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Living in the presence of others: towards a reconfiguration of space, asylum and inclusion

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One of the core characteristics of inclusionary discourses and practices is their emphasis on living in the presence of others. Despite this self-evident character, the question of what is understood by living in the presence of others only sporadically has been the object of critical inquiry. By turning ourselves towards Stengers' conceptual figure of the idiot and the work of a rather unknown French educator Fernand Deligny, we – opposed to what contemporary scholars and professionals tend to think – will argue that space still occupies an important role in inclusive discourses and practices. Deligny's remarkable reappraisal of the word 'asylum' in particular seems fruitful in order to think the relations between space, inclusion and living in the presence of others anew. In line with Stengers' idiot, Deligny's polishing of the word 'asylum' leads to an alternative presentation of inclusion as something which has to do with creating (1) spatial interstices in one's own thinking while living in the presence of others, and (2) places where the other can find refuge against the dominant languages of divergent contemporary professionals and disciplines.

Keywords: inclusion; asylum; space; Deligny; living in the presence of others; Stengers; idiot; interstice

> I have dragged this kind of institution [asylum] through the mire and then, with the coming of age, I became aware that in order to respect the others, whoever they might be, one has to respect the words; asylum is a primordial word, every living being will confirm that. As regards the human being, it seems to me not obvious that the *real* asylum would have been found. (Fernand Deligny in Touati and Conrath 1983, 9)[1]

Today, one could argue, we are interpellated to try to transform our current social order into an inclusive one where nobody is discriminated on the basis of gender, race, disability, social class or religious conviction (Oliver 1996, 78–94; Thomas 1997). Geared towards one particular human difference, namely disability, inclusive societies can be characterised as societies where people 'live everyday life as an everyday thing, with and *in the presence of* special, specific human beings who are our disabled equals' (Stiker 1997, 11, emphasis added).

Closely related to the idea of an inclusive society is the promotion of inclusive education which has become common currency in educational debate since the early 1990s of the twentieth century (see e.g. the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for*

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Action on Special Needs Education ratified by 92 governments and 25 international organisations [UNESCO 1994] or the publication in England of the Green Paper *Excellence for All Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs*, DfEE 1997). In sharp contrast to the dominant segregational tendencies of the past inclusive schools precisely aim at educating all children together in order to contribute to the foundation of an inclusive society by learning how to value difference (Thomas 1997). Proponents of the inclusionary discourse indeed presuppose that being confronted with human differences in the daily classroom is a necessary condition for the establishment of democracies in general and accepting and respectful relationships between adults in particular (Lipzky and Gartner 1999, 20–1). We want to note that, although the terms 'differences', 'otherness' and 'diversity' to a certain extent imply one another, we will not put them on a par. The words 'otherness' and 'others' refer to the reality of different human beings who relate to one another in a particular way. The words 'difference' and 'diversity' rather refer to the several differences that might constitute an individual's otherness. One could say that 'other' and 'otherness' refer to the existential and 'diversity' and 'differences' to the epistemological.

Thinking and speaking in terms of inclusive societies and inclusive education thus seems to reflect two important and closely interrelated changes. First of all, and opposed to a longstanding tradition in Western culture, it implies and requires that people live in the 'presence of others'. Instead of segregating, oppressing, confining or even killing those who do not fit into the widespread ideas of what a normal individual is said to be we are asked to live our lives in the presence of those others. Secondly, and as a consequence of the foregoing, the role attributed to space in the era of segregation has changed dramatically. At least in theory the conception of space has changed from something which can be marked and reserved for particular populations – think about Indian reserves or Jewish ghettos – to something which has to be organised in such a way that it enables all people to live in the presence of others (Sibley 1995). What it boils down to in both alterations is the idea that we should accept differences as such and design/develop environments which enable us to live in the presence of those differences (see also the contemporary emphasis on 'universal design' in architecture and learning devices or the idea of enabling and multi-sensorial cities in the emerging geographies of disability studies: Devlieger and Renders 2006; Gleeson 1998; Preiser 2001)

In this article, we would like to take a closer look on both of the above-mentioned basic characteristics of the inclusionary discourse. Despite the self-evident importance of living in the presence of others for inclusionary discourse, it largely has been neglected in discussions and philosophical reflections with regard to inclusive education. Until now it only seems to have been taken into account in the context of early childhood education (Etienne et al. 2008). In the first section we will focus on the idea of 'living in the presence of others' by introducing the philosophical figure of the idiot as presented by Isabelle Stengers in her text *The cosmopolitical proposal*. Stengers' idiot offers us a particular (spatial) understanding of the 'other'. This will enable us to question the way we (are asked to) relate ourselves to the other in contemporary inclusionary discourses. In the second section we will argue that one of the consequences of this contemporary inclusionary discourse is the production of a spaceless space resulting in a devaluation of the importance of space for educational thinking. Finally, we would like to suggest the possibility of reconfiguring the notions 'space', 'inclusion' and 'living in the presence of others' in educational thinking by introducing the work of a rather unknown French educator, namely Fernand Deligny (1913–1996).

Although Deligny refrained himself completely from the mainstream intellectual frameworks and the well-established ways of treating persons with disabilities at that time, throughout his life he continuously worked with children who for one reason or another were considered to be 'abnormal' such as autistic children, children with behaviour problems or children with an intellectual disability. In particular Deligny's counter-interpretation of the word asylum will prove fruitful for exploring new paths of inclusion and the role played by space in these ventures.

1. Inclusion and the *presence* of the idiot

As a point of departure for our discussion of what one today understands by 'living in the presence of others', we would like to present the figure of the idiot as it was introduced by Stengers in her text *The cosmopolitical proposal* (Stengers 2005). In this text Stengers tried to imagine a way for doing politics and science in a postmodern era when authority and truth increasingly have become associated with the complex and sophisticated way power is exercised in contemporary societies. At the very beginning of the text she explicitly states that her proposal 'can be useful to those who have already effected the 'political shift' associated with political ecology and thus learned to laugh not at theories but at the authority associated with them' (Stengers 2005, 994).

According to Stengers, the idiot – inspired by the conceptual character Gilles Deleuze borrowed from Dostoevsky – actually can offer a way out of what has been described as the sterile consequences of critical theory for political action and scientific research. Rather than becoming associated with nihilism or a kind of intellectual paralysis Stengers links the political shift with an ability to 'slow down' and so suggests 'a proposal that requires no other verification than the way in which it is able to "slow down" reasoning and create an opportunity to arouse a slightly different awareness of the problems and situations mobilizing us' (Stengers 2005, 994).

In contrast with the ancient Greek meaning of the word 'idiot' which referred to someone who did not speak the Greek language and literally and figuratively was cut off from the civilised community, Stengers' idiot forms an essential part of the community. S/he is 'the one who always slows the others down, who resists the consensual way in which the situation is presented and in which emergencies mobilise thought or action' (Stengers 2005, 994). Transported to the context of disability studies we might illustrate Stengers' proposal by means of Stiker's description of what happens when one is confronted with a disabled person: 'Our life shatters, our plans collapse, and, beyond us as individuals, the various social organizations appear rigid, closed, hostile […] In us, or around us, the onset of a disability creates a disorganization that is both concrete and social' (Stiker 1997, 3; see also Davis 1995). If in her proposal Stengers stresses the ability of the idiot to 'arouse a slightly different awareness', she at the same time warns us for every attempt to imagine and theoretically fix this different awareness. The vital insight of her proposal precisely lies in the fact that we should not ask the idiot why: 'the idiot will neither reply nor discuss the issue. The idiot is a presence or […] produces an interstice. There is no point in asking him, 'What is more important?' for *he does not know*' (Stengers 2005, 995, original emphasis). For Stengers the temporal definition of the idiot as a presence and its ability to 'slow down' thus is inextricably bound to a spatial characterisation, namely its ability to produce an interstice which can be understood as another way of conceiving the space of our living together.

Stengers seems to suggest that when we think today about political change while being confronted with the challenging voices of geographically and figuratively marginalised people, we are immediately tempted to conceive of a cosmos understood in the traditional sense of the word: a good common world constructed around a general interest. We then usually proceed by asking the refractory voices to utter their personal wishes, to express their fears and longings and make explicit their immediate and pressing needs in order to promote a new and improved conception of communality (Stengers 2005, 996). So the challenge Stengers lays bare in her text is how to take into account the murmurings of 'the idiot' without immediately pinpointing its significance for the creation of a more common world or in her own words: 'how to design [the political scene] in such way that collective thinking has to proceed "in the presence of" those who would otherwise be likely to be disqualified as having idiotically nothing to propose, hindering the emergent "common account"?' (Stengers 2005, 1002).

At the turn of the twenty-first century several scholars have engaged in a critical inquiry into the nature and functioning of the inclusionary discourse (Allan 2004, 2008; Cigman 2007; Graham and Slee 2008). Unlike most of these critiques, we do not want to focus on the discrepancy one can observe between reality and discourse in order 'to ask ourselves how we can do better' (Graham and Slee 2008, 277), but on the question 'how we can think differently about inclusion' (Allan 2004, 2008). Stengers' presentation of the idiot, then, is helpful to critically highlight two particular tendencies in our current efforts to establish so-called inclusive societies where everybody belongs and to install inclusive educational regimes where differences between students are seen as resources for learning: the emphasis on communality and the production of a transparent otherness. First of all, the establishment of inclusive societies and the concurrent plea for inclusive education clearly projects the idea of a perceived communality or universality where all people/pupils can belong in a nearby future. To be different then, one could argue, has become the norm and constitutes the heart of a society which claims to be truly democratic in the sense that it not only respects the existence of different life patterns, forms of body or thinking patterns, but actually sees this diversity as contributing to the prosperity in society: 'the fundamental principle of inclusive education is the valuing of diversity within the human community. Every person has a contribution to offer to the world' (Kunc quoted in Lipzky and Gartner 1999, 20). Metaphorically speaking one could compare this world with a place where people are actively encouraged to pull at different strings which all in one way or another are attached to the same common good – be it the idea of difference, the prominent space reserved for special educational needs or the urge to provide high quality education for all. If the existing theories and practices of inclusion indeed differ greatly with regard to a number of practical and theoretical characteristics, they, according to us, at least share an effort to reconcile the contemporaneous ethics of difference with a longstanding Western tradition of generality in education and policy-making.

Secondly, if the ambiguous incorporation of diversity into an overarching political collectivity already seems to run counter one of the characteristics of Stengers' idiot in her text *The cosmopolitical proposal*, then it seems that her insistence on the idiot's muteness is even more incongruent with our current efforts to include the other. Since the 1970s of the twentieth century onwards, one increasingly has argued for a radical shift in our Western health care systems away from a paternalistic and charitable approach of those in need of help towards a demand-driven and

need-driven perspective which takes into account the desires, needs and capabilities of the persons at stake (Barnes 1997). One of the central assumptions of these new conceptions of how to organise help and support in a neo-liberal society is that the persons who would like to benefit from it precisely are asked to express and communicate their wishes.

New practices such as the introduction of the 'Personal Assistant Budget' in the reorganisation of the care for people with disabilities in most West-European countries, the USA and Australia clearly can illustrate this point (Glasby and Littlechild 2002). Rather then fitting the person with a disability in a preconceived and stable care structure where the decisions with regard to what is good or helpful for a particular patient are left to the (medical) professionals, it is the person with disability her/himself who on the basis of a rigorous analysis of her/his particular situation decides which kind of help s/he wants at what time and is provided with an annual budget that s/he more or less freely can spend in the light of her/his decisions.

What is remarkable then from the point of view Stengers suggests by means of her conceptual figure of the idiot is that in order to make this new social care structure work a complex and thoroughgoing system of practices is installed around the person with disability in order to help her/him to find out what her/his real needs, capacities and wishes are. In other words, the person with disability continuously is asked to speak up and express what s/he desires, how s/he would like to see her/his life organised and which life career s/he aspires the most. In the ongoing transformations of social health care systems which increasingly become characterised by marketisation and consumerism, otherness continuously is asked to get rid of its opaque aspirations and has to become completely transparent. The inclusion of otherness increasingly seems to depend on its ability to render itself transparent and to speak up with a clear and understandable voice. In this way one could say that there is no space for the idiot or that the interstices Stengers is referring to cannot be produced.

This of course does not mean that we would deny the importance of having a voice for minority groups such as people with disabilities (see e.g. Erevelles 2002). On the contrary, the languages – or even better the forms of communication – used by those groups will have a central meaning in our alternative reading of what inclusion might consist of when one focuses on Deligny's interpretation of living in the presence of others. For us the importance of those languages then does not lay in the contribution they might make to the establishment of a common good but precisely in the extent to which they produce *interstices* in this communality.

In contrast to the production of interstices, proponents of an inclusionary discourse understand living in the presence of others in terms of the existence – at least in theory – of a common good. It, moreover, seems to encompass the promotion of the other as a transparent being, someone who has analysed her/himself and has rendered her/his own desires in an accessible format. Besides this perspective on how one should live in the presence of others, the inclusionary discourse also implies a shift in dominant conceptions of space in relation to otherness.

2. Space, asylum and the ruins of history

Inspired by Henri Lefebvre's pioneering study on the production of space (1991) and instigated by a number of studies undertaken by social geographers, the role and function of space in the production and reproduction of difference has become an important point of interest in the study of inclusionary discourse (Armstrong 2003, 20–8).

Rather than being a mere collection of neutral places (social) space increasingly has become associated with the reigning values and norms in a particular society. Space also contributes to the production and reproduction of difference. It helps sustaining particular attitudes towards segments of the population which have been attributed to this or that special place. To give only one example of how this 'spatialisation of otherness' is at work still today, we can refer to the remarkable observation made by Armstrong on the role space plays in the obstruction/fulfilment of inclusion. Today in many buildings one has installed accessible toilets for people with disabilities. However, as these public lavatories have to be used regardless of gender it certainly '[sustains] stereotypes by homogenizing disabled people into undifferentiated, asexual "other"' (Armstrong 1999, 77).

The worrying role of space in the production of otherness has been mostly associated with the attribution of human beings to a particular place due to some bodily or mental characteristic. Throughout the history of the West one can observe a continuous attempt to assign intentionally designed spaces to people who were considered refractory, special or abnormal. Not only do these (historical) spaces confirm the legitimacy of the diagnostic procedures used to populate them, they also to a large extent influence the identity formation of the people at stake and the public attitudes towards them.

One of the most well-known examples of how space interacts with the way Western societies have approached difference throughout its history is of course the psychiatric asylum. The word 'asylum' historically refers to a well-defined place where people said to be deviant like poor people or psychiatric patients could find shelter and support (OED 1989). From the end of the eighteenth century onwards, the modern asylum indeed became the dominant mode of handling psychiatric patients and put an end to what was called by psychiatrists such as William Tuke and Philippe Pinel the inhuman incarceration of lunatics in dark and damp dungeons (Goldstein 2001). Rather than being chained together with other criminals, those mad men had to be treated in an appropriate environment according to the principles of the newly established psychiatric discipline. Together with the huge influence exercised by the example of the psychiatrist himself, the asylum building had an important role to play with regard to the efficacy of the newly conceived moral treatment (Yanni 2007). Etienne Esquirol, one of the most important psychiatrists of the first half of the nineteenth century, stated that 'a lunatic hospital is an instrument of cure' and so in a way blended the internal therapeutic aspects with the external institutional characteristics of the emerging psychiatric discipline (Esquirol quoted in Goldstein 2001, 131–2).

Throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, the symbiotic relationship between space, treatment and psychiatric illness would be sustained and elaborated by the development of a thoroughgoing psychiatric knowledge complex. From the 1960s onwards, however, it increasingly became subject to vehement critiques. Here the year 1961 can be considered a milestone. At that time both Erving Goffman's *Asylum: Essays on the Social Situations of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Goffman 1961) and Michel Foucault's shortened version of his philosophical dissertation *History of madness* were published (Foucault 1961). For Goffman the asylum pre-eminently symbolised a so-called total institution such as military schools, prisons, industrial factories, boarding schools or religious cloisters. All of these institutes – despite their differences – could be described as asylums or total institution because they had some common characteristics, the most important one for Goffman being the fact that a total institution led to the mortification or the profanation of the self (Goffman 1961, 24).

Whereas Goffman's highly critical analysis of the vicissitudes of the self within a total institution was restricted to the limited space of the asylum, Foucault's historical inquiry into the growing silence between madness and reason rather symbolised a critique of society at large. The birth of the asylum around 1800 for Foucault was a metaphor of a changing power–knowledge complex which sought to shape and incorporate the individual's liberty in a new way of wielding power (Foucault 1975, chap. IX). After the mental patients of Bicêtre – a well-known psychiatric asylum in Paris – were liberated by the famous psychiatrist Philippe Pinel, they subsequently became inserted in a more humane though highly sophisticated treatment whose ultimate goal was to make the psychiatric patients behave in a particular way. For Foucault this insertion of liberty in the wielding of power thus did not restrict itself to the functioning of an asylum alone. On the contrary, some of the interviews Foucault gave at the time his philosophical dissertation was published do not leave any doubt that according to him the world had to be considered an unlimited asylum (Foucault 1973/2001, 1977/2001).

Goffman and Foucault of course did not directly address the problem of special education but their work – as Thomas and Vaughan argue with regard to Goffman's *Asylum* – 'marked the beginning of a questioning of the automatic assumption that separation of a portion of the public to segregated institutions must be a good thing' (Thomas and Vaughan 2004, 31). Their work indeed inspired a lot of scholars to engage in a critical examination of the dominant institutional model in the context of social health care and indirectly contributed to the coming into being of an intellectual and activist climate which laid claims on the deinstitutionalisation of society. At the heart of this plea for the deinstitutionalisation of society, one could say, was a multilayered aversion to the spatialisation of otherness. On a very concrete level this distaste was directed towards the actual and material reality of the asylum itself: the only acceptable solution for the perceived problem of relegating persons somewhere to a remote corner of society, it was said, was the closure of those segregational sites. From the 1960s onwards, most countries on the European continent indeed have witnessed the factual shutting down or thoroughgoing reorientation of large institutions for psychiatric patients or people with intellectual disabilities (Moon, Kearns, and Joseph 2006).

On a more abstract level, however, one also could argue that the process of deinstitutionalisation triggered a new way of conceiving space and placing 'other' people in it. If from the seventeenth century onwards until the second half of the twentieth century, the dominant conception of space in the West with regard to other people was to exclude them in order to establish and carefully maintain strict epistemological and factual borders between the normal and the abnormal, one can say that from the 1960s onwards this binary construction of space-made place for the unification of its components (Sibley 1995). Instead of dividing the societal space in two strictly separate, non-communicative and perpendicular sections, there is a growing consensus with regard to the fact that the spatial should become unified. Those who previously were excluded should be given the full opportunity to participate in everyday community life.

The result of this inclusionary movement, one could say, in the end will be that one cannot speak anymore of an outside, that every border or frontier will have disappeared and everybody belongs to that societal space called community. There is something to say for the interpretation that the inclusionary movement dreams of and thinks in terms of a 'spaceless space' (Castells 1996); a space which has been devoid of

boundaries and any possible kind of binarism in order to embrace and accept the rich variety of human differences. One of the possible consequences of this despatialisation of difference is that one starts to think about education as something which takes place with no reference anymore to a spatial framework.

But even in inclusionary societies, space still has an important role to play not in the least because – as we have argued in the previous section – one of the core characteristics of the inclusionary projects can be described as living in the presence of others. In what follows we now will turn to the work of the French educator Fernand Deligny whose writing and educational initiatives can be read as an attempt to stress the importance of space in 'living in the presence of others'. What is interesting is that Deligny hung his argument on a controversial and provocative revalorisation of the notion 'asylum' (and closed asylums seem to attract also attention of both scholars and artists again today, e.g. Garton 2009; Moon, Kearns, and Joseph 2006; Van Rensbergen 2007). In the wake of the deinstitutionalisation movement, many of the existing asylums have been reduced to disused buildings and abandoned ruins. However, and following Hannah Arendt in her introduction to the publication of the works of Walter Benjamin, the remainders of these former sites can be approached without reference to its former usage in the light of psychiatric knowledge production or identity formation. What guided Benjamin's thinking according to Arendt namely was:

> The conviction that although the living is subject to the ruin of the time, the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization, that in the depth of the sea, into which sinks and is dissolved what once was alive, some things 'suffer a sea-change' and survive in new crystallized forms and shapes that remain immune to the elements, as though they waited only for the pearl diver who one day will come down to them and bring them up into the world of the living. (1978, 212)

3. Asylum, space and living in the presence of others

In our opinion, it is precisely this pearl-like essence of asylum that Fernand Deligny had been looking for throughout his entire life. From the 1930s onwards, Deligny engaged in educational initiatives with children and adolescents who had been relegated from the regular school system due to refractory behaviour or some form of intellectual incapacity. In 1933 Deligny could be found in the presence of the so-called backward and feebleminded children. During the 1940s and 1950s, he successively worked with refractory youth in a huge psychiatric asylum situated in the North of France, became involved in a social preventive service in Lille and set up a network for professional and social integration throughout France. From the 1960s onwards, he then withdrew himself with a couple of like-minded individuals to the Cévennes – a rather inhospitable region in the South of France – where he would devote the remainder of his life to the existence of autistic children (Alvarez de Toledo 2001). Despite the constant presence of children who were considered to be dangerous and incurable by the reigning psychological and criminological definitions of that time, Deligny has never presented himself as an educator on whose authority the well-being of the child would depend. On the contrary, time and again he tried to keep this classical position of what it means to be an educator at arm's length.

In an interview conducted in 1983, Deligny stated to his interviewers that his idea of being an educator of refractory and 'untreatable' youth actually referred to someone who searched for asylum (Touati and Conrath 1983, 9). When Deligny used the word

'asylum' to describe his lifelong activities and what according to him should be the core business of social work, he, however, did not refer to the word in its widespread connotation which has become 'a byword for a place of refuge for those routed and disturbed' (Deligny 1975, 5). According to Deligny the word itself deserved another meaning which had to be strictly dissociated from the word 'Asylum' written with upper case 'A' which then referred to the historical and colonised psychiatric entity (Deligny 1975).

Deligny's (1975) use of the word 'asylum' written with lower case 'a' on the contrary reminds us to its etymological and Greek origins. The word 'asylum' indeed derives from the Greek 'asulon' which signified a sanctuary or inviolable place of refuge and protection from which one cannot be forcibly removed without sacrilege (OED 1989). In order to speak and write about this asylum with lower case 'a', Deligny developed a nautical terminology by means of which he, so to say, polished language. Instead of addressing the other or the world by means of *concepts* – which always in a certain sense tend to grasp reality in its totality – he instead falls back on the purity of *words* which reserves an important place for other things and explanations and thus remains intrinsically uncomfortable.

One of the first things Deligny draws our attention to while polishing the word 'Asylum' is that the French word 'asile' completely encompasses the French word 'île' meaning island in English (Deligny 1976/2007). For Deligny it is no trivial coincidence that the word 'asylum' contains a hidden geographical entity. On the contrary, this linguistic association with space is crucial for his understanding what asylum really was about. It primordially referred to a particular space – 'The asylum was a place'. However, and this is of equal importance, this geographical reference did not completely fix Deligny's polished presentation of asylum for at the same time he contended that searching for asylum not solely had to do with finding appropriate places/islands. It actually consisted in finding places where one could be: 'The asylum was for me a place for being' (Touati and Conrath 1983, 10).

So if the word asylum for Deligny (1975) intrinsically referred to a spatial entity, it also largely depended on the presence of those children who were said to be untreatable. Referring to his work with severely autistic children in the South of France and touching upon the metaphor Arendt used to characterise the work of Benjamin, Deligny further specified that 'this kind of asylum is formed around and by means of the presence of children considered autistic, just like a pearl is formed around some splinter of mother-of-pearl' (Deligny 1975, 10). It might be clear by now that for Deligny in the word 'asylum' both the idea of living in the presence of others and space become intrinsically bound up to each other. What's even more important is that Deligny's notion of asylum embodies a different thinking of communality and so might suggest an alternative way of conceiving inclusionary projects.

Taking up again Deligny's comparison between asylums and islands, it is important to note that for Deligny the presence of the other had nothing to do with a state of nakedness which then would underline the equality of those beings being stuck on a desolate piece of land surrounded by salt water. It rather has to do with the fact that all of the – as Deligny calls it – indigenous people of that island are subjected to the same elements of nature. 'Asylum' then does not refer to a particular situation where different subjects become individuals but refers to individuals who live in the presence of each other under equal circumstances. This different conception of communality as understood by Deligny becomes a bit clearer when he uses the term 'common air'. What is common between those individuals then is not a shared opinion, a mutual

bodily characteristic or a collective history, but rather the fact of being surrounded by the same air. Deligny gives another example when he refers to a personal wartime experience which might bring further clarification:

> 1940: Bombs were falling. Living, for hours long, under that same roof – […] – roof which at every moment a bomb could penetrate: that creates alliances. The communal cause so difficult to find when there are supervisors and people supervised can be produced by that place where everyone experiences the same fear. (Deligny 1976/2007, 1003)

Taken together one could say that according to Deligny the word asylum refers to a particular space or situation where one is literally in the presence of others. This living in the presence of others, however, does not result in the creation of communal entities – a shared language, a common cause, a longstanding tradition, etc. – but rather highlights the difference between subjects and individuals. Whereas subjects for Deligny are human beings whose words are totally taken over by the meanings produced by psychological or educational discourses, individuals seem to resemble the existence of Stengers' idiot. The voices, gazes and gestures of individuals are not dumb, they do mean something, and they do express something. However, what is signified cannot be grasped by existing ideologies, ways of behaving or traditional discourses. To put it even stronger, they produce interstices in the linguistic spaces of those disciplines.

What Deligny then seems to be looking for are precisely those places where people can seek refuge against the dominant use of language as a pre-structured and structuring reality. Deligny's archipelago metaphor then also can be read as follows: the island which literally is at the heart of the word 'asylum' cannot be separated from the surrounding salt water which according to him denotes the idea of language as the pre-eminent institutionalising instance in modern times (Jouvenet, Caillot-Arthaud, and Chalaguier 1988; Moreau 1978). Searching for refuge or asylum then means searching for a language – or even better a non-language – which allows autistic children in their own singular way without having their existence reduced to a psychological theory or educational insight:

> Talking about asylum, that's talking the language in which one lives. Since living in asylum has become, for me, living close to autistic children, I talk in a language, which for sure is not theirs, but which does it's best to help those who try to allow them to exist. (Touati and Conrath 1983, 9)

Seeking refuge and looking for asylum thus cannot be put on a par with a foremost Western tradition of diagnosing and putting children in isolated and walled spaces where they are loved and treated according to the newest insights of psychology and other disciplines. On the contrary, time and again Deligny has stressed the fact that rather than being outward, the action radius of the educator should be transformed towards a gaze which focuses on itself. The focus of any educational initiative for Deligny was not the child which had been described as in need of help or special support, but was the educator her/himself. What should be transformed then was not so much the incurable child, but precisely the way of relating and the language used by the educator to approach the situation (Deligny 1976/2007). This becomes very clear when we take a closer look on a letter Deligny wrote in September 1976 to the French communist philosopher Louis Althusser: 'In our practice', he

wrote 'what is the object? This or that child, the "psychotic" subject? Certainly not. The real object which has to be transformed is us, we *there*, we close to those "subjects" who, to speak properly barely are "subjects" and it is precisely for that reason THEY are present, there' (Deligny quoted in Alvarez de Toledo 2007, 24; emphasis added).

Referring again to Stengers' text, one could say that the aim of Deligny's reversal of the educator's activity precisely consisted in getting rid of the widespread and commonly used strategies of immunisation when one is confronted with a human being whose language cannot be understood. As Stengers argues 'The insterstices [caused by a confrontation with something inintelligible, JM&PV] close rapidly. Worse still, silencing the fright often results in confirming our many reasons with an additional baseness that does away with hesitation' (Stengers 2005, 996). What Deligny is pointing at are those places where our strategies of immunisation can be perforated in order to open up our thoughts and allow hesitation to leave its exiled existence.

Besides the metaphor of the island, another trope can be found in the Delignian terminology which can be helpful in clarifying this urge to transform oneself/one's thinking while living in the presence of the other, namely the raft. Besides the fact that the raft – just like the island – emphasises the importance of the spatial for our intercourse with the other, it also suits very well to clarify Deligny's idea of asylum as being an activity in which the educator is transformed. Imagine a raft, Deligny asks us at some point, on the wide sea of time and history where the language rages. 'A raft, you know how it is made: there are tree-trunks which are connected in a rather loose manner, so that, when the mountains of water thunder down, the water passes through the separated trunks' (Deligny 1978/2007, 1127). On this raft Deligny stages a bunch of pearl fishers who, because when trying to look beneath the wild surface of the sea, time and again are confronted with their own reflection. In order to by-pass this reflection the pearl-fishers fabricate a quite simple instrument: 'They take away the bottom of a cookie box, replace the bottom by a piece of glass; and that will do; they immerse the box a bit in water and they see, underneath 'something other' than the mirroring reflections of the sun' (Deligny 1976/2007, 1007–8).

In Deligny's metaphor of the raft, the sea surface stands for our common use of words and language in order to relate ourselves to the world and other people. What is characteristic for our relation to language, according to Deligny, is its reflective nature. Our way of speaking and the words we expect from other people mirror a preconceived and a priori conception of what is good and human and thus hide other possibilities from view. Avoiding that reflection and imagining other possibilities actually is what Deligny sees as the heart of every attempt to establish a place of asylum: a place where something other can be seen, where one while living in the presence of others can think and act differently – even if it only is for a limited period of time: 'The point is not to cut, a few doubts will do; a few drops of doubt in an ocean of certainty which gives you a state of mind and by means of this state of mind you see, you hear, you understand, you interpret, you think and say' (Deligny 1975, 73).

4. Rethinking inclusion: diving for pearls in educational waters

In this article, we have approached the inclusionary discourse by means of Stengers' text *The cosmopolitical proposal* and the work of a rather unknown French educa-

tional thinker, namely Fernand Deligny. Taken together the work of Stengers and Deligny enabled us to concentrate on and conceive new ways of interpreting the vital connection for inclusionary discourse and practice between space, asylum and living in the presence of others.

Although living in the presence of others obviously has to be considered the core characteristic of any inclusionary proposal, it up till now has remained undertheorised. Stengers' text clearly instigates a critical reflection on what exactly this living in the presence of others might consist of. Stengers' conceptual figure of 'the idiot' seems to suggest that including the other should not result in the confirmation of the worldly routines, but actually should result in a temporal moratorium of thought. In this way Stengers reminds us of what the German philosopher Walter Benjamin once wrote: 'Thinking involves not only the movement of thoughts but their arrest as well [*Stillstellung*]' (Benjamin 1940/2003, 396). To include the other thus, following Stengers, seems to run counter the dominant ways of approaching the world, one another and oneself. It results in the creation of interstices where the world stops turning – even if it only was for a moment.

This particular counter-position and search for interstices can also be found in the work of Fernand Deligny who time and again stressed the importance of living in the presence of others. What is interesting is that Deligny to a far greater extent than Stengers underlined the fact that this attempts to create interstices in our own thinking depended so to say on a spatial component. Although contemporary inclusionary debates more or less have put the notion of space aside in favour of a spaceless conception of society where everybody belongs independent of the space one finds her/himself in, Deligny's revisiting of the notion 'asylum' actually enables us to revalue the notion of space within inclusionary debates and practices. For Deligny working with children who for one reason or another are excluded by the regular (school) system has everything to do with creating places of refuge or as he controversially names it: places of asylum. For Deligny these places of asylum can be put on a par with linguistic interstices and urge scholars and professionals alike to search for new languages who in the presence of others can open up unknown spaces for communication – not only with the other but, as Deligny stressed time and again, also with oneself.

Those places of refuge according to Deligny, thus, do have two important characteristics. They first of all, provide a place where individuals can live without being subjected to the requirements and signifiers of this or that professional language. Secondly, and even more importantly, they have to be seen as places where the convictions and professional tendencies of the educator for a moment are put aside, where the water of the sea does not get any grip on the disorientated raft. Following Deligny in his nautical terminology, one could say that it is only by means of these rudderless spaces that we as educators will be able to (re)find some of the pearls we have lost in our educational waters.

Note

1. As none of the texts written by Deligny has been translated into English we make use of the recently published book *Oeuvres: Fernand Deligny* edited by Sandra Alvarez de Toledo which renders a faithful introduction to and makes public the writings Deligny produced throughout his whole life (Alvarez de Toledo 2007). As a rule we take this volume as a starting point for our own translations from the original French into English.

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