


Research article

The cinematographic community: Fernand Deligny's 'tentatives' and radical film education

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Submission date: 27 April 2023; Acceptance date: 19 March 2024; Publication date: 12 December 2024

How to cite

 Comanducci, C. (2024) 'The cinematographic community: Fernand Deligny's 'tentatives' and radical film education'. *Film Education Journal*, 7 (2), 68–79. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/FEJ.07.2.01>.

Peer review

This article has been peer-reviewed through the journal's standard double-anonymous peer-review process, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

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Open access

Film Education Journal is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

Abstract

Fernand Deligny's experiments with film in the context of social work and therapeutic communities since the 1950s are part of what Marlon Miguel calls 'semi hidden histories', whose study is broadening the landscape of film theory and film education. Located at the margins of institutional forms of teaching and care, the 'tentatives' organised by Deligny involved a participatory use of the camera, the idea of film and film-making as an egalitarian and heterotopian space, and rested on the formation of radically inclusive communities. This article focuses on the proximity Deligny saw between cinema and that 'common body', made of contingent events and impersonal gestures, which for him constituted the common ground of the human. Inspired by the principles of *éducation nouvelle*, by his life with non-speaking autistic children, and taking shape through a collaboration with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Deligny's work placed itself within an alternative vision of education, beyond the pedagogical model later criticised by Jacques Rancière, which understands it not as a series of techniques for the transmission of knowledge, but rather as a fundamental dimension of collective life.

Keywords Fernand Deligny; participatory film-making; Jacques Rancière; rhizome; film education

Cinema and the common body

In 1968, Fernand Deligny moved into the hamlet of Graniers in the Cévennes hills to live with a small group of friends, associates and nonspeaking autistic children who had been deemed 'gravely psychotic, uneducable and incurable' (Deligny, 2007e: 691). This experience – or, in Deligny's own terms, this attempt (in French: *tentative*) – would become the main catalyst and centre of his work, connecting radical education and non-psychiatric forms of care with poststructuralist philosophy (see Marshall, 2004) and participatory film-making in ways that, I contend, allow us to reimagine, against their current spectacular separation, a continuity between cinema and common life, and, in turn, to recognise this continuity as central to critical film education.

Deligny had trained as an educator and social worker during the late 1930s and early 1940s, reorganising the Armentières psychiatric hospital on an egalitarian basis, forbidding all forms of punishment that were practised in the asylum, and organising a weaving workshop, football matches and outings to the city, in order to remove the barriers that separated the inmates and the caregivers (Perret, 2021). In this, he was inspired by the work of Louis Le Guillant and of Henri Wallon:

Associating Wallon's favourite formula ('occasion makes a thief') and the poetical appeal of chance, Deligny takes circumstances as his principle, against the logical tie of cause and effect. He defines the educator as a 'creator of circumstances', ready to meet the 'un-known' from which new configurations are born. (de Toledo, 2007a: 22, my translation)

Deligny gave Wallon's conception of the milieu (see Wallon, 1945) a further anti-authoritarian and anarchist twist (Deligny, 2007g; see also Perret, 2021), which, retrospectively, would place him closer to the anti-psychiatric movement and situationism, despite his criticism of the former and his relative distance from the French *gauchistes* movements of the 1960s and 1970s (see Deligny, 2007b).

Life in close proximity (*vie en présence proche* – Deligny, 2007e) was the concrete ground and the methodological and ethico-political linchpin of Deligny's practices. He thought that his and his helpers' interactions with nonspeaking autistic young people, for instance, were not of the order of therapy: the idea of cure as a vertical relation of care between the sane and the insane was replaced by a horizontal analysis and transformation of the interactions that took place in the context of shared life (Deligny, 2007e).

Deligny understood that the severe forms of psychosis and autism he encountered resulted in an exclusion from the sphere of language – a sphere that, especially given the influence of structuralism at the time, and of certain readings of Jacques Lacan, was considered foundational in the construction of human subjectivity and social life. The children he was living with were not simply silent, then: they were something other than 'speaking subjects', but Deligny did not, for this, consider them as any less human. The question, from his perspective, was not how to make the children talk or have them engage with the world as it is constructed by and through language, something which they were largely incapable of and that clearly caused them pain, but how to make the speaking beings around autistic children more like what these children were already capable of perceiving and responding to, albeit in a modality that was radically different from the verbal (see Miguel, 2022). For example: since Janmari, one of the members of the community in Graniers, did not communicate, and often did not seem even to see people around him, but was fascinated by water sources and streams, Deligny and his collaborators thought they should learn, as they phrased it poetically in the film *Le Moindre geste* (France 1971), how to become themselves more like water.

In this attempt at radical listening and 'gestural philosophy' (Guerra-Miranda, 2024: 19–20), taking place not in an institution or on the therapist's couch, but in the concrete folds of the everyday, Deligny experimented with an extreme and paradigmatic educational situation, which suspended those aspects of pedagogical and therapeutic relations that depend upon and can support relations of power, and, with this radical confrontation with language, placed itself at the limits of the Western medical and philosophical epistemologies of the time.

In the community, children followed freely the other people living with them as they went about chopping wood, milking goats and baking bread, finding in these customary and life-sustaining activities some points of reference and occasions for contact. In this way, after a few years in the milieu, Janmari became the community's waterfinder, began helping out with the necessary work, and even helped to introduce other autistic people in the hamlet (Deligny, 2007e).

The paths that autistic children took wandering around the village, following unknown pursuits and rituals, were understood as significant traces, and were recorded on maps that Deligny, Jacques Lin, Gisèle Durand and other companions kept and discussed, not in order to fix and explain these movements in a disciplinary mode, but because, as Deligny argued, in the tracing itself (the children's as well as the adults'), one could be surprised to find something other than what was intended or expected (Deligny, 2007c, 2007d, 2007f).

We find in these maps the fundamental praxis, the central element of an 'experimental attitude' (Perret, 2021: 102), which would also lead Deligny to foreground the performative dimension of cinema. To shift from the traced to the tracing (Perret, 2021) is to suspend the centrality of the film as work of art and bearer of meaning, and to refocus on the potentiality that the gestures and the situations of film-making have in themselves, regardless of their goal. In the map-drawing in Graniers, the slightest unexpected gesture that appeared in the texture of ordinary life was read not as a personal symptom, but as an expression of the whole milieu, a sign made by a common body. This commonality names a level of interaction and contingent experience shared by people who live in close proximity, regardless of whether or not they are capable of language, and whether or not they can act as psychological 'persons' (Deligny, 2007e). Gestures, Deligny suggests, arise from a subtle interpersonal (in fact, impersonal) field that is made of routines and landmarks traversed by chance encounters and wander lines (*lignes d'erre*) (Deligny, 2007e).

This was not, for Deligny, a zone of despair and muteness that appeared only as a consequence of the ruin of language, nor was it a direct expression of a biological and, in this sense, 'prediscursive' behaviour, but a universal and primal 'autistic' dimension of human experience that everybody, autistic or not, partakes in (see Wiame, 2016).

It is in the context of this wrestling with the very fact of language together with autistic children – its presence and absence as performative act, its force of inclusion and exclusion, of humanisation and dehumanisation – that Deligny thinks about film-making, adopting it not as a technique for documenting therapeutic action, telling stories, producing 'art', or affirming one's self, but as a way of addressing the common body (see Miguel, 2022; Perret, 2018, 2021). The film image itself shares with autistic experience the same quality of being impersonal and radically embedded in the web of contingencies that, for Deligny, constitutes the human (see Deligny, 2015).

Film-making as a place: heterotopia and film education

In the period before and during Graniers, Deligny became acquainted with film-making through a variety of encounters. François Truffaut sought Deligny's counsel in preparing *Les 400 coups* after reading his book about his work with 'temperamental children', *Les Vagabonds efficaces* (Deligny, 2007g), and later gave his advice on the rushes of *Le Moindre geste*, the first of the three completed film projects that Deligny was part of. Chris Marker, whom Deligny had met at *Travail et Culture* in 1955, founded the cooperative SLON to finance the film, and also maintained a correspondence with Deligny during its conception, shooting, editing and distribution (see de Toledo, 2007d). Josée Manenti of the La Borde clinic, where Félix Guattari worked and Deligny had spent some time, was behind the camera; Guy Aubert and Deligny himself helped out and recorded the sound; and Jean-Pierre Daniel eventually took care of the editing (de Toledo, 2007d).

The second film production in which Deligny was involved, *Ce gamin, là* (France 1976), was shot by Renaud Victor, who had become a film-maker as part of the 'tentative' in Graniers (de Toledo, 2007b). The

film was co-produced by the INA (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel) and five other backers (de Toledo, 2007b), and closely supervised by Truffaut, who insisted on severe cuts to Deligny's preferred four- or five-hour version, and on a voice-over commentary, which Deligny wrote as a poetic rather than an explanatory text (de Toledo, 2007b). Both films had a commercial release (*Ce gamin, là* in 1976, and *Le Moindre geste* only in 2004, after a projection at the Cannes Film Festival in 1971), and they received significant attention from film critics and from the field of psychotherapy.

Le Moindre geste and *Ce gamin, là* have a place, in counterpoint, between the anti-psychiatric films of the 1960s in the UK (see Snelson, 2021) and the 'Basaglian' documentaries of the 1970s in Italy, such as *Matti da slegare* (1975) and *Fortezze vuote* (1975), on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the French experiments in participatory cinema directed by Jean Rouch, such as *Un été* (1960) and *La Pyramide humaine* (1961). While having elements of both, Deligny's films were neither documentaries about the therapeutic communities, nor a kind of collective storytelling like Rouch's ethnofictions.

Unlike the anti-psychiatric documentaries, in particular, *Le Moindre geste* and *Ce gamin, là* arose from a direct and long-lasting engagement, both professional and personal, with the lives of formerly institutionalised children. Deligny always opposed filming the 'tentatives' from the outside, so to speak, and only worked with film-makers who were, or became, part of the community in Graniers – Josée Manenti for *Le Moindre geste*, Renaud Victor for *Ce gamin, là*, and Alain Cazuc for a later INA production for television, *Projet N* (1978). While *Le Moindre geste* had a scenario, functioning as a *canovaccio* over which the 'incurable' Yves G. improvised (see de Toledo, 2007b), *Ce gamin, là* was shot over hours of daily observation for a period of 18 months. In this context, the camera was used, like the maps, as an experimental tool (see Perret, 2021) within a therapeutic as well as a cinematographic observational practice.

There are already significant studies of these two films (Comolli, 2006; Daniel, 2012; Hermann, 2012; Miguel, 2014; Perret, 2018, 2021; Vidal-Naquet, 2023; Witt, 2022) and, without downplaying the documentary value of the recordings produced within Deligny's 'tentatives', or the interest of the films themselves for a discussion of the relations between cinema and gesture, my intention here is to focus on the ideas of community and education, and on the habitual presence of the camera behind their making.

In the 1950s Deligny had already used, and later theorised, the camera as a pedagogical tool as part of the activities of La Grande Cordée. The Cordée (French for a roped climbing party) was a semi-formal network for assisting young adults in difficulty, organised in collaboration with the French Communist Party, and run according to Wallonian principles in the context of the politics of *éducation nouvelle*. Deligny's 'tentative' was to offer the young a new milieu, trying to find for them a working and living situation that was supportive of the capacities they wished to develop for themselves, but it did so without forcing or confining them to the 'circuits of mandatory "insertion"' (Perret, 2021: 270; also see Miguel, 2017). As Deirdre O'Neill (2018: 33) has argued in relation to her practice of film education in and around prisons, film as a radical pedagogical tool 'is concerned with education, not in the conventional model of knowledge transmission and acquisition but as a reaction to our environment'. In a similar way, Deligny saw and used the camera not so much as an instrument to make films, but as a 'tool that mediates collective relationships' (Miguel, 2022: 22).

At this stage, Deligny imagined a permanent documentary production (see de Toledo, 2007c), where an assistant director would be present in every local residency ('*séjour d'essai local*') hosting the children of the Cordée, and then referring to the centre of the initiative in Salzuit for the realisation of a film in which all members would participate (see Perret, 2021). While the whole network that would have been necessary to actually produce a film as part of the experiences of the Cordée was never put in place, the project of making films was used as a means of federating the dispersive experience of the residencies (see de Toledo, 2007c). The camera therefore worked as an instrument for establishing a community, as well as to help turn a place of work and 'rehabilitation' into a freer stage for reimagining one's life (see Perret, 2021).

Deligny wrote about this in the essay 'La Caméra outil pédagogique', published in 1955 in *Vers L'Éducation nouvelle*. In this text, three ideas motivated the use of cinema as part of the educational project of the Cordée. First, film was understood as a more manageable and more direct form of expression for young people who, in many cases, had not mastered the written word (Deligny, 2007a). Second, Deligny stressed the importance of taking into their own hands a medium whose experience was almost always one of reverent passivity. Cinema gives the illusion of a reality that exists independently from those who experience it, Deligny (2007a) wrote, thus negating, by way of our very separation from the film, any sense of our participation in the construction of the reality we inhabit. By playing at making a film, then, the children can enter, so to speak, the backstage of the spectacle (Deligny, 2007a), and thus reappropriate cinema and the image by deconstructing and demythologising their power. Third, and more concretely, Deligny described how the camera was to be left in full view inside the spaces of the residences, as a tool that anyone could take at any moment (Deligny, 2007a). This availability was understood both as a gesture of trust and respect towards the young people (nothing prevented them from stealing the rather expensive equipment), and as the basis of a collective and non-hierarchical documentary practice:

The idea of entrusting a camera to temperamental teenagers was extravagant at a time when cinema at best offered itself as an educational spectacle, and when film-making equipment was not considered as a 'toy' to be left in inexperienced hands. (de Toledo, 2007c: 397, my translation)

The main element of Deligny's use of the camera is, in this sense, the experience of potentiality that can be communicated through it, against the constraining actuality and the imperatives that define the 'real world': anyone *can* use it, to register or stage something that *could* happen, working towards a film, or rather a life, which, eventually, *may* take place.

In the same article, Deligny described how, in summer 1954, he, Huguette Dumoulin and Josée Manenti joined 15 members of La Cordée (aged between 13 and 18 years old) in the Vercors for a film project on the traces of the Maquis (Deligny, 2007a). The attempt was funded by the adolescents themselves, through farming and organising projections of Pudovkin's and Renoir's films on the walls of barns in the region (de Toledo, 2007c). The original plan was to have former members of the resistance retell and stage for the camera their memories of the occupation (also see Perret, 2021). The experience itself became a sort of *mise en abîme* or performative re-enactment of the gesture of resistance (see Deligny, 2007a). The participants took to the woods to escape, at least for a while, a world that was hostile to them, to regroup, and to invent another life (Deligny, 2007a). Even if no film was edited after what was shot, the intended film still worked as a vector of relational connections ('vecteur de lien') (Perret, 2021: 191). Participatory film-making was thus mobilised by Deligny first of all as a way to change the gaze that the participants cast upon the world, and the one that the world saw them through (Deligny, 2022).

The use of the camera is not framed as a productive activity, an artistic accomplishment, or even as a series of gestures oriented towards and defined by a goal, but as a matter of the playful and transformative effect that the film-making situation can have on the life of those involved in it (see Odin, 2008). The film-making 'tentative' restages the gestures of everyday life in such a way that they lose some of their fixedness and actuality and become, instead, open and potential. The camera thus helps reinvent the possible by destituting (see Agamben, 2014) the rules that establish people's customary conditions of existence and perception. Whenever you are interacting with a camera in this way, you are not simply using an audiovisual instrument in a way that can be immediately more gratifying, but also playing with the ensemble of forces and techniques that define a given sense of the world and of your place in it: you are potentially reconfiguring a consensual distribution of the sensible (see Rancière, 2013).

The kind of film-making community that Deligny's 'tentative' invites as part of the Cordée is not a community of purpose, but a community of wandering, experimentation and escape, which foregrounds

the experience of collectivity over the specialised skills that are involved in professional film-making. The film remains forever 'to come', and its eventual production responds, then, to different objectives and a different logic. Cinema is, here, a shared and shareable modality of experience, a way of being (together), rather than an apparatus that colonises the imaginary from a distance (see [Chambers, 2021](#)) or that contributes to the reproduction of established, and inegalitarian, forms of knowledge and conditions of existence. The same sharing, I argue, occurs whenever spectatorship and the discussion and analysis of films are practised in a free associative way and on the basis of intellectual equality (see [Burgin, 2004](#); [Rancière, 2009](#)).

More than being a tool for making films, Deligny would go on to write, in 1977, that the camera functions in this context almost like a 'place' ([Deligny, 2022](#): 70), in the sense that it establishes a place of film-making where it is possible to experiment with the generative potentiality of gestures and situations. To borrow the words of Paul [Goodman \(1962](#): 174–5), who had framed the university as the 'appropriable city' (in the context of a discussion of the politics of knowledge and its places in *The Community of Scholars*), we can say that participatory film-making sets up an 'appropriable community', where everyone can 'exercise initiative' as part of an egalitarian and open collectivity. In this sense, the space of film-making is invested by Deligny as a transformative heterotopia. It is the fact that film-making can work first of all as a place of otherness and as a counter-situation (see [Foucault, 1986](#)), suspending the power of the customary and the consensual, that makes it not just a technique that can be learned in ways that are more or less free, but in itself (and by the same token) a scene of education and community making.

The youths of the Cordée, [Deligny \(2022](#): 57) remarked, could use language, and were even quite talkative, but spoke emptily, 'only for the sake of talking', and lacked a certain 'literacy' whenever the meaning of their existence was truly at stake in their speech. One could imagine that Deligny saw therein a situation of alienation that then took much more extreme forms in the case of autistic children. In both cases, although from the two sides of a threshold, social exclusion is shown to be one with language becoming a barrier against the potentiality of life. Eventually, [Deligny \(2022\)](#) understood the wall of silence created by autism, the wall of the asylum, and the wall between the spectator and the screen, to be aspects of the same exclusion, meaning that his tentative film education is conceived as an attempt to bridge all these forms of separation at once, and in relation to each other. The making of participatory cinema thus becomes, for him, at once a common aesthetic experience, an egalitarian experiment in 'indisciplinary' education ([Rancière, 2008](#): 2–3), and a radical gesture of inclusivity.

The politics of film-making in Deligny's 'tentative' may thus be made to join the politics of spectatorship evoked by Mirjana [Borrić \(2020\)](#) through her understanding of the role of free-roaming film dialogue in film education, precisely in that both involve what Jacques [Rancière \(1995, 2006, 2010\)](#) considers a declassification of discourses and a suspension of the separate and unequal positions that are created by disciplinary practices of knowledge and consensual forms of perception.

The camera infinitive: impersonal gesture and radical equality

Together with the heterotopian potentiality of the film-making situation, Deligny's philosophical and educational engagement with film continued in Graniers through a further confrontation with language as a constraining force, and through a more radical immersion in the common life of bodies. In this new setting, the camera is used as an observational tracing practice ([Deligny, 2022](#)), which, like the maps, may help all the members of the milieu relate to a common dimension of impersonal experience, habits and contingent events.

To distinguish this interaction with the camera from the activity of disciplinary observation that could be carried out with it, Deligny, in his writings, recurs to a distinction between 'filming' (*filmer*) and 'camering' (*camérer*). First of all, as we have already seen in relation to the 'tentative' in the Cévennes, while filming is an activity oriented to making a film, camering is done for its own sake and for the transformative

potentiality of film-making as a collective performative practice. While filming relates to and identifies a person, then, camering addresses a more material dimension of relational dependencies and interactions between bodies, objects, places and situations that happens before and beyond the subject. This, for Deligny, is a contingent, gestural and molecular level of reality and agency which corresponds to an 'infinite', impersonal, mode of film-making (Deligny, 2022: 146). The camera, Bernard Ogilvie (2007: 1575) will later comment, is not treated as an instrument able to capture an 'objective' world, but as one that touches upon an 'a-subjective' one.

Camering, Deligny (2022: 82) wrote, must evade 'the surfeit of intention that comes with believing the dematerialised image of the person', as well as the ideas of intentionality and instrumentality that come with it: 'The space of attempt is, for me, the space of a rupture ...; it is a matter of breaking away from the image acquired of the person, of myself, of others' (Deligny, 2022: 77). Returning to the idea of water introduced earlier, Deligny (2022: 78) argues that the human is less like the reflection of a face on the surface of water than like the water itself that collects and supports this reflection: 'to take the reflection for the water is to take the person for the human'. It is this materiality of the human before the subjective and the figural that the camera 'sees' and interacts with in the first place.

This concept of 'camering' is influenced by specific theories of film materiality, in particular those of Jean Epstein and Siegfried Kracauer. Echoing the latter's *Theory of Film* (Kracauer, 1997), Deligny stresses the accidental, contingent (see Hansen, 2012; Harbord, 2007) quality of the film image: 'his proposition is to think of the image as being outside the reign of intentionality and subjectivity. For him, images can only appear 'by accident' (Miguel, 2022: 37).

In a similar vein, Epstein (1974: 251) had written that cinema allows us to glimpse a reality beyond our 'egocentric habit'. Through cinema, for Epstein (1974), we face the chaos of material forces that, from the point of view of our sense of self, are dissimulated, denied, forgotten, and only apparently tamed. In one passage, Epstein (1974) describes this impersonal universe as it is evoked to him while viewing a family film, where the group of people itself appears to him as something indivisible, not a higher unity but a multiplicity, unbroken by the fact that it is made by separate members. In 'Acting and the acted' (originally published in Italian in 1978), Deligny (2015) will very precisely develop this distinction between the classical subject (the individual) and this collective or rhizomatic common body (the indivisible) in terms that are close to Epstein's.

Epstein (1974) saw the materiality of the world that cinema interacts with to be an 'immense beast', of which stones, flowers, birds – and, we can add, words and gestures – are the organs. There is, in other words, under the fragmented landscape of figures and personas, an 'essentially homogeneous and strangely anarchic' world – a material network (*réseau matériel*) of interactions and force fields (Epstein, 1974: 260), which Epstein called, as Deligny would go on to do, a 'trame' (a texture). The cinematic and the human meet, in this particular sense, without solution of continuity.

With this idea of a cinema in the infinite, Deligny's theory of the common body encounters cinema as a communal space and integrates it in the habitual, also moving towards what we could call a non-pedagogical form of education. Camering, indeed, entails 'respecting that which doesn't mean anything, doesn't say anything, doesn't address anyone' (Deligny, 2022: 168). To the impersonality of the human and the materiality of camera-reality thus corresponds the recognition of a relational dependency (see Butler and Athanasiou, 2013), which, going beyond personhood, becomes radically inclusive. Deligny's experiences, I think, give us a thread for (and suggest the importance of) constituting film educational groups beyond the constraints of ableism.

The transformative effects of the creative experience of the moving image envisaged by Deligny lie beyond an identitarian politics, narrowly conceived, and the 'tentative' is not aimed at people reimagining themselves, nor at the enjoyment of a plurality of selves (on the model of an actor playing different characters). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari had, at the time, caught on to this characteristic of Deligny's practice, about which they wrote in *Rhizome*, making direct reference to his work in Graniers as a model (Deleuze and Guattari, 1976). The rhizome is precisely this structure of multiplicity that negates the

genealogical order of roots and branches and, rather than presenting each person as a node, presents the human as such as a meshwork and a common, impersonal, 'body'.

The camera is in this sense integrated as one element of the rhizome, without occupying in it a privileged position (see [Deleuze and Guattari, 1976](#)). In the practice of collective film-making, this does not necessarily mean avoiding any kind of specialisation or distinction of roles (although it can mean that, too), and rather invites us to treat every aspect of, and around, film-making as equally important and potential. Teaching and learning, coming up with an impromptu idea or unwarranted connection, filming in a certain way and setting up a light in the 'wrong' place, catering and screenwriting, acting in front of the camera and interacting around it, the rehearsals of a scene and the chance passage of a bird – all these are interconnected elements which have the same creative potentiality, each of them part of a rhizomatic 'place' of film-making that extends across different bodies through space and time. From this point of view, not only every film-making or educational project, but also every human gesture, entails a fundamental element of co-creation (see [Chambers, 2019](#)) and mutual support.

This egalitarian way of seeing life as radically collective, and work as inherently collaborative, is regularly practised, although not always recognised, on the plateaux of participatory film-making and as part of non-authoritarian forms of education (such as Célestin Freinet's, Paulo Freire's and Francisco Ferrer's and, more recently, the Zapatista's Caracoles or Free Skools projects; see [Haworth, 2012](#); see also [Fielding and Moss, 2011](#)). While a certain tendency in the current discussion of 'rhizomatic learning' (see [Khine, 2023](#)) seems to me to appropriate the concept mainly to support the framework of digital pedagogy (thus wrongly equating the rhizome to a cybernetic network), Deligny's 'tentatives' are closer to contemporary political ecology, and move in the direction of radical forms of inclusivity. In other words, Deligny can be seen to have given us a version of 'environmental agency' (see [Bachmann and Zahn, 2018: 81](#)) that does not involve an ambivalent celebration of the role of technics in causing, defining and controlling gestures, but rather emphasises the communal and contingent constructedness of the human as such (see [Miguel, 2022](#)).

Conclusion: education beyond pedagogy

In the cinematographic 'tentatives' for La Grande Cordée, and in Graniers, Deligny made use of some of the possibilities and the politics of amateur film-making, understood as a practice that is free from concerns of authoriality and commercial production, and that neither remains confined to family or national memorialisation, nor lends itself to the classifying function of the archive (see [Salazkina and Fibla-Gutiérrez, 2020](#); [Tepperman, 2014](#)).

Due to its focus on 'camering', rather than on completing films, Deligny's use of the camera stresses its performative potentiality over its instrumental power; it is, as it were, concerned with what a camera can do even when there is no reel in it, and no professional behind it. Further, because of the specific challenges of living and working with nonspeaking autistic children, it highlights the collective and contingent dimension of film experience over ideas of film education, based, instead, on the personal acquisition of literacy and intellectual mastery. In this, I think, Deligny's cinematographic 'tentatives' can join those radical practices of film education that can be articulated through and around spectatorship, once spectatorship is no longer understood as a state of physiological or ideological passivity, but instead as the creative and critical sharing of film experience (see [Comanducci, 2018](#)). 'Camering' can be seen to complement this politics of spectatorship with a playful, ethical and radically inclusive practice of film-making.

In part, then, Deligny's Cordée 'tentative' follows in the wake of Jean Rouch's 'shared anthropology' to establish a genre of participatory film-making of which *Quién lo impide* by Jonás Trueba (2021) is a recent example. In this film, as in Rouch's *La Pyramide humaine*, a group of adolescents are brought together to shoot a film fictionalising their own lives, an experience which becomes in turn a way to take these lives into their own hands and transform them. These films can be read not only as a particular take

on the relation between documentary and fiction, life and storytelling, but as experimental practices of film education that reflect on what lies beyond 'the instrumentalization of filmmaking' (Nunn, 2020: 199) and prioritise the at once playful and life-transforming dimension of film-making over the achievement of goals and the transmission of know-how. The point, in all these cases, is less to learn how to use a camera or to make a film together, than to establish a situation in which it becomes possible to think about a liveable life. This same aspect is stressed in experiences such as the Inside Film project conducted by O'Neill (2018), is implicit in the dialogic teaching methodology proposed by Borčić (2020), appears in the initiatives taken by the participants in *Scotland, Our New Home* narrated by Frimberger and Bishopp (2020), and arguably plays a role in the complexities of co-creation in the context of film education in primary and secondary school described by Chambers (2019).

Seen from the perspective of Deligny's 'tentatives', these kinds of participatory film-making and progressive film education practise something other than a pedagogy, intended as the exercise and reproduction of intellectual inequality (Rancière, 2009). Instead, they move toward a situation in which watching, learning about and practising film become a form of political education and community making, and vice versa, where egalitarian and inclusive ways of making community translate into a film education that puts, from specific locations (see Bachmann and Zahn, 2018), both the politics and the aesthetics of cinema in question.

We can think of the way in which the participants of *La Commune*, directed by Peter Watkins, integrate their own reflections on their present condition into the staging of the events of 1871; and, vice versa, how learning about and re-enacting those gestures of resistance and liberation became a way of interpreting the present, as well as of transforming the participants' relation to cinema and the news – and this despite the fact that Watkins still spoke of participatory film-making and its intended effect on the public in the strictly pedagogical terms of French critique that Rancière has challenged (see Watkins, 2001).

As the encounters animated by O'Neill (2018: 5) around film watching and discussion created in practice a 'conjectural reimagining of critical pedagogy', so do Deligny's 'tentatives' bring us closer to an idea of film education based on the Rancièrian axiom of emancipation. Starting from what he considers to be the anonymous capacity of anyone to speak politically and to make art, Rancière's work suggests that we seek to understand both critical media education and engaged film-making as a matter of removing the barriers that define the various practices and experiences of the moving image in terms of distinct spaces and positions: the exclusive spaces of the auteur and of professional film-makers, the ever more interactive but still subaltern spaces of spectators-consumers, and the mediating spaces of film educators and self-styled 'masters of emancipation'. Art, politics and education are, for Rancière, first of all ways of redefining and bringing together these spaces, and the perception of the world they articulate, on a more egalitarian basis.

Participatory film projects and egalitarian forms of teaching and care can, in this sense, be taken as a paradigm of a different relation between film-making, spectatorship and critical, inclusive, education as such. Putting in place a new kind of space which is neither pedagogical nor 'industrial', neither professional nor 'amateur', neither documentary nor fictional, neither purely political nor purely aesthetic, these experiences communicate the potentiality of film education practices to bring people together in dissensual communities (see Rancière, 2010). As part of this broad political and aesthetic gesture, Deligny's 'tentatives' further stress that this community is not a question of the representation of essentialised identities, or the belonging to an idealised national or ethnic whole, but of a radical, rhizomatic, commonality of bodies. Film education before and beyond a pedagogy of film entails a creative and inclusive problematisation of the 'we' of cinema (see Chambers, 2018), as well as of the forms of agency, perception and subjectivity that are articulated by and around the camera. Deligny's cinematographic 'tentatives', then, invest the educational dimension of film-making at the same time that they construct education not as a pedagogical relation consisting in the transmission of knowledge but as an ethico-political practice of common life.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

Filmography

Les 400 coups (FR 1959, François Truffaut)

Ce gamin, là (FR 1976, Renaud Victor)

La Commune (FR 2000, Peter Watkins)

Un été (FR 1960, Jean Rouch)

Fortezze vuote (IT 1975, Gianni Serra)

Matti da slegare (IT 1975, Silvano Agosti, Marco Bellocchio, Sandro Petraglia and Stefano Rulli)

Le Moindre geste (FR 1971, Jean-Pierre Daniel, Fernand Deligny and Josée Manenti)

Projet N (FR 1978, Alain Cazuc)

La Pyramide humaine (FR 1961, Jean Rouch)

Quién lo impide (ES 2021, Jonás Trueba)

Scotland, Our New Home: The documentary (GB 2019, Simon Bishopp and the New Young Peers Scotland)

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