Cultures of light: contemporary trends in museum exhibition

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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’Allegro*. 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, Ben, Bobby, Cathy, Chuck†, Dennis, George, 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 promotor 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

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engrossed myself in her work while completing Leicester’s demanding coursework. It
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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,
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at the very moment Hanneke took up a position at Oxford University’s History of Art
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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
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gave me the courage to continue when I thought I had nothing more to write.

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(somewhere between) Amsterdam and Paris