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Questionnaire Response:

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VCS in the 90s

It's now thirty years since I arrived in Rochester, taking over as VCS director from Mieke Bal in the program's second year. I think I am right in recalling that Douglas came the following year – 1992. Michael Holly as Chair of Art and Art History had brought us both to Rochester, and we worked closely together until she left (for the Clark Art Institute) in 1999. I left (for Columbia University, and then later home to England) in 2001. So for most of the 90s we worked together, the three of us. We were a great team, with an effortless and easy collaboration and division of labor – our offices next door to one another, dropping in and out for chats and consultations.

This photo (still date-stamped) was taken of Douglas and me on Michael's porch in Williamstown, on a visit a year after I'd moved back to the U.K.

It was the best job of my life, and I still miss it. Now, of course, I also really miss Douglas. We kept in close touch and met regularly in New York. He also came to Manchester on two occasions on a Simon Visiting Fellowship which I arranged for him in our own interdisciplinary arts program. I felt proud that one of the essays that became a chapter in his wonderful memoir, *Before Pictures*, was first written as a talk to the Urbis centre in Manchester. He also presented a version of his first chapter – the one about Charles James and the Guggenheim – at the University during his stay. Both were hugely successful events. I remember being especially struck by the rapt attention and enthusiastic questioning of the young – non-academic – audience at Urbis, Mancunians so enthralled to hear about New York in the 1970s.

Douglas and I were writing our (very different) memoirs at the same time, both thinking through the question of the relationship between academic writing and personal writing. (My book, *Austerity Baby*, was published in 2017, a year after Douglas's.) I am indebted to Douglas as one of a small number of academics who opened up the possibilities of this kind of work, and for many conversations along the way. (He was also instrumental in getting one of my own chapters published in *InVisible Culture* in 2014, while I was working on the book.) I think I was never quite as brave as Douglas in allowing the personal into my writing. But then I was never as brave as him in many areas of our lives. As generally a more passive supporter and sympathiser of political causes and issues from the late 60s on, I could only admire and respect his life-long activism. Actually, this obvious contrast was evident at our very first meeting, when we were double-billed at the enormous cultural studies conference in Champaign-Urbana in April 1990 – the event later became a book edited by Lawrence Grossberg and others. Douglas spoke very movingly about portraits of people with AIDS; I had to follow right away with a very academic (and not very inspiring) talk I'd prepared on interdisciplinarity in the study of art. I've no idea why the organisers put us together in the session – it was such a mismatch in theme and tone, and (I felt) almost an insult to the importance of Douglas's subject. But I was very thrilled to meet Douglas. Two years later we were colleagues in Rochester.

Another photo I have was taken in New York in May 2006, the month before I left to return to England after eighteen years in the U.S. It was a sort of leaving party for me, and Douglas said a few nice words of farewell. What he actually said was that he was a bit fed up with having to make goodbye speeches, as he thought he'd already done that five years earlier when I left Rochester; and he had. It wasn't, though, a final farewell. He was in Manchester soon after that, and I was regularly back in New York. I haven't been back since November 2019, and when I do go I know I will feel his loss once again.

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