A SELF PORTRAIT

A thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree Master of Fine Arts in the
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By
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The Ohio State University
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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents excerpts of different stages throughout my life. It is a blueprint of who I am and what I am made of as a human being. The basic components are growing up in a Northern City in The Netherlands. Being raised by a Liberal Socialistic family. Going to Art school. Living in Gabon, Africa, photographing Pygmies. Experiencing being sicker than sick. And living in The United States.

The decisions made, good or bad, are all evident in the work I have committed.
Dedicated to Sean
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the members of my committee: Ardine Nelson, Tony Mendoza and Vicky Uris for their great impetus, support and encouragement.
VITA

June 23, 1971...........................................Born - Doesburg, The Netherlands
1996......................................................B.F.A, Academie Minerva,
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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Art
Studies in Photography
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A SELF PORTRAIT

The volkskrant 1996, Dutch Liberal Newspaper

And when I will die
don't waste your tears
I haven't really died...
you must know
It's merely a body
that I have left behind
I will have died when
you have forgotten all about me

I remember when I was a child, I used to look up images of strange diseases in my parents encyclopedia. The photographs documenting the diseases were always portrayed in a very elaborate manner and, if I was lucky, usually in color. The diseases depicted people with body-parts that were swollen, missing, erupted or had died off. I became a dedicated voyeur of these types of images and was obsessed with the grotesque, deterioration, decay and the sinister implications of the diseases. Since I was a toddler, I have also held a fascination for the icon of Jesus Christ's crucifixion. My mother
told me when the family went to the museum on Sunday afternoons, I was only interested in looking at woodcarvings, drawings and paintings of Jesus being nailed on the cross with blood dripping out of his chest. I simply wasn’t interested in seeing anything else.

This all had a great psychological impact on me. Later while attending Minerva Artschool in the Netherlands, an assignment for a drawing class was to draw mutated body-parts in formaldehyde at the University of medicine in my hometown. I was fascinated! These experiences lead me to read about psychological (intangible) diseases of the mind. The fact of its invisibility for the eye captivated my interest. I had a friend whom was studying to become a doctor. When ever I went to her place for dinner, I was drawn to were she kept her medical books. Every time I visited her house I could not resist the temptation of looking in these “treasures”; absorbing as much imagery and language as my mind would take in. I also forced my friend to tell me hands-on experiences in the practical aspect of studying medicine, including hinting at the deceased corpses she had to dissect as part of her study. She told me about the phenomenon of a body in decay that turns black due to excessive exposure to heat. She said that it took her days to get the rotten stench of dead flesh out of her nostrils.
I simply could not get enough of these stories!

Some years later, while visiting my boy-friend in Africa for a period of four months, I was "lucky" to get a couple of strange diseases myself.....

Plate I

Since I started taking photographs, around the age of sixteen, I have always focused on living creatures, mainly people. I was mesmerized by Dutch photographers Ed van der Elsken and Emmie Andriesse, who's photographs depicted a certain still-yet-liveliness. To me their images conquered an actual part of the living subjects they had
portrayed. The photographic work of Ed van der Elsken is labeled as social-documentary. He photographed his friends, family and strangers throughout Europe and Africa. Emmie Andriesse’s work conveys a certain drama, subtle or pontifically present. She either photographed people or their belongings in a very striking manner. Her excellent use of light is what gave her photographs a sense of surrealism. Sanne Sannes, another Dutch photographer, studied at the same Art Academy in the Netherlands as I did. Sannes was known as a very reserved and nervous individual. Interestingly enough his photographs show the opposite; nude flirtatious women seemingly in ecstasy! He was a master in capturing their utter femininity. His images revealed an almost obsessive passion for women, which became clearly visible in his photographs. Another photographer that I have admired since I seriously started taking up photography is Paul Strand. I have always remembered one of his remarks, “If you cannot identify with the person in front of your lens, you will never end up with a meaningful photograph”.

I don’t necessarily agree with his statement. What you’re trying to portray, or intend, as an individual photographer is eventually what makes it a valid photograph. I assume Strand was applying his statement to documentary photography not to photography in general. That to me would be too linear. I mainly admire Paul Strand for his use of aesthetics, his compositions are always perfectly balanced out. Strand was known as a formalist who, together with
master Edward Steichen, introduced the aesthetic value of form into photography.

Looking at a lot of different photographers has really made a difference to me, I know what I like and dislike. Appreciation for instance would be the appropriate word to me for photographer Ansel Adams. Awe is what I feel when coming across the work of the photographers named before, and others such as Jerome Liebling, Christian Boltanski, Arnold Raînier, Joel-Peter Witkins, John Coplans, Yves Tremorin and various other less known artists. Most of the artists named above had some sort of a fascination with flesh or/and the human body in deterioration.

I have never really tried to copy another photographer's work. Although I remember what a disappointment it was when I noticed that whatever I was doing as an undergraduate, had already been done by a dozen other photographers before I had "discovered" it. (I was a bit more naive as an undergraduate student).

Before undertaking my four month long trip to Africa in my Junior year of Art school in the Netherlands, my work primarily consisted of taking portraits. My interests were in nudes mainly and close up facial portraits of friends and family, if possible, caked with raw meat on their faces. Not all my friends were into volunteering for that type of
portraiture. Although my vegetarian friend Regina, who didn't want to do nudes, ended up posing for most of those to my own surprise.

Plate II

Nature, Landscape and Architectural photography has never been my passion. I tried it out, since it was a requirement in Art school, but my imagination just wouldn't cooperate with me on that part. Within the
medium of photography itself I have worked small, medium sized and super large (bigger than life-size) prints. All different sizes yielded their own advantages and disadvantages. Working small forced me to make strong imagery; since big is automatically viewed as impressive. I didn’t want my images to be viewed as impressive, assessed only by the size that they carried. I rather wanted my photographs to be precious intimate images, viewed as little icons even. I pretty much started working consecutively small at the end of my undergraduate year at Academy Minerva in the Netherlands. I liked the challenge of working small. I myself had established that most people are conditioned to view small as inferior or insignificant, I wanted to prove them wrong.

From: The Heart of Darkness, by Joseph Conrad

“ All that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men. There’s no initiation either into such mysteries he has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible which is also detestable, and it has a fascination too that goes to work upon him. The fascination of the abomination you know imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape the powerless disgust the surrender, the hate.”

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-23 March 1998: When I came back from Africa, I was a senior in Art-school in the Netherlands, I had a little less than one year left to focus on my final stage of photography as an undergraduate student in the Netherlands. I had no idea what to focus on anymore and I had suffered, yet survived my second Malaria Tropica infection in Holland, and was physically slowly recovering.

Psychologically I had this great urge to translate my sickness into imagery. I had literally been possessed by little creatures, and the impact of this and all the drugs involved was overwhelming and incomprehensible! I remained more or less sick for another six months, nonetheless I pursued my photographic plans. Even still up until the beginning of graduate school I was struggling with the "translation of my physical state of being." I had tried self-portraits and focused on dancers, since I could identify with the physical pain and weariness of the body when it’s being pushed around. I attempted a dozen other approaches but it still left me unsatisfied.

It had never dawned on me before that perhaps I was not working in the right medium.!? From this point on a whole new set of ideas came to light. I started working with liquid light, and that was quite a revelation to me, I could now print onto any surface with hardly any restrictions attached. This lead me into working with Polaroid emulsion transfers. Photographically I had already started working
with grotesque imagery. I took the images myself of bodies seemingly in deterioration, either recorded as such or manipulated by me through the use of acrylic paint and household bleach. This was to emphasize the body in decay.

Plate III
plates and amorphic glass shapes. I have always liked the intimacy of working physically with each material. Each print ended up being a unique one due to the technique(s) applied. Most images are small which enhances intimate character. These photographs consist of multi layered images from my own negatives and/or slides, creating a surreal effect.
The photographs are portraits of people depicted in a neutral setting, either superimposed with fresh human organs, taken at the campus morgue, or they are overlaid with another portrait.

Plate V

An interesting experience was visiting the campus morgue. I had obtained approval, because I was a Graduate student, to photograph while autopsies were being performed. While I actually never ended
up witnessing a dead body perse, I did arrive where I wanted to be at photographically. It had been my own choice not to witness an autopsy, I wasn't ready for it. I will most likely still pursue my visits to the campus morgue in the future.

Plate VI
So far I decided to only work with organs in formaldehyde and fresh organs from previous autopsies, I was allowed to pick them up and arrange them to photograph....Maybe I didn’t end up being as brave as I initially thought I would be, but I am content with the outcome of my imagery. There is this ambiguity or disturbance present now, due to the superimposition of specific slides assembled together. Some portraits somewhat ended up looking like corpses.

In a way I have abducted my objects of desire from their original environment. People usually assume that I admire Joel-Peter Witkin’s work a lot, which in fact I do only to a certain degree. I appreciate his work and enjoyed reading about his infatuation with the grotesque, but I see his way of working quite different from mine. What we might have in common is an interest in human decay, and the fact that we both manipulate our images after they have been printed. Joel-Peter Witkin stages his set-ups elaborately with great detail, and includes a lot of props in his frame. I prefer simplicity over an abundance of props and/or attributes.
Quote Christian Boltanski

“When you are growing older, you’ll find out, that things simply are not explainable, working is giving access into yourself, to able yourself the acknowledgment of madness.

I’m lucky to be able to acknowledge my sadness......I’m saved!”

I have always liked this quote by Christian Boltanski; a French postmodern photographer, sculptor, painter and installation artist. Subject in his work are particular manifestations of his ongoing themes of childhood and death (“and of memory which shapes our sense of reality”). I believe these words to be true: whatever direction your life takes you forms/creates the person that you are today. All of my work is based on stored images in my mind from the past and present. I arrive to its form by working with a spontaneous and instinctual approach; constructing, figuring and fragmenting my preexisting imagery. My intent is to execute my frames of mind intuitively, in a sense to medicate stored images from my past, and immortalize and acquire characteristics of the dead.
I suppose it is having a collision occur between the known and the subconscious.

Plate VII

*BIOLOGY:*

"The hypnotic power of which someone the will power of somebody else subdues under his law"

Out of Websters ninth New Collegiate dictionary
My body of work from my final project consisted of mostly small images (3 by 4 inch Polaroid emulsion transfers). I had five relatively large pieces (8 by 10 inch Polaroids) which formed a successive grouping. Each individual print features the same portrait with overlays of different organs. I had placed these prints behind manipulated glass.

Plate VIII
For my latest pieces in the show I printed with liquid light (photographic sensitive solution) onto latex, which I had poured and stretched myself to make it appear skinlike. Altogether this was my largest piece about 14 by 20 inches. I also decided to print on irregular shaped glass blobs to emphasize fragility and elusiveness. These glass pieces were about 1 inch in diameter (one was larger about three inches in diameter). Most of the 3 by 4 Polaroid transfers were paired together, some I placed together as a triptych others were framed autonomously. All 3 by 4 inch Polaroids were transferred onto, manually corroded, copper plates and sandwiched between two Plexiglas plates, which were held together by four or more, also manually corroded, nuts and bolts. This was my solution to stress deterioration. My body of work depicts a self-portrait, physically absent in person, yet spiritually ever so present. Words of significance regarding my work include for instance transitoriness and elusiveness.

A quote that inspired me in relation to this is by George Santayana 1912.

“Although everything in the physical world seems to change quickly enough, everything physical is stable in comparison with the absolute instability of images in the mind.”
Other words in context with my work are:

-Ambiguity  
-The existential mind  
-Imperfection  
-Somberness  

-Isolation, loss of identity  
-Stillness in the body  
-Surreality  
-Vision-Dreamlike state of mind

Plate IX
"I can never reach the other... I am here and you are there.
I can merely live this life.
I cannot escape from myself. Humans are essentially loners.
When that notion settles not only loneliness
but a great force presents itself!"

Translated out of an article from a Dutch magazine
"Vrij Nederland", regarding Existentialism.

-1 July 1997: It is almost like an umbilical cord, but it's attached in a slightly different way. It beeps at me occasionally, letting me know its presence. It's called "King of hearts", and it is supposed to be my friend, but it annoys me. I have heart palpitations, serious ones, so they say, but this is only the beginning. The real story begins September 1994 Gabon, West Central Africa, after I had experienced my first Malaria Tropica infection. Ever since then, I have been "cursed", or so it feels.
'It was Aristotle whom assessed
that the Pygmies did actually exist'

- Out of People of the Forest,

By Colin Turnbull

21/28 August 1994: Groningen- Amsterdam - Paris -
Libreville - Dust Roads -
Lastourville - Dust Roads -
Mouilla - More Dustroads
------------------------------- Mimongo!

Mimongo (Gabon - West Central Africa) is located beautifully in the
middle of the rain forest; there is no running water, no electricity. So,
this little paradise will be my home for the coming four months! It's
kind of ridiculous in a way; here I am visiting my boyfriend - whom I
haven't seen for one whole year and two months -. I'm surrounded by
gorgeous scenery and people to photograph, and on top of that I
have gotten my Art-Academy's approval - read “money” - to enjoy this
all!
My boyfriend Andy was stationed in Gabon for a two year program within the Peace-Corps.

1 September 1994: Went over to Jean-Marie, the local medicine man, for a chicken dinner. Usually members of the Fang tribe (former cannibals!) would ordinarily just decapitate their pet chickens. But since Paulette - one of Jean-Marie's wives - is pregnant, no blood is allowed to be spilled: "C'est ne pas bien pour le bebe" (that is not good for the baby) replied Paulette right before she choked the chicken to death by stuffing its own feathers down its throat, and up its nose.

Last night I was also introduced to the 'medium' called palmwine; I forgot the taste as soon as I gobbled it down. The wine had been a forced attempt to feel relaxed about the whole dinner ordeal. (It did not quite work.) Andy told me later that, the night had ended pleasantly with more palm wine and sugar cane wine, dancing, and singing.

3 September 1994: Dieu-Donner (means god-given), Paulette's son - not Jean-Marie's! - was circumcised a couple of days ago, together with two other fellows. Dieu-Donner is the oldest of the three, he's thirteen, the other boys are nine and eleven years old. It was a traditional circumcision; the boys were put on a drug called Iboga
(native to Gabon), to numb them a bit. I felt so bad for those little boys - now to be considered men - because I could still see the pain in their eyes - when looking past their drugged, dull facial expression. I did take some really nice portraits of them, which made me feel like a sadist in a way, but Jean-Marie really urged me to take some pictures, so I guess I was slightly validated to act like one.

Plate X

I have already established a great affinity for the African Continent, the language of the camera is luckily an universal one, and that is
one step in the right direction since the general language spoken here - French - isn't the one that I master that well.

Plate XI

What also gives me some sort of a kinship with this continent is the fact that right now I am down at the roots of my existence as a "Mardoe-being"; since my name is African. I have already come across a few Madoe's, mamoe's, mamadoe's and two Mardoe's (boys though).
-9 September 1994: Andy and I read a lot; the mind desires spiritual work to cope with life. Since we have to absorb so many different cultural habits that are completely foreign to us, we feel the need to make (see) things relative again, in relation to what we are accustomed to. I was just thinking of what to get for dinner when I stumbled across this recipe in Andy's Peace-Corps recipe book, applied to this region, sounds...interesting

Plate XII
SINGE ROTI GABON GOURMET

Ingredients: 1 monkey, mustard, salt, pimento

"Skin and clean the monkey, coat the meat with mustard, put the meat on the spit, roast over a wood fire, turning the meat slowly. When the meat is brown, add salt and pimento to taste. ........... ................. Bon Appetite!"

Well, I had slimy palm grubs and roasted chicken feet for lunch, so I have had my meat for today. (I guess) The chicken feet were all right actually, just like deep fried French fries which have been sitting around too long (quite crunchy and crumbly). The palm grubs (full of protein!) I will leave aside for "Jack the ripper", alias Andy, since the way to prepare them is to rip their cute little heads off before chewing them to pieces. Andy doesn't seem to be bothered at all.

14 September 1994: I have been here exactly one month now and have finished off twelve rolls of film, all thirty-six exposures. Today I shot two whole rolls of film in Nikodi (a Pygmy town). I find these Pygmies to be intriguing little people...I am obsessed with them! They are the most energetic, humorous and liberated people I have ever seen in my life. They almost seem to move like animals, fast and
soundless, and their physique is different too. They are not only shorter (short legs, long upper body) in comparison to other tribes. They have a particular lock of their own which is very characteristic, yet very attractive. Their head is shaped quite primitive and their bodies seem to be a bit disproportionized with regards to the length of their limbs to the size of their head. They overall possess a lot of body hair. The men work as hard as the women do, which is not an issue with us in the Western world, but in West Central Africa that is quite rare. As busy as the Pygmies might appear to be, there's always enough time to dance around whenever the urge arises to do so. Sometimes it's as though they have a hot pepper stuck up their bum; they suddenly jump up and start dancing their butts off. Usually if one individual start, others will quite often follow. I admire their free unconcerned minds, They are such an impressive dancers!

-19 September 1994: Lately we have been shopping in Nikodi. We usually buy /trade the same type of food: mushrooms, cassave, bananas, crab, sweet potatoes, peanuts, berries and honey (fresh, right out of the jungle). In comparison with other tribes, the Pygmy-businessmen are the cheapest - the ALDI of the jungle, so to speak.

-The Aldi is one of the cheapest grocery shops existing in Europe and the United States.
-20 September 1994: I am adapting quite well, apart from some common sicknesses and other health hazards like having the shits constantly, fleas laying eggs in my feet, worms wiggling around in my body, various bacterial viruses (which usually cause the many shits that I have...daily), dehydration (caused by the shits), but other than that, I am loving it here!

-22 September 1994: The general tips given by the Peace Corps for buying meat here are to be taken into consideration, since we are going hunting tomorrow!

   "Take a whiff, does it smell bad? if so look elsewhere."

   "The animal should not be swollen whatsoever."

   "The groin should still be pink ( not gray )."

   "Check the anus for maggots."

-23 September 1994: The only "hunting" that we have done today was hunting for pathways, but there were none. We actually didn't even spot one animal, since one particular European in our group scared off all the animals present in this kingdom by (her way of) trotting ( tripping ), panting and coughing -"I kept on inhaling insects"! We were in the rain forest from 8:30 am until 9:00 PM. Since it starts getting dark around 6:00 PM, we had a scary three-hour walk back to the 'civilized' world of Mimongo. Scary not in the sense of being afraid of being eaten or attacked by some animal ( I had scared those off
myself) but scary in the sense of getting shot by a local hunter. The way they hunt at night is they stroll around with a flashlight, and whenever they see a pair of eyes reflect, they fire their rifle hoping for a big catch. Well, they would have had a big catch al right! A couple of people were killed just that way; they were mistaken for an ape, antelope or gorilla. So, tired as we already were from walking up and down hills, wading through rivers and swinging on vines (I am not kidding) we had to sing and scream to draw attention to our selves. Besides insects hitting my mouth nothing else struck us other then tiredness.

I really cannot wait to see how all of the film that I have shot so far will come out. The people here keep asking me when they are going to get their promised photographs, so I keep on explaining over and over again that I first have to go home for that, do a little magic, and send them the results of that consequence. Some people just get so impatient. This one guy in particular even told me that if I did not give him the photographs soon, he would make sure that something bad would happen...(better do some magic soon, for my own safety).

-25 September 1994: According to Andy I might have the “Dengue-fever”. Last night I started to develop a slight fever, this morning it was still there and my muscles are starting to stiffen as well. The Dengue-fever is transmitted through a mosquito-bite just like
Malaria. Both are viruses. The only difference is that there is no medication that can be taken for the Dengue-fever; you have to sit through the process of being ill. The symptoms of the Dengue-fever resemble the ones of Malaria very closely. Andy relates my fever to the Dengue-fever, since most Western visitors get exposed to that particular virus at least once; due to the fact that our bodies do not have the resistance built up that natives have. Nonetheless, to give Malaria the benefit of the doubt, we both agreed that it’s wise for me to take the Fansidar treatment. In a suspected case of Malaria Tropica, the Peace Corps recommends taking three Fansidar tablets, to prevent immediate life-threatening consequences.

- Afternoon: My fever is up to forty-one degrees Celsius. I feel like shit.

-26 September 1994: My fever is down again, but I still have a slight headache. If I have caught the Dengue-fever, the symptoms are a rash, swollen eyelids and a stiff neck, I don’t have any of these...

-27 September 1994: This morning I again woke up with a high fever, sore muscles and a splitting headache; I have never before felt as bad in my life as I do now. It’s as though lightning strikes my head,
time and time again. I have also had my first hallucinogenic experience; it scared the crap out of Andy.

Plate XIII

In Andy's medical handbook it says: "If there is a question of a Fansidar treatment failure, initiate treatment with the more radical drug Quinine, plus Tetracycline (antibiotics), by mouth four times
day for seven days." Since my body has not responded whatsoever to the Fansidar medication, a Fansidar resistant Malaria seems to be the case, and that is bad news.

I have just taken four A-B pills (Tetracycline), and took the first six, out of twelve, Quinine pills. Tomorrow Andy will take me to Mouilla, a small city about three hours away from Mimongo. Mouilla has a hospital that was established by the French; Gabon used to be a colony of France. The hospital is still partially operated by a French doctor, and that's the man I want to see. I actually could have been "treated" right here in Mimongo's local hospital, if I would not mind standing in line, waiting for the only needle and syringe to get passed by, and to receive a straight shot of Quinine in my ass. (I decided to restrain myself from such a privilege.)

-28 September 1994: We got up early in order to find a ride to get us out to Mouilla. The fever went down again, and will hopefully stay down. I feel much better than I did yesterday, but appearances can be deceptive.

- PILLS PILLS PILLS PILLS PILLS PILLS PILLS PILLS -

My fever had gone up again by the time we arrived at the hospital in Mouilla, where it was ascertained that I had been infected by an
Anopheline-mosquito, causing the potentially lethal Malaria Tropica to establish in my blood.

According to "Monsieur Peret" - The French doctor - I had to triple the amount of pills that I was taking at the moment; to kill off the little creatures whom were rapidly destroying my red blood cells. He said that the amount that I was taking would hardly affect the parasites. He also gave me another drug called "Halfan", which - to quote out of Andy's Medical Handbook once more - : "Halfan has erratic absorption and an unacceptable high recurrence rate, such that it may need to be given in repeat doses". "At this time we need to stress that Quinine treatment is the only Peace-Corps approved therapy for a Fansidar treatment failure". Andy is officially, by law, not allowed to take Halfan. Since May 1994 the Peace-Corps disapproves of taking Halofantrine (Halfan) as an alternative treatment for an acute Malaria infection, and more recent news indicated that Halfan could cause irregular heartbeats: quite a drastic remedy.

Puked my guts out tonight due to all the pill combinations I have to take, my fever stays consistently high and my head feels as though it's going to explode any second. I feel utterly disconnected from my body and my mind. I am scared now that I have been confronted with the knowledge of being possessed by something invisible from the outside, but so devastating for the inside. My mind wants to wander
off, but I need to stay clear in order to get a grasp on what's happening to me.

Plate IVX

-29 September 1994: Still sick. The fever still comes and goes irregularly, to cite the "Bible" (medical handbook) for the last time: "Plasmodium Falciparum - Malaria Tropica - clinically this is the
most serious, as it can cause cerebral Malaria or other serious or fatal syndromes, this is the most frequent in Gabon".

What makes it so difficult to comprehend is the fact that Andy - who has been here for more than a year now - has never had any signs of Malaria. I am really seriously starting to doubt the Malaria-prophylaxes I was given in Holland - “for prevention”. Especially regarding the circumstance that Andy and I both had been given different prophylaxes - by different Countries - for the same region. The difference is Andy’s prophylaxes work, mine obviously do not - I might as well have been eating smarties instead.

-Had hallucinations again. I wonder if all of the pill-combinations evoke them, or is it a combination of the high fever and the pills that occasionally causes me to be in a delirious state of mind? The fever is caused by the fact that my body has been reduced to a state that allows it to be a host for the Malaria-parasites. This enables them to attack my red blood cells, multiply themselves while they get all cozy in there, and produce a whole new army. This activity makes the red blood cell rupture. It is basically a chain-reaction in which more and more red blood cells get involved and destroyed, until the person reaches an anemic state. Maybe I shouldn’t read that much about it. It might not particularly enhance my process of recovery. I just keep on hoping that all of the pill-combinations will encourage the internal
battle to come to an end. I'll better stay in good spirits, let's make *that*
the slogan for today.

Plate VX
In Holland we have this saying (roughly translated): "Fight the malignant off with the more evil" - "Het kwaad bestrijden met het ergere". To get back to my hallucinations; why do they always need to be of the horrendous caliber. Can't I just request some pleasant ones please? I deserve to get at least something good out of this experience! I guess that is not how it's played. So far I have been attacked by a mad African man swinging a machete, A tropical spider that tried to suffocate me by inflating itself on my face, and - at least - a hundred oversized cockroaches (as big as my head) that leaped from the ceiling, and used my body as a landing-ground. I think I have had enough now.

-1 October 1994: Came back from Mouilla in the late afternoon. I feel relatively quite good, the pills seem to wrestle the parasites down.

-6 October 1994: I have just taken my last dose of medication. I hereby declare myself cured of the Malaria Tropical! - since there is nobody else more official around to do that for me. I still don't have a whole lot of energy, but that is to be expected since my body is now using all the energy that it has left, to rebuild the damage that has been done.
-9 October 1994: Started taking “Notezine” pills yesterday night. They will prevent me from getting: inflated knees, ankles and other strange swellings in the joint areas, caused by a Filaria (Loa-Loa) infection; which I have started to develop the initial stages of. According to Andy my infection is still in an early stage, so not to worry. And it seems that, since I have just quit taking my other drugs, the time has come to start taking something new! Andy knows it all about Filaria; he is the Filaria-king. To be more precise he’s a recovering “Filaria-ist”. A couple of months ago, before I came over, he had been hospitalized in Libreville to get treated for his Filaria infection. It had gotten so bad that he couldn’t even walk properly anymore! Since then Andy was advised to keep on taking Notezine-pills as a Profylaxe, and that is basically what I started doing now as well.

A chronic Filaria-infection will eventually cause elephantiasis (puffed up “elephant-feet”) and/or river-blindness. The Notezine-pills make us both really drowsy and nauseous; they serve us as a “night-cap”.

-11 October 1994: Andy and I had planned on getting up really early to walk over to “Seka-Seka”, a little village about five kilometers South of Mimongo. There was a ritual circumcision taking place there in the early morning executed by Jean-Marie, our local medicine man. Second thoughts by Jean-Marie, I was not allowed to witness
the circumcision; since I was a woman. I ought to respect his decision, based on their point of view upon women, but I have to fight it though.

I am obviously not interested in the actual act of the circumcision. But am drawn to the fact that those little boys don’t even appear to blink with their eyes during the “moment supreme” - the crucial happening. Due to the fact that they are heavily drugged with “Iboga”. I would like to have seen them in that particular state of mind; “Am I being a sadist again?” Andy thinks that I’m getting obsessed with my photography, he feels neglected, which I think is greatly overstated. What’s already quite a pain in the ass is that my 135-mm lens broke today, it’s unfixable.

-“Iboga” is a stimulant and hallucinogenic drug native to Gabon. it is derived from a plant and made into a powderform for use.

-12 October 1994: Paulette delivered a baby boy last-night, and they have named him after Andy ( Andre ), no doubt with a particular interest in mind. Paulette ensured me again that I should not give up hope............. of getting pregnant!
When I first arrived, Paulette's estimation of my age was twelve years old; her estimation was roughly based on the fact that my breasts were still in the upright position. She even reached out and squeezed them to confirm her beliefs. So when she found out that I was twenty-three years old, she just assumed that I could not become pregnant very easily. She actually gave me a tip; I should sleep with my man every night after I had cooked him a good dinner. If only she knew.

Today I witnessed something funny; Dieu Donner had gotten an infected eye - an insect had flown right in it - Paulette just took out one of her breasts, bent over her son and ..bulls eye squirted some fresh milk right in it, for sterilization of course. How inventive!

-14 October 1994: I'm half way through my time with Andy here in Gabon. Last night Andy and I had a big fight. I had packed my things, was ready to leave but there was no where for me to flee too, since we are completely surrounded by rain forest. Last night was also the first night that we slept apart; we had had it with each other, totally. Andy and I have been right in each others faces, day and night, for two whole months. So I don't think that that is all that surprising...isn't it?
16 October 1994: Andy and I had initially wanted to go to the 'uncultivated' Pygmies near Diyanga, but our own chosen 'cultivated' Pygmy guide Mombe never showed up this morning. (Part of his family lives out near Diyanga.) We had already bought sardines, matches, cigarettes, razor blades, fishing line and some other stuff to give to them as presents when we would stay over. Actually, Mombe just walked in; he had been collecting fresh honey for which he had walked approximately thirty two kilometers. Andy and I bought it off him for 3000 Cfa. (about three dollars.)
- I have attacked Andy with scissors tonight; I went completely nuts, but this time can’t blame it on my medication anymore, or is the tropical frenzy kicking in now?

-17 October 1994: Nate, another Peace corps volunteer stationed in a village called Yeno, has offered to bring us all the way to Diyanga, so now we will not have to walk all the way on foot. (Diyanga is about twenty-five kilometers away).

Nate has more or less escaped his village; the people in his village were ‘tapping the devil’ - slightly different from an average carnival celebration, I would think. What happened was a couple of people had died in his village over the past three days, and their relatives had found personal items buried in the ground. The inhabitants of Yeno are now convinced that the incidents are all based on voodoo practices.

What is actually going to happen is that people are going to be convicted through the rational of a medicine man’s visions, now that is pretty scary.

-18/19/20 November 1994: I am truly exhausted, we just returned from visiting Mombe and his family; three full days of partying non stop. I have never met such party animals before in my
life! And I nearly did not even make it back home - read with slight exaggeration - since Andy had accidentally traded me - for just a couple of chickens and a goat - to the local medicine man to be. The future medicine man had asked Andy how much i had cost, to which Andy replied jokingly “Not too much, just a couple of chickens”. Since that was supposedly quite a bargain, Andy constantly had to keep an eye on me...I became bait. All of us did actually leave with one chicken; that was their present to us which we, of course, could not refuse. It is good to be back home again in good old Mimongo. My feet hurt badly from the trip; blisters do not heal here very well due to the severe humidity, but I could not care less since I have quite an experience stored in my head now ....for life.

- 27 November 1994: Andy and I still haven’t solved our mutual annoyance towards each other yet; last night we had another fight. And after we had sorted that one out, so we thought. We went out, had fun, were in love again, came back to our place, and started fighting again. This time Andy let it go loose and swung a wooden chair at my head.

- I wonder what has started happening to us...
-30 November 1994: I decided to be ready for the Dengue-fever now: I'm covered in a rash, and have a nice full-blown headache to compliment my stiff neck with.
-Only one more weeks to spend in Mimongo. "God I'll miss this place", I genuinely will. I feel like I have somewhat grown old here.

-4 December 1994: Last night was party night. Jean-Marie had arranged a ritual "baby-shower" for Andre (Jean-Marie and Paulette's baby son) It was interesting as usual. Andre was dragged about quite a lot; he got thrown in the air, dragged through a fire, pinched with various objects and yelled at, but "that's life" for a new tribe member.

-7 December 1994: Unfortunately my time here has come to an end. Altogether I have shot forty rolls of films (1440 photographs, averaged out over four months.) My patience is coming to an end, I can't wait to scamper into my darkroom to perform "the magic tricks" and find out the results. I'm actually really nervous about it, afraid not to have captured what was of importance to me; making visible the forgotten souls of the rain forest.

If things will go as planned, we will be spending the night in Lambarene. (Albert Schweitzer's place) Another Peace-Corps volunteer is putting us up.

-8 December 1994: Our plans ran smoothly, for a change, and we did spend last night in Lambarene.
-9 December 1994: Yesterday morning we had to get up really early to catch the "banana boat" to Port-Gentil. The boat trip took exactly twenty-four long hours, and carried us across the "Oqoue" river - which ends in the great Atlantic ocean. The trip was a "trip" by itself; we sat among twenty-dozen other passengers, whom had evidently brought their whole livestock along with them. - The "livestock" that had been unfortunate to die, on the way to the boat, were dragged along for lunch time snacks. We on the other hand had enough bananas to last us 'till next Christmas.

This morning we arrived early in Port-Gentil, and from there, took an ordinary boat back to the Capital of Gabon, Libreville. In the late afternoon we arrived in "La-la-la", a suburb of Libreville. But it didn't make me all that happy.

-13 December 1994: After a long and painful good-bye, I flew back to my homeland. With that leaving my beloved and my heart, behind in the jungle.

-17/25 December 1994: Evidently I had let a couple of "Tropical passengers" ride along with me. Three days after my homecoming in the Netherlands I was caught by surprise of a new Malaria tropica infection, since I had been cured from my first one. Also this one was full of fireworks. I was brought under urgent care, into the emergency

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room of the Academic hospital in Amsterdam; which has a Tropical-
science department. After three hours of research, and waiting
around, they established the Plasmodium-Falciparum type in my
blood. I had once more managed to catch the potential lethal Malaria
Tropica. Further on - after having made an E. C. G. of my heart, they
offered me an ultimatum, to take the disreputable drug “Hallan”, or
die.

-So much for a Christmas feeling.
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