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‘De Storm der Hartstogten Woedt’: The works of Johannes Jelgerhuis Rienkszoon as a source of stagecraft for the historically informed performer

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Conclusion

In this dissertation I recounted my trajectory in search of new knowledge regarding the works of Johannes Jelgerhuis as sources of stagecraft for the historically informed performer. I investigated how Jelgerhuis's lesser-known works could contribute to a better understanding of his treatise *Theoretische lessen* and of his acting style, and how this in turn could contribute to the field of HIPP; how a training based on Jelgerhuis's works could enrich my own artistic practice; and how I could transform my newly acquired knowledge and techniques into training materials intended to guide and inspire other performers.

My original contribution to knowledge touches on theoretical and practical fields of study and consists in

- casting light on Jelgerhuis's lesser-known works as a means to aid (through contextualization, analysis, and comparison) an informed present-day interpretation of his treatise *Theoretische lessen*;
- describing how Jelgerhuis's lesser-known works add to the information in his treatise, and how combining these sources can provide new (that is, currently forgotten) knowledge for the theatre historian, the performer, and others interested in HIPP of the early nineteenth century;
- applying my knowledge of Jelgerhuis's sources to inform my own training and performance practice
- creating acting tools for performers based on Jelgerhuis's sources.

I will follow this order as much as possible in the following sections, asking the reader to consider that elements of these four aspects overlapped in my study and practice, as they do in this Conclusion. Before elaborating on the four aspects, however, I would like to share the following general reflection:

Jelgerhuis's legacy provides a combination of material related to interconnecting disciplines, as it contains elements of education, theory, art, and practice. My exploration of the versatility of his works shows him balancing between and finally uniting multiple talents and professions as they intersected on different levels, similar to the balance in the professional lives of artist-researchers and/or artist-teachers today. A thorough understanding and interpretation of Jelgerhuis's published and unpublished works entails a consideration of layers of information pertaining to these disciplines; particularly so when one aims to apply elements of his oeuvre to physical practice.

It would be a misrepresentation to see Jelgerhuis's *Theoretische lessen* as a complete manual for stagecraft: the manuscripts (in particular *Toneel Studien*) must also be taken into account. The treatise is technical and provides basic knowledge for aspiring actors, whereas the manuscripts document Jelgerhuis's interpretation of specific roles. When viewed through the lens of his lesser-known works, *Theoretische lessen* proposes rules to inform, rather than to rigidly constrain the actor's art, allowing for adaptations of the rules to differences between stage characters and their emotions within the context of 'high art', or nature perfected. The world of the stage as presented by

Jelgerhuis combines rules of acting and costuming, which occasionally can be broken for practical reasons or to improve the dramatic effect, as long as *welstand* and *waarheid* are respected.[1] The actors' awareness and application of *welstand* in costuming and movements contributes to the visual harmony of the '*the schilderij*' (the painting) on-stage, while *waarheid* safeguards the ideal of representing characters whose emotions, movements, and costume correspond to the play text.

My practice of interlacing information from Jelgerhuis's oeuvre with physical work led me to the following conclusion regarding my two main sources: if the *Theoretische lessen* prepares the actor's body, the *Toneel Studien* prepares their mind and emotions. In other words, these two sources complement each other. While Jelgerhuis's documentation, in the manuscript, of his own acting significantly broadens the repertoire of emotional transitions and expands the information on timing, vocal delivery, and physical interaction between characters on-stage, the *Theoretische lessen* provides a foundation for stage behaviour by providing basic concepts and physical examples. This means that, although Jelgerhuis did not propose a didactic function for the 1811 *Toneel Studien*, elements of this manuscript can be used as teaching material, following the tradition of learning through imitation. Jelgerhuis's lesser-known works therefore deserve to be employed alongside the *Theoretische lessen* as a source for HIPP and in the discussion of European theatre history of the early nineteenth century. Both in research and in practice, his writings may bring us one step closer to understanding early nineteenth-century acting techniques in the Netherlands and contribute to a better comparison between acting practices across Europe at the time.

Bringing manuscript and manual together

The material from Jelgerhuis's manuscripts as treated in this dissertation only shows the tip of the iceberg: I focused on one of Jelgerhuis's seven *Toneel Studien* and have merely mentioned his other manuscripts and costume designs. However, a significant development has been made at the dissemination of Jelgerhuis's unpublished illustrated journals, as I transcribed most of the manuscripts in the archives and analysed the roles of Avogaro and Nero as I have done with the Siméon study.[2] Throughout the previous chapters I have addressed several gaps, mentioned in the Introduction, regarding information on acting in the *Theoretische lessen*. By establishing a deeper understanding of Jelgerhuis's oeuvre and its relevance for stage practitioners, this dissertation also lays the groundwork for further inquiry into other aspects of his legacy. The process of staging scenes from the play *Omasis, of Jozef in Egypte*, based on his descriptions of Siméon in the *Toneel Studien* manuscript (described in the first case study) convinced me of the effectiveness of practice-based research for this purpose. This form of experimentation exposes problems, raises questions, but also yields results that cannot always be foreseen by theoretical study of the texts alone. I suspect that future practical studies of Jelgerhuis's other six theatre studies can fill in more of the gaps in information concerning the stage practices in his acting style, specifically regarding

[1] For the purpose of this dissertation I have translated *welstand* as 'that which looks good'; a concept referring to beauty in form, harmonious proportions, and/or expression. For contextualization and translation of the terms *welstand* and *waarheid* (truth), see Chapter 1, sections 1.2.4 and 1.3.1, respectively.

[2] For the role of Avogaro, see Jelgerhuis, *Toneel Studien*, pp. 35–69; for Siméon, see pp. 115–180; for Nero, see pp. 181–195.

blocking, declamation, and the timing of words to gestures. His thoughts on acting are reflected in his indications regarding e.g. the imagination, the passions, eye movements, muscle tension, gestures, and full body attitudes. The stage actions described in his manuscripts contain natural, everyday elements as well as features particular to Jelgerhuis's time and acting style. His style is marked by alternating passages—those revealing strong contrasts between the passions on the one hand, and slow, nuanced build-ups of tension on the other. Both manifest in all the acting parameters such as the voice, attitudes, and gestures; yet, however strong the passions may become, *welstand* and *waarheid* are essential to create a visual harmonious unity with the other actors, with the costumes, and the stage sets. Returning to the acting parameters not or barely mentioned in the *Theoretische lessen*, as listed in the Introduction, my research was able to shed light on the following:

- declamation (vocal contrast, volume, colour, articulation, pauses, timing)
- timing: word to gesture
- quality of execution (flowing or emphatic, quick or slow, and so on)
- blocking and interaction with other actors
- implementation of attitudes in the context of a scene on-stage
- use of imagination
- the creation of a character and the preparation of a role

My study of Jelgerhuis's manuscripts did not provide sufficient information to inform the last two aspects of acting listed in the Introduction. However, through experimentation — building on my practical artistic vocabulary grounded in the available material in his works, and by incorporating information from sources contemporary to Jelgerhuis, I was able to address them in Chapter 4:

- a mention of softer, more positive passions (such as longing and hope)
- the use of costume in practice (for instance of a mantle or a veil)

Additional aspects of stagecraft drawn from the manuscripts and discussed in this dissertation included the actor's relationship to the character, depth and limits of identification, the fourth wall, asides, soliloquies, tears and the voice, additional combinations of passions, additional gestures, stage entrances, claptrap, and decorum.

I have demonstrated, for example, how Jelgerhuis sought solutions to make the soliloquies and asides more plausible, how the vast variety of passions and transitions he described directly stemmed from his interpretation of and identification with the role, and how he approached the limits of identification (for instance, concerning the state of sadness in which tears impede the capacity to remain audible). In short, Jelgerhuis's manuscripts have allowed me a glimpse into the variety and intensity of an acting style that may seem (when based on the *Theoretische lessen* alone) merely visually artificial, repetitive, and static.

Historically informed acting techniques in 21st-century research and performance practice

Having experienced the fertile environment created when theatre practitioners join efforts with theatre historians, people specialized in theatre-related crafts, and scholars from other fields, I am convinced that discussion between these different fields of expertise is essential for historically informed productions. By exploring and by sharing information among colleagues (opening discussion among performers, theatre scholars, students, and teachers), those involved reciprocally inform and enrich their results and research. By documenting this work, elements of the outcomes and processes that may be useful in future projects are made available to others. A complicating factor regarding this exchange in research and practice in HIPP is exactly that historically informed theatre productions require expertise on numerous planes, and that they are expensive. Because in our present time governmental funding for the arts rarely suffices to cover the costs of entire historically informed productions, focusing on separate aspects of the craft may be the only viable option for many research projects (as it was for the case studies in Chapters 3 and 4). Although this division is not ideal, I believe that working on separate elements has advantages of its own (depth and focus of the research) and is worth pursuing. Such smaller projects can provide unexpected outcomes and can result in eventually inviting knowledge and techniques from the past in HIP as well as in other genres and art forms.

Whether in large-scale productions or more narrowly concentrated research projects, staying open to challenge prevailing ideas and modes in historically informed performance practice should be considered as an intrinsic part of investigating theatre practices based on historical sources. Awareness of an inevitable contemporary biased view of past practices need not impair engagement with historical material but instead may lead to additional in-depth exploration and appreciation of their present-day value; present-day interpretations and integrations of source-based practices can offer inspiring and empowering material for re-creation. My study of Jelgerhuis's works increasingly led me to view historically inspired research and practice with the following question in mind: 'What can I learn from studying craftsmanship of the past, and which elements can again flourish in the varied theatre landscape of the present?'

Unlocking the potential of attitudes and transitions

Here, I want to draw attention once more to the transitions between the various passions. Or to be more specific: the transitions through the various passions. By this second formulation I want to restate my belief that an embodied passion is, when performed well, and as indicated by Jelgerhuis, not static. The danger of applying historical information from the page to physical practice in our present time is the lack of kinetic examples, and if the actors are not given enough time to fully integrate the movements into their body and imagination, this can result in a stiff acting style in which performers mechanically shift from one passion or attitude to the next. Both in Jelgerhuis's manuscript and his treatise the bodily attitudes, although often inspired by statues are not described as motionless. Jelgerhuis warns against stiffness in acting and describes potential movements on different planes: both internal and external, providing material to work from the inside out (the imagination, the breath, the impulse) as well as from the outside in (the outer physical form and its effect on the imagination). Moreover, in his manuscript he describes how the character's thoughts are awakened to trigger an emotional transition into the next line of text,

and how thoughts concerning technical elements of acting can keep the emotions at bay when needed. Each actor is attentive to the text spoken by the other characters, using their imagination to act and react, thereby keeping the performance alive in the moment, not only for oneself, but also for the other actors as well as the audience, so that the entire picture lives. This use of the imagination, described in the *Toneel Studien*, in combination with practice, is the path to keeping each attitude alive. Although the use of the imagination is nothing new in the history of acting and actors, it is important to emphasize that the theoretical elements in the *Theoretische lessen* are to be viewed with the role of the actor's imagination in mind.

Welstand and *contrast* in practice

Over the course of the research period, my conceptions of *welstand* and *contrast* have changed. Today the term *welstand* is used mainly for indicating well-being in life, often associated with material comfort and health. Having learned the difference between this material connotation and the concept of *welstand* as proposed in this thesis, my conception transformed in stages: after my first reading of the *Theoretische lessen*, I mainly noticed substantial adjustments, for instance of contrast between arm and leg positions. In time, my perception shifted increasingly towards *welstand* as indicator of harmony between the various elements, including imagination and *waarheid* as generators for physical outer changes. It became more related to an idea than to a recipe or formula for standing. When someone performs an attitude and then is asked to think of *welstand*, it is not only the outer shape of the performance that is altered. Ideally, it affects the various acting parameters from the inside out and can therefore also be perceived in very subtle alterations, for instance in the quality of movement, the gaze, or a minimal release of tension in the shoulders.

As with the concept of *welstand*, my interest in and sensibility for *contrast* developed over time. *Contrast* has become a tool of its own as an important vehicle of expression in the acting style based on Jelgerhuis's sources: one to employ in most of the discussed acting parameters (i.e. in alternating passages, and in smaller units such as the body, the voice, between attitudes, and between passions).

Naturalness and adaptability

Reflecting on the preparation, staging processes, and performance in my own work and in that of others, I conclude that gestures, attitudes and other acting tools/techniques strike me as unnatural or unfit for the stage when they are not yet quite integrated in the physical vocabulary and the imagination of the actor/student/performer. Once the vocabulary has become second nature to the performer, it can create a unification with the costume and theatre sets that results in the '*schilderij*' ('painting') to which Jelgerhuis often refers. This thespian painting has the function of transporting and enchanting us, and just as we accept costumes and theatrical entourages that are not part of our usual environment and fashion, the gestures and attitudes, when performed with such ease as seemingly to belong to that character, will seem natural in their environment, pulling an audience further into the theatrical enchantment. Ideally, gestures and stage behaviour in a particular style can become a tacit agreement between the audience and the performer to immerse themselves in an illusion together. They are part of the means whereby theatre art is expressed,

just as skates are for ice skating, singing for opera and musicals, pointe shoes for ballet, and specific harmonic frameworks to specific musical styles.

The ideal of natural stage behaviour is an ever-changing concept, influenced throughout the centuries by many factors. As others before me have pointed out, what is natural acting to us today is far from what it may have been to early eighteenth- and nineteenth-century actors and their audience. What is important, is to choose the acting vocabulary and style for a particular production or scene, and, unless one aims for a specific effect, to stick to it. Performers who do not specialize in a single style can be confronted with a time gap of centuries between productions. They would benefit from getting a sense of the gestures and facial expression appropriate for historically informed performances by candlelight, while also being able to adapt to modern productions in which, occasionally, each detail of facial expression is projected onto gigantic screens, and/or captured on video. Accordingly, most actors, performers, or students, will be well-served by cultivating a vast and flexible physical and mental archive of movements and images—firstly, so that their prepared part looks and feels natural (as if speaking another well-known language); secondly, so that they may draw upon a broad vocabulary to avoid repetition; and thirdly, so that they can improvise when necessary or desirable during a performance. The exercises and my research in the two case studies were steps or ways to expand this vocabulary, not only for my own practice, but also for other performers.

Bodily *contrast*, *welstand*, and confidence

I have seen in colleagues, students and myself how, with practice, the knowledge and physical understanding of *welstand* and *contrast* can help performers to feel more confident in their own bodies (on-stage as well as in daily life) by increasing one's awareness of their own body and its potential freedom of expression; notwithstanding the search for asymmetry, their body is balanced. Moreover, the amplitude of large gestures required for various attitudes, trains performers to feel comfortable also when their arms, chest, and shoulder region are free and open. This sense of physical confidence is not self-evident with less experienced performers and can be of use on-stage as well as in speaking in public and similar situations.

Historical acting education: past - present - future

The research process described in this dissertation broadened my expressive vocabulary and my sense of freedom on-stage as a professional singer. By submitting my body and mind to practical training based on information in Jelgerhuis's *Theoretische lessen* and other works, I developed a different way of reading historical dramatic texts and libretti as indicators for specific aspects of the studied acting style (such as contrasting attitudes and their transitions). This practice-based research trajectory became important in my teaching historical acting techniques to singers, as it enabled me to provide them with acting tools while ensuring that their vocal technique was not jeopardized. I believe that students who have experienced these basics at conservatories, will be more flexible in adjusting to historically informed performances as well as modern productions, and will feel more empowered in expressing and performing with ease. Historical stagings may increase in quality when the focus during rehearsal can be more on dramatic content and

expression, and less on form or style (as the performer is accustomed to delivering with naturalness and ease in this style). I therefore join Dionysios Kyropoulos in his plea to include acting techniques based on historical sources in the conservatories' curricula for singers, particularly, in both the early music and classical departments.[3]

Future development of my training material

Some of the most accessible results of my study are likely to be the exercises and the information drawn from Jelgerhuis's works as inspiration for didactic tools, training, and performing. The stereotypical characters presented in the *Theoretische lessen*, which are often useful for inexperienced actors, can be extended into varied and profound characterizations with information drawn from Jelgerhuis's manuscripts (the first case study, Chapter 3, is an example of this process). The exercises (Chapter 2) and the building blocks for creating a character (Chapter 3) can be used for training both the physical techniques and the imagination of students and professional performers, so as to aid them in finding ways of expressing the character they wish to portray on-stage with ease and freedom of expression within their desired gradation of *welstand*. In this way, these tools are an addition to other historically informed acting techniques, but more specifically a way to adopt and understand the acting style inspired by attitudes deployed not only in the early nineteenth century in the Netherlands, but throughout Europe.

The exercises, other elements of training, and the results presented here are not intended as the only way to achieve historically inspired acting. They can now be compared further with other sources on historical theatre and acting practices, and I am hopeful that they will continue to be applied in practice as a means to stimulate students and performers to develop their own style, but with a solid basis to rely on, in which their own specialities can flourish. My aim is to pass on all stylistic options in a manner that they become so comfortable for the performer that they experience a sense of freedom, in which each option becomes so connected with their imagination and taste that they can decide for themselves how to adjust to each situation to achieve their expressive goals. The techniques and exercises leave ample space for further development of the tools based on Jelgerhuis's sources. Separate elements can be combined with other methods, techniques, and sources relating to theatre or visual arts, to adapt these tools to earlier or later styles and different genres. The one element that is crucial in any combination is the imagination, as only this will allow for binding all the others together. If a historically informed performance is the aim, a notion of *welstand*, contrast, and ease in performing are required, the amount of which is to be adapted to the character portrayed.

Order and methodology

Working on Jelgerhuis's *Theoretische lessen* resulted in methodological insights, eventually changing my method of presenting teaching material. This development was influenced by the work of Anne Smith and her perspective on the body and historical acting as a teacher of Alexander Technique. Having received my own training in acting techniques based on Austin's treatise *Chironomia* as one of the main sources, I perhaps stuck to this source too closely in my first years of teaching. As

[3] Kyropoulos, 'Teaching Acting to Singers', pp. vii, 307–308.

Austin's notation system requires the ability to distinguish different but precise shapes of the hands, I used to introduce the students to these shapes (with a notion of painterliness) early in the process. This occasionally resulted in tension in the hands, and at times artificial-looking gestures, as the rest of their body and mind were not yet free and available to shape the hands and fingers with naturalness and ease in the heat of a specific passion or situation. I had put *welstand* before ease of motion—or in modern terms: style before substance. I then realized the benefit of the order and methodology in the *Theoretische lessen*, in which the balance of the whole body (contrapposto and contrasts) is presented first, and the hands later. I now introduce the details for specific hand positions later in the teaching process, and less explanation is needed. When the students' bodies are free, they mostly already shape their hands in various painterly ways, as they have seen examples in paintings, in my movements, or in those of advanced fellow students. Their gestures then originate from their own imagination: they contain *welstand* while they look easy and seem natural. At this stage, working with attitudes as well as Austin's notation is an efficient working method, both for teaching and in my own performance practice.

Pitfalls and proposed solutions

The following reflection regarding the sequence of acting tools and terminology (*waarheid* and *welstand*, discussed in Chapter 1) is intended for performers that are new to historically informed acting techniques and to adapting the creative processes to their individual needs. **Pitfalls:** the danger of prioritising *welstand*, painterliness, or gracefulness early in the physical practice lies in an artificial result of only outer body and style, when imagination and *waarheid* are not yet integrated with movement. If only *waarheid* and imagination are prioritized, the passions may claim the body and one may not express the best results for a historically informed production: *welstand* and technique are lacking. **Proposed solution:** Rotating between small building blocks to stimulate a physical and cognitive understanding through embodiment and observation of visual examples. The initial focus, for instance, can include *contrast* and *welstand* through work on attitudes and the imagination. This creates a sense of balance of the body. When naturalness and ease are found in standing, sitting, and walking, and painterliness and gracefulness have become clear concepts through visual observation, all elements can progressively be combined to portray the character with *waarheid* and *welstand*. The exact sequence of presenting the various building blocks will vary slightly between different groups or individuals and can be combined with (teaching) material from other sources. **To summarize:** in general, isolating and focusing on solely one term until it is fully integrated before moving to the next is likely to be counterproductive. The solution lies in presenting the various elements in small alternating building blocks, and in returning cycles, increasingly overlapping and combining, until all elements have become a unity. When one building block returns, it has been enriched in the meantime by the others in between.

Perfecting and perfectionism

Perfectionism today is often considered a negative influence on people's well-being (potentially contributing to anxiety, procrastination and impostor syndrome).[4] However, performers are pressed to produce faultless material (for websites, pictures, audio and video recordings,) to promote their artistic skills as a product. It may be important to emphasize that this is not the idea of perfection I want to promote today when citing Jelgerhuis's call for perfection in Chapters 1, 3, and 4 or my own references to the phrase 'nature perfected.' My aim for perfecting one's acting skills is to try to improve one's practice and performance by understanding and working with the idiosyncrasy of each performer, including their own distinctive qualities and boundaries. I hope that my research will not inspire performers to see perfection in their practice as a finished product, but that it will instead encourage the idea of an ongoing journey of practice to obtain and develop freedom of expression on-stage. As renditions of the dramatic repertoire of the past require an understanding of the means whereby it can be conveyed with a strong effect and to a high level, this freedom of expression can then be deployed to make performances more exciting and moving. Similarly, the practical examples in this research are not intended as a perfect or 'correct' product or formula. It is my aim to share my experience to inspire others in finding their own versions and combinations of the proposed material and to create hybrid techniques.

Coda

Film actress Natalie Portman says in the introduction to her online masterclass on acting: 'This is a job about your imagination.'[5] She explains that putting oneself in the place of the character, whether from the perspective of the audience or the actors, is 'an act of empathy.' These citations of Portman resonate with descriptions in Jelgerhuis's *Toneel Studien* manuscript. Just as Jelgerhuis recalls how he imagined himself in the footsteps of the character, thinking of the possible motives behind a character's actions for a truthful rendition on-stage, actors today, in preparing a role, learn to see through the eyes and emotions of this other human (or deity, animal, or mythological) character. The capacity to understand, recognize, and execute the facial expressions and muscle tension relating to various passions are additional ways to portray a character on-stage. This skill serves to recognize and react to expressions of fellow actors while they develop their characters in real time on-stage, potentially lifting the interaction between the characters (and therefore lifting the performance) to another expressive level. By discussing these aspects of Jelgerhuis's oeuvre, and by sharing his description of these acting skills, I wanted to draw attention not only to the differences but also the similarities at the core work of creating a character. Although centuries have passed and acting styles change, I am confident that elements of the past can still be useful for stagecraft today and can contribute to a generation of performers who continue moving and sharing the passions through the arts and on the living painting of the stage.

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[4] For an example of literature discussing the positive and negative sides to perfectionism, especially for students, see Mirjam Pol, V*an Stress naar success. Praktische wegwijzer voor studenten* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2022), pp. 86–125.

[5] Trailer for 'Natalie Portman Teaches Acting', on Masterclass.com, https://www.masterclass.com/classes/natalie-portman-teaches-acting (accessed 12 July 2025).