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Cultures of light : contemporary trends in museum exhibition

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Deciding to write a doctoral dissertation about light was a decision that did not come about over night. In fact, it took half my lifetime to ripen. One of my earliest memories about lighting recounts a scene of receiving a book at age thirteen from my cousins Gilda and Wally, entitled *The Magic of Light: The Craft and Career of Jean Rosenthal*, which kindled my general fascination with theatrical lighting and more specifically, the phenomenon of light. It was the first time I read the phrase and understood what it meant to “trip [...] the light fantastik” as Milton expresses it in *L’Allgero*. This early event was the catalyst for my lifelong fascination with the spectacle and conceptualization of physical light. The educational expedition I would undertake several decades later and which took place on two continents, coalesced while working an on-again-off-again theatrical engagement on a sunny resort island. My appearance in this extravaganza as Misha lasted nine years and took place on a far from deserted “sand bar” in the Great South Bay off the coast of Long Island, New York with the highly esteemed Fire Island producer, singer, and musical virtuoso Isaac Steven Vaughan. The supporting cast of thousands included Andy, Ariel, Bella, Ben, Bobby, Cathy, Chuck†, Dennis, Dennis, George, Jacque, Jerry, Jerry, Jim, Kevin, Mac, Nelson, Richard†, Rick, Ricky, Robert and Sal.

At the fantastic speed of 300 kilometres per hour, the 1st class compartment on Thalys’ Amsterdam-Paris Express, in which I chose to write these appreciative remarks, seems a world away from New York where I first began my exploration of the technologies of light. At night I would work, lighting the dance clubs of New York’s trendy Meatpacking district while working my less glamorous day job at Universe Stage Lighting on West 47th Street at the heart of the theatre district in Manhattan. During the past twelve years of formal academic training, the world has become just a bit smaller to me and the time has now come to thank some of the people whom it was my pleasure to meet along the way.

It is therefore a great satisfaction to take this opportunity to thank at least a few of the extraordinary people who accompanied me along this journey of analysis and intellectual discovery. Firstly, I would like to thank my promoter Mieke Bal who has been a inspiring supervisor throughout the past six years. It was Mieke’s intriguing work which attracted me away from the University of Leicester where I had already been accepted as a PhD candidate. While studying for a Master’s degree in Museum Studies, I kept coming across captivating work by Mieke that I found intellectually stimulating. While commuting to Nottingham Castle for my MA internship, I

engrossed myself in her work while completing Leicester's demanding coursework. It was at this late stage when I mustered enough courage to send her a message asking if she was interested in supervising my project. After a few emails, she agreed to provisionally promote my project. It now approaches completion. I felt from the very beginning that, with Mieke as a supervisor, this would be a challenging intellectual experience. *And so it was*. Her critical remarks on my chapter drafts were so insightful; so in tune with my work, that no one else, I felt, could get closer to what I was struggling to articulate. Through the Theory Seminars she organized and directed, Mieke introduced me to new authors, theories and perspectives for which I am eternally grateful. Thank you for taking a chance on me and my endeavour.

Enthusiasm, professionalism and understanding characterized my first research leader Hanneke Grootenboer. She asked me questions that improved my theoretical and intellectual understanding and helped me sharpen my arguments. The four chapters that comprise this study were written with the assistance of her expert guidance and tutelage. My second research leader, Esther Peeren, came onto the scene at the very moment Hanneke took up a position at Oxford University's History of Art Department. Esther, whose acquaintance I had made during my early years at the Bungehuis was from the beginning personally effervescent, enthusiastic about my project and intellectually stimulating. She not only advised me during the writing of both the introduction and the conclusion, but she also made the radical suggestion to rearrange the chapters. A suggestion I enthusiastically took on board and which worked out – I think – rather successfully.

Without the administrative support provided by Ania Dalecki, Jantine van Gogh, Eloë Kingma, and Margreet Vermeulen my project would have been much less enjoyable. Immediately upon my arrival they made me feel comfortable in what was an unfamiliar land. Over time, especially Eloë would become not only a dependable colleague but also a trusted friend. My fellow PhD candidates Astrid, Bastiaan, Begüm, Cigdem, Cornelia, Eliza, Huub, Ihab, Joy, Jules, Laura, Noa, Paulina, Pieter, Saskia, and Stephan made the daily experience of research most enjoyable. Murat and Jan-Hein were always enthusiastic, helpful and insightful. Mireille, Paul and Stephan deserve many thanks for translating my summary into French, Dutch and German respectively. I cannot emphasize enough how important these people were to me during the writing of this study. Somehow, just seeing their smiling faces every week gave me the courage to continue when I thought I had nothing more to write.

I am thankful to Martin Garnett and Claire Wilson of the Imperial War Museum who promptly identified the ALARM missile and provided me with the technical information needed for my study. I would like to thank David Bryson for

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Alison Hall deserves much appreciation for her friendship, motivating demeanour and above all for helping me attain an appreciation for matters of protocol. Richard and Barbara from the Museum Studies department at the University of Leicester showed me that you can study museums seriously, while having fun at the same time.

The friendship of two people I came to know shortly after arriving in Amsterdam was instrumental to my successful integration into Dutch society. By helping me create a safe and pleasant social environment in my newly adopted homeland, these two people helped me to integrate into a challenging European environment. René Teunissen, whom I met on an exploratory trip to Amsterdam in 2002, continues to be a good friend and a great inspiration. Michael van der Geest is a reliable friend who has shown me nothing but kindness and support. To both of you I say “*hartstikke bedankt.*”

I could not imagine completing this undertaking without the encouragement and loving support of my immediate family: Todd, Jennifer, Laurie, Joe, Sheri, Jim, Rebecca, Chris, Suzanne and Mark. My aunts and uncles, Barbara, Phyllis, Lance and Stuart have always treated me compassionately and took the time to listen to what I had to say. I wish to thank them and their families for staying in contact and remembering that I am far away, especially during the holidays. My newly-acquired Dutch family, Aart, Georges, Lineke, Yvonne and De heer † & Mevrouw J.B. Oranje have welcomed me into their family with open arms.

My parents Jane and Ron, whose loving, stable and nurturing tough-love approach gave me great confidence and encouragement throughout my life, deserve the lion's share of the credit for influencing me to return to higher education and earn my academic credentials. This reminds me of the inscription they once had engraved on a piece of jewellery given to me many years ago. I have now proven to myself that – “I can do it”. Thank you both for all your lustrous pearly words of wisdom.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to express my dedication and appreciation to Paul, my partner, best friend and source of inspiration throughout the past five years. Without his patience, support, understanding, advice and humour this postgraduate experience would have surely been a solitary undertaking.

5 March 2009
(somewhere between) Amsterdam and Paris