

## **The Mata Hari Syndrome**

---

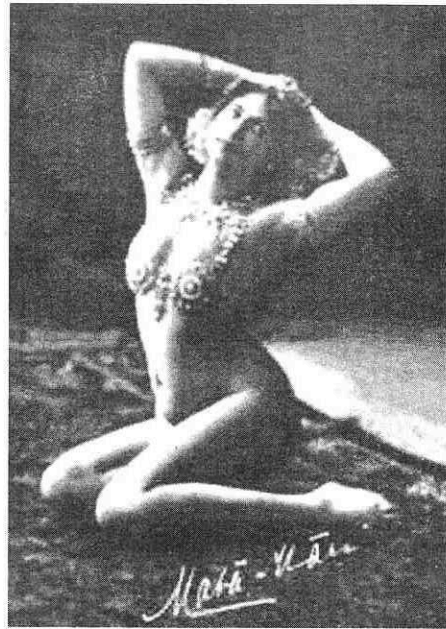
**Every Night Different**



*Sarah Lewison*

## **Prologue**

---



Margaretha Geetruida Zelle, aka Mata Hari, was born to a petit-bourgeoisie family in Leewarden, Holland, in 1876. As the 18 year-old mail-order bride of a Dutch naval officer, Zelle lived for years as an officer's wife in Dutch colonized Indonesia, where she encountered the local art and ritual dance. Returning to the Netherlands, she was divorced from her abusive husband and emerged some years later in Paris as an exotic dancer whose mysterious "Eastern" identity titillated and fed popular Orientalist fantasies. Her alleged career as a spy followed on the heels of her success as a dancer and demi-monde. She was partial to military men, and her beauty and prestige led to a series of both long and short term affairs with high ranking men who were active in military and diplomatic services in Germany, France and Belgium.

During the summer of 1914, Zelle was residing in Berlin with an engagement scheduled at the Metropol Theater. At the onset of the war, she departed Germany for the Netherlands. Biographical records conflict here; some

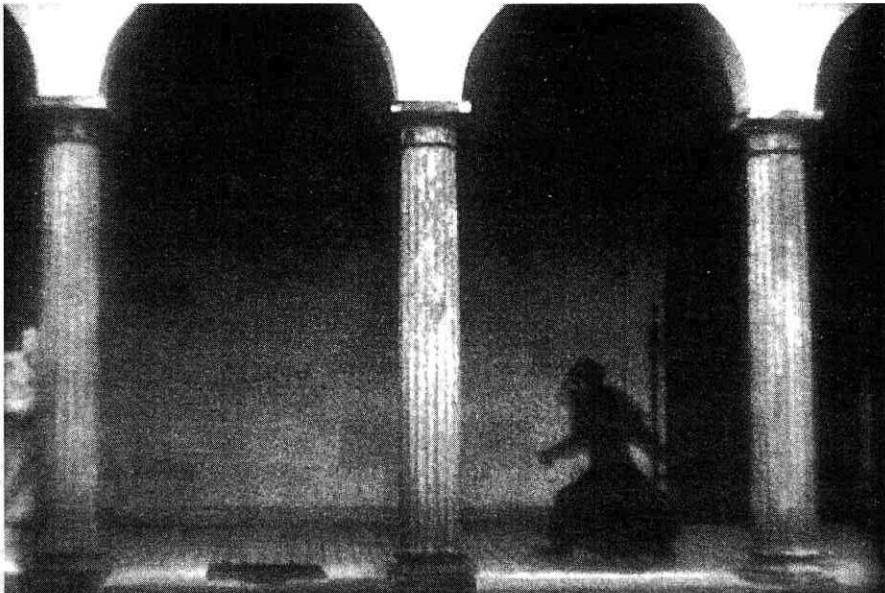


The Lover of Mata Hari, Pierre de Mortissac, Who, After Believing That He Had Arranged for the Escape of Mata Hari, Has Buried His Memories of His Failure Under the Robes of a Monk in the Monastery of Miraflores, at Bargoñ, Spain.

*Newspaper clippings from the personal collection of Eloise Richert, found taped inside the front cover of Mata Hari, Courtesan and Spy, by Major Thomas Coulson, O.B.E., published in 1930. Other biographies deny her involvement with a Pierre de Mortissac, if they mention him at all.*

place her in Antwerp at a German school for spies, while others indicate she was supported in Amsterdam by a lover. The accounts agree, however, that she spent the summer of 1916 in Paris at the Grande Hotel, where she came under scrutiny by French intelligence for counter-espionage. The notes of the two officers assigned to monitor her relate mainly trivial activities.

In the course of two meetings with Captain Georges Ladoux, a senior officer in French counter-intelligence, Zelle allegedly agreed to procure information for France, an act which served to confirm French suspicions of her. Later, an intercepted German telegraph transmission provided indicting evidence the French were looking for; it was only later they understand that the German's code had been decoded by the Allies a year prior, and was in dis-use by that time, introducing the possibility that she was the victim of a frame-up. Tellingly, one of her biographers writes that four days after Zelle's execution, Captain Ladoux, who led the investigation, was arrested for spying for Germany. (Howe 267)





## Mata Hari Syndrome

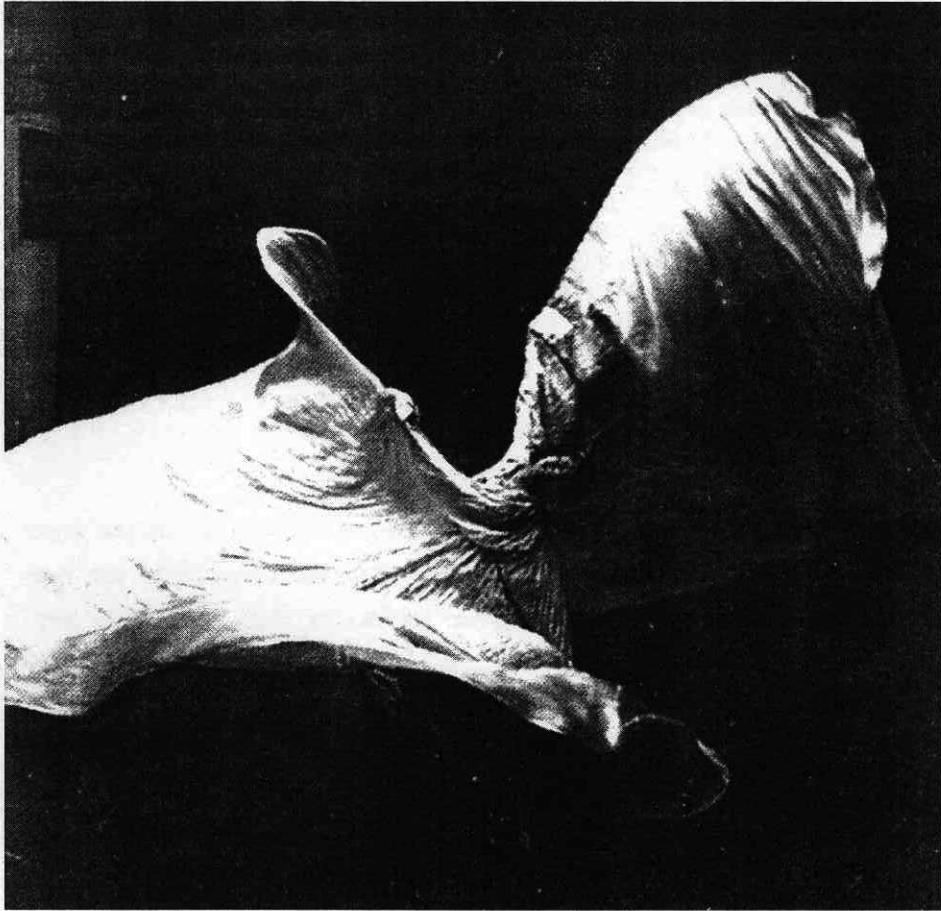
"Beneath the apologist, the parasitologist." - Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, p 8

Twenty-five year old Margaretha Zelle, a provincial Dutch woman, is the victim of circumstances. The conventions of her time, her temperament, and the boundaries of her imagination offer her limited possibilities. She has succeeded in divorcing her husband who recently threw her statuesque body against Javanese thatch and beat it black and blue, but she has failed to attain custody of her 6-year-old daughter. Her remaining family has rejected her, and although she is educated to teach kindergarten, her megalomania won't tolerate this banal drift into spinsterhood. She has already visited Paris, seeking work as an admired muse, and finds she is not quite prepared for the exposure, nakedness to be exact, this unexacting employment necessitates. Her aspirations are postponed. Neither submissive enough to do what is required nor conventional enough to do what she may, she ignominiously returns to her native Holland. There are meetings with established gentlemen, and re-readings of translations of tantric verses and the Ramayana, romantic fairy tales on which she fed as a child bride in Java. There is no clear record of what she does in this private period, yet a year later, she arrives again in Paris with a letter of introduction; a change has occurred, and is it so remarkable? She rides horses in a circus for a few months, and then suddenly rises over the horizon as the dawn of her own planet, with a billing delineating stardom itself, as Matahari, an Indonesian translation for "Eye of Dawn". Self-guided, she has become a new attraction in the amusement park of Paris. Within 10 years, she rises to the apex of fame in modern Europe, only to slide into absolute despicability as the ultimate traitor of all national safeties, the double agent. Somewhere along the way, she has lost control of her self-made publicity machine.

Matahari is only the starting point for this series of propositions. How is she so different from any self-conscious creature attempting to survive amidst shifting sands? How different even from a slime mold creeping across a petri dish? The year is 1905. A cultural longing for vanquished nature and spontaneity continues to grow, along with a higher threshold for shocking experiences and shock value. Loie Fuller, who allegedly knew more about lighting and theatrical production than dancing, has already been a Parisian sensation since 1892, and her image was widely known through reproductions by Lautrec and Cheret. Fuller was billed as the Goddess of Light, which might have inspired Zelle's own stage name (as well as the much later Thomas Kinkaide Painter of Light). Zelle says, "I am Matahari, Eye of Dawn." She says, "I (too) am a channel for fucking light." Certainly it was not just copy-cat-ism. A combination of personal exigencies and experiences (including a predilection for dramatic and expensive apparel), combined with popular tastes, the salon as a vehicle for social circulation, and a lot of libido and chutzpah lead to Zelle's appearance on the stage as an Orissan temple initiate. Bricoleur Zelle assembles a series of sinuous movements to propel her delicious limbs and thin conceptual cloth from a gleaning of sacred texts, but likely there was no plan. What did she do during that missing year? Probably she was sitting on the lap of a Dutch banker when she laid off her studies in the lowland dusk, sipping brandy and munching windmill cookies. It's likely there was no scheme beyond an instinct to do something unfamiliar, novel or fantastic. Perhaps she had an infection, or an infestation of worms. I call this her incubation period.

In medicine, a syndrome refers to a number of symptoms occurring together and characterizing a specific disease. (Greek: syndrom- a running; dromos, a course). Matahari, a Dutch woman patching together an identity as a traditional Indian dancer, is symptomatic of her time: a woman who



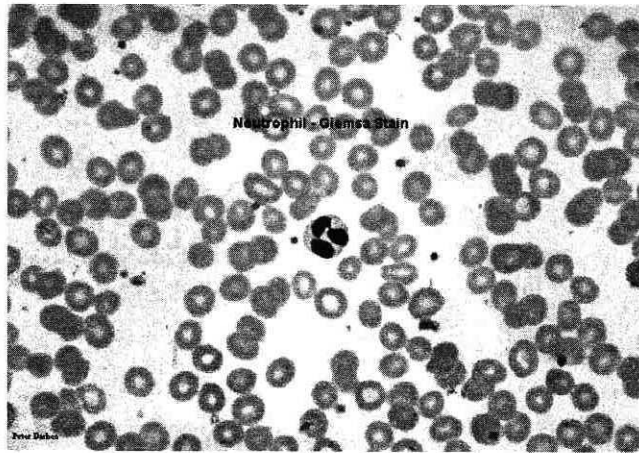


Photograph of Loie Fuller, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris

devises a survival mechanism out of the running together of the fevers of colonial imperialism, demi-monde culture, embryonic feminisms, and material avarice. The combination is infectious, and creates a cult following. She runs infections that she has no need to treat, for they treat her well. But the untreated course runs too long; she has no sense of timing, and failing to inoculate against newer symptoms which arise in the period of pre-war nationalism and paranoia by aligning her loyalties with one



*Neutrophil,  
Parasitology Images list  
([http://www.life.sci.qut.edu.au/  
LIFESCI/darben/general.htm](http://www.life.sci.qut.edu.au/LIFESCI/darben/general.htm))*

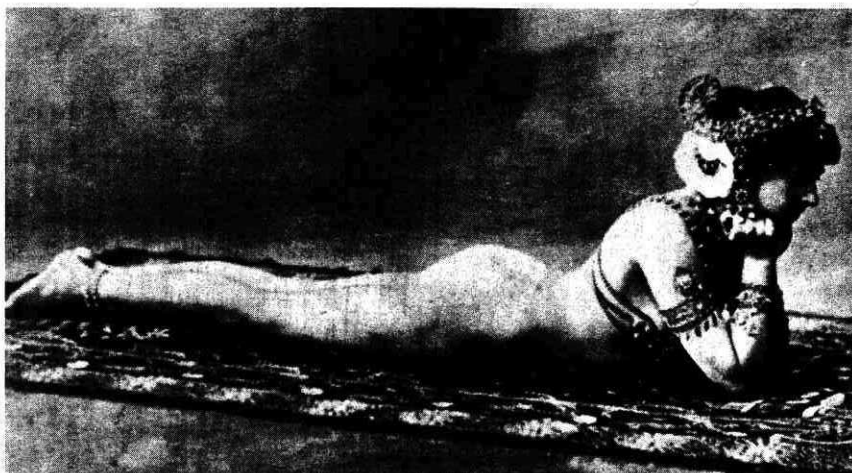


nation, her attractions begin to show some wear. New symptoms adhere to her and she becomes an entire amusement park of attractions, the known ones, exotic sexuality, and new ones, which however, have their own histories; the dark woman of mystery and traps, a deceiver. First she is the fun house, then the tunnel of love, finally the haunted house. The progression of her symptoms open on the edge of a world of paranoia and phantasms, and blur into other generalized suspicions about the untrustworthy-ness of women, the idle, and strangers.

The attractions of Matahari consist of unaligned components, each a symptom of the time. Narcissism meets a rudimentary familiarity with exotic religion, flows into a fascination for difference, courses through the salon of a retired opera singer, and washes up in numerous bedchambers. She takes advantage of opportunities the way a parasite infests a host, feeding her enormous appetite for popular trends, and she becomes very big, big enough that she can host her own soirees. A courtesan is also a host-ess.

But we are not finished with the metaphor of river or wash. An underground tributary forms from love juices and coins and trinkets which tumble down, down, through beds covered with the flags of hostile nations. Deep underground, they form a nourishing microbial soup, which sustains her, soup that is also a trap, a quicksand waiting for the wash-up of her career. The microbial soup, a syndrome in itself, becomes infested as a current of paranoia, preferences and dire circumstances run together. Like an organism, she has generated a process, which must fulfill its own life cycle.

One year of preparation, ten years in the limelight, followed by uncounted days seeking new gigs, becoming fat, fatuously expecting to be desired forever although no longer young and lithe, while Germany and France prepare for war. A hostess has figured out how to survive without being killed by her parasite, but new noises interrupt and the milieu has changed. The parasite turns elsewhere to feed; it goes to war. The parasite departs. We can't afford this bar anymore. Fantastically, a second hostess surfaces, or is this Matahari a parasite? It is as if there were two Mataharis, the *nice lady who only wants to dance*, and H21, the courtesan and trained spy, a criminal.



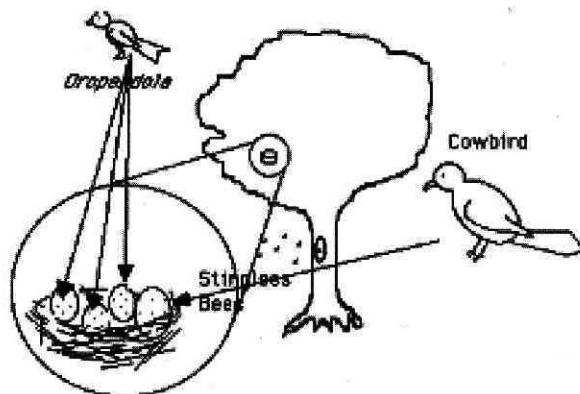
*Exhibit at Exotic World  
Burlesque Hall of Fame and  
Museum in Helendale, California*

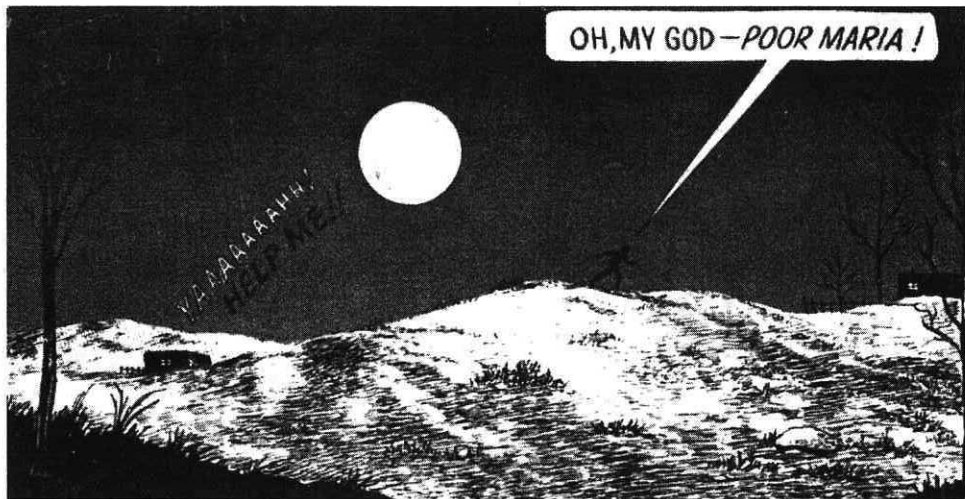


In the Matahari syndrome, rather than pursuing the literal enactment or entombing of Zelle's life, I've attempted to retrieve some of the symptoms, and establish them as a set of threads, or vibrations, for I wanted them to resemble something which is alive. Allopathic medicine would attempt to isolate and reproduce symptoms clinically to determine the nature of an 'illness.' I attempt to re-combine them to instigate a syndrome that will run its course. In the language of art, it is a process piece for its qualities of organic growth, stimulated by myself as well as by physical forces and visitors. The spaces contain no narrative, but each has a different quality, and they change and run into each other as well as being run into from the outside for the duration of the piece. The notion of process is important in this work, for without the possibility of change over time, or the eventuality of contributions and participation of other desiring bodies, the syndrome could not be nourished. No syndrome could be nourished in isolation, or without time.

In alluding to a notion of 'nourishment' from an 'outside,' it seems that a Matahari syndrome could also be thought of as a model of the contractual

relationship between parasite and host. The relationship between parasite and host is both biological and social and even objects are not immune from these relations. The parasite is that which feeds at the expense of its host. Socially, the host invites the guest into his home and offers sustenance freely. How long the guest can stay, I don't know. It depends upon how persistent or entertaining he is. And for what reason would the host allow itself to be parasitized in the first place? Of course, the host is parasitizing someone else, another parasite. There is no stability in this relationship between parasite and host. I am literally the host-ess, with a limited agenda to produce a fantastic space that changes over time. The cocktail glasses are gleaming, and there is glint in a thirsty eye of my guest; or perhaps the visitor is host? For in French the word *hôte* refers to both guest and host. Not that they are always interchangeable, but the intrusion of another parasite, or debt incurred in their relations, could cause the roles of guest and host to switch around. Michel Serres suggests that this ambivalent set of relations is also a concurrency, for we need not decide our roles, again, it is a symptom expressing relations between relations. Here is adventure, survival, desperation, narcissism, sensuality, a land of imagination and contamination. All this has been constructed from the detritus of your own environment. Come spend the night and I'll unfold the petrified sofa bed for you.





back up in the woods  
up there where the moon leaked through  
where it cleared out after that dark hunk  
to a certain kind of accident

back up in there, you coulda been drinking snake poison and nobody'd know  
wasn't nothing, wasn't no law, protectin you  
just the blood you know had turned a certain color  
once it got inside

where you crossed the balance beam  
the lady inside, a willow taken up by some walking spirit  
she let the liquors pass  
through where it got all blurry

and it ain't that you was outa reach  
or under cover  
you was right under their noses  
where they eyes don't try to smell

and what you weren't s'pose to be doin back there all folks knew but also didn't  
what ran a crease across it  
like a fault bulging out the wall  
is what nobody had words or courage to speak about - *K Vann*

# Every Night Different

## Day I. Sand.

What is the nature of this space we are talking about? There are two spaces divided by a wall. The first one, an outside, an other, is the desert, where the sand ramps upward, and unevenly invades the hermetic interior, the salon behind the wall. Sand appears on the table, static drowns out intelligible conversation. There are objects. The salon world counters the absence of social space for university exiles, but as such, it also functions as a trap. There is only one trapdoor; to the (non-existent) restroom. This space recalls other fictional spaces, those where a group of people are gathered together for an occasion, and they mysteriously die off. Bunuel's *Exterminating Angel*, Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Indians*. But no one is dying off here, in fact it is quite safe and friendly. The sand mostly stays outside, the wind comes up, static roars, dead birds sing, new people enter, and they are also quite whole.

At first the sand is pristine and surprising within the white walls of the gallery. Before long, however, it clings to me everywhere; and the gallery is filthy. Its fight or flight and I must fight, for my virtuous intention is to impress my guests. But wait! Donald Kuspit, the critic, a *known* parasite who lives off the labor of others, has something to say about sand.

"Identification with the medium is in direct proportion to the feeling of being overwhelmed by the indifference of the crowd: the more overwhelmed the artist feels, the more he turns to the medium for solace. And the more materially explicit, unexpected, and elemental the medium must be: not just paint, but boulders (Carl Andre)..earth (Heizer and Smithson)..."<sup>1</sup>

Boulders, hair, shit, sand, and so forth. Yes, I want the crowd to stay, and to *feel something*, but I'm not sure what. As if something is growing which



*Mata Hari Syndrome, Detail of Installation*

will not stop. Blind sand crunches underfoot, raw natural material introducing an unmediated experience with nature. Kuspit references our experiences in the pristine national park. It is true that I started with lines on the wall; a horizon, a landscape, and an inclination leading to a road (to a national park). Now Kuspit is getting buggy; he wants to add that this is not complete as an artwork, to use sand, it is a cop-out, an unsubstantial meal. But it's too bad, it's too loud in here now, and I can't hear you now, Donald, because I've got the sound up and the road is leading somewhere. I'm not sure where, but I'm your parasite now; the one with the last word. I will dispense with virtue, for cleanliness is impossible here, and the yield of this system I am setting up is uncertain, as are all systems.<sup>2</sup>

First I want to protect my guests from the sand, but later I want to throw it in their eyes to make them move, animate them, treat them as if they



were inanimate, do something to make this contamination more sensible, in terms of sensation. In a series of photographs, Joyce Campbell takes swabs of human waste fluids and incubates them to produce lurid images of bacterial growth, claiming that hosting is an amplification of that "exchange which accompanies the moment of touch." To present these images to the viewer is mildly confrontational; "a disturbing proximity renders visible the disgusting substance of enjoyment, the crawling and glistening of indestructible life,"<sup>3</sup> My intentions are less restrained, nevertheless it is the proxemics between guest and parasite (*hôte et hôte*) which is important.

In *The Sand-man*, by ETA Hoffman, the protagonist Nathaniel is told that the Sand-man is a "wicked man, who comes to little children when they won't go to bed and throws handfuls of sand in their eyes, so that they jump out of their heads all bloody."<sup>4</sup> Admitting he is too old to believe this story, Nathaniel nevertheless declares, "the Sand-man continued to be for me a fearful incubus, and I was always seized with terror- my blood always ran cold, not only when I heard anybody come up the stairs, but when I heard anybody noisily open my father's door and go in."<sup>5</sup> Michel Serres would call the Sand-man a noise, or a parasite, same thing in French. Noise, as in static, and noise as in what interrupts. *Noise* travels in ways difficult to predict. In Hoffman's tale, the Sand-man's heavy tread can be heard on the stair, and he intrudes upon the hermetic family scene, a parasite re-ordering relationships, re-ordering knowledge. I have no stairs, but the door slams and the static and jets roar. On the third day I become so bored with my guests that I slash open a pillow and stick it in the window between the desert and the salon. I turn on a fan and depart, and when I return, everyone is coughing.



## **Day 2. Darkness**

Undecidability. What should be illuminated and what should remain unlit? What belongs to the system and what is corrupting it? I am hosting you but also other things and objects here, and I make no distinction between the importance of you and the other things. I will absorb from you what I think I can use later. What is projected and what is being absorbed? The projector is the source of the image running along the side of the wall. It should be putting out the image, but appears to be sucking it in. It is behaving *wrong*, a good thing, a bad thing, a suspect.

Ilya Kabakov writes that a 'total' installation must be oriented to a viewer who can move around freely, and includes interventions that both 'switch' the attention of the viewer, and allow him/her to examine detail. Other elements include an expectation that something might happen, and a limit

to what can be immediately understood.<sup>6</sup> There should be obstacles, passages and doorways, and places that one can observe that are forbidden for ingress. For Kabakov, nothing is left to chance, the cognitive operation of the observer is considered at every step; even his "Incident at the Museum," or "Water Music," where a museum ceiling leaks onto the floor and into plastic sheeting includes a pre-recorded soundtrack.<sup>7</sup> My arrangements, in contrast, are haphazard, believable and stupid, to instill a sense of disorder and disease is a part of my role as a host-ess.

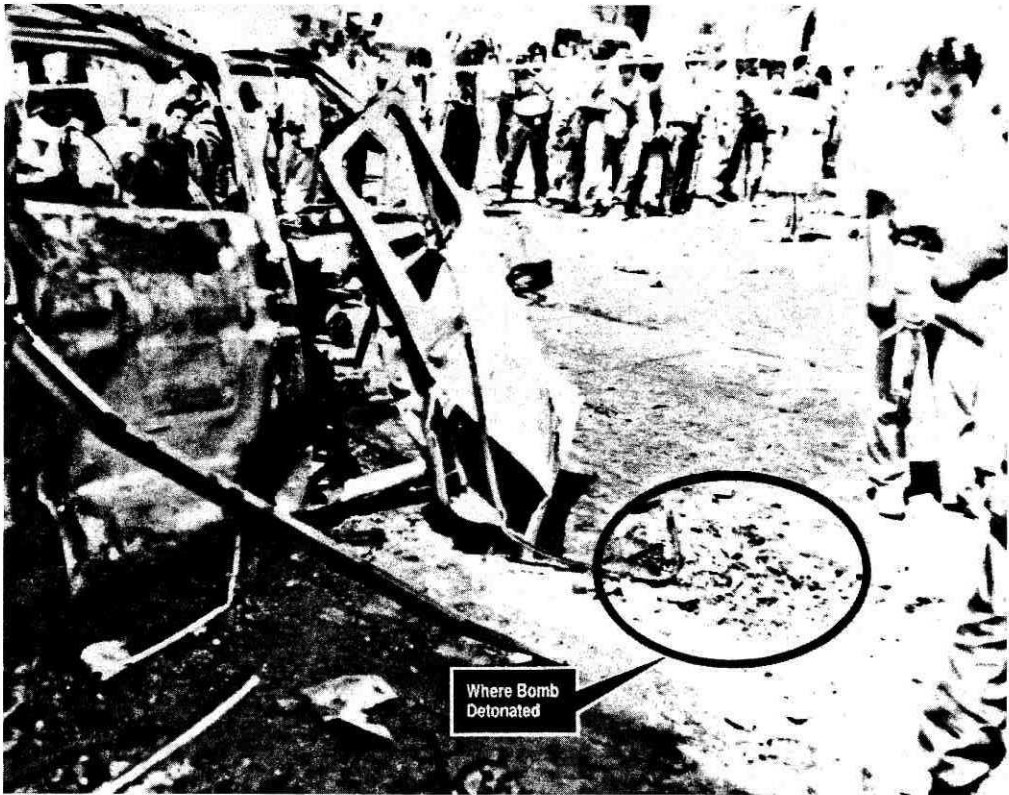
Darkness is my cover. The sand is unexpected, a liminal *surface* rather than passageway. A border, usually a line, is now a horizontal. In the darkness, on a shifting surface, one must hesitate. Tzvetan Todorov writes that the subject of fantastic literature must hesitate upon facing the unexplained;

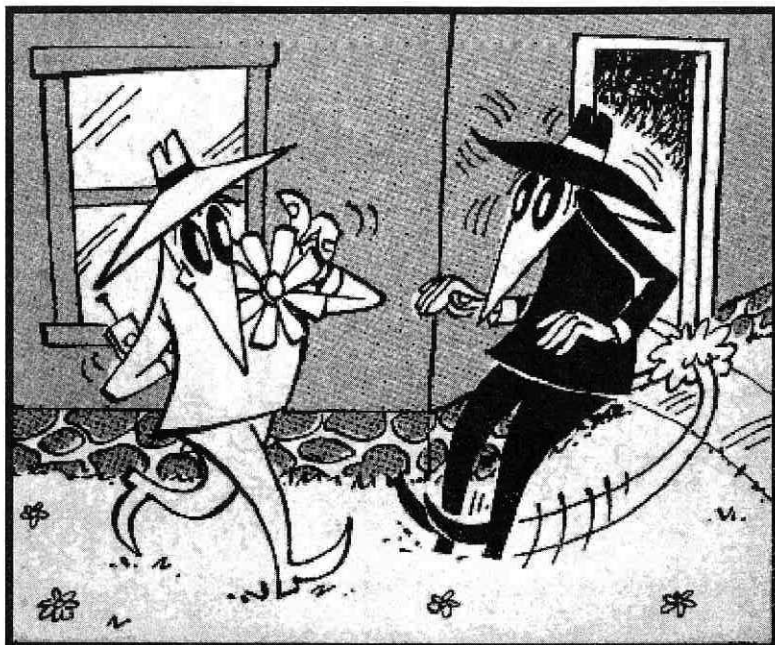
"Either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination- and laws of the world remain what they are; or else the event has taken place, it is an integral part of reality- but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us."<sup>8</sup>

Is it a trick, or error of perception? Kabakov too insists upon hesitation at the threshold of his worlds. The reader/viewer hesitates, and questions the reliability of the narrator's observation, or, in the case of the latter, where or whether to step. One must flounder in. The narrator seduces the reader with his own uncertainty, through modal language, 'it *seemed* as if there were two parallel worlds, side by side.' The unseen sand seems to shift unpredictably underfoot; is that my fault? As good child, I follow Kabakov's proscriptions almost to the letter, but as a parasite, I never stop altering them, for I refute stabilization. The only steady illumination, the neon battle cry for Matahari; "I was a channel for fucking light," does not enter the system; does not illuminate the interior.

### Day 3. Spontaneous Combustion.

My wallet goes on fire. Mysterious things happen, believability and hesitation. The uncanny event in particular provokes a hesitation in the reader (sic). The way to produce a sense there is another, unsuspected world, would be through the amplification of these mysteries, neither coherent as signification nor describable. It is a simple matter of abuse value. Instinct or decision, what does it matter?







#### **Day 4. Relational Aesthetics**

Subject:

NOMADS+RESIDENTS\_LA hosts an evening of presentations: Both Maria Karlsson and Åsa Sonjasdotter belong to the group of younger artists emerging on the Scandinavian art scene in the early to mid-90s and could be said to be working with a relational aesthetics. Since 1993, Karlsson has conducted an inquiry into social reality and how the individual is present in social situations. This inquiry has taken place in a series performative works that she herself characterizes as “handler” (acts).<sup>9</sup>

“I wish this installation was my mother.” Can we write of the salon in terms of popular psychology? Is the host an agent for codependency, a shoulder to cry on, someone who understands you, the philosopher/barkeep? The host is the one who entertains you, but you need to reckon with your host. I need you like I need my parents (debatably). But I need you! There is the

simple parasitic-host relation of the abusive companion, the codependent amigo. This supposes a one-way direction of relations, one eats the other, but, there is always more left. Someone else is behind the bar. Now who is the host? Or? The avaricious mouth. The malevolent breast. Debts are accrued. "Receiving hospitality, you are at the mercy of the other."<sup>10</sup>



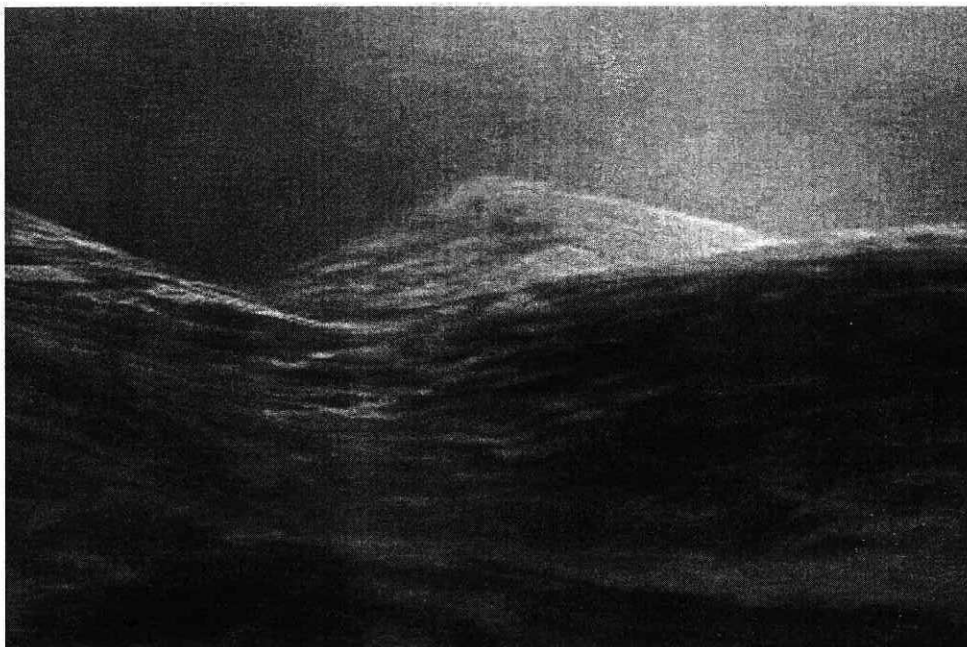
*Installation details: L. Bar customers  
R. 'Art's lawyer' with 'Prospective  
Investor' played by actors.*

Matahari makes her first appearance at the salon of Mme Kireyevsky, a retired opera singer. It is a complex contract; you come here and do your act, elevate my prestige in the eyes of my patrons, and I will introduce you. The salon is a swarm of innocents, or a cavalcade of parasites; they have been born this way. They are business people, impresarios, artists, and writers. Kireyevsky is ostensibly the host, also once a star, a fantastic host fed upon by fantastic parasites. They offer each other the world and pos-



sibilities proliferate. There is a buzz. A fantastic parasite continually finds more opportunities. A fantastic host continually finds more pleasures to serve its guests. Survival is serve-vival.

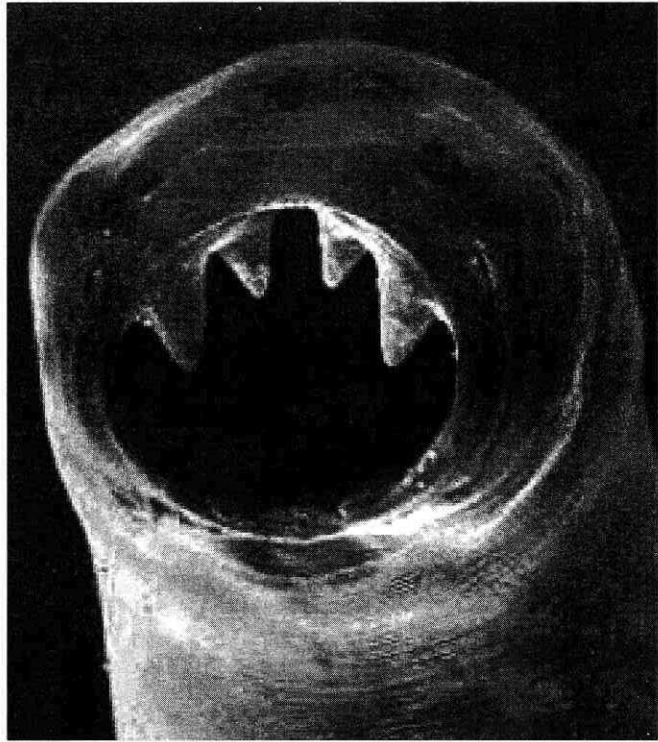
In the bible, host means also the multitude. The host-ess waits for the parasites to arrive, offering her services, setting a schedule. She, like the other parasites in general, has produced nothing. She only has a bar, a place to serve. Once the guests arrive, we can start making accounts, running a tab. The bar fills up, and there is a buzz inside, countered by a buzz outside. The salon is a theater guided by propositions that fly from host to parasite feeding upon parasite in a chain. Forced participation is a hard sell and there must be a payoff. Have a drink. It is just a lot of noise, depending on where you stand. In French, I reiterate, parasite also means static, a sound that has no meaning. Serres writes about the aesthetics of relations. Messages pass from one to another, and they are interrupted by noise, the entering of the third body, 'the third,' the parasite. Or, "a moving observer enters, perceives the noise (he is the repressed, the parasite). The border goes from the message with repressed noise to noise with repressed message...there is a change from hearing to seeing."<sup>11</sup> Possible polite expulsion of parasite. The static, noise, parasite, is either meaningless, or it is meaningful for it expresses exactly, relations. To Serres, orders of parasitism, the cascade of parasites, one atop the other, order social knowledge. Or, "...whoever belongs to the system perceives noises less and represses them more, the more he is a functioning part of the system. He never stops being in the good, the just, the true, the normal. All dogmatism lives on this division, be it blind or decided."<sup>12</sup> Noise becomes conversation.



*Frame from "The Perfect Storm"*

### **Day 5. The Perfect Storm<sup>13</sup>**

A speech act; I was a channel for fucking light. The auto-induced whammy does not accomplish much; the private language does not exist. You must see me. I put a spell on you. Cinema of affect. In the submissive environment of the cinema, we look at the faces of the subjects, and empathize. Question: In a 129-minute film about a perfect storm, how many of these minutes depict the subject, the storm? Answer: 4 minutes. The rest depicts the experience of its victims. A future comes not as a result of the past, but as a constant re-mixing, re-hashing of positions, shots.



*Hookworm, Ancylostoma duodenale*

## **Day 6. The Uncanny.**

Several movies I saw as a child involved sand, but it is futile to locate the original source of the ghastly image I retain; a man buried up to his neck in sand and left to die. Birds peck the lice from his hair, his lips bleach and crack, his eyes fill with sand until they burn, the tide slowly rises, while the sun beats down until beads of sweat turn into streams, exhausting his body of its last fluids while grit fills every wet pore. Its like a Sadean horror show, where sand plays the part of a torturer (what else but human), with its correspondingly minute multiplication of the insults it can enact on one body. Is it an 'it' or they? Such a thing seems like it could not exist, but

presumably these scenes are re-enactments of historical torture. The image is disturbing, uncanny. Wait, there is another severed head in this story, that of Matahari herself, preserved for phrenological purposes, and subsequently stolen when the Museum of Anatomy in Paris moved to a new location.

Freud remarks that severed heads are stuff of the uncanny. The German for word is evocative- *unheimlich*, un-homey, not like home, *unbewegung*, uncomfortable. In my memory, the heads in the films appeared severed, but their animated expressions told me that they must be sustained by something. Their faces were like blooms of sand food, a parasitic root that grows entirely below the sand, anchored to the roots of other plants up to 6 feet away. Above ground, it exposes only its flower, a face. In the 1930s, 106 sand food plants were found arising from a single arrowweed plant in Imperial County. "The host plant weighed just over one pound, while the 106 sand food plants weighed 46 pounds. In this remarkable case, the parasite outweighed its host by more than 3600 percent."<sup>14</sup> As with the single clone of *Armillaria bulbosa* (Chicken of the Woods) mushroom, which was found to branch unseen under 38 acres of land, it is disturbing, uncanny, to imagine such gigantic living organisms.<sup>15</sup>

Freud suggests we maintain traces of the animistic belief that all life can communicate with us. These traces, "can be re-activated, and [that] everything which now strikes us as 'uncanny' fulfils the condition of stirring those vestiges of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression."<sup>16</sup> The parasite which is greater than us triggers such speculation. Roger Caillois writes, "The fantastic must have something of the involuntary about it, something submitted to"<sup>17</sup>

In his essay, Freud at first “must plead guilty to a special obtuseness in the matter....It is long since he (the writer) has experienced or heard of anything which has given him an uncanny impression...”<sup>18</sup> We are modern. Yet he warms to his subject, or it chills him sufficiently to recall two instances that involved spatial disorientation. Once, he is lost and circling in a town, and “his presence is beginning to excite attention” from the local sex-workers, and again, “when one wanders about in a dark, strange room, looking for the door or the electric switch, and collides for the hundredth time with same piece of furniture.”<sup>19</sup> Something is not right, he must submit to it. He describes the uncanny as, among other things, a “sense of helplessness sometimes experienced in dreams.” Kabakov’s recipe for the viewer’s experience of the “total” installation stresses a combination of believability and the oneiric.

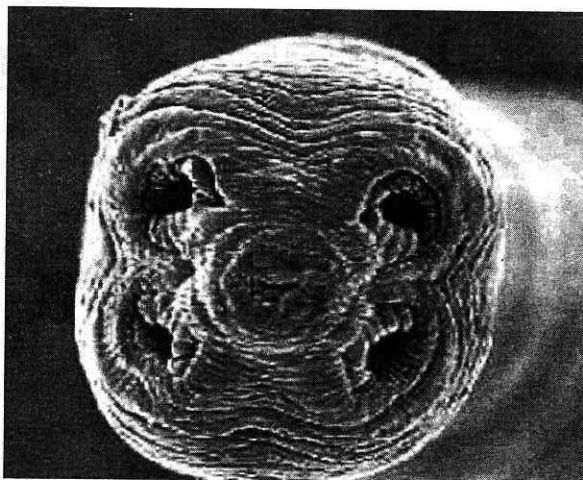
“You are abiding in... the world of semi illusion, in which, as they say, you can day-dream while simultaneously preserving total control over yourself and over the circumstances you find yourself.”<sup>20</sup>

A scientist interrupts with something to say about dreaming:

Dreams fulfill a critical, but elusive, biological purpose. During sleep, neurochemicals act to cripple and thus, ironically, protect the dreamer. Muscle activity, perception, memory, and consciousness are impaired or disabled. It is only alone, and only in this reduced state, in which we face our sleeping dreams. I personally experienced ‘the matahari syndrome’ as an experimental setting for the waking dream, an unnatural and revealing foray into a socially-distributed material dream state. Prolonged exposure to disorienting conceptual and perceptual cues bypasses normal interpretive filters by violating otherwise necessary assumptions (a causal reversal of Blake’s “melting [of] apparent surfaces”). Yet rather than losing the experience to overwhelming disorder, the challenging but strongly familiar social circumstances force an uneasy grounding. Under the symptoms of the syndrome I found my conscious control contaminated, rather than wholly relinquished. Socially, this appeared to be an autocatalytic process: the “release” of one mind into the social dream state locally encouraged that of others, a process exaggerated by the participants’ interdependence in the face of such intensive environmental uncertainty.

My repeated visits to the installation introduced the sensation of a third and separate physiological state beyond waking and sleeping, uniquely identifiable by consistent dreamlike content accessible through the regular channels of wholly conscious and embodied cognitive activity. Does the syndrome begin to satisfy biological needs served by nocturnal dreams without demanding the wholesale forfeit of social and bodily experience? <sup>21</sup>

The passageway to the salon is worth mentioning. It is dark and difficult to find, and it is filled with clothing. Some don't even make it. What happens when one enters such a space? I propose there is expectancy involved in crossing this threshold. One predicts what is going to be there, yet entertains a slight wish that it will be something else. A little fantasy. For a moment, one might think of this. But on passing through a cave, a dark hole, with costumes like dirty laundry hanging down, and you can't see, and you don't want to them to touch you, what do you think of? Perhaps there is another parasite, an intruder, hiding in here. For a moment it is completely dark. The hanging clothes down are disgusting like bats, but you are also entering a room. What do you think of, and where are you? It is a complicated operation.



Tapeworm, *Hymenolepis diminuta*



*Mata Hari Syndrome installation, detail*

Roger Caillois speculates that the mystery of darkness springs from our permeability to it. He writes about schizophrenics at the end of his essay about mimicry; "Space pursues them, encircles them, *digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis*. It ends by replacing them...He tries to look at himself from any point whatever in space...He feels himself becoming space, *dark space where things cannot be put.*"<sup>22</sup> It is dark. You don't know where you stand and therefore can't act. Every day, the sand is coming in with you. Where has the sand come from? The space is shifting, because you have shifted, and for a moment you can't think. In such an instance, perhaps the passageway is a noise, a parasite.



One guest suggested it seemed like a backstage party, entered via the dressing room. This is a narrative that considers an *other* space. What other space? A third space. Where has the sand come from and where have all these people come from? There must be another space, which was missed, or something that I missed. Then the earlier question, upon first entering the dark hole filled with clothes or bats, redoubles, the first expectancy and fantasy of what is on the other side of the doorway. Birth, incubation, pregnancy, another parasitic relation, something that is fantasized as being grown in the other- room, confirmation by the weirdness of Cobra Lily, who I shall come to soon. Where is the other parasitic space that parasitizes this one? Perhaps this is a medium for growing something, or a badly conducted séance? For like the séance, we mainly see each other, or the afterimage behind our own eyelids, and not the thing we are attempting to channel.

## **Day 7. Testimonial**

... What was it that pulled me to the Matahari Syndrome like some crack addict to his dealer? Dusk would come, and I knew soon the nexus would again arise from the regular day. Within the womb through back closet, like some Narnian dream, a convivial world of unexpected dialogue would spring up night after night.

It would be easy to say that the space's proximity to the studios was what made it so popular. Or perhaps the cheap drinks and friendly service. But something else occurred in that back room. The initial nights and temporary nature of the installation set a tone of urgency. It was urgent that one be present, to not miss the next version. Never did one have a repeat experience. I think it could have only existed as the temporary space it was. A nucleus for community - hard drinking, hard smoking, hard talking individuals burning themselves out in a shanty town bar - a refugee camp for misfits and miscreants. And this, all this, occurring on the hallowed ground of Academia set in the lofty and desirous environs of La Jolla, land of convenience. We were given our personal responsibility back. Each night we decided to enter this smoke filled fire trap, allowed ourselves to be present amongst dangers. I will wear my seat belt if and when I feel like it! It became a space in which

there was no mediation between participants. License was given, responsibility bestowed. Implied social contract ruled. Within the salon, the external social space of neighborhood aesthetic committees voting on the hue of your shutters, and litigious individuals suing hammer manufacturers for not placing warning labels on the hafts of their products, all but disappeared.

And so it was that I made the journey almost nightly to creep through the hanging dresses, eyes closed and hands in front of my face, to arrive in a place far better than the one I came from. And so it consumed me, it took me away. Only in its demise was I able to return to this world, these responsibilities...

- M. Hincman

## **Day 8. Animism**

Inside the deepest chamber, most highly evolved animal meets the most highly evolved species of plant. Cobra Lily and Nepenthes are heterotrophs, requiring complex organic molecules that have been pre-processed by other life forms, a biological trait we share with parasites literally, beyond what we share figuratively.

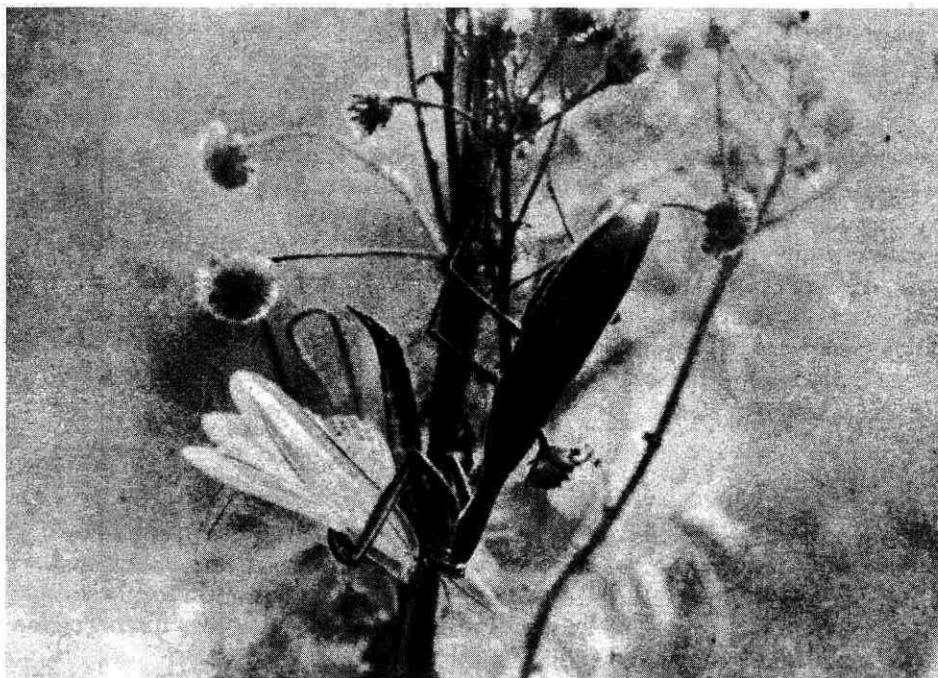
Both plants attract insects using nectar glands. The insect is led completely inside the Cobra's head by tiny hairs that prevent escape as it tries to fly through the clear windows that scatter through the head. The insect falls to the liquid at the bottom and dies. Nepenthes produces a pitcher at the end of its leaf. Once the insect has fallen into the pitcher, it cannot crawl out. Exhausted, the insect falls into the enzyme liquid at the bottom of the pitcher where it is digested by the plant.<sup>23</sup> There is a relation between the anthropomorphized behavior of carnivorous plants, and the reductive computer modeling of human behavior in game theory, which presumes that every individual is purely and only self interested. Like humans, Cobra Lily and Nepenthes are not biological parasites. With their frilly feminine appearance, we can convince ourselves they are



*Cobra Lily*

playing a game, but the tracks of their victims only lead one way, inside. It is confusing. They are the philosophers, waiting at the end.

Cobra Lily, *Nepenthes* have the names of maidens, and an accompanying suggestion of sex and courtship, the courtship of preying mantises. A man proposes we pull off a scene on the desert, but this seems too extreme and expected. Another haunting film scene: the orgy from Antonioni's 1969



*Preying Mantis devouring its mate*

film, *Zabriskie Point*, with its naked bodies sprawled out upon the sand dunes. The color of bodies and sand is monochromatic brown, an abject dissolution of difference. The only difference is imaginary; my imagining the female sexual organs, they at least must be pink, but they can't be seen. I fall asleep in the canoe one night while meditating upon this, and startle the guests when they come in.

The world is coming alive, hallucinations produced by your drinking. I want you to take responsibility for this. Drug induced, liquor induced delusions. The world before modernism was animated with spirits of animals and plants, and with sand in your eyes this world comes closer, the

separation between worlds becomes blurry. In the darkness you cannot really separate things out anymore. The storm is still raging. But, I wasn't really asleep. It was just a game.

### **Day 9. More Parasites**

Hey Sarah...congrats...you didn't need that piece of paper anyway..well unless you want to teach...how did I like it?-Loved it ...bought it..right? Some complications with the LA space may have to postpone till July but lonnies in Sri Lanka or something then...don't know My assistant Dan will call you (isn't that funny we have the same name?—I'm the real Dan!) Well Matahris tits were my favorite part and the article about her brain...it was all a bit messy but hey I'm "down" with that. Boat was cool ...movies too low tech...the cheesiness kind of made it homie...you know kind of third world without the smell...anyway let me know thru Dave-o if you got some new haunted house for me to produce...I'm serious...I got my eyes on you...I'll take your shit to the Big Apple...How'bout that...

Dan, the real one.<sup>24</sup>

### **Day 10. The Police.**

They never come. The suspect parasitized the community, but was never discovered, he latched on to another passer-by, a noise, and got out of town. Beside the law, not within it, all criminals are considered parasites. Margaretha Zelle, our Matahari, a parasite, does not make it out of town. She tries to return to Holland, but a noise interrupts her departure, a coded German telegraph message. To the French, it is at first static, but they are able to decode it; it becomes a message. A noise becomes a message, the milieu has been transformed, and the parasite is excluded. We still don't know if she was guilty of the accused crime.

## **Attribution**

---

Mata Hari was known especially for her mythologizing, which is correspondingly reflected in her biographical material. Russell Warren Howe organizes half the chapters of *Mata Hari: The True Story* according to Zelle's various pseudonyms; Marguerite, Grethe, Lady MacCleod, Marina, Matahari, etc. The attribution of lovers' names, and the spellings of the names of military and diplomatic figures rarely align from book to book, nor is any author definitive about her activities during the years she was not actively in the limelight.

The following is based upon four English language biographies that disagree in many places, and include a great deal of narrative improvisation, rather flowery at that. There are a few notes in Erika Ostrovsky's *Eye of Dawn* attributed to French police records from the 30s, but the remaining factual gaps, in hand with the sensational nature of the material invite a great deal of speculative embellishment.

The Mata Hari Syndrome/Every Night Different was exhibited as a 2-room installation at the Marcuse Gallery, UCSD, in April 2001, in partial completion of the Master of Fine Arts degree.

I wish to thank my advisor Steve Fagin for provocative and well-timed advice, as well as the members of my academic committee.

## Notes

- 1 Kuspit, 129
- 2 Serres, 13.
- 3 *Hosting*, at the Physics Room, Christchurch, New Zealand  
<http://www.physicsroom.org.nz/space/1997/hosting.htm>
- 4 ETA Hoffman, *The Sand-man*, 171
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Kabakov explains the "total" installation with proscriptive thoroughness in "On the "Total" Installation," transcripts of 15 lectures given in Frankfurt (1992-93), with titles like, "The general situation at the time the "total" installation emerges," (lecture one), and "The total installation and its viewer" (lecture six).
- 7 Ibid, 309
- 8 Todorov, 25
- 9 email correspondence from Nomads+Residents\_LA, May 23, 2001
- 10 Serres, 22.
- 11 Serres, 69.
- 12 Ibid, 68.
- 13 Dir. Wolfgang Peterson, 2000. "a true account of the courageous men and women who risk their lives every working day, pitting their fishing boats against the capricious forces of nature."
- 14 Wayne P. Armstrong, *Natural History Trivia*  
<http://daphne.palomar.edu/wayne/ww0704.htm>
- 15 *Nature* (April 2, 1992) 356:428-431.
- 16 Freud, 149.
- 17 Caillois quoted by Todorov, 35. TT quotes RC (with no source), and then dismisses him because the formula does not entirely work for literature. But it does work for space
- 18 Freud, 123.
- 19 Ibid, 143.
- 20 Kabakov, 280.
- 21 Correspondence from M.P. Hayward, cognitive scientist.
- 22 Caillois, 72. Emphasis mine.
- 23 Animals are all heterotrophs. Most bacteria are heterotrophs, as are parasitic and saprophytic plants. Carnivorous Plant FAQ  
[www.sarracenia.com/faq/faq1100.html](http://www.sarracenia.com/faq/faq1100.html)
- 24 Dan was an actor who played the assistant of an art collector who purchases the installation with the intention of mounting it in a location in Los Angeles.



## Sources

- Armstrong, Wayne P. "Natural History Trivia"  
<http://daphne.palomar.edu/wayne/www0704.htm>
- Caillois, Roger, trans. John Shepley, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia."  
*October: The First Decade 1976-1986*. Ed. Annete Michelson, Rosalind  
 Krauss, Douglas Crimp and Joan Copjec. Cambridge MA: MIT Press,  
 1987. 59-74.
- Coulson, Thomas. *Mata Hari; courtesan and spy, by Major Thomas Coulson*. New  
 York, Blue Ribbon Books [1930]
- Kabakov, Ilya. *On the Total Installation*. Ostfildern: Cantz Verlag, 1995.
- Keay, Julia. *The spy who never was : the life and loves of Mata Hari*. London :  
 Michael Joseph, 1987
- Kuspit, Donald. *Psychostrategies of Avant Garde Art*. Cambridge UK: Press  
 Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2000.
- Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard University  
 Press, 1993.
- Serres Michel, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr, *The Parasite*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins  
 University Press, 1982
- Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny.'" *Collected Papers, Vol. 4* Authorized translation  
 under the supervision of Joan Riviere, New York, London [etc.] : The  
 International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1946-50
- Russell Warren Howe, *MataHari: The True Story*. New York: Dodd, Mead &  
 Company, 1986
- Erika Ostrovsky, *Eye of Dawn*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1978.
- Lesley Stern. "Disorderly Orderliness: Jerry Lewis and the Performance of  
 Chaos." September 1998. Manuscript from the author.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*.  
 Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973.
- Waagenaar, Sam. *Mata Hari*. New York, Appleton-Century [1965]

HET LIEFDE-LEVEN VAN  
**MATA HARI**  
EN HAAR DOOD



DOOR E. GOMEZ CARRILLO