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Author(s):Pieter Verstraete (submitting/presenting), Jan Masschelein (presenting)

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Session Information

13 SES 03 A, Education and the Presence of the Other

Paper Session

Time:2009-09-28
14:00-15:30

Room:HG, HS 41

Chair:Sharon Todd

Contribution

Educational asylums: Fernand Deligny's rethinking of asylum as/while living in the presence of others

In this lecture we would like to explore some of the writings and educational attempts of a rather unknown French educator: Fernand Deligny (1913-1996).* From the ?30 of the twentieth century on Deligny found himself in the presence of marginal and childlike figures like the feebleminded or backward child, the young delinquent or psychiatric patient and the autistic adolescent. Breaking with the commonplace educational ideas and psychological convictions of that time Deligny sought to establish a different educational approach towards those who continuously fell outside the normal and accepted development of childhood. One of the things Deligny during his entire life would remain extremely critical towards was the (discursive) reality of the (psychiatric) asylum. Unlike authors like Erving Goffman and Thomas Szasz, however, Deligny would not link his critical attitude to a radical plea for deinstitutionalization of the so-called ?total institutions?. On the contrary, in several interviews, essays and diary notes Deligny precisely presented his educational initiatives as ?asylums?. Rather than caring for the other ? which was the central focus of most of the psychological and pedagogical projects of that time ? Deligny emphasized the importance of a bare living in the presence of feebleminded children in e.g. a huge psychiatric hospital or in the presence of a handful of autistic children in an inhospitable region of France. This being in the presence of others was seen by Deligny as a major antidote against the manifold processes of assimilation embodied by both psychology and educational sciences. It is precisely this intriguing association between on the one hand Deligny?s rethinking of the asylum ? with reference to its Greek origin as being a place of refuge ? and on the other hand the recurrent theme of ?living in the presence of? in Deligny?s work that we would like to present as e-ducational

asylums: spaces where one can find refuge from the ideologies of childhood, where one can live and let live infinitively ? as Deligny phrased it time and again ? and where one can approach the other in a different way.

Method

Essays, interviews, books and articles by Fernand Deligny.

Expected Outcomes

Taking Deligny?s critique as a starting point we especially will focus on Deligny?s later educational initiatives with autistic children in the ?60 and ?70. By means of these projects we will show how Deligny (1) explicitly sought to link the idea of a «relation asilaire» and the ?living in the presence of? ?abnormal? children, (2) how he did this in such a way that it could not lead to any kind of formal institutionalization and (3) how his experimental ethos brought him to develop an ?art of (the) asylum?, ?un art d?asile?.

References

*Alvarez de Toledo, Sandra (Ed.) (2007). Fernand Deligny. Oeuvres. Paris: L?Arachnéen.

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Author Information

Pieter Verstraete (submitting/presenting)

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

Educational Sciences

Leuven, Belgium

Jan Masschelein

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven - BE0419.052.073

Educational Sciences, Centre for Philosophy of Education

Leuven, Belgium