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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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Summary

The Dutch actor and painter Johannes Jelgerhuis Rienkszoon (1770–1836) is known today mainly for his paintings and his treatise on acting theory *Theoretische lessen over de gesticulatie en mimiek* (“Theoretical lessons on gesticulation and facial expression”), published between 1827 and 1829. Less known, however, are his unpublished manuscripts and costume designs. In this dissertation I investigate how the study of Jelgerhuis’s unpublished works can cast new light on his acting style as well as his *Theoretische lessen*, and how this in turn can contribute to the acting practice of historically informed performers today. Throughout four chapters, one on theory and three on stagecraft, the following research questions guided my study:

1. How can a study of Johannes Jelgerhuis’s lesser-known works add to a more complete understanding of Jelgerhuis’s treatise *Theoretische lessen*, of his approach to acting and of his acting style, and how can this contribute in turn to historically informed performance practices?
2. How can a physical and mental training following the *Theoretische lessen* and the study of Jelgerhuis’s other works add to my own artistic practice, both during the preparation process and in performance?
3. Which acting tools can I develop from such training, and how can I make them available and useful to other performers?

In search of a better understanding of Jelgerhuis’s treatise and acting style, Chapter 1 has at its centre a discussion of selected works by Jelgerhuis within the context of the various disciplines he practiced, and the changes occurring in the Amsterdam theatre in the early nineteenth century. As part of this investigation and in preparation for Chapters 2–4 on stagecraft, I contextualize and discuss eight terms — *schilderachtigheid*, *contrast*, *attitude*, *welstand*, *waarheid*, *naturalness*, *gracefulness*, and *ease* — frequently adopted by Jelgerhuis and his contemporaries.

Chapters 2–4 focus on how physical and mental training based on the *Theoretische lessen* and the study of Jelgerhuis’s other works inform my practice, both in the preparation process and in the actual performances, which acting tools I acquire from such training, and how I make them available and useful to other performers. The eight terms are here applied within practice-based research.

In Chapter 2, I adapt information from the illustrations and written text in the *Theoretische lessen* to create basic physical acting exercises, not only to increase the understanding of this source but also to facilitate a practical path of embodiment and practice for myself and other performers. The importance of the imagination to generate the reason why a character executes any movement or stage action is an essential part of these exercises and of the training and staging processes in the following case studies.

Chapter 3 commences with an analysis of Jelgerhuis's acting style as described in his manuscript *Toneel Studien* of 1811. This information is then used in practice. Two actors and I go through a training based on the exercises proposed in Chapter 2, and three actors stage three scenes from a Dutch play by meticulously following clues and details in Jelgerhuis's manuscript and information from *Theoretische lessen*. The analysis, training, and staging processes demonstrate the benefits of combining information from the treatise and the manuscript. Both sources complement each other, illuminating different but equally important aspects of Jelgerhuis's acting style. Another result of the analysis carried out in this chapter is a list of preparatory building blocks for creating a character for the stage according to Jelgerhuis's ideas.

In Chapter 4, I review my study of the acting techniques hitherto presented in a broader perspective, by combining them with international source material of Jelgerhuis's time. The focal point of this case study is the preparation process of creating a historically inspired performance of the German melodrama *Proserpina* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) and Franz Carl Eberwein (1786–1868). Investigation into the original production of 1815 leads, for example, to the concept and creation of a costume for Proserpina, and to merging techniques based on Jelgerhuis's sources (his stage attitudes) with artistic practices (artistic attitudes) of Lady Emma Hamilton (1765–1815), Henriette Hendel-Schütz (1772–1849), and Ida Brun (1792–1857).

The conclusion distills my original contribution to knowledge, consisting in three key points: 1) demonstrating how the combination of Jelgerhuis's lesser-known works and his treatise *Theoretische lessen* can provide new knowledge for the theatre historian, the performer, and others interested in HIPP of the early nineteenth century; 2) describing how my study of Jelgerhuis's sources enriched my own training, teaching, and performance practice; and 3) proposing a series of exercises based on Jelgerhuis's sources that can be used as training and acting tools for (historically informed) performers today.