



Strange utterances, horrible pronouncements,
accents of anger, words of suffering,
and voices shrill and faint, and beating hands
all went to make a tumult that will whirl
forever through that turbid, timeless air,
like sand that eddies when a whirlwind swirls.

(...)

The world will let no fame of theirs endure;
both justice and compassion must disdain them;
let us not talk of them, but look and pass.

from

The Devine Comedy
by Dante Alighieri (1265–1321),
Inferno, Canto 3,
verse 25–30
verse 49–51

'Apocalyptic, with a high Hieronymus Bosch-factor.' This is how the Magnum photographer Carl De Keyzer describes the atmosphere in a bizarre church in Bouaké, in Ivory Coast. He visited it twice in 2005, on both occasions only briefly for lack of time. This small building is a psychiatric hospital to which outcasts and the disturbed are taken in a minibus or pickup truck every day. People with war traumas too, as Ivory Coast suffered a bitter civil war from 2002 to 2007. When De Keyzer was there, it was still thick with 'dangerous fellows with Kalashnikovs'. It's a little quieter now.

Like many African countries, Ivory Coast barely has any psychiatric services as we know them. Psychosis, schizophrenia and other disorders are generally thought to be the work of evil spirits. People suffering from them are often literally chained up, beaten in order to drive the madness out of their body or simply left to their fate. The hospital in Bouaké is one of the two centres in Ivory Coast, a country of sixteen million people, where this sort of patient can receive care. It is kept in operation by an Italian catholic ngo 'with limited resources and a mediaeval instinct for recruiting souls,' as De Keyzer puts it.



" Les malades sont la pupille
et le cœur de Dieu "





