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On the Adamant

A film by Nicolas Philibert

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On the Adamant

A film by **Nicolas Philibert**



FRANCE, JAPAN • 2022 • 1H49 • 1,85

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www.filmsdulosange.com*



The Adamant

is a unique day care centre : it is a floating structure. Located on the Seine in the heart of Paris, it welcomes adults suffering from mental disorders, offering them care that grounds them in time and space, and helps them to recover or keep up their spirits. The team running it is one of those that try to resist the deterioration and dehumanization of psychiatry as best it can. The film invites us to board it and meet the patients and caregivers who invent its life day to day.



The Adamant

The Adamant is moored on Quai de la Rapée, on the right bank of the Seine, a stone's throw from the Gare de Lyon railway station. It is a "day centre" and part of the Paris Central Psychiatric Group, which also includes two CMPs (Centres Médicaux Psychologiques – Psychological Medical Centres), a mobile team, and two units within the Esquirol psychiatric hospital – famous in the past as the Charenton asylum – which in turn is attached to the Saint-Maurice hospital complex.

Therefore, this is not an isolated place because the interlinked units that make up the group form a network in which patients and carers are constantly on the move, each one able to build up his or her own cartography and so find an individual solution among the different elements on offer.

With large bay windows opening onto the Seine, the Adamant is a wooden building with a surface area of 650 m². The architects who designed it worked closely with the carers and the sectors' patients.

It opened in July 2010.

As public psychiatric care in France is divided into sectors, the Adamant, along with the other reception centres in the Paris Central Group, is dedicated to patients from the first four arrondissements of the capital.

Some patients visit every day, others only come from time to time, at regular or irregular intervals. They are of all ages and from a wide range of social backgrounds. The week begins with breakfast for everyone who is there, and then it's Monday's weekly meeting that brings together carers and patients. Everyone can add the points they want to see talked about to the agenda, news is exchanged, projects are discussed: an outing to the theatre, an upcoming guest, a walk in the forest, a concert, an exhibition...

The care team is made up of nurses, psychologists, occupational therapists, a psychiatrist, a secretarial office, two hospital service agents, and various outside contributors from a range of backgrounds. Permanent attention is paid to everyday life. Everyone, both patients and carers, is invited to help to "build it up together".

The therapeutic function concerns the group as a whole. Everyone can get involved whatever their title, status, diplomas, place in the hierarchy, personality or style. It will not shock anyone if a patient confides important things in the person running the bar that day - whether the latter is a caseworker, a nurse, a "simple" intern or another patient - and does not say much to the psychiatrist during the next day's consultation, for the team will find a way to link up information given in a scattered manner.

There are numerous workshops: sewing, music, reading, a magazine, a film club, writing, drawing and painting, radio, relaxation, leatherwork, jam making, cultural outings... but patients can also come along just to spend a moment there, to have a coffee, to feel welcomed and supported, caught up in the atmosphere of the place. Indeed, the object of a workshop is not an end in itself, it is often only a pretext, an invitation not to stay shut in at home, to reconnect with the world and reshape their bond with it.





Interview with Nicolas Philibert



How did this film come about?

I first heard about the Adamant a good fifteen years ago, when it was still just a project. At the time, the clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst Linda de Zitter, to whom I have remained very close since the filming in 1995 of *Every Little Thing* at the La Borde psychiatric clinic, was involved in the exciting adventure of its creation: for months, patients and carers had been meeting with a team of architects to define its key components. And what started out as a utopian dream finally came true.

Years later, around seven or eight years ago, I had a first opportunity to go to the Adamant. The *Rhizome* workshop invited me to come and talk about my work. *Rhizome* is a conversation group that takes place every Friday in the library. From time to time, five or six times a year, a guest is invited: a musician, a novelist, a philosopher, an exhibition curator... That day, I spent two hours in front of a group that had prepared for my visit by watching some of my films and continually forced me out of my comfort zone. Since starting out as a filmmaker, I have had many

opportunities to speak in front of an audience, but this time it left me particularly invigorated, spurred on by the remarks of the people who were there. The wish to make another film in the world of psychiatry, to "see who I am elsewhere"¹, had been with me for a long time, and that day reinforced my desire. Some patients and carers certainly had very high expectations! However, I would need to wait a few years before beginning because I was focused on another project.

Why, years after filming at the La Borde clinic, did you want to make another film in the world of psychiatry?

I have always been very attentive to and very interested in psychiatry. It is a world that is both disturbing and, dare I say, very stimulating, insofar as it constantly forces us to think about ourselves, our limits, our flaws, and the way the world works.

Psychiatry is a magnifying glass, an enlarging mirror that says a lot about our

¹ Linda De Zitter

humanity. For a filmmaker, it is an inexhaustible field.

Moreover, in the last twenty-five years, the situation of public psychiatry has deteriorated considerably: budget cuts, bed closures, lack of personnel, demotivation of the teams, dilapidated premises, carers snowed under with administrative tasks and often reduced to the role of simple guards, the return to isolation rooms and restraint. This decline was undoubtedly an additional motivation. There has never been a golden age, but we hear from all sides that psychiatry is now at the end of its tether, completely abandoned by the authorities. It is as if we no longer wanted to see the "mad". They are no longer discussed except through the prism of their dangerous nature, which is most often fantasized. The security-oriented rhetoric of a large part of the political class and a certain press who unashamedly exploit a few isolated incidents is obviously not unrelated to this. In this extremely devastated context, a place like the Adamant seems a little miraculous, and we have to wonder how long it will last.



What you say about the degradation of psychiatry is not perceptible in the film. Does this mean that the Adamant has escaped the devastation that has struck the sector?

The Adamant has managed to remain a lively and attractive place, both for patients and carers, because it does not rest on its laurels. It is a place that is constantly in touch with the outside world, open to everything that is happening, and which welcomes all kinds of contributors. Our filming is an enlightening example of that.

Moreover, it is a place that strives to do work on itself, in line with "institutional psychotherapy", that current of thought with a rather barbaric name that prescribes that, in order to care for people - and to keep desire alive - the institution must be cared for, that it must fight relentlessly against everything that inevitably threatens it: repetition, hierarchy, excessive verticality, withdrawal, inertia, bureaucracy... And the place itself is very beautiful, which counts for a lot: the spaces, the materials, its location, the proximity of the water, when most similar units, without



always being sinister and cold, are content to be functional.

Why then did you choose a place that is not representative of the situation you describe? Wasn't there a risk of giving a very partial image of psychiatry?

What psychiatry? There is no "one" form of psychiatry, it is plural, multiple, and always in need of revision. The kind I wanted to show is this human psychiatry that still resists and that is so under threat. It resists everything that is destroying society everywhere, and tries to remain dignified. The film is not explicitly one that denounces things. By taking the opposite direction, it does so implicitly, by stating them. As Jean-Louis Comolli² wrote shortly before his death, "the true political dimension of

cinema is to ensure that the dignity of people is recognized by others, between the screen and the audience".

The Adamant is an atypical place, but it is not the only one. And the team that runs it is not the only one to show imagination either, we must not glorify it. The question of representativeness is not my main concern. When I shot *Every Little Thing*, the La Borde clinic was not representative of the psychiatry of its time either, and still isn't today. These are places that experiment. They take risks. We need to move away from clichés to show the audience that restraint is not a solution and change the image of the

² Film director, writer, former editor-in-chief of *Cahiers du cinema*.



mentally ill that is so degrading. The basis is the human relationship. It is everything that is set up, everything that is attempted, using various tools, without excluding any, so that the encounter may take place. There is no recipe, no magic wand. "Human" psychiatry - a pleonasm? - is one that fumbles, that finds tailor-made solutions. It considers patients as subjects, recognizing their singularity without seeking to domesticate it at all costs.

What was your state of mind when you started filming?

Every Little Thing helped me a lot. It took me a long way, allowing me to rid myself of a certain number of preconceptions. At the time, I was very hesitant about making a

film on psychiatry: how could I film people brought low by suffering without exploiting them, without abusing the power that the camera inevitably gives to the person holding it. People for whom the sight of a camera, a boom or a microphone can nourish a feeling of persecution, provoke delirium, decompensation, a performance. How can we avoid making a spectacle of suffering, avoid falling into folklore and complacency? But once I was there, the encounters changed everything. The answers came from the patients themselves. They encouraged me to confront my scruples and doubts, and helped me to overcome them. Some said: "Are you afraid of exploiting us? What are you thinking? We may be crazy but we're not stupid!"

Today, in the age of social networks, where we are encouraged to say and show everything, these same questions are no less relevant. Films must keep their secrets, keep the questions open. It is important for me to resist this injunction, this call to make "everything visible", into which our world is inexorably sinking.

What were your initial resolutions?

Above all, I wanted to feel free and not impose anything on myself. Not to have to worry too much about the film's architecture, convinced that the unity of place, along with the identifiable and recurring "characters", would be enough to constitute the cement and allow for undisciplined construction.

Following characters, losing them, finding them later, filming a meeting, a workshop, the greeting of a newcomer, filming private conversations, informal exchanges: at reception, at the bar, in the kitchen, on the deck, between two doors, catching an exchange on the fly, a monologue, a play on words, and recording all these little details that one might find trivial, eccentric, anecdotal or simply idiotic, and that would become the very fabric of the film we were making.

I've always liked to improvise, and over time, improvisation has become an ethical necessity for me. Above all, explain nothing. Avoid subjecting the film to a programme, to pre-existing ideas that have to be expressed. Track down any hint of intentionality.



Moreover, nothing ever goes as planned, the presence of a camera always reshuffles the cards. Making a documentary means dealing with the accidental, with everything that escapes predictions. The most beautiful scenes are often those that come about by surprise, without premeditation. Sometimes it is enough to be there, attentive to the surroundings, and to believe in it enough for this place to become a setting, these men and women the characters of a tale, these seemingly insignificant actions authentic stories. For me, the most important thing is to have a solid starting point, like the promise that something will blossom. "I write my books to find out what's in them," used to say the writer Julien Green. I could adopt that line for myself.

How did you go about getting yourself accepted, along with the presence of a camera?

Before you can reap, you have to sow: gain the trust of those you want to film. Luckily, some of the nursing staff and several patients knew a few of my films. That helped. I took the time to explain my project without trying to conceal any of the hesitations I might have, sharing them on the contrary with everyone. This also helped. They understood that if I was demanding, that was first and foremost in relation to myself. Finally, they saw that I was ready to let myself be carried along, that the film would built up according to circumstances, contingencies, availability, and not from a position of superiority. In the end,

there was a fairly spontaneous acceptance. Curiosity too. And for many, the desire to be part of it. Some people asked not to be filmed, without being hostile to our presence.

How long did shooting last and how much footage did you accumulate?

I had planned to take my time, but if shooting goes on too long it can become intrusive. So you have to disappear now and then to give people a break. Hence the filming over several stages, which ended up being spread out over seven months - from May to November 2021 - because Covid got involved... not counting a few isolated days in early 2022. With the same idea in mind - to avoid being too invasive - I often shot alone. When the team was complete, there were four of us: a sound engineer, a camera assistant, an intern, and me behind the camera. To film a meeting, a workshop, we had to use a boom, and on certain days we had to shoot with two cameras, but for more intimate situations I managed alone. I probably shot alone half the time. In the end, I had around one hundred hours, maybe a little more. That's a lot. But shooting is not about gathering as much material as possible and thinking "we'll see later, we'll see when we edit", otherwise there would be no reason to stop. Shooting means already beginning to build up the film, to make associations, to look for correspondences, to put situations into perspective. So it means already thinking about editing.

How did you construct the film during editing?

I had to find a balance between the moments of daily life, with everything that can mark it - workshops, meetings, the bar, informal exchanges - and more intimate moments in which a person confides in me a little of his or her story, while ensuring the unity of the whole. Another challenge was to make the collective exist, as it is so important in this place - from a therapeutic point of view - without the audience feeling lost. I therefore needed a few recurring "characters" to whom we could become attached. Another balance to be found.

I was of course very keen for the audience

to hear the patients. Their sensitivity, their lucidity, their humour sometimes. Their words, their faces. Their vulnerability, which would encounter ours here and there. I wanted us to be able to identify with them, or at least recognize what unites us, beyond our differences: something like a common humanity, the feeling of being part of the same world.

Once again, I attached great importance to voices, accents, language, speaking and listening. *His Master's Voice, In the Land of the Deaf, Every Little Thing, La maison de la radio, Nénette...* my films are all variations on language, with gaps, fullness and silences. It's all about rhythm and sound.



In the film, the carers seem to be more or less in the background. We can't always tell them apart from the patients...

Indeed, there is nothing to identify them as such at first sight, as they do not wear white coats, do not have syringes in their hands... In short, they do not conform to the clichés. Moreover, I have kept nothing of the daily meetings they have with each other, nor anything that resembles explanatory speeches by them. Even so, they are not in the background: we see them talking with patients, conducting workshops (drawing, accounts), co-moderating meetings, in brief they play their part completely, attentive to each other, often discreet but very much

there. We could say that caring is first and foremost caring for the atmosphere, it is not frontal, it is subtle, often imperceptible, it goes through a thousand and one details. A great Japanese fashion designer used to say: "The most important thing in a garment is what makes it stand up while remaining invisible, its hidden side".

The fact of not distinguishing between patients and carers from the outset can be a little confusing, I agree. It's sad to say, but today, in these times of inward-focused thinking, it's as if we need to put people in boxes, to reassure ourselves by knowing precisely who is who, who does what. That guy over there? A schizophrenic! And that

one? A nurse! But the Adamant - like La Borde, La Chesnaie and other places - has a different philosophy. Many activities are co-hosted there. The carers do not spend their time draped in their status, concerned about appearing for what they are. The border between carers and cared for, if there is one, is not set up as a bulwark. By adopting this logic, the film places the viewer in the position of having to get rid of certain clichés. It is an assumed political position. It makes things more complex, when today everything pushes us towards simplification.

The film ends in fog...

It was an idea I had very early on, which I really wanted to keep. For two months I set my alarm clock for five in the morning to watch the weather. Unfortunately, in Paris itself, fog is a virtually non-existent phenomenon. I ended up capturing a little of it, but I would have liked it to be much more enveloping. Like a sort of homage to haziness. A blurring of the edges. In other words, of the sacrosanct normality.

This film is the first part of a triptych. Can you say a few words about the other two?

I shot the second part at Esquirol in the two intra-hospital units that come under the Paris Centre group. It will be called *Averroès and Rosa Parks*, since those are their names. It is largely based on individual interviews between patients and psychiatrists. Some of the patients filmed on the Adamant, and

others, will be included. It is currently being edited.

The third film will be a collection of home visits to patients by carers. The final title has not yet been chosen. Once again, there will be some familiar faces. Most of the film has been shot, and partly edited. But I must insist on one point: the three films are completely autonomous. You don't need to have seen the first one to see the next ones. You can see them in any order, or only one, etc. What they have in common is that they are set in the Paris Central Psychiatric Group, but they are three very distinct films. They will be released in theatres within a few months of each other. I had set out to make only one, but things turned out differently. ■

Paris, January 2023



Crew

This film has been directed with the complicity of **Linda De Zitter**

Camera
assisted by

Nicolas Philibert
Rémi Jennequin
Pauline Pénichout
Camille Bertin
Katell Djian

Sound

Erik Ménard
François Abdelnour

Intern

Baptiste Vidal

Editing
assisted by

Nicolas Philibert
Janusz Baranek
Meryll Chandru

Sound editing & mix
assisted by

Nathalie Vidal
Élias Boughedir

Grading

Christophe Bousquet

Post-Production

Delphine Passant

Coproducer

Norio Hatano

Producers

Miléna Poylo & Gilles Sacuto,
Céline Loiseau

assisted by

Clément Reffo

A coproduction

TS Productions

France 3 Cinéma

Longride

With the participation of

Ciné+

France Télévisions

Centre national du cinéma

et de l'image animée

Les Films du Losange

Universciné

Région Île-de-France

With the support of

CNC

In collaboration with

With

Patients and caregivers

from the Adamant daycare center



Selective filmography Nicolas Philibert



- **ON THE ADAMANT** (2022, 109')
Berlin Official Selection (competition)
- **EACH AND EVERY MOMENT** (2018, 105')
Official Selection Locarno Film Festival ; États généraux du film documentaire, Lussas ; Festival du Film Francophone d'Angoulême ; Festival Internacional de Cine de Morelia (Mexico) ; Rencontres Internationales du Documentaire de Montréal ; Sevilla European Film Festival ; International Documentary Filmfestival Amsterdam (IDFA) ; Jury Award, Filmmaker Festival Internazionale di Cinema, Milano ; Cinéma Vérité, Iran International Doc Film Festival...
- **LA MAISON DE LA RADIO** (2013, 103')
Berlinale (Panorama) ; French Press Etoile d'Or; Prix Tiempo de Historia (Valladolid) ; Telluride FF, London FF, Istanbul FF, Sydney FF, Tübingen FF, Jérusalem FF, Melbourne FF, Stockholm FF, Thessalonique FF, Saint Petersburg FF, Vancouver FF, Rio de Janeiro FF, Tromso FF, Morelia FF, Cluj FF, Santiago (FIDOCs), Buenos Aires (FIDBA) Copenhague (CPH Dox), Helsinki (Doc Point), Lisboa (Doc Lisboa), Warsaw (Planet Doc)...
- **NÉNETTE** (2010, 70')
Berlinale (Forum) ; Best Director Award, RiverRun Film Fest (USA) ; Viennale, Edinburgh (EIFF), Nyon (Visions du Réel), Helsinki (Doc Point), Warsaw (Planet Doc), Toronto (HotDocs), San Francisco...
- **BACK TO NORMANDY** (2007, 113')
Official Selection Cannes Film Festival.
- **L'INVISIBLE** (2002, 45')

■ **TO BE AND TO HAVE** (2002, 104')

Official Selection Cannes Film Festival ; Prix Louis Delluc ; French Press Étoile d'Or ; Audience Award - Le Masque et la Plume ; Prix Méliès du syndicat de la critique ; Cesar Nomination: Best Director, Best film, Best Editing ; Best Editing César Winner; nominated at BAFTA ; Humanum Award (Belgium Press) ; Best non fiction film Award (National Society of Film Critics, USA) ; Grand Jury Prize, Full Frame Film Festival (USA).

■ **WHO KNOWS?** (1999, 106')

■ **EVERY LITTLE THING** (1997, 105')

Official Selection Locarno Film Festival ; Audience Award, Rencontres de Cinéma à Paris ; Audience Award, Festival du Cinéma et des Nouveaux Médias (Montréal) ; Best Documentary Award, Potsdam FF ; Grand-Prix Amascultura (Lisboa) ; Golden Spire (San Francisco).

■ **ANIMALS** (1995, 60')

Best Research Film Award, Festival dei Popoli (Florence) ; Golden Gate Award (San Francisco).

■ **IN THE LAND OF THE DEAF** (1993, 99')

Official Selection Locarno Film Festival ; Grand-Prix , Festival de Belfort ; Grand-Prix , Festival dei Popoli (Florence) ; Grand-Prix , Festival de Vancouver ; Prix Humanum (Belgium Press) ; Grand-Prix, Festival de Bombay ; Golden Gate Award (San Francisco) ; Stephanie Beacham Award (USA) ; Peabody Award (USA).

■ **LOUVRE CITY** (1990, 85')

Prix Europa (Best Documentary 1990) ; Intermédia Award ,Cinéma du Réel.

■ **HIS MASTER'S VOICE** (1978, 100') and **PATRONS/TÉLÉVISION** (1979, 3 X 60') codirected with Gérard Mordillat.

