

## **My Time Working At *Laborde***

As part of the Women's Lib Parisian group, Politics and Psychoanalysis (*Editions and Librairie des Femmes*), I had heard of Michel Foucault, his history of madness. Also I knew of intellectuals like Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze. I happened to go myself through a delirious state for a few months in 1975 ( called *bouffée délirante* in French). After which I could hardly go on with my usual life and English teacher career. Also quite shaken by the experience and its depressive aftermath, I asked the famous clinic of *Laborde* at *Cour Cheverny* to go for a few months study and training as a *stagiaire*. As soon as you arrived and are picked up at the station, you started feeling part of the *Laborde* family. I was struck by the wide park where patients called *pensionnaires* were walking about freely. Monitors as they were called (rather than *infirmiers/nurses*) were eating with the *pensionnaires*, animating a Club with them to talk of institutional matters, also the usual medication giving and care for everyday life.

As you may know, *Laborde* was open in 1953 by Jean Oury after the experience of World War II led certain psychiatrists in *St.Albanâ* like Tosquelles and Bonnafe, to refuse the enclosed situation of psychiatric asylums that were to them of the same segregation as concentration camps. Of course that doesn't mean it had to do with extermination camps, although the starvation of patients in French asylums was a tragedy, but just that the segregation situation with people being often there for life and out of the usual daily part of life, meant that society was getting rid, on a eugenist basis, of part of its population.

Psychiatrists having experienced World War II then called for a change in psychiatric institutions, either in public service, or by creating this clinic near Blois, not too far from Paris

In *Laborde*, apart from Oury, Felix Guattari, the famous philosopher, gave an outsider's look on this medicalized place. Jean Oury, director of the clinic, wasn't opposed to medication but thought that the institution itself was also curing the patient, it was *psychotherapie institutionnelle*. It meant that the institution had also to cure itself, hence the necessity of talking together about the relationship between patients and monitors, and any incident or accident in the institution, hence *le Club* and other clinical meetings. We *stagiaires* lived inside the clinic and shared the everyday life, bringing a permanent outside look, so badly needed in closed institutions.

Patients would live there for as long as needed, helped in the kitchen, and worked in different *ateliers* (workshops). Theatre was played together; and parties organized for different events. One of the important decisions was to ignore the white blouse uniform. Psychiatry doesn't need to be protected from bacterias, and monitors were acknowledged by patients without this external signal.

It did give a feeling of belonging, and pride to be part of a special experience.

I reluctantly left after three months, Felix Guattari having told me that I should get my diploma as a psychiatric nurse, to work then as a monitor. The Health Insurance in France starting to demand then the monitors to be qualified nurses. He advised me to train in *Ville Evrard* hospital, and more particularly in Guy Ballon's service. By the

time I got my diploma three years later, I hesitated going back to this lovely but separate world.

I was proposed a job in a dispensary (CMP) in the heart of Paris where I lived and where I was to organize a Club, in the manner of *Laborde*. Lucien Bonnafe had been head of service there, working as the city antenna of hospitalizations. We used to meet once a week with patients out of hospital to talk freely about any subject. We would also organize outings in the city.

Much later, working this time in the St. Anne hospitalization's wards, I realized that *Laborde* received only patients of their free wills, that is no *hospitalisations de office* (hospitalization of patients who were dangerous for themselves or others), and no *placement a la demande d'un tiers*; that is, patients who's family or doctor asked for hospitalization.

That means of course that you can afford having all open doors and tolerance, as all patients agree to be there, and there is no legal responsibility concerning there leaving the place.

Public service means in fact facing any kind of patients, with no choice of any kind. So I think that *Laborde* was and is a wonderful place for trying a different relationship to patients, but more difficult in public service where any patient from your geographic sector must find a place, day or night. Hence the *Laborde* experience is a light to think about the institutional impact on patients of any disfunctioning hospital or absence of talk.

Like the changes in education can start in private and then be applied in public service, *Laborde* and its *psychotherapie institutionnelle* has enlightened the movement in changes in psychiatry during the last 70 years and going into the future.

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