

Paper on Corinne Cosserson - Published in LE MONDE
(a French highly influential daily paper, the equivalent of the New York Times)

Properties of laughter taught in a good school ! The students of the sessions of "RIGOLOGIE" belong, most of the time, to the medical and social-educative world.

The image shows the front page of the French newspaper 'Le Monde'. The main headline is 'Les vertus du rire enseignées à bonne école' (The virtues of laughter taught in a good school). A sub-headline reads: 'Les participants aux sessions de « rigologie » sont issus, le plus souvent, des secteurs médicaux et socio-éducatifs' (The participants in the sessions of 'rigology' are mostly from the medical and socio-educative sectors). The article is a reportage by Françoise (Moussé) and Corinne Cosserson. A photograph shows a woman laughing heartily. The article discusses the benefits of laughter, its physiological effects, and how it is being taught in schools and workshops. It mentions that laughter is a universal language and can be used as a tool for social and educational purposes. The article also touches upon the historical and cultural aspects of laughter, including references to Rabelais and the concept of 'rigologie' (laughter therapy).

Is laughter truly specific to mankind, as claimed Rabelais, though a sentence voiced by his famous character Gargantua (1) ? Is it still true since American scientists found in 1998 that rats squeak with pleasure when they are tickled? This question is approached in the most serious manner by Corinne Cosserson, founder of the International School of Laughter, in the Herault (2).

Since 2002, she has animated over two thousand trainings of "laughterologists", and about twenty "expert" courses for those who want to go further. In this case, they are authorized, after writing a paper and doing an internship, to create laughing clubs and to use "laughterology" in their professional practice. Having first come to improve their own well

being, most of the interns (there are 7 to 15 persons in a group) work in the medical, paramedical and socio-educational fields.

At the program of the training, which counts at least three internships lasting a week to 10 days: meditation and laughter yoga - exercises to let go, where participants lying on the floor with their bodies as a rose-window, heads against each other, let come the wave of laughter - collective sessions of clowning, and a silent and individual show in front of the group with the mission to induce a fit of giggles.

The price: 800 Euros for private people, 1200 Euros for firms (some sessions are paid for by professional education). The location for this laughter school is a colorful house with a room covered with mirrors, a garden, a swimming pool. Great weather, birds singing, flowers smell good. It does help, of course, to learn how to relax without holding back or fearing to be ridiculous,

Laughter is soothing, we all experienced that. In tough moments or to resist adversity, laughter is a relief. It creates spaces of freedom where one lives in the present moment, it transforms angst into hilarious bubbles. Natural reaction, necessary outlet for stress? "A clown is like an aspirin, except that he works twice faster, said Groucho Marx.

For the neurologist Henri Rubinstein, laughter is a vital reaction, present in each person from birth to death, and is a powerful natural anti stress. Good for the heart, it gives energy, improves the breath by freeing the diaphragm and has positive effects on sleep. It can help with pain, notices Robert Provine, neurobiologist. If Provine believes in the true usefulness of laughter, he also thinks that there is no real evidence that it liberates endorphins, the pleasure hormones. For the child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Stanislas Tomkiewicz, laughter would be a kind of happiness pill, a "resilience tutor" that helps overcome traumatism.

The interns working with Corinne Cosserson and her assistant Julien Peschot, trained as a clown, have no doubt. Pascale Dupont, a general practitioner for 17 years in Saint-Aignan (Loir-et-Cher) (2) is at the end of her training. She has already started to offer to her patients some laughterology sessions, and she measures the benefits during her "normal" consultations: "Listening and prescribing [drugs] is not enough. With laughter exercises, patients regain their ability to be surprised and to be spontaneous". A laughterologist in a retirement home in the South of France, Patou Morello has integrated laughter and games in each steps of the daily routine. "The physicians of the facility are surprised to find that the residents, nearly all of whom are suffering from Alzheimer, become

more alert and able to remember simple things, previously relegated into oblivion".

Even more surprising, the project of Audrey Julie, a clinical psychologist for 19 years in an association of prevention of cardiovascular diseases, at Aubernai, in Alsace. Since her education at the International School of Laughter, she gathers 20 to 30 volunteers in a workshop, while maintaining her one on one conversations. "My diabetic patients, the patients who are stressed or recovering from a heart attack, play down the pain when comes the moment to be treated with insulin. They are happy to consult a psychologist in a different way", she notices.

As for the physicians of the association, Patrick Nicol and Odile Bonomi, they find it easier now to entice their patients to change their behavior. Not separating the mental and the physical is a primary concern in these pathologies. Laughter seems a great option in order to achieve this purpose.

Anne Beaujard, geriatrician in Albi in the Tarn (2), that just started a formation, is aware of it: "I am too stuck into my scientific and cartesian education, she says. I need to regain my own emotions to be able to hear my patients. I need to feel "alive" to cure better".

A need share by her companions in the session, Stéphanie Michat, Nadine Sicard and Valérie Papet, psychiatric nurses. They come from all over France, Nancy, Clermont-Ferrand and Lavaux, in the Tarn (2). Their purpose: "To create a laughing workshop in their day hospital. An alternate therapy efficient for the anxious and depressed pathologies", says Nadine Sicard.

As Corinne Cosserson reminds us, "you laugh more in a group. Laughter has a social role, it reinforces connections and develops a feeling of belonging and of recognition."

Mélina Gazsi
in *Le Monde*

1- Rabelais is a French writer and physician of the 16th century Renaissance, whose books describe the philosophical value of merriness and pleasure of the senses.

2 - French departments.