

Ndayé Kouagou

Position and Balance

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The simplest questions often have the most complicated answers. Who am I? What do I want? Why am I here? I feel dizzy... It's as if a handful of words placed there, one after the other, had the power to disrupt our certainties, influence our behavior, force us to think, deeply, without any trigger.

Yet what we usually ask of words is simple: to convey a message, without question; to formulate an answer that doesn't make me want to ask again. They are here to remind me of what I have to do, when I write them down on a post-it note so I don't forget. To tell me what I should look like, when I see them on a sign I didn't want to look at. How should one write them for me to remember those words? Who should say them for me to listen? It's all a question of "position and balance" -that's the only answer Ndayé Kouagou will give you. It sounds like a magic formula; I'll give you that. But did you notice his tone? He feels so confident he must be right. He writes words all over the walls so that you only see them. He tells you which ones to remember by writing them bigger. He throws them out in flashy formulas on such shiny surfaces they could attract magpies. The character he introduces us to pronounce them in a robotic voice that doesn't sound like their own, on top of their beveled heels, in their brightly-colored suits and behind plastic glasses. Are they both making fun of me? They stroll from screen to screen in the gallery, guiding me along the walls, into their Reveries of a Solitary Wanderer and their own quotes, that Ndayé intertwine with a meme or an iStock image. Here and there, amid absurdity, I recognize saucy bits of the world that lays out of the capsule they built.

In the Middle Ages, the day of Carnival, the king loses his crown and gives it to the Fool. On this day, hierarchies are overthrown, orders are subverted, and the meaning of the ordinary world is turned upside down. Words, however, remain. They describe the norm and its reverse, what must be and how to transgress it. On this special day, rationality changes tack, and the absurd comes to describe the flaws and shortcomings of what goes on the rest of the time. Bodies and words unravel the meaning that the king wants them to have every other day of the year.

There's a touch of carnival in Ndayé Kouagou's change of perspective. Who is the King? Who is the Fool? Don't look for the answer. Your new guru told you himself: you won't find one here. Change your perspective instead. One well-asked question is worth a thousand convoluted answers.

- Horya Makhlouf