted by Gisèle Durand-Ruiz—describe the tasks of the 'customary' as they are accomplished, smoothly and deliberately, by the adults and the group of autistic children in the 'dwelling area'. In 'L'Arachnéen', Deligny associates the

patterns of aboriginal painting with the ‘wander lines’, since both of them refer to a *common* space. Monoblet’s ‘singular tribe’ goes hand in hand with primitive communism, and the restless question of the WE enabled Deligny to circumvent the 1980s debates on ‘community’. After *Ce gamin, là*, the film *Projet N* (the *N* standing for NOUS, ‘WE’), directed by Alain Cazuc, who lived in the network, once again attempts to map the ‘common body’ of the network, and its continuing quest.

*For us, language is not like the sun, it never goes down*

Fernand Deligny, *Projet N*, 1979

## Room 9

In the 1970s, the network acquired Super 8 cameras, and later video cameras. The ‘nearby presences’—Jacques Lin, Alain Cazuc, Rose Marie Ursenbacher—filmed in the dwelling areas; Caroline Deligny—Deligny’s second daughter—used the small camera known as ‘La Paluche’, whose lens was held in the hand like a microphone. The sequences shot were intended to be shown to the parents of autistic children, or archived as diaries, in the style of experimental cinema. Jacques Lin, assisted by Janmari, produced short animated films using objects and puppets made by the ‘nearby presences’. To define this almost non-stop activity of filming but with no actual film project in sight, Deligny invented a new word, *camérer*, ‘camering’ instead of ‘filming’—thus shifting attention to the possibilities of the tool, the camera, rather than the finished object, the film. He penned several texts about *camering* before turning his attention to the image. For Deligny, an image is either a splinter—the snippet, the ‘scraps’ left on the cutting room floor—or, on the contrary, permanent. Or even belongs, as he wrote in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, to ‘the animal kingdom’. Deligny’s meditations on the image have informed a simultaneous montage of these film archives together with excerpts from the unedited rushes of *Le Moindre geste* and *Ce gamin, là*.

Deligny derived the principle of the infinitive (*to rock, to mark, to do* and *to act, to will*, etc.) from Janmari's 'out-of-subject' condition, which makes him an unassimilable individual, and which, in his drawing, takes the form of rings or ripples endlessly traced out on large sheets or in a notebook left at his disposal. From the 1980s onwards, Deligny began writing a dream autobiography, *L'Enfant de citadelle* (Child of the Citadel) by hand on A3 sheets. This endless manuscript, as he himself called it, was left unfinished after 6,000 pages and almost a hundred versions, most of which began with the same sentence: 'On November 7 of that year, the sun did not rise over Flanders'. This date is his seventh birthday, and is linked with the traumatic memory of some little monkeys which he saw locked in a cage that day at the Lille fair. Deligny, the artist whose medium is the asylum, has an alibi: he 'tells his wandering'; he is elsewhere, *outside*.

– *What is it that you do? Social rehabilitation?*

– *Well, you know... not really.*

– *You're a doctor.*

– *No.*

– *A priest?*

– *No.*

– *What, then?*

*It's the worst penalty a man can incur, to have no alibi.*

– *Are you an artist?*

– *That's more like it...*

– *In what medium?*

– *Asylums.*

– *What?*

– *In asylums... I tell my wandering.*

– *How?*

– *I write books...*

– *Ah! I see...*

*Alibi or raison d'être, it's basically the same thing.*

*Everyone has to have an alibi.*

Fernand Deligny, letter to Jean-Michel Chaumont,  
February 1983





Janmari, drawn with black marker, 2000-2001.

Reproduced in *Journal de Janmari*, published by L'Arachnéen, 2013.

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Text by Sandra Alvarez de Toledo

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