

Acknowledgements

From experience I can tell you that these last pages of a PhD thesis are the most widely read pages of the entire publication. It is here where you think that you will find out whether you have meant something in the life of the PhD candidate. While this may be true to some level, you have to weigh my verdict with the disturbingly low level of sanity left in this PhD candidate after several years of studying toxic molecules in distant galaxies while poking around the Galactic dust bin to discover how they relate to matter closer to home. I reckon it is about time to put the extragalactic silicate and ice absorption features aside and take a look again at some real rocks and glaciers for a while.

First of all, I would like to thank my friends from my undergraduate years in Utrecht. Gert-Jan, Jeroen, Marc, Michiel, René² and Wouter (note the alphabetical order!): you have been in my life ever since we started in Transitorium-I and had to endure the ‘quantum-gelal’ echoing around us. I cherish our many holidays together and hope that we will be able to stay in touch despite the large distances between us.

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The first two and a half years of my thesis project, I spent at ESO, the center of European astronomy. To me ESO is also synonymous with ‘social@eso.org’, the group of students and fellows with whom I had the pleasure to explore Munich and the Alps. Particularly fun were the games nights, during which I had the pleasure to butcher — among others — Elise, Greg, Ilse, Jacco, Joël, Mark, Martin, Patrick and ‘Sanders’. Some of these events were preceded by the haute cuisine of Joël and Elise: I still can’t stand the smell of Reblouchon cheese, but the Tartiflette, which results from it, is delicious! Jacco, thank you for introducing me to mountain biking and for infecting me with your passion for arid landscapes. I further would like to mention my office mates, Gerti and Ralph. Did you know that one of our always clinically-dead plants has survived us? Finally, I would like to thank Ed Janssen and Hännens Heyer for their help with creating conference posters and my thesis cover and Ralf Siebenmorgen for our La Silla expeditions.

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Henny: in the end it was not such a big step from LBVs to ULIRGs. LBVs are the most luminous stars and ULIRGs the most luminous galaxies. Flör: bedankt voor de Smarties. 'Gedeelde smart is halve smart!' I'm also grateful to my 'ole friend Jack for designing my thesis cover. It was about time we worked together again, 5 years after the ISO T-shirt project!

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Henrik Spoon, Groningen, September 2003