

‘Het corps = kansloos’

Towards a New Materialist University History? The Case of Student
Graffiti at the Utrecht University Library



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‘As we penetrate into matter, nature does not show us any isolated “basic building blocks”, but rather appears as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of the whole.

These relations always include the observer in an essential way’.

(Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, 1975, 68)

‘The wisdom of the plants: even when they have roots, there is always an outside where they form a rhizome with something else - with the wind, an animal, human beings (and there is also an aspect under which animals themselves form rhizomes, as do people)’.

(Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987, 12)

““We” are not outside observers of the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places *in* the world; rather, we are part *of* the world in its ongoing intra-activity’.

(Karen Barad, ‘Post-humanist Performativity’, 2003, 828).

‘Actor-network theory... does not celebrate the idea that there is a difference in kind between people on the one hand, and objects on the other. It denies that people are necessarily special’.

(John Law, ‘Notes on the theory of the Actor Network’, 1992, 3)

‘The challenge for historians is to learn how to think with the object and how to understand the “thingness of the thing”’.

(Adrienne D. Hood, *History beyond the Text*, 2008, 177)

‘De cultuurgeschiedenis van de eenentwintigste eeuw zal zich opnieuw rekenschap moeten geven van haar eigen grenzen’.

(Joris van Eijnatten, *Beschaving na de cultural turn*, 2011, 17)

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Preface: ‘Studenten bekijken krabbels op wc’s’

The story behind this tale goes back to 2009. The *Letterenbibliotheek* (LB) at the Drift was still in existence, and I was an undergraduate, working in the library on a BA thesis on the role of zodiac signs and natural disasters in medieval historiography (Schouwenburg 2009). After a regular visit to the restrooms at the ground floor my uncluttered intellectual life took a surprising turn. While answering the call of nature, my attention was suddenly attracted to a small text that someone had scribbled on the toilet door: “*God is dood – Nietzsche*” it said, and then: “*Nietzsche is dood – God*”. This particular graffiti made me laugh out loud, and I couldn’t stop thinking about it when I returned to my books. During the following days, I took everyone who dared to listen to me to the lavatories to show them my catch. After careful examination, I discovered that the walls of the study booths in the attic of the library were covered in graffiti as well. I never found out who wrote the Nietzsche/God text. This person, however, provided me with inspiration to write this thesis.



Figure 1. Interviewed by RTV Utrecht on 22 October 2009

Media Hype

Together with fellow student and close friend Guido van Eijck, I decided to do ‘something’ with the graffiti in the library. Maybe we could write an article about it, we mused, *U-Blad* or *Geestdrift* would do! Around that time, though, it came to our ears that the study booths in the attic of the library were going to be demolished. A time for drastic renovations was at hand. Due to these rumours our plans become part of a greater cause: we were going to preserve all the student graffiti. In order to do so, Guido and I teamed up with Matthijs Kuipers and Anne Roetman. In the canteen of the LB we constituted an ad hoc committee. To give our project a bit of academic rigour, we asked Joris van Eijnatten, freshly appointed professor of Cultural History, to interpret the graffiti with us. After we had

interviewed caretaker Paul van den Lugt, we wrote a short piece about ‘wall polemics’ and got in touch with *U-Blad*. The editors appreciated our effort but wrestled with financial and other problems. Unable to publish the piece, they sent a reporter who conducted a short interview with me about our findings in the LB (*U-Blad* 41.4, 15 oktober 2009, 8). And then all hell broke loose..

First up was Campus Radio, whose editors had read the interview in *U-Blad*. They invited me and Anne to elaborate on student graffiti in their live radio program. RTV Utrecht, Radio M Utrecht, and the Utrecht edition of *Algemeen Dagblad* followed suit. A radio reporter interviewed us and called Joris for further explanation. A camera crew turned up to shoot pictures of the graffiti in the LB (see Figure 1). Local excitement became national news. NOS Headlines, BNN Radio, 3FM, *Het Parool* and Villa VPRO all wanted to hear our story. Slok op Utrecht invited us to their *café littéraire*, where local poets paid tribute to ‘shit house poetry’. And we could publish our article in *Geestdrift* (Schouwenburg et al 2009). Although the media were particularly interested in scatology and sexual graffiti, I tried, following Leen Dorsman, professor of university history and teacher extraordinaire, to translate some scholarly problems about the interpretation of non-traditional sources in order to reconstruct the lives of neglected groups to the public (see Figure 2). I have no idea if anyone noticed these more serious sides of toilet graffiti. One thing, however, is clear: an unsuspecting visit to the restroom made me into an expert on scatological issues. Not a bad start for a budding cultural historian innit?



Figure 2. Teletext, RTV Utrecht, 22 oktober 2009

During the media hype, I promised to write a MA thesis about student graffiti. The website of the Faculty of Humanities noted: ‘On 30 October, history student Hans Schouwenburg told in radio programme Villa VPRO (radio 1) about cultural historical research he and three fellow students are

conducting on graffiti found in Utrecht's University Library. Their initiative already gained quite a lot of media attention during the past week. The students aim to preserve the graffiti for posterity, and Schouwenburg hopes to write a thesis about them' ('Student geschiedenis Hans Schouwenburg vertelde op 30 oktober in het radioprogramma Villa VPRO (radio 1) over het cultuurhistorische onderzoek dat hij en drie medestudenten doen naar teksten op de muren van wc's en studiehokjes in de oude Letterenbibliotheek. Het initiatief kreeg in de afgelopen weken al veel media-aandacht. De studenten proberen de teksten voor het nageslacht te bewaren en Schouwenburg hoopt hiervan ook zijn afstudeeronderwerp te maken').¹ With this essay I will fulfil this promise.

I am indebted to: Patricia Faasse, Leen Dorsman, Joris van Eijnatten, Willemijn Ruberg, Ed Jonker, Jeroen Stumpel, Iris van der Tuin, Rick Dolphijn, Kathrin Thiele, Paul van den Lugt, Peter Selten, Pieter Caljé, Robert Friedman, Adrian Mackenzie, Maureen McNeil, Vicky Singleton, Richard Twine, Roland Bertens, Guido van Eijck, Anne Roetman, Thijs Kuipers, Rick Vedder, and Sanne.

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¹ Geesteswetenschappers in de Media: <http://www.uu.nl/faculty/humanities/NL/Actueel/nieuws/Pages/20091104-indemedia.aspx>.

Introduction: University History Beyond the Cultural Turn

Point of departure of this essay are two methodological issues. The first is rather specific and only exists in a particular academic subfield: university history. In 2000 the Norwegian historian of science Robert Marc Friedman published a reflection in which he located a series of ‘historiographic challenges’ which faced university historians.² In particular, Friedman worried about three neglected groups or themes in university histories: students and student culture, non-academic personnel, and women and gender relations. In an effort to ‘provoke discussion’ and ‘stimulate further thought’, he provided an agenda for research to come. Friedman’s first task for university historians was to ‘make gender visible’. He was not only thinking about biographies of individual women, but also about discriminatory practices and hidden power relations. Secondly, university historians needed to ‘bring the students to life’. Friedman suggested a history of student culture; he mentioned ‘the mental world of students’, ‘the geographic spaces where they live, assemble, play, and read’, and the various ways in which students ‘attempt to find and create meaning in their everyday lives’ as possible research themes. Finally, Friedman urged his colleagues to ‘let the non-academic personnel speak’. Like student culture and gender relations, the contributions to academic life of tea ladies, doorkeepers, laboratory technicians and librarians had rarely been examined. I will call this issue *Friedman’s problem*.

Friedman’s suggestions quickly spread among university historians (e.g. Dorsman 2008; Tollebeek & Nys 2008). In practice, however, it proved difficult to actually realize them. Thus in 2008 Leen Dorsman, writing about university history in the Netherlands, acknowledged that in the case of the three neglected groups/themes a lot of work had yet to be done (2008, 53). The reasons for neglecting student culture, non-academic staff and gender relations in university histories are, I would like to argue, methodological. It has to do with internal developments in the history of university history as a scholarly sub-discipline.

University historians usually classify the historiography of their subfield according to three paradigms: traditional university history, social science university history, and cultural turn university history (Otterspeer 1995; Otterspeer 1999; Dorsman 2003; Frijhoff 2008).³ University history originated as a genre that celebrated the accomplishments of individual institutions. In the beginning it often was the professor of rhetoric, or the rector, who, during centenary or anniversary celebrations,

² Robert Marc Friedman, Integration and visibility: Historiographic challenges to university history. *Forum for University History Occasional Papers* 1/2000 (Oslo 2000). Unable to obtain this article, I have used Friedman’s own draft, without page numbers (!), to which I will refer as ‘Friedman 2000’. I would like to thank Friedman for sending me this copy.

³ Although Kuhn initially developed the notion of ‘paradigm’ (or ‘disciplinary matrix’) in relation to the natural sciences, the term has been applied to other academic disciplines as well. Generally speaking, then, a research paradigm denotes the all the things (values, theories, commitments, ‘group licensed ways of seeing’) that scholars within a ‘scientific community’ or ‘sub-discipline’ share (Kuhn 1996, 176). The term, thus, describes research as a ‘group activity’, and in exactly that sense it is applicable to both the natural sciences and the social sciences/humanities.

gave an account of the heroic deeds of his associates (Otterspeer 1995). In some cases, the rector appointed a committee of respectable gentlemen to write a commemorative book about the glorious past of their university. Such committees were often chaired by the professor, or professor emeritus, of history, who conducted quite substantial archival research for the occasion.⁴ Commemorative books celebrated the intellectual achievements of individual universities as autonomous institutions (Dorsman 2003). They usually contained biographies of famous professors and centred around the foundational period of the university during the middle ages or the early modern period (Frijhoff 1996). Within this gentlemen's pursuit there was no place for student culture, non-academic employees or gender relations. The students, however, as gentlemen in the making, published their own memorial books.⁵ These projects, though, were not guided by professional historians and only focused on the organizational history of student unions.

During the 1960s and 1970s, in a reaction against university history as 'une histoire médiévale, institutionnelle et intellectuelle' (Chartier and Revel 1978), a group of social science historians adopted quantitative methods to professionalize the sub-discipline (Stone 1964; Stone 1974; Ringer 1979; Frijhoff 1981; Ridder-Symoens 1992). These historians did not focus on universities as isolated institutions, but rather on the relationship between universities and social processes which took place in society at large. They thoroughly collected statistical data which enabled them to compare long term developments. One of the themes these social historians were interested in was student history. Drawing on registration numbers and birth certificates they established an extensive overview of the 'size and composition of the student body' in Europe (Stone, 1974). Students, however, are more than a 'social body' to be depicted in diagrams and tables. Students are individuals who, in the words of Friedman (2000), 'live, assemble, play, and read'. Thus, limited by their quantitative approaches the social science university historians had not exactly neglected students, but they had failed to make their 'mental world' visible. With regard to gender relations, social science history remained, by and large, a gentlemen's pursuit. And their quantitative methods did not take notice of the non-academic employees either.

In the 1980 and 1990s, social science university history became the object of serious criticisms. Klaas van Berkel (1982), for instance, complained about the fact that university history had become detached from intellectual history and the study of science. He and others, therefore, suggested a syntheses between social science approaches and history of science (Van Berkel 1982; Otterspeer 1995; Friedman 2000). Other critiques were more serious and affected not only the subfield of university history. Indeed, a combined army of feminists, cultural anthropologists, postmodern philosophers, poststructuralist deconstructionists and new cultural historians attacked the foundations of social science history and other quantitative approaches in the social sciences and the humanities

⁴ For example: Brugmans, Scholte and Kleintjes 1932; Kernkamp 1936. G. W. Kernkamp (born 1864), professor of history at Utrecht University, published an anthology of archival sources (Kernkamp 1936-1940).

⁵ For example: Vredenburg 1914; Byll 1932; Bierens de Haan 1936; Vrankrijker 1939.

alike. This assault initiated the so called ‘cultural or linguistic turn’ (Bonnell and Hunt 1999).⁶ The results were profound: the focus in historical studies shifted from social structures and social categories to cultural practices, discourses and language; from casual explanation, quantitative analyses and objectivity to textual deconstruction, interpretation, and subjectivity; from numbers, graphs and tables to ‘real’ people. Within this new paradigm – ‘the new cultural history’ (Burke 2008) – historians paid attention to power relations and subordinate groups, and in doing so, smoothed the way for a university history that did not exclude students, gender relations and non-academic personnel.

Within the subfield of university history, however, where the currents usually run slower than in the discipline of history at large, it took some time before the effects of the cultural/linguistic turn became noticeable. At first, some university historians tried to reconcile social science approaches with cultural analyses (Dorsman 2003; Caljé 2009). Pieter Caljé (2009), for example, in a dissertation about students at the University of Groningen in the nineteenth-century, combined quantitative prosopographical research with qualitative analyses of ‘forms of student culture’.⁷ For the qualitative part of his study, Caljé could not rely on social science history sources like genealogical databases and registration numbers. Thus, to bring the students to life, he looked for alternative traces, which he found in the student yearbooks (*studenten Almanakken*). Recently, some university historians have moved away from social science approaches altogether (Dorsman and Knegtmans 2008; Tollebeek 2008; Zaunstöck 2010; Zwicker 2011). Instead, they employ methods from disciplines such as literary criticism and cultural anthropology to revive the everyday life of professors and students (male and female!) alike. At the same time, these new cultural historians explore neglected sources ranging from public denunciations to diaries and letters.

In sum: three research paradigms have informed university historians during the past century. *Traditional university history* centred around professors and the university as autonomous institution. Social contexts, and Friedman’s three groups - students, women and non-academic employees – were neglected. *Social science university history* situated the university in society, and collected statistical data about students to examine long term developments and changes in the institution’s population. Everything which did not fit into diagrams, graphs and tables, however, remained unseen. *Cultural turn university history* used deconstruction to expose hidden power relations, and cultural anthropology to penetrate into the everyday life of all the university’s inhabitants. Thus, the latter

⁶ The ‘cultural or linguistic turn’ is a catch-all term that was coined retrospectively to cover a range of different shifts that took place during 1980s and 1990s. It usually includes theoretical movements such as feminism, post-colonialism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, cultural anthropology, Lacanian psycho-analysis, literary criticism, and new cultural history. In the case of the study of history, its intellectual heroes are Hayden White, Clifford Geertz, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, *e tutti quanti*. See: Bonnell and Hunt 1999, and for an insider’s account: Eley 2008.

⁷ Caljé defended his thesis at Maastricht University in 2006 (Caljé 2006). A popular version was published in 2009 (Caljé 2009).

provided theoretical approaches, and found alternative sources, to bring the students to life, make gender visible and let the non-academic personnel speak. Friedman's problem solved?

Not quite! In the discipline of history at large, and in the humanities and social sciences more generally, a great many academics are currently distancing themselves from the cultural/linguistic turn (Bonnell and Hunt 1999; Burke 2008, 102-127; Jonker 2006; Eley 2008; Eijnatten 2011). Influenced by the rise of fundamentalism, and a turn to the right in politics, scholars want to move beyond postmodernism's political correctness, and be able again to express moral judgements about methods that foreground 'others' at the expense of other pressing issues (Jonker 2006; Eijnatten 2011). At the same time, they feel uncomfortable with the one-sided focus on textual critique and deconstruction; there is an urgent need to 'speculate' once more about 'the nature of reality' (Bryant, Srnicek and Harman 2011, 3). Poststructuralist deconstruction seemed emancipatory at first, but turned out to be 'epistemological electroshock therapy' (Haraway 1988); it demolished everything, even the possibility to uncover some kind of the truth. The postmodern critique reduced reality to 'an endless play of unstable signifiers' (Reinfandt 2009, 46), and the humanities and social sciences became a mere literary pursuit producing ironic fiction.

The new cultural history has become the object of serious critique as well. The Cambridge historian Peter Burke (2008), in a companion to cultural history, located a recent shift away from 'cultural construction' because it turned out to be too subjectivist (2008, 114). In addition, Burke enumerated three serious weaknesses of new cultural history, weaknesses which are also applicable to cultural turn university history. In the first place, Burke acknowledged that 'the definition of culture has become too inclusive' (2008, 115). It is not quite clear anymore where 'culture' ends and 'society' begins. Indeed, society has been reduced to 'culture', and, as a result, historical analyses have lost touch with the social, and with economy and politics. A second weakness of new cultural history has to do with its methods. New sources ask for their own specific techniques of interpretation, but what these techniques look like is not yet clear according to Burke (2008, 116). Also, the way in which new cultural historians, drawing on Clifford Geertz's cultural anthropology, have tried to read culture as a text, remains too intuitive. Another problem with anthropological theories is that they are not immediately applicable to, say, rituals in early modern societies. The danger is that modern notions, which did not yet exist, determine what the past looked like (Buc 2001). Finally, Burke warned against 'the problem of fragmentation' (2008, 117). New cultural historians often conduct detailed studies of small communities or exotic individuals.⁸ Efforts to grasp society as a whole, or to get a bigger picture, as social science historians once aspired, have been abandoned.

The weaknesses of new cultural history are the weaknesses of cultural turn university history. Cultural turn university historians made gender visible and brought the students to life, to be sure, but they lost an awful lot along the way. Methodologically, they went from one extreme to the other.

⁸ Classical examples are: Ginzburg 1980; Zemon Davies 1983; Darnton 1984.

Compare, for example, a study by Willem Frijhoff (1981), who worked within the social science university history paradigm, with a recent publication by Holger Zaunstöck (2010), who draws on the cultural/linguistic turn. Both books are about students and both focus on the early modern period. The picture they draw, however, differs tremendously. Using statistical methods, graphs and tables, Frijhoff writes *histoire sérielle* and talks about ‘social elite’, ‘Dutch society’ and ‘bourgeois class’. Zaunstöck, on the other hand, builds on theoretical approaches from cultural anthropology and uses terms like ‘German culture’, ‘symbolic performance’ ‘rituals of masculinity’ and ‘disciplinary politics’. The example illustrates a common shift: a new generation of scholars define themselves as antithesis of their predecessors (Burke 2008, 114) and, as a result, switch the methodological pendulum from one side (i.e. social science history) to the other (i.e. new cultural history).

The problem of such dialectical positioning, I think, is this: by defining oneself methodologically and epistemologically against a preceding paradigm it becomes almost impossible to revert to that preceding paradigm. The new and the old are positioned in such a way that they exclude each other. For example, social science historians believed that by adopting quantitative methods they could provide objective explanations (Bonnell and Hunt 1999). New cultural historians, on the other hand, rejected such objectivity by stating that historians, instead of recovering the truth, construct a (certain version of) the past (Iggers 2005). Another problem is that the new cultural historian’s undermining of historiographical objectivity is hard to ignore. After the cultural/linguistic turn it is simply impossible to maintain that approaches from the social sciences provide ‘scientific’, ‘objective’ and ‘impartial’ reconstructions of the past (Bonnell and Hunt 1999). But the new cultural history paradigm that replaced it is not free of problems either. Also, a synthesis between the two, the logical next step in a dialectical world, does not provide much of a solution; it only reconciles two problematic frameworks. Both social science university history and cultural turn university history proved unable to solve Friedman’s problem. Indeed, social science (university) history is simply impossible after the cultural/linguistic turn, and cultural turn (university) history is simply undesirable, because its epistemological foundations are too unstable. As a result, cultural/university history finds itself in an impasse on the level of theory.⁹ Historians, and scholars in the humanities and social sciences more generally, seem to be caught in an epistemological merry-go-round from which there is no escape (Jonker 2006). In the ‘Afterword’ of the second edition of *What is Cultural History*, Peter Burke (2008) suggested three possible, but unsatisfactory, future scenarios: historians may carry on with the cultural/linguistic turn in spite of its weaknesses, or return to social science history, or draw renewed inspiration from earlier paradigms (e.g. traditional university history or the history of high culture). Burke’s scenarios are meant for the best but neither of them helps to escape the impasse and

⁹ Within the study of history there seems to be a gap between ‘theoretical historians’ and ‘archival historians’. While the first group worries about the problems of the cultural turn, and indeed speaks about an ‘impasse’, the latter does not ‘do epistemology’ and proceeds with their business in the archives like nothing is the matter. See: Tollebeek 1996, 415-422 and LaCapra 2004, .

move history *beyond* the cultural/linguistic turn. The question thus is: where to go from here? I will call this issue *the problem of Burke's scenarios*.

It is with *Friedman's problem* and *Burke's scenarios*, then, that I want to engage. The question I want to answer is: is it possible to write a history of the university that brings students to life, makes gender visible and lets non-academic employees speak without simultaneously drawing on problematic theoretical approaches of the cultural/linguistic turn? In order to 'reach' the three neglected groups, in the first part of the question, I need alternative sources which reflect their voices. In this essay, I will draw from an unexpected corpus: graffiti from the walls of study booths and toilets in Utrecht University's former *Letterenbibliotheek*. The methodology that will I adopt to interpret these sources, a methodology that needs to provide an alternative to the problematic theoretical approaches of the cultural/linguistic turn, can be called new materialism(s).

New materialism(s) are a set of critical approaches in the social sciences and the humanities, which are presented as *the* 'cultural theory for the twenty-first century' (Iris van der Tuin and Rick Dolphijn 2010). This new paradigm-in-the-making has been characterized as a 'commentary' on the cultural/linguistic turn (Van der Tuin 2011a). Scholars within this new movement admit that the cultural/linguistic turn has some major weaknesses, but they do not reject it altogether. Indeed, one of the major strengths of new materialism(s), or 'material poststructuralism' as it has been called by John Law (2004b), and the feature that really makes it 'new', is its attempt to affirmatively read different paradigms and (inter)disciplines through one another (c.q. Barad 2007; Van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2011). Diffractive rather than dialectical, and monist rather than dualist, new materialists try to continue the critical program of the cultural/linguistic turn, while avoiding its pitfalls. Thus, instead of radically opposing the preceding paradigm, as happened in the 1970s and 1980s, when cultural turn scholars negatively defined themselves vis-a-vis positivism and social science approaches in the humanities, new materialist scholars read state of the art ideas about matter and the body – domains which have been neglected during the heydays of postmodernism - through cultural turn theories. New materialism(s), in short, are not a critique of the cultural/linguistic turn, but a radical *rereading* of it.

In this essay, I will not unquestioningly employ new materialism(s) as panacea for all the problems of the cultural/linguistic turn. Rather, I shall treat it as a 'problem', as a new approach that needs to be tested and critically discussed before it can be applied to the study of history. My engagement with *Friedman's problem* and *Burke's scenarios*, therefore, serves a broader purpose: I will use them as case study to test the relevance to historical research of new materialism(s). What do we gain and what do we lose by drawing on this 'new' methodology? In order to pursue this broader aim, I have divided the essay in two main parts. **Part One** elaborates on theory and methodology. In the **first chapter** – Towards a New Materialist University History – I will introduce 'new materialism(s)' and discuss how they may provide solutions to some of the problems of the cultural/linguistic turn. The **second chapter** of Part One - Writing Practices Matter: A Posthumanist Account of Student Graffiti - introduces the source that enables me to bring Friedman's neglected

groups to life, and proposes a new materialist cartography to interpret this source historically. **Part Two** provides a historical travelogue, a series of empirical casestudies which aim to illustrate and test new materialism(s) applied to cultural history in action. In the **conclusion**, I will knit the threads together and return to ‘the final problem’: does new materialism work for the study of history?

Relevance

This research project matters for different reasons. First, it discusses, and looks for, possible solutions to two interrelating methodological/theoretical issues in the subdisciplines of university history (*Friedman’s problem*) and cultural history (*Burke’s scenarios*). Secondly, by treating new materialism(s) not only as solution, but rather as a problem in itself, this essay tests the relevance to historical research of a new methodology. A lot has been said about new materialism(s). A recent companion describes the movement as ‘an emerging trend in 21st century thought that has already left its mark in such fields as philosophy, cultural theory, feminism, science studies, and the arts’ (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012). But does it work for the study of history as well? Such reasons do not make this project socially relevant, however, but the importance of theory should not be overlooked. Indeed, social relevance, in every field of study, starts with theoretical innovation. Some of the most exciting historical books, which are read by more than specialists alone, came about when historians looked beyond the borders of their own discipline to theoretical developments in fields such as anthropology and literary studies. We will only find out if new materialism(s) possesses this same potential by testing it.

In addition, this study attempts to preserve an unusual piece of academic heritage.¹⁰ During recent renovation work at the Utrecht University Library all student graffiti have been removed. As a result, physical fossils of twenty-odd years of student culture, and the symbolic remains of a place where several generations of students have studied, swotted or hung about, are completely gone. By making hundreds of photos, I tried to save a historical source that is not only interesting for university historians and cultural historians who are trying to ‘bring student to life’, but also for all the folks – students, ex-students and *burgers* – who enjoyed the *krabbels op wc’s*, as much as I did. Before I can welcome the reader to the intriguing world of student culture and toilet graffiti, though, I first need a cartography that helps me to show you around. It is to this cartography, then, that I now turn.

¹⁰ See <http://www.academischerfgoed.nl/>: ‘Wetenschappelijk erfgoed, universitair erfgoed of academisch erfgoed: er zijn verschillende verzamelnamen in omloop. Grofweg worden hiermee de objecten bedoeld die het bijproduct zijn van het wetenschapsbedrijf door de eeuwen heen. Het gaat hier bijvoorbeeld om voorwerpen gebruikt voor onderzoek en onderwijs, zoals meetapparatuur, wiskundige modellen, onderwijsplaten en botanische collecties. Maar ook om de neerslag van ditzelfde onderzoek en onderwijs: van hoogleraararchieven tot collegedictaten en boeken over elk denkbaar onderwerp. En natuurlijk alles wat met de geschiedenis, cultuur en tradities van de universiteiten te maken heeft: van hoogleraarportretten tot *reliken van het studentenleven*’ [my italics].

Part One: New Materialism(s), University History and Student Graffiti

In the introduction, I have argued that university historians have to deal with the fact that three groups/themes (student culture, gender relations, and non-academic personnel) receive too little attention in their narratives (*Friedman's problem*). The cause of this problem has to do with method. During the last decades, the subdiscipline of university history has been guided by quantitative approaches from the social sciences, and within this paradigm it proved difficult to reconstruct the lives of 'others'. In the wake of the cultural/linguistic turn, therefore, some university historians dialectically opposed social science history, and embraced deconstruction and cultural anthropology in an attempt to uncover gender relations and reconstruct the mental world of students. The cultural/linguistic turn, however, turned out to be unsatisfactory on various grounds. First, because of its value-relativist stance towards ethical, the cultural/linguistic turn does not provide the right tools to confront current political, economic, and environmental crises. Second, because of the one-sided focus on culture and language important domains of reality (e.g. the social, nature, matter) are being neglected. Third, the epistemological-relativist framework of the cultural/linguistic turn reduces reality to mere language games. Peter Burke discerned different scenarios to move *beyond* the cultural/linguistic turn, from extending deconstruction to a return to social science history. These scenarios, though, are all highly problematic; they do not provide a way out of the impasse in which the theory of history finds itself (*the problem of Burke's scenarios*).

The aim of this essay is to test the relevance to the study of history of a different scenario: new materialism(s). In order to do so, I shall, in **Part One**, (1) introduce these new methodology. I will then proceed by (2) introducing a 'non-traditional' source – student graffiti – that enables me to bring Friedman's neglected groups to life, and propose a new materialist cartography to interpret this source historically.

1. New Materialism(s)

What are new materialism(s)? New materialism(s) are neither a unified theory nor a clearly defined research paradigm. They might be more accurately described as 'a series of movements' (Van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010, 153) in contemporary social and cultural theory, which share concerns about the increasing inadequateness of existing critical theories to understand and deal with the contemporary world and the environmental, economic and political problems it faces (Coole and Forst 2010). The term 'new materialism' (or 'neo materialism') was coined independently by Rosi Braidotti (1994) and Manuel DeLanda (1996) in the 1990s. Braidotti and DeLanda, both drawing from the critical philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2004), explored approaches that tried to break through the nature-culture binary, and other dualisms, which underlie Western thought. Their attempt to formulate monist theories have recently culminated in three companions (Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Coole and Frost 2010; Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012) in which 'new materialism(s)' are

proposed as an alternative to the cultural/linguistic turn, the research paradigm that has governed social and cultural theory during the past three decades.

New materialism(s), then, are currently 'in the making'. Scholars from different disciplines are discussing the exact implications of the term and propose different versions of it (e.g. Van der Tuin 2009; Hemmings 2009). For example, Myra Hird (2006) locates new materialism in the natural sciences: 'new materialism attends to a number of significant shifts in the natural sciences within the past few decades to suggest agency and contingency within the living and non-living world' (2006, 37). Susan Bordo (2002) tries to bring the natural sciences, especially biology, into cultural studies, while Vicki Kirby (2008, 2011), in her recent re-reading of Derrida's 'no outside of text' as 'no outside of nature', argues that 'so called cultural critics are already practicing science' (Kirby 2011, xi), and Iris van der Tuin (2011b), moreover, states that 'a new materialism is always already at work in the humanities' (2011b, 285). Because of these competing views, I will, throughout this essay, refer the movement in plural.

I encountered pioneering initiatives to develop new materialism(s) at Utrecht University and Lancaster University (where I studied at the Sociology Department). Scholars at both universities reject the cultural/linguistic turn's one-sided focus on language and discourse, try to break through dualisms and other artificial frameworks which researchers superimpose onto their analyses, and, in doing so, turn to matter, and to new forms of realism and ethics. However, they do so from different directions. At Utrecht University, it seems to me, the impulse derives from Rosi Braidotti's feminist re-reading of Gilles Deleuze, and Karen Barad's notion of matter as intra-active agency, while at Lancaster University the turn to matter is driven by Bruno Latour's object-orientated ontology and engagements with 'ontological multiplicity' (Mol 2002; Moser 2008) in Science and Technology Studies in general. The 'new materialism' that I propose in this essay, then, consists of a transversal reading of the 'Utrecht school' through Lancaster's engagement with 'material post-structuralism' (Law 2004b; Law 2004c). In so doing, I enact a particular version of new materialism into being, that is necessarily limited in scope and not representative of 'new materialism(s)' in general (whatever that might be). My aim is both to contribute to new materialism as an upcoming methodology by testing its theoretical implications in practice via an empirical casestudy, and simultaneously to contribute to historiography by testing the relevance to historical research of this new methodology.

What, then, is (my version of) new materialism? I take new materialism to be a thorough rethinking of the cultural/linguistic turn. For the purpose of clarity, I shall (1.1) discern three interrelated features: (a) a transversal/diffractive cartography; (b) a turn to matter, naturecultures and material semiotic practices; and (c) a methodological engagement with complexity, multiplicity and 'mess'. In what follows, I will first introduce these features by unpacking the titles of three programmatic articles – 'The Transversality of New Materialism' (Van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010), 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter' (Barad

2003), and ‘Making a Mess with Method’ (Law 2006) - that helped to establish or inspired the recent turn to matter at Utrecht and Lancaster.

1.1 The features of New Materialism

(a) ‘The Transversality of New Materialism’

New Materialism(s) are first and foremost a commentary on, or a critical rethinking of, the cultural/linguistic turn and its postmodern epistemological foundations (Alaimo and Heckman 2008; Coole and Frost 2010; Van der Tuin 2011a; Van der Tuin 2011b). Postmodern theorists associated with the cultural/linguistic turn claimed to have deconstructed the dualisms (i.e. culture-nature, subject-object, language-matter, mind-body) that underlie modern thought. However, by focusing exclusively on the culture/subject/language/mind parts of these dichotomies, and by dialectically positioning themselves against modernism, they reinforced, rather than debunked, dualist thinking. In the words of Iris van der Tuin and Rick Dolphijn (2010):

‘New materialism is a cultural theory for the twenty-first century that attempts to show how postmodern cultural theory has made use of a conceptualisation of ‘post’ that is dualist. Postmodern cultural theory re-confirmed modern cultural theory, thus allowing transcendental and humanist traditions to haunt cultural theory after the Crisis of Reason. New materialist cultural theory shifts (post-)modern cultural theory and provides an immanent answer to transcendental humanism. It is a cultural theory that is non-foundationalist yet non-relativist’ (2010, 167)

Thus, by ‘pushing dualism to an extreme’ (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2011) new materialists try to break through the binary oppositions that informed both modernist theory and the linguistic/cultural turn.

In order to do so, new materialists abandon (post-)modernism’s dualistic, dialectic, and linear classificatory practices and follow a *transversal or diffractive cartography* instead (Van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010; Barad 2007, 71-94). Dialectic classifications create negative relations between terms by structuring theoretical approaches and research paradigms as dual opposites (e.g. postmodernism *versus* modernism, or new cultural history *versus* social science history). New materialists, on the other hand, attempt to establish ‘a relationality that is affirmative, i.e., structured by positivity rather than negativity’ (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2011, 395).¹¹ By transversally cutting across different (inter)disciplines and paradigms, new materialists look for ‘sharing characteristics’ between bodies of

¹¹ See also Law 2007: ‘How useful it is to live in an intellectual world defined by criticism, defence, and the desire to ‘win’ arguments? This is a complicated question but one way of translating it is to ask whether we really think that there is a single intellectual and political space to be ‘won’. Perhaps if we wash away this assumption we might conceive of theoretical intersections differently: as a set of possibly generative partial connections’ (2007, 11).

thought which were considered incommensurable in both modernist and postmodernist paradigms. ‘In their writings, new materialists bridge seemingly opposing categories, and in the process they jump generations. As such, their knowledge theoretical work is *generative* of shared conversations and new, unexpected theorisations; it is not totalising or relativist’ (Van der Tuin 2009, 27 [emphasis in original]).

Theoretical physicist and feminist theorist Karen Barad (2007), for example, deploys the physical phenomenon of ‘diffraction’ as a metaphor for her methodological approach of reading insights from different (inter)disciplines through one another (2007, 92-93).¹² Her aim is to ‘remain rigorously attentive to important details of specialized arguments within a given field without uncritically endorsing or unconditionally prioritizing one (inter)disciplinary approach over another’ (2007, 93). In *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007) Barad places ‘our best’ insights and approaches from physics (e.g. Niels Bohr’s philosophy-physics, recent discoveries in quantum mechanics) and ‘the best’ cultural and social theories (e.g. Foucauldian discursive practices, Butler’s notion of performativity) in conversation with one another.¹³ In theorizing the social/cultural and the natural together Barad provides a ‘posthumanist performative account’ of the ‘role of human *and* nonhuman, material *and* discursive, and natural *and* cultural factors in scientific and other material-discursive practices’ (2007, 26 [emphasis in original]). Thus, by reading notions of performativity, discursive practice and matter through one another, Karen Barad, and other new materialists, turn to matter without neglecting ‘the lessons learned from the linguistic turn’ (Alaimo and Heckman 2008, 6).

The new materialist *turn to matter*, therefore, does not imply another switch of the methodological pendulum from culture to nature. Rather, new materialists argue that nature and culture are always already intertwined. Their dichotomy has been the result of developments in Western epistemology and is not an immanent quality of reality itself.¹⁴ Bruno Latour, for example, who in the late 1970s put himself in the shoes of an anthropologist to observe ‘the tribe of scientists’ in their natural habitat (Latour and Woolgar 1979), found that in laboratory practices the boundaries between humans and nonhumans are not easily to be drawn, although scientists usually make these

¹² When waves (e.g. water waves) interfere with one another they create a phenomenon that physicists call interference or diffraction patterns. For technical details see Barad 2007, 71-94. **Karen Barad**, like many new materialists, comes from a trans-disciplinary background. As a professor at the University of California at Santa Cruz, she currently holds a chair in ‘Feminist Studies, Philosophy, and History of Consciousness’. She studied physics and philosophy and earned her Ph.D. in theoretical particle physics.

¹³ See: Foucault 1977; Butler 1990, 1993.

¹⁴ The radical separation between culture and nature, human and nonhuman, mind and matter, subject and object, etc. goes back at least to the philosophy of Plato, who distinguished form from matter. The dichotomy was reinforced by Descartes (dualism body-mind) and Kant (Ding an sich/*phainomena*). Following the French Philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who ‘discovered’ a minor monist tradition in the history of Western philosophy, new materialists align themselves with Lucretius, Spinoza, Hume and Bergson rather than Plato, Descartes, and Kant (Van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010).

distinctions in their theories. Hence Latour (1993), in conversation with Donna Haraway (1989, 1991), argued that reality is made up of ‘hybrids of nature and culture’ or ‘naturecultures’.¹⁵

New materialists, then, do not see nature/matter and culture/language as individual components. Rather, they speak of ‘collectives’ of ‘objects-discourse-nature-culture’ (Latour 1993), ‘material-discursive practices’ (Barad 2007), or ‘materialesemiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another’ (Haraway 2008, 4). Scholarly/scientific disciplines, however, are organized according to the nature/culture dichotomy. The humanities and social sciences focus on the culture/social/subject part, while the natural sciences concentrate on the nature/object part, and it seems that neither dares to look beyond these artificial boundaries. New Materialism tries to break through this false dichotomy by *bringing ‘nature’ into cultural theory* in an effort to shed new light on the interaction between culture and matter (Coole and Frost 2010; Van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010). What, then, is this strange thing called ‘matter’ according to the new materialists?

(b) ‘How Matter Comes to Matter’

New materialists use ‘matter’ in different ways. Firstly, matter refers to ‘the materiality and materialisation of reality as process or becoming’ (Moser 2008, 98). According to this notion, that derives from the natural sciences, and is the focus of the ‘Utrecht school’, matter is a *dynamic and agentive force*. ‘Matter is neither fixed nor given nor the mere end result of different processes. Matter is produced and productive, generated and generative. Matter is agentive, not fixed essence or property of things’ (Barad 2007, 137). Secondly, the Lancaster school’s attention is focused on matter in the sense of ‘*matter-real*’, that is stuff which is ‘not reducible to discourse, culture or social construction, but brought into being in material practices and relations that include laboratories and research instruments’ (Moser 2008, 99). Thirdly, new materialists at both schools are engaged with ‘*matters of fact*’. After the deconstructionist and cultural constructivist approaches of the cultural/linguistic turn, they are ‘speculating’ once again about the ontology of the world and the nature of reality (Bryant, Srnicek and Harman 2011, 3). This move, however, does not imply a simple return to positivism or representationalism; reality, it is argued, does not exist of stable and independent facts that researchers, as impartial and neutral observers, can find and represent by using scientific methods. Rather, reality is ‘full of action’ and scholars are right in the middle of it. Karen Barad (2007) calls her realist framework ‘agential realism’ to stress the insight that both researchers and objects of inquiry are ‘agents’. Finally, new materialists use ‘matter’ to stress that some matters of fact matter because they are ‘*of concern or importance*’ (Moser 2008, 99). The ecological crisis, for instance, is both matter of fact and matter of concern (Latour 2004). This last notion of matter indicates a turn to ethics;

¹⁵ **Bruno Latour** studied philosophy and anthropology. He taught at the École des Mines de Paris, and currently holds a chair at the Paris Institute of Political Studies. Together with Michel Callon and John Law he is one of the founders of actor-network theory (ANT). **Donna Haraway** was trained in zoology, molecular biology and philosophy. She earned a Ph.D. in biology/history of science, and taught Gender Studies and Science and Technology Studies at Johns Hopkins University and the University of California, Santa Cruz.

following Donna Haraway (1992, 1997) new materialists consciously take side with ‘some ways of life and not others’ (1997, 36).¹⁶ In what follows, I will elaborate on these different notions of matter. The idea of matter as a dynamic and agentive force in particular, which is, I think, most foreign to scholars in the humanities, needs further discussion. It might be helpful, therefore, to start with the notion of ‘material culture’ as it is used in various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences to show how it differs from ‘generative matter’ of new materialism(s).

Archaeologists, art historians, anthropologists, and historians alike have been interested in objects and material culture for decades. During the 1980s in the United States and Canada, attempts were made to unite these scholars into a new interdisciplinary field: material culture studies (Hood 2008). Within this field material culture was defined as ‘objects made or modified by humans’ (Schlereth 1982, 3). In so doing, matter was restricted to ‘culture’, and ‘things’ were seen as passive transporters of human ideas. Exemplary for such a notion of matter is Leonard Schmieding’s statement that ‘the way people use things creates meaning’ (Schmieding 2010, 68). Objects, in other words, do not carry any significance of their own. For scholars in the humanities and social sciences, then, matter is ‘inert stuff awaiting cultural imprint’ (Coole and Frost 2010). Humans, on the other hand, are seen as agents who actively move in and give meaning to the passive world around them. Erving Goffman’s (1990) theory of social action, for instance, only attributes agency to human actors, while the stage on which these human actors perform remains immutable and lifeless. I will call this notion of matter ‘cultural matter’.

New materialists are interested in more cultural matter alone. They draw on insights from the natural sciences to argue that matter is a ‘dynamic force’ or ‘lively agency’ (Alaimo and Heckman 2008). In the words of Iris van der Tuin and Rick Dolphijn:

‘New materialism is fascinated by affect, force and movement as it travels in all directions. It searches not for the objectivity of things in themselves but for an objectivity of actualisation and realization. It is interested in speeds and slownesses, in how the event unfolds according to the in-between, according to intra-action’ (Van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010, 169).

This new materialist notion of matter, then, differs in fundamental ways from the humanities and social sciences’ concept of cultural matter. Firstly, matter is not the immutable stage on which humans act, or the ‘inert stuff awaiting cultural imprint’, but rather the ‘energy flows’ which, ‘through a variety of self-organizing processes and an intense power of morphogenesis, generate all the structures that surround us’ (DeLanda 1996, quoted in Van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010, 155). These ‘self-organizing processes’ (e.g. erosion, cell division, atomic electron transition) are at work in both the outer world and the inner body of living organisms (Capra 1997). When new materialists read these

¹⁶ Donna Haraway aligns herself with ‘a still possible socialism, feminist and anti-racist environmentalism, and science for the people’ (1992, 296) and I will join her.

insights from the natural sciences through social/cultural theory a picture of social reality emerges that differs tremendously from, say, Goffman's immutable stage.

Secondly, the new materialist's notion of matter differs from inert cultural matter in that it views matter as agentive. Again drawing on insights from the natural sciences, new materialists argue that matter acts, that it actively interacts with and changes other entities (Alaimo and Heckman 2008). Closely linked to these insights is the idea of 'objects as actors', that is, the idea that the object of knowledge ('the known'), like the researcher ('the knower'), is an actor or agent (Haraway 1988). Scholars within Science and Technology Studies found that in practice research is not about active scholars or scientists who investigate a passive and objectified world, as traditional Western epistemology would have it, but rather that the researcher and the researched both influence one another. This goes for human research objects (e.g. interviewees (Oakley (1981)) *as well as* for nonhuman objects (e.g. microbes (Latour 1983), scallops (Callon 1986), and even doors (Latour 1988) and bush pumps (De Laet and Mol 2000)). Nonhuman entities, in other words, like humans, *do* things by actively resisting, shaping or influencing the doings of other entities, including human actors. Thus, De Laet and Mol (2000) concluded that 'the "actor" that sociology has inherited from philosophy, Rational Man – a well-bounded, sane and centred human figure – is in urgent need of an update' (2000, 226). Within Science and Technology Studies, then, scholars redefined the notion of 'agency' by detaching it from human intention, and defining 'actor' as 'any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference' (Latour 2005, 71).

Let's recall how we got here. New materialists try to break through the artificial dualisms that underlie Western epistemology by bringing accounts of matter from the natural sciences into social/cultural theory. They argue that matter and nature are dynamic and agential forces, and that nature/matter and culture/discourse are always already intertwined. Indeed, not cultural/discursive (social/cultural theory) or natural/material (natural sciences), but naturalcultural or material-discursive forces constitute reality, including individual bodies and the body social. For example, human bodies are both discursively constructed and biologically determined, that is, historical and cultural specific power relations *as well as* universal biological forces constitute the human body. Social/cultural theory has traditionally focused on the first category (i.e. discursive practices, semiology) while the latter category (biological forces) has been neglected. Natural scientists, on the other hand, have focused on the latter while historical and cultural specific power relations have been neglected. As a result, a unilateral picture of the human subject has emerged in these separate disciplines. New materialists attempt to reconcile both sides of the 'great divide', without granting prominence to either part, by providing 'an appreciation for just what it means to exist as a material individual with biological needs for survival yet inhabiting a world of natural and artificial objects, well-honed micropowers of governmentality, and the more anonymous but no less compelling effects of international economic structures' (Coole and Frost 2010, 28).

Important questions, however, remain. How exactly does this complex interaction between material and cultural forces operate? And how can researchers investigate a reality that is not fixed but dynamic and agential? With her ‘posthumanist account of performativity’ and ‘agential realism’, Karen Barad (2007) offers an answer to the first question, while John Law (2004a; 2006) examines the latter in his work on complexities. I will first turn to Barad before engaging with Law in the next section.

According to Barad the relation between entities, including ‘discursive practices’ and ‘material phenomena’, is one of ‘*intra-action*’ (2007, 132-185). In her ‘agential realist’ framework there are no ‘separate individual agencies’; agencies only emerge through their ‘specific intra-actions’. Consequently, ‘the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity’ (2007, 184). It is important to note that in Barad’s posthumanist account discursive practices are not exclusively human-based practices, rather they are ‘material (re)configurings of the world through which the determination of boundaries, properties, and meanings is differentially enacted’ (2007, 151). And matter, moreover, does not refer to ‘fixed substance’, but to ‘substance in its intra-active becoming. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity’ (idem).

What does this mean? The world – as we saw above – is an open-ended process of becoming. Within this process agencies are further materialized in material-discursive practices. Thus, material-discursive practices ‘produce different material configurings of the world’ (2007, 184). Barad’s point is that boundaries between entities (e.g. between humans and nonhumans/subjects and objects) are neither fixed nor pre-given, rather they are produced through specific material-discursive practices; humans and nonhumans are ‘intra-actively co-constituted through the material-discursive practices that they engage in’ (2007, 168). In other words: each practice generates its own reality, that is, with each practice, or with every agential cut, new configurations are enacted. The task for the researcher, then, is to investigate how boundaries are produced in material-discursive practices and how they matter.

The epistemological implications of Barad’s ‘agential realist’ framework are profound. She provides an account of how nature and matter intra-act, and, in doing so, sheds new light on the nature of scientific/research and other practices. One oversimplified example may hint at where she is going. New materialism does not pre-exist *as such*. Rather, it is enacted and re-enacted in different material-discursive practices (e.g. lectures, books, articles). In this thesis, for instance, I enact or perform (a version of) new materialism by producing boundaries (e.g. ‘the Utrecht school’, ‘the Lancaster school’). Hence, Barad and other new materialists argue that epistemology, ontology, and ethics are inseparable. Doing research is not only about knowing the world/reality (epistemology), but also about enacting worlds/realities into being (ontology), and taking responsibility for the worlds/realities enacted (ethics). ‘Reality can be unmade and reconstructed otherwise. And if it can be remade, then within the clinging stickiness of the constructed web of relations, it is possible to ask what kind of reality, what kind of nature, might be both possible and better’ (Law 2004b, 3). On an epistemological

level, then, new materialists break through the dichotomy between knowledge and values. Epistemology is always ethical and research is, in the words of Barad (2007), a matter of ‘ethico-onto-epistem-ology’. And it is exactly this insight that provides a point of departure for a history ‘that is engaged’, as I will argue below.

(c) ‘Making a Mess with Method’

New materialism(s), as I described it above, consist of several features. There is a new approach to reading theory that is not dialectical, linear or deconstructive but rather affirmative, transversal and diffractive. There are attempts to break through dualisms and other artificial frameworks which underlie Western thought. And, by reading insights from the natural sciences and social/cultural theory through one another, new materialists draw a picture of the world as a complex and pluralistic process of becoming in which intra-acting material-discursive practices enact and re-enact multiple realities. John Law (2004a) describes this world as a ‘maelstrom or tide-rip filled with currents, eddies, flows, vortices, unpredictable changes, storms, and moments of lull and calm’ (2004a, 7). Reality, in short, is chaotic, unpredictable, non-coherent and messy. And Law (2006) asks an important question: ‘How might method deal with mess?’ In this section, I shall engage with Law’s work on complexity and mess. In particular, I am interested in how researchers in the humanities might ‘catch’ a disordered, diffuse, ephemeral and elusive reality, and why existing research methods are ill-equipped to do so.

What do research methods *do*?¹⁷ According to John Law (2004a), who draws on Karen Barad, ‘methods not only describe but also help to *produce* the reality that they understand’ (2004a, 5 [emphasis in original]). To make their analysis manageable, for instance, researchers isolate parts of reality and superimpose artificial categories upon it (e.g. ‘class’, ‘culture’, ‘nature’). In doing so, they distort complexity into clarity as research methods/theories ‘try to make the world clean and neat’ (Law 2006, 2). Law then takes the argument one step further: by ordering, dividing and simplifying reality, methods/theories simultaneously ‘exclude’ and ‘suppress’ parts of that reality. Everything that does not fit the scheme is ‘Othered’ as mess. Thus while reality is ‘multiple, slippery, fuzzy and indefinite’ it is almost always presented as uniform, clean, orderly and finite in scholarly articles and books. Law’s (2004a; 2006) aim, therefore, is to broaden method; he, and other new materialists, are looking for alternative approaches to ‘represent the vague, the multiple and all the rest’ (2006, 11). Several methods to deal with mess have been proposed. Some new materialists are experimenting with ‘forms of knowing as embodiment’ or ‘emotions as forms of knowing’ (Law 2004, 3).¹⁸ For the

¹⁷ John Law is interested in what research methods *do*, not what they *are*. Research methods, to be sure, are ‘ways to gain knowledge’ (Leezenberg and De Vries 2001, 15) like ‘source criticism’ or ‘discourse analyses’ in historical studies or ‘participant observation’ in anthropology. Law talks about ‘method’ in a broader sense which also includes ‘theories’.

¹⁸ New materialists at Utrecht University, for instance, are collaborating with artists in an attempt to find alternative ways to present their research. See also: Barrett and Bolt 2012. In addition, historians in the field of material culture studies are also pointing at the importance of the senses to understand objects. Some of them are

purpose of this essay, however, other approaches are more relevant. In what follows, I will elaborate on actor-network theory (ANT) and post-ANT work as a method to ‘map’ complex realities.

ANT or ‘the sociology of translation’ was founded by Michel Callon (1981, 1986), Bruno Latour (1983) and John Law (1986) in the 1980s. In their case studies of ‘science in action’ (Latour 1987) they found that entities and categories which were hitherto methodologically separated by sociologists and other scholars (e.g. macro/micro, human/nonhuman, meaning/matter) formed in practice materially heterogeneous networks (Law 1992). Researchers had overlooked these relations between entities/agencies because they took artificial frameworks or pre-determined social groups as point of departure. The insight that agencies – both human and nonhuman as I argued above – are entangled in networks means that reality is not entirely chaotic and unpredictable. The key point of ANT is that reality is already ordered by the actors themselves, who/which form relations with other actors. Researchers, therefore, should not fit an already heterogeneously ordered world into artificial schemes, but rather trace and map ‘the many contradictory ways in which social aggregates are constantly evoked, erased, distributed, and reallocated... it is crucial that enquirers do not in advance, and in place of the actors, define what sorts of building blocks the social world is made of’ (Latour 2005, 41).

As a research methodology ANT may sound simple enough: just follow the actors themselves as *they* move through society! This, then, is ‘classical’ actor-network theory or ‘actor network theory 1990’ (Law 2007). However, as we saw above, things are never that simple. Indeed, some scholars in the field of Science and Technology Studies have recently argued that classical ANT has strengths but also weaknesses (De Laet and Mol 2000; Mol 2002; Law and Singleton 2005; Moser 2008). One of the dangers is that the ‘actor-network’, if it is applied too rigidly, might become an artificial scheme itself. If we want to map reality in all its complexity, therefore, ‘actor network theory 1990’ is not quite good enough. In the final part of this section, I will draw on different ‘actor network successor projects’ to provide a new materialist research methodology to analyse materialsemiotic practices.

As we saw above, different materialsemiotic practices produce realities. Annemarie Mol (2002) ethnographically observed how ‘the body’ is enacted in medical practices. She argued that there are many different practices in which ‘the body’, and other entities, are produced, and that, as a result, entities such as ‘the body’ may seem single in theory, but are in practice multiple. Entities which are grouped under the same rubric, in short, are enacted differently in different practices. Ingunn Moser (2008), for instance, analysed eight practices and locations in which knowledge of Alzheimer’s disease is being produced.¹⁹ She argued that ‘each of these locations presents a different

even investigating the past through historical re-enactment, which is used as a way ‘of getting to know some of the physical aspects of an object’ (Dannehl 2009, 131).

¹⁹ These locations and practices are: ‘an international Alzheimer’s disease movement; a medical textbook; the laboratory; care practice; an advertisement for anti-dementia medication; general practice; parliamentary politics; and a conference on dementia’ (Moser 2008, 99).

version of what Alzheimer's is' (Moser 2008, 99). The question is: how do these different practices/realities relate?

According to John Law the answer should be: 'in complex ways' (Law 2007). The relations between different practices/realities are uncertain; it remains an 'open ended process' (Law 2004c). Law elaborates: 'Perhaps, sometimes, they fit together neatly. Perhaps they contradict one another. Perhaps they pass each other by without touching, like ships in the night. Perhaps they are included in one other. Perhaps they are added together to produce new natures. Perhaps they are deliberately kept apart because any encounter would be a collision. Or perhaps their relations are a mix of these: complementary, contradictory and mutually inclusive' (2004c, 6). Thus, there may never be a single actor-network, rather agencies are multiply enacted in various practices and locations, and these multiple practices and locations interfere in complex ways. How, then, can researchers 'catch' a disordered, diffuse, ephemeral and elusive reality?

Firstly, researchers need to give up 'that noble dream' (Novick 1988) of objective knowledge, universal truth and totalizing claims. The world is far too complex and unpredictable to be known in general. It is impossible to reach final conclusions about the essence of things because reality is always in-process-of-becoming. Knowledge, as a result, is 'situated', 'partial', 'limited' and 'contradicting' (Haraway 1988). Secondly, researchers need to treat cases as unique, 'as incitement to ask questions about difference and similarity, about what alters in moving from one place to another' (Law and Mol 2002, 16). Thirdly, researchers need to keep the world open like a rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 2004). There are no beings, only practices, doings, actions, and unfinished processes. Mol and Law (2002) suggest several modes to 'pay tribute to complexity': researcher may 'list rather than classify; tell about cases rather than present illustrative representatives; walk and tell stories about this' (2002, 16-17). Finally, researchers need to avoid artificial dualisms and pre-determined schemes. 'In a complex world there are no simple binaries. Things add up and they don't. They flow in linear time and they don't. And they exist within a single space and escape from it' (Mol and Law 2002, 17-18).

1.2 New Materialism and the Cultural/Linguistic Turn

A transversal/diffractive cartography, a turn to agentive matter and materialsemiotic practices, and a methodological engagement with complexity, multiplicity and mess. These are the features of the new materialism that I enacted into being in this essay. The question is how they may provide a solution to some of the problems which university historians face after the cultural turn. At the beginning of this chapter, I have argued that the cultural/linguistic turn has various weaknesses which derive, in part, from the fact that it defined itself dialectally against social science history. In this dialectical process, new cultural historians turned their attention away from social structures and social categories to cultural practices, discourses and language, and from causal explanation, quantitative analyses and objective facts to textual deconstruction, interpretation, and values. Unsatisfied with the results of

these turns, and urged by pressing economic, environmental and political issues, historians now want to be able again to speculate about the nature of reality, express moral judgements, and theorize about culture as well as the social, politics, economics and nature (Bonnell and Hunt 1999; Jonker 2006; Eley 2008; Eijnatten 2011). In what follows, I shall elaborate on (a) dialectical thinking, (b) culture, language and discourse, (c) epistemology, and (d) ethics.

(a) **Dialectical thinking**

Dialectical reasoning is one of the grounding principles of Western thought. Postmodern philosophers, who tried to deconstruct binary oppositions, failed to do so because they were unable to debunk dialectical thinking. They attacked modernism with its own weapons, and, as a result, only reinforced it. The problems of dialectical reasoning are many. Dialectic classifications are dualist, linear, critical in a negative sense, and work to exclude 'the other'. New materialists, therefore, do not position themselves dialectically against the cultural/linguistic turn. Rather, they diffractively/transversally/affirmatively cut through different paradigms and literatures in search for shared conversations. In the case of university history, they would argue that the pictures that social science and cultural turn university historians have sketched are untrue, but rather that different paradigms enact different realities into being. They would stress, moreover, that in practice the university is multiple (e.g. the university as a breeding ground for learning as well as a training centre for civil service, a disciplinary institution and a stage for cultural practices). As a consequence, important insights from previous paradigms remain preserved. In addition, the new materialist's approach of reading different paradigms and literatures through one another, may help (university) historians to look beyond the borders of their own discipline. Historians who want 'to bring the students to life', for example, might benefit from insights from fields such as youth subcultural studies, media studies, cultural anthropology, feminist studies, and even, as I will demonstrate below, phenomenology, behaviourism, and sociobiology.

(b) **Culture, Language and Discourse**

Within the cultural turn, 'culture' has become a meta-category to explain everything. A one-sided focus on culture, however, excludes important domains of reality, such as the social and nature, and affirms the artificial culture/nature binary that underlies most Western thought. Following insights from Gender Studies and Science and Technology Studies, new materialists argue that reality consists of *naturecultures*. By taking *practices* as a starting point they are sensitive to hybrids and relations between heterogeneous entities – human and nonhuman - that remain unseen for researchers who rely on predetermined frameworks and schemes. New materialists do not take artificial binaries for granted. Rather, they are interested in the practices which produce and stabilize such binaries. Dualisms can never be an explanatory category. They rather need to be explained.

In addition, new materialists do not deny the importance of language and discursive practices and other key insights from the cultural/linguistic turn. They stress, though, that language and discourse are always already material and materialized. Not semiotics and discursive practices, but material-semiotic nodes and material-discursive practices are the subject of new materialism(s). They trace movements and complex networked relations instead of ordering the world according to pre-established themes. A focus on material-discursive practices, and the complex relations they produce, may help historians to move beyond the narrow gaze of the cultural/linguistic turn. By focusing on doings and actions, rather than finished processes, they can investigate how culture, nature, the social, language and matter are mutually produced.

(c) **Epistemology**

At first glance, the epistemological foundations of social science (university) history and cultural turn (university) history seem as different as chalk and cheese. Social science historians rely on a correspondence theory of truth, or the idea that historical reality exists of stable and independent facts that historians, as impartial and neutral observers, can discover by using quantitative methods from the social sciences, while cultural turn historians, on the other hand, argue that historical facts are not simply found but constructed in language and discourse. The underlying rationale of both paradigms, however, is representationalist; and as such they share the same epistemological assumptions (Barad 2003). Representationalism is 'the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent; in particular, that which is represented is held to be independent of all practices of representing' (2003, 804). For both social science historians and cultural turn historians there is a distinction between representations (e.g. historical narratives) and that which is represented. The entities to be represented, however, differ: social science history aims to represent facts ('the past as it actually occurred'), while new cultural historians argue that historical narratives only mirror the culture of the historian who wrote them.

One of the reasons why historians are distancing themselves from the cultural/linguistic turn is that they want to speculate again about the *reality* of the past. In the face of current political, economic and environmental problems, historians (and other scholars in the humanities and social sciences) want to engage with matters of fact (Latour 2004; Jonker 2006, 8). A simple return to the totalizing knowledge claims of the social science paradigm, however, is impossible after the critique of postmodernism. Historians, to be sure, are active participants in the construction of the past, but they are not the only ones who possess agency. New materialists like Karen Barad (2003; 2007) offers an *agential realist* framework as alternative to the representationist paradigms of both social science history and cultural turn history. Agential realism, as I described above, is grounded on a posthumanist notion of performativity, and indicates that words and things, objects and subjects are mutually constructed in natural-cultural/social-material practices. By drawing on agential realism, (university)

historians can speculate again about the nature of reality, and, at the same time, avoid the pitfalls of positivism or the relativism of postmodernism.²⁰

(d) **Ethics**

One of the features of agential realism is the idea that epistemology, ontology and ethics are entangled. Building on the philosophy physics of Niels Bohr, Barad (2007) argues that ‘objects’ and ‘agencies of observation’ do not exist prior to their intra-action. Rather, the object of study (itself an agent), the researcher and her/his research apparatuses are mutually produced in research practices. The three are, in other words, active participants in the world’s on-going becoming. What are the implications of these insights for the *practice* of history? It is recognized, in the first place, that the past is not a passive and inert world that awaits to be discovered. Rather, the past is full of action, as it is constantly enacted and reworked in multiple practices, of which historiography is only one example. Politicians and television programmes, for instance, are constantly producing pasts as well. Secondly, historians are no neutral observers, who represent the past as it actually occurred. Rather, history is performative and historians are part of the constant enfolding of the world. In their practices they materialize and (re)enact realities into being. But if historians are engaged in reality-making, they need to ask a question: what worlds do we want to enact? Are there other realities, than the ones we perform, which are also possible or even better? Following critical scholars like Donna Haraway and John Law, new materialists consciously take side with some worlds but not others. They try to create diffraction patterns which interfere in the on-going enfolding of the world. And in so doing, they try to *make a difference*.

For example, most historians bring realities into being which are founded on linear, dualist, anthropocentric and dialectic assumptions. Linear time and binary oppositions, however, are not pre-given; they are the result of ideological and epistemological disputes. Linear chronology and the nature-culture dichotomy, for instance, may seem natural because historians constantly perform and reproduce such worlds. The problem is that dualisms and linear notions of time have inbuilt normatives, they are the product of modernity and its corresponding ideologies and prejudices. By enacting nonlinear notions of time *into being*, and breaking through the dualisms that underlie modern thought, therefore, new materialist historians may help to create an ‘imagined elsewhere’ (Haraway 1992). The point is – and this is one of the ways in which new materialists can write a ‘history that is engaged’ - that we are not going solve the problems which the contemporary world faces by reaffirming modernist frameworks and corresponding ideological and epistemological systems – the very systems that helped to create the problems of our time. What we need, in the light of environmental degradation, neoliberalist globalization, and a turn to the right in politics, are

²⁰ In part 2, I will demonstrate and test the relevance of agential realism for the study of history through an empirical case study of student culture at Utrecht University.

alternatives visions, diffraction patterns, and a 'mapping of interferences' (Haraway 1992, 300). New materialism(s) may help historians to make a difference in the world.

2. Writing Practices Matter: A Posthumanist Account of Student Graffiti

In the previous chapter I introduced new materialism and elaborated on how it may help so solve and rethink some of the problems of the cultural/linguistic turn. My aim is to test these new materialist approaches through a series of casestudies of student culture at Utrecht University, which includes gender relations and pays attention to non-academic staff. In order to do so, I first need sources which enable me to penetrate into the worldview of these neglected groups/themes. In this chapter, therefore, I will introduce an unusual source that I accidentally discovered in Utrecht University's former *Letterenbibliotheek* (now University Library City Centre). It is not a book, incunabulum, epistle, or piece of parchment. Nor is it a peculiar curiosity from the special collections. It is, instead, a frequently unnoticed, but to many all too well-known, source: student graffiti! For years on end, Utrecht's students scribbled a great many texts and images in the toilets and study booths of the old *Letterenbibliotheek*. These texts and images provide a unique opportunity to gain entrance into the worldview of a subculture that normally does not produce an abundance of source material. Recently, however, during renovation activities, these fossils of student life were removed without mercy. Fortunately, though, I managed to preserve quite a large amount of student graffiti by taking photographs. These pictures make it possible to reconstruct most of the texts and images in their original context.

In what follows, I shall first (2.1) introduce student graffiti as a source to university history. I will then proceed by (2.2) describing the Utrecht corpus in detail. The next section (2.3) reviews some recent scholarship on graffiti in the social sciences and related disciplines. The chapter ends with (2.4) a new materialist cartography to interpret student graffiti historically.

2.1 Graffiti as a Source

'Graffiti.. are worthy of serious study. They deal with a wide range of significant contemporary topics. They throw light on usage, slang, idioms, and dialects. They reflect contemporary customs and moral values. They give intimate details about everyday life. They are a rich source of literary and rhetorical forms and techniques. They satirize people and institutions. And they are almost always creative, imaginative, and highly entertaining' (D'Angelo 1976, 105).

When the study of history became a professional scholarly discipline in the nineteenth-century, it was mainly, not to say exclusively, concerned with 'documents', that is, written sources from the official archives (e.g. Langlois and Seignobos 1909; Strubbe 1954). Indeed, the pursuit of history had almost solely thrived on 'official' textual sources until new cultural historians in the 1980s desired to penetrate into the worldview of 'the Other', the poor, women, and people of color whose doings were not registered in the official documents. In their search for 'alternative' traces, new cultural historians

turned to a wide range of neglected textual as well as visual and oral sources (Barber and Peniston-Bird 2009). Cultural turn university historians who aim to bring the students to life, make gender relations visible, and let the non-academic staff speak, need to look for alternative traces as well. Thus, Pieter Caljé (2009) used student yearbooks (*studentenalmanakken*) for his doctoral thesis on student culture in Groningen, while Holger Zaunstöck (2010) proposed public denunciations as a source for university history. The goal of this chapter is to add another alternative trace to the list: student graffiti.

Student graffiti are inscriptions – texts, drawings, symbols, and the like - created by students. They can be found in toilets, study booths, libraries and lecture halls in university buildings, as well as in student houses, pubs, and other places where students socially interact with one another. Student graffiti are quite an old phenomenon. Sixteenth-century student inscriptions, for example, have been found at the University of Cambridge (Underwood 1980). The writing of graffiti by students, though, expanded enormously in comparison with earlier periods during the revolts and strikes in the 1960s and 1970s (McGlynn 1972; D’Angelo 1976). In public toilets and on buildings and fences in the area around the Sorbonne in Paris (Quartier Latin), for instance, and at campuses of American universities, graffiti dealing with political and social issues were scribbled all over the walls during the protests in 1968 and 1969. At the radical University of Paris 8 of Vincennes, where students and professors – among whom Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze - mutually opposed the riot police, ‘militant graffiti covered every available surface’ (Macey 1993, 227). And when in 1971 Dutch Minister of Education Mauk de Brauw proposed educational reforms, students in Utrecht painted anti-government slogans on statues on the Domplein (Snijders 1986, 201). As a result of the student uprisings, public restrooms became, as a contemporary commentator noted, politicized; they turned from places where one used to find scatological and sexual messages into ‘political forums’ (Hougan 1972, 20). Nowadays, universities still hold an abundant quantity of student graffiti. I encountered and photographed a great many texts and drawings in restrooms and libraries at the University of Amsterdam (UvA), the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), Berkeley, the University of Paris (Sorbonne), the Humboldt University of Berlin, Lancaster University in the UK, and – last but not least – Utrecht University.

Given the fact that student graffiti are available in such large quantities, it is slightly surprising that university historians, to my knowledge at least, have neglected this rich source. One of the problems is that toilet walls and study rooms are often cleaned. Graffiti is seen by many as vandalism and a sign of degradation. These ‘humble data’ (Brunor and Kelso 1980) are, therefore, often granted only a short life. It so happened, however, that at the end of the 1960s, due to a concurrence of circumstances, social scientists discovered that they could use graffiti to gain entrance into the (sub)conscious life of different social groups. As a result, psychologists, sociologists, and folklorists, and from the late 1970s onwards also geographers, scholars of popular culture, linguists, and feminist researchers, collected thousands of graffiti. And for practical reasons most of these graffiti were

gathered at the toilets and libraries of the universities where these scholars worked. Thus, an extensive corpus of student graffiti, deriving from different American, European and even African universities, and collected over more than half a century, is available to university historians. It is my profound conviction that we might find here one of the keys to solve Friedman's problem.

So, why exactly did social scientists become interested in graffiti in the 1960s? The social scientist's turn to graffiti involved valiant efforts of individuals and small groups of scholars, who worked on graffiti, independently of one another and often in splendid isolation. It would make a good pub quiz question: what unites a recalcitrant etymologist, the Kinsey Reports, an informal seminar at Northwestern University, and a Freudian folklorist? The answer: the beginning of a graffiti hype in the social sciences!

The story begins in the 1920s with a remarkable American etymologist: Allen Walker Read (1906-2002). Read, a postgraduate in English at the University of Iowa at the time, became interested in 'racy words' and other folk dirt. He was the first American folklorist who published, without mentioning the word itself, on 'fuck' (Schellenberg 1996, 127). Prim and proper America was far from ready for his shabby endeavors. Thus, after an extensive fieldtrip through the United States and Canada in pursuit of toilet wall writings in the summer of 1928, Read was unable to find a publisher for his collection. Eventually he had the book privately printed in Paris in 1935 under the title *Lexical Evidence from Folk Epigraphy in Western North America: a Glossarial Study of the Low Element in the English Vocabulary*. Because of the 'abominably, incredibly obscene' content, the small monograph was limited to 75 copies and solely intended for 'students of linguistics, folklore, abnormal psychology and allied branches of social sciences' (Read, 1935, 5-6). Although the work took the form of a catalogue, Read provided some hints for further research. He suggested that graffiti could be used to reveal changes in social attitudes, and speculated about the psychological reasons for writing graffiti. Due to the limited edition of *Folk Epigraphy*, Read's efforts remained practically unnoticed for three decades. It would take almost twenty years, and a world war, before another group of researchers, associated with the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University, re-discovered graffiti.

Like Read, Alfred Kinsey (1894-1956) was a true trailblazer in his field of study. Where Read became interested in the word 'fuck', Kinsey was the first biologist who systematically studied the 'deed' itself. In the 1940s, Kinsey, together with a group of fellow sexologists, interviewed thousands of men about their sexual behavior. When the group decided to conduct the same research on women, they were faced with a problem: their new target group was rather reticent to talk about sexuality. Thus, Kinsey needed to look for other ways to investigate 'sexual behavior in the human female'. Accidentally, the group discovered sexually-laden inscriptions on the walls of female restrooms. In their final report Kinsey et al (1953) argued that toilet graffiti, like Freud's erotic jokes or dreams, contained 'uninhibited expressions of sexual desires' and that, for this reason, they could be used to inquire into 'basic differences between male and female sexual psychology' (1953, 87). According to Kinsey et al's findings men produce more graffiti than women, because women are more inclined to

respect social conventions which inhibit writing on walls and expressing sexual desires. Most inscriptions on men's toilets, furthermore, are 'erotic' or sexually stimulating, and also homosexual, because of the male-only space in which they are written. Women's graffiti, on the other hand, tends to be 'romantic' rather than 'erotic'. Here, then, Kinsey et al (1953) argued, lies the main difference between male and female sexuality: men look for erotic stimulation, while romanticism is more important to women. The reports on human sexual behaviour made Kinsey into a celebrity. The graffiti mania in the social sciences, however, had yet to break loose.

This ultimately happened after the publication of two more works on the value of graffiti as a data source to research in the social sciences. One of these publications was the result of an informal colloquium at Northwestern University in which participants tried to outstrip one another by proposing new methodologies for social research (Lee 2000). Aim of the seminar, more precisely, was to come up with alternatives to participant observation, interviews and questionnaires, to study human behavior without affecting it. In 1966, four participants of the seminar, led by Stanford professor Eugene J. Webb (1993-1995), published an extended list of 'unobtrusive measures', that is, physical human traces such as garbage, footprints and 'accretion measures'. Example par excellence of the latter, Webb et al (1966) argued, were graffiti, especially toilet inscriptions. In the same year, folklorist Alan Dundes (1934-2005) published the results of his study on graffiti, which he had collected in men's restrooms in and around Berkeley in 1964. Dundes (1966) made a passionate plea for the study of dirt: 'the concept of dirt is part of our culture and as such it falls into the province of the cultural anthropologist' (1966, 93). One of the few places to encounter accounts of dirt, Dundes argued, is in toilet graffiti or 'latrinalia', as he called them. After providing several entertaining examples of latrinalia, Dundes, like Read before him, speculated about the psychological motivations for scribbling them. Drawing on Freudian psycho-analysis, he suggested that toilet graffiti are cultured substitutes to 'infantile desires to play with feces' (1966, 104). Men, moreover, write more graffiti than women, because of 'pregnancy envy': while women are able to bear children with their bodies, jealous men need to look for other ways to be corporally creative. Restricted by cultural norms to smear feces, then, they write dirty words on toilet walls.

Four independent publications, in short, all directed attention to the research value of graffiti. When Robert Reisner (1967), drawing on these four pioneering studies, published a non-specialist collection of graffiti ranging from the ancient world to his own day, in which he argued that wall writings reflect changes in social trends, graffiti became all the rage. The popular press got wind of the hype (Brackman 1967; Walker 1968), and American psychologists and folklorists threw themselves *en masse* into public toilets to collect 'latrinalia' either as barometers of social attitudes, expressions of sexual desires, unobtrusive measures, and/or traces of cultural taboos. Conducting research in this unusual fieldwork site, though, was not without practical problems: 'not everyone understands why someone is loitering in toilets', two social psychologists noted, 'one may protest that it is for science, but the stares of disbelief or the knowing leers are intimidating' (Sechrest and Flores 1969, 10).

Following these early endeavors, a great many scholars from a wide range of disciplines have collected and utilized (toilet)graffiti from university buildings for their various inquiries. Psychologists examined the content of graffiti in order to study attitudes towards homosexuality (Sechrest and Flores 1969), political interest (Rudin and Harless 1970; Jorgenson and Lange 1975), intergroup conflicts (Sechrest and Olson 1971), gender differences and changes in human sexuality (Farr et al 1975; Wales and Brewer 1976; Ahmed 1981; Arluke et al 1987; Otta 1993; Otta and Paulo 1996), authoritarianism (Solomon and Yeager 1975), the adolescent personality (Peretti et al 1977), and differences between attitudes towards social issues in Britain and Nigeria (Olowu 1983). Folklorists have analysed the form of specific graffiti (Birney 1973; Barrick 1974; Grider, 1975; Longenecker 1977; King 1980) and, following Dundes, deployed toilet texts to investigate social taboos (Gonos et al 1976). For linguists, the rhetoric and the grammar of graffiti have been valuable sources to analyse developments in language (Gach 1973; D'Angelo, 1974; Nilsen 1980; Claramonte and Alonso 1993; Whiting and Veronika 2007), while feminists have used it to expose forms of oppression of minority groups (Bruner and Kelso 1980). Urban geographers have exploited gang graffiti to examine territorialism (Ley and Cybriwsky 1974; Lindsey and Kearn 1994) or to analyse the geographical aspects of a conflict in the Kingston ghetto (Eyre 1984). Prison graffiti have been used by criminologists as unobtrusive measures to study institutional cultures (Klofas and Charles 1985; Peters, 1990; Wilson 2008b), or to hear censored voices of a doubly marginalized group: female convicts (Wilson 2008a). The life of another 'Other', homeless street youth, has been traced by sociologists by using their graffiti (Luna 1987). Finally, cultural studies scholars have utilized political graffiti to examine how culture in Hungaria changed after 1989 (Brown 1995), or as a barometer of an area's political atmosphere, e.g. in Northern-Ireland (Rolston 1987), Israel (Peteet 1996), and the Balkans (Miklavcic 2008).

For a great many scholars in the social sciences, in short, graffiti have been an extremely fertile source for a wide range of research projects. As Frank D'Angelo (1974), one of the graffiti researchers from the 1970s, remarked: 'To the linguist, they throw light on grammatical structure; to the archaeologist, they help to date buildings and events; to the sociologist, they reflect customs and institutions; and to the psychologist, they are manifestations of pent up hostilities and sexual frustrations' (1974, 173). University historians, I would like to suggest, can use them to bring students to life, make gender visible, and let non-academic personnel speak. To demonstrate the potential of graffiti as a source to university history, I will draw on a fairly recent corpus from the Utrecht University Library. University historians who aim to go further back in time may exploit the collections from social scientists that passed in review above.

2.2 *Corpus Fontium*: Student Graffiti at the Utrecht University Library

In 2009, I photographed more than 500 student graffiti on the walls of a toilet and eight study booths and a toilet in the attic of the building on the corner of Drift/Wittevrouwenstraat (Drift 31), which then belonged to the Utrecht University *Letterenbibliotheek* (henceforth LB). Shortly after I took these pictures, the LB was closed for renovation. Drift 31 will be reopened again in the summer of 2012, as part of the new University Library City Centre (henceforth ULCC). The graffiti were all removed during the renovation activities; the interior of Drift 31 was demolished completely. The 2009 renovation was not the first drastic redevelopment of the premises. Indeed, Drift 31 has known a long history of renovations and alterations. The exterior of the building as we know it today once belonged to a seventeenth-century mansion, built on the site of a medieval claustral house of the immunity of the chapter of St. John (Elzen en Kempen 1996, 41-42). In 1807, Louis Bonaparte, King of Holland, decided to move his court to Utrecht, and purchased various mansions on the Drift, including Drift 31. He then let his carpenters re-alter the interiors of these buildings. Several premises were internally connected to each other, while the exterior walls retained their physical appearance. After the king had left Utrecht with great dispatch in 1807, Drift 31 first served as court-martial (*Hoog Militair Gerechtshof*), until Utrecht University obtained the premises in 1921. Utrecht University used it for different purposes: the building first provided accommodation to the Institute of Medieval History, and then to the Spanish, Portuguese and Ibero-American Institute.²¹ The interior in which I encountered student graffiti was the result of renovation activities that took place in 1985, when contractors converted the attic of Drift 31, once the sleeping quarters of Louis Bonaparte, into study booths for self-tuition.



Figure 3: Figure 3: The large study room

²¹ Dossiers van percelen, stukken betreffende de percelen Drift 29-31, A&R UU, Archief HBH, inventaris nr. 77.

Between 1985 and 2009 the interior of the attic of Drift 31 consisted of a unisex toilet, a large study room equipped with writing/reading desks and eye-catching red chairs (see Figure 3) and three adjoining study booths, as well as a corridor with four more study booths. Like the large study room, each study booth was equipped with writing/reading desks and chairs. Students used the place for self-learning. The attic of Drift 31, according to the doorkeeper, was the domain of students. Non-academic staff avoided the place if possible. It sometimes happened, however, that homeless people tried to sneak into the LB. Especially in the evenings, when not many students were around, the secluded, even dreary, space of the attic of Drift 31 apparently provided a convenient spot for addicts. Most of the time security guards obstructed the junks in entering the building. In 2001, a furious homeless person, who tried to get into LB, even attacked one of the security guards with a knife (*U-Blad* 13, 22-11-2001). Cleaners charred the rooms early in the morning. The walls of the study booths and study room, however, once decorated in virgin white latex paint, with a grey latex band at the bottom, had not been cleaned or repainted for years. As a result, walls, even ceilings, of all the rooms, the toilet, and the corridor were covered with graffiti (see Figure 4 and 5).



Figure 4: One of the study booths

While junks accidentally sought safety for their dodgy endeavors in the attic of Drift 31, the loft basically belonged to the students. We can safely state, therefore, that students wrote most, not to say all, graffiti. Indeed, the texts and drawings were scribbled by students for students. Little can be known, however, about the exact identity of individual graffitists. Until 2009, after the brand new ULCC opened its doors, the premises at the Drift were mainly inhabited by students in the humanities.

Students from other faculties, as I remember it, preferred the University Library Uithof, which was much more spacious and better equipped. Also, most computers for self-study were located at Kromme Nieuwe Gracht 80 at the time. The content of the graffiti, though, indicates that students from other faculties, even college students (*hbo'ers*), visited the attic of Drift 31 as well.



Figure 5: The wall of one of the study booth covered in graffiti

The corpus itself consists of texts, drawings, and symbols, produced with various writing tools (e.g. pens, pencils, biros, underline markers, permanent markers and lipstick), in different colors, predominantly blue and black (biros), and, more noticeably, yellow, pink, green and orange (underline markers). Graffiti were scribbled on every available surface, from walls, doors, and ceilings, to beams, tables, toilet role holders, and plug-sockets. In the unisex toilet I also encountered a couple of stickers propagandizing the PvdUS, one of Utrecht University's student parties for the representative advisory body. The physical dimensions of individual graffiti varied from a four foot phallus drawing on one of the pillars in the large study room, to tiny, almost unreadable scribbles. Consequently, I was unable to reconstruct all graffiti. In some cases, the photograph's quality prevented infallible determination. In others, the graffito itself was simply indecipherable for various reasons (e.g. too vague, weathered, scratched out, or drawn over by other graffiti). Ultimately, after careful deciphering, I identified 512 individual texts, 28 drawings, and 9 symbols.

It turned out to be quite difficult to exactly date individual graffiti. Some texts refer to 'current issues' in (inter)national politics ("Pim for president" or "BUCK FUSH"), intellectual history

("BAUDRILLARD IS ☺ DOOD"), or the student world ("ORCA HEEFT DE (V)ARSITY GEWONNEN! 01-05-'00"), which clearly indicates that most graffiti are from the 2000s. According to Cees Boshuis, who worked for Utrecht University's maintenance service in 2009, the study booths and toilets had not been cleaned for at least six years. He explains: 'At first, the walls of the study booths were cleaned on a regular basis. After a while, however, we gave up because students kept writing graffiti. Continuing would be a waste of time and money' (quoted in Schouwenburg et al 2009, 22). This means that some graffiti go back at least to 2003. Some texts, however, are dated. Fraternity students, for example, frequently write the name and date of their society (*jaarclub*) on the wall: "Jaguar UVSV/NVVSU '94" or "Onz'elf '98". The oldest 'society advert' is dated '93, which makes it likely that some graffiti were written well before 2003. Also, one of the texts I photographed is mentioned in a 1999 issue of the *U-Blad*.²² It seems safely to conclude, therefore, that the graffiti in the attic of Drift 31 cover the period roughly between the mid-1990s and 2009. Thus, the ups and downs of two decades of student life at Utrecht University have been captured on the walls of the LB.

(a) Form and Discursive Patterns

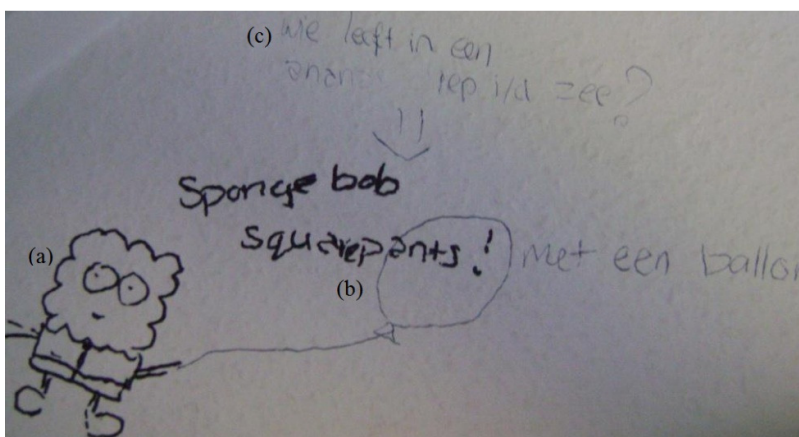
So, what are the texts about? First of all, it is important to note that, on a very general level, we are dealing with two basic types of graffiti: 'student graffiti' and 'latrinalia' (toilet graffiti), or more specifically, 'student toilet graffiti'. I will come back to problem of the classification in the next section. For now it is enough to stress that context in part determines the content of graffiti. In the unisex toilet, for instance, I found context-specific graffiti about scatological issues that were non-existent in the study booths (examples will follow in due course). Secondly, some graffiti (e.g. "Ik wil chocola", "Lana zoekt haar droomman" or "U-Blad = links FNV-pamflet") consisted of single or zero response statements. The vast majority of texts and images, however, were part of 'utterance and response chains' (Whiting and Koller 2007). Most single utterances, in other words, incited reactions. Consequently, the interactional nature of the texts and drawings makes it hard to distinguish individual graffiti. Take, for example, the following conversation that begins with a general statement which is followed by a chain of responses:

- (a) Farmacie = cool
- (b) Not! Opzouten pillendraaiers
- (c) Wij gaan geld verdienen. Veel geld. Haha
- (d) Kaal en impotent worden

²² Compare: 'Ik lees de volgende tekst op de muur: "Zo Baardmans, wanneer kom je ons weer van deze plek wegsturen?"' (*U-blad* 26, 18-03-1999) with "Hoi bebaarde boeman van de bibliotheek! Hoe is het? Wanneer kom je ons weer wegsturen?"

The dialogue opens with a clear statement (a), which is followed, in linear fashion, by a response statement (b), a counter-statement by a third author (c), and another response (d). Thus, one graffito enticed three other graffitists to react. Such a scheme has been characterized as ‘dialogue between ideologies’ (Trahan 2011), *in casu*, between two pharmacology students (a, c) and two objectors or – following the jargon - anti-pill-peddlers (b, d). In this case, however, ‘dialogue between *ideologies*’ is a bit overexaggerating, as ‘pharmacy’ does not represent a clear ideology. I, therefore, prefer the more general term ‘wall polemics’ (Schouwenburg et al 2009).

Take another visual example of a response chain:



In this case, the opening statement (a) consists of a drawing of SpongeBob SquarePants, the main character of a popular American animated series. Like the pro-pharmacy statement, this drawing invites various responses. Interestingly, though, the first response (b) is both textual *and* visual; someone extended the drawing with a toy balloon and explanatory text: ‘met een ballon’. Another response to the drawing (c) quotes a line of the television series opening tune (‘Wie leeft in aan ananas diep i/d zee?’ [who lives in a pineapple under the sea]). Contrary to the anti/pro pharmacy polemic, the responses are ordered according to a circular pattern around the original statement, and none of the reactions are aversive in nature. The Spongebob drawing, in short, invites affirmative responses. I call such a scheme: ‘dialogues of congeniality’.

In some dialogues over twenty graffitists participate. In one of the male toilets in Educatorium Uithof next to the canteen, for instance, I encountered a chain response consisting of almost seventy graffito’s. I will quote five utterances, that are illustrative for a phenomenon which I frequently encountered in the LB corpus as well:

- (a) Een iemand moet de eerste zijn
- (b) En een tweede daarop reageren.....
- (c) De derde is gewoon aan het schijten

(...)

(d) De 67e vraacht zich af waar de 3e geschreven heeft.

(e) De 68e heeft gemerkt dat de 67e vraagt niet kan spellen ook al staat het al 100x geschreven

The opening statement (a) is followed by an affirmative response (b) and another scatological remark (c). Subsequently, a sequence of almost seventy responses follows, all according to the same format, i.e. ‘the fourth ..’, ‘the fifth..’, ‘the sixth ..’ and so on and so forth, until the sixty-seventh participant (d) commits a spelling error (e.g. “vraacht” instead of *vraagt*). This spelling mistake invites a purist (e) to point at the linguistic blunder of (d). Such a move occurs frequently in the LB corpus. Thus when one graffitist scribbles quite a funny rib-tickler on the wall (e.g. “Vraag: Wat doen Feyenoorders als ze de championsleageu hebben gewonnen? → De playstation uitzetten”), another reacts with “Hopelijk een cursus spellen...?”. This exact same process takes place on the internet, in chat rooms, forums and blogs, where people who feel the need to correct others’ spelling mistakes, even if it does not contribute to the discussion at all, are called ‘grammar Nazis’.²³

Other similarities between student graffiti and internet culture arise. Both media are interactive in nature and for the greater part anonymous. The influence of internet culture, moreover, is clearly present in LB corpus. I encountered literal references to internet websites, mostly pornographic websites (e.g. “www.blacksonblondes.com”), and shabby puns on web addresses: “www.kijk me aan als ik.com”. Also, some student graffiti refer to internet memes (e.g. a drawing of “Kees kanker kachel” or the text “Conjo Patrick hij is vies”). Internet memes are phenomena – usually movies, images, links or words - which suddenly become immensely popular on the internet. The *Kees kachel* meme, for example, consisted of a YouTube clip in which ‘Kees’, one of the colorful characters in the 2005 SBS 6 television programme *Probleemwijken*, rails at his malfunctioning heater (“stervende hoeren kanker kachel”). Links to the clip were posted on various weblogs, and, as a result, Kees kachel became some sort of an internet celebrity. One of Utrecht’s students, then, decided to honour Kees kachel with a toilet graffito (see Figure 6).

The “Conjo Patrick hij is vies” text is an allusion to Joran van der Sloot, another dubious Dutch celebrity, who gained notoriety as chief suspect in the disappearance case of American student Natalee Holloway in Aruba in 2005. In 2008, Dutch crime reporter Peter R. de Vries released an undercover video in which Joran spoke about the vanishing of Holloway to Patrick van der Eem, who secretly worked for De Vries. During this conversation, Joran uttered the sentence “Conjo Patrick hij is vies”, which is a slang expression to articulate a token of respect to one others actions. Like the

²³ See entry ‘grammar Nazi’ in the encyclopedia *dramatica* (http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Grammar_Nazi): grammar Nazi is ‘a captious individual who cannot resist the urge to correct a spelling and/or grammar mistake even in informal settings. After pointing out the linguistic shortcomings in others, a Grammar Nazi feels a strange sense of twisted and unconstructive intelligentsia delight. Everyone hates Grammar Nazis because they are the ultimate lulz killers’.

Kees kachel clip, the Joran video became an internet hype, and eventually, made it into the cultural repertoire of Utrecht's students.



Figure 6: 'Kees Kachel'

One last thing about the massive "een iemand moet de eerste zijn" chain in one of the Uithof's toilets. We are dealing here with a variation of a common form of (toilet) graffiti, which has been identified as 'sequential parody graffiti' (Longenecker 1977). The main feature of this form of graffiti is the arrangement of parodies or humorous entries on a certain theme according to a list often preceded by a title (1977, 356). In the LB's study booths and unisex toilet, I found several of such 'sequential parody graffiti'. One example involves a list of alternative meanings of U.V.S.V./N.V.V.S.U., which I will discuss in greater detail in Part Two of this essay. Another list from the door of the unisex toilet runs as follows:

- (a) Alternatieve dingen om te doen met de boeken in de bieb:
- (b) - Eiffeltoren nabouwen
- (c) - Kristallnacht naspelen
- (d) - Afvegen
- (e) - Alle werkwoorden vervangen door 'neuken'
- (f) - Opeten
- (g) - Als paraplu gebruiken

The first move (a) provides the title to the list, and invites other graffitiists to participate. Contrary to the “een iemand moet de eerste zijn” chain, this chain does not begin with an initial statement, but rather with a question in the form of an appeal to add suggestions. Six humorous, although the humorous nature of the “kristallnacht” statement (c) is of course disputable, entries were added. I encountered yet another ‘sequential parody graffiti’ in the unisex toilet. In this case, the list is clearly related to the context in which the graffiti were scribbled. The title reads: “synoniemen voor poepen” (synonyms for the act of taking a crap). Parodical entries range from: “Nelson Mandela bevrijden” and “Obama in het Witte Huis zetten” to “een bruine trui breien” and “je ruggengraat verlengen”.

Other context-specific graffiti include single statement latrinalia such as: “Soms zit het tegen / soms zit het mee / soms een mooie bolus / en soms diaree” or varieties in other languages: “Here I sit and hesitate / shall I shit or shall I masturbate”. The latter draws on a remarkably successful oral tradition, as Alan Dundes (1966) found the same form in a Berkeley toilet in the 1960s. The Nietzsche text (e.g. “God = dead, Nietzsche / Nietzsche = dead, God”), that made me shatter in 2009 (see Preface), turned out to be another typical example of ‘traditional toilet graffiti’. Dundes’ Berkeley corpus contained exactly the same text (1966, 97). Thus, some graffiti have been handed down through generations, and even crossed the oceans. Graffiti scholars such as Stocker et al (1972), therefore, have categorized such texts as ‘trite’.

Whereas some graffiti are context-specific in content, others creatively interact with the physical surface or space in which they are written. Next to a plug socket, for instance, someone wrote: “test hier je gezondheid”, and next to a light switch another scribbled: “test hier je kracht”. In the unisex toilet a creative mind wrote “gratis sjaal” on a toilet role holder. I encountered another version of this practical joke in a restroom at the University of California, Los Angeles. In this case, someone had written “UCLA diplomas” on the toilet role holder. Next to practical jokes, the LB corpus contains several interactive games. Students not only played tic-tac-too and lingo on the walls, but also tried to outstrip each other in ‘outdo games’. On the wall of one of the study booths, for example, near the roof, a student wrote: “Ik kan het hoogst schrijven!”. A bit above the text of his predecessor, another reacted with: “Ik ook: het hoogst”. Other contributions followed suit: “Mis! Ikke dus”, and then on the roof: “Nee hoor! Ik” and “Das niet waar ik!”. Convincing winner of this particular outdo game became a clever student who outsmarted all his opponents: “Ik op het dak, maar dat zie je niet vanaf hier!” Other types of interactive ‘games’ consist of ‘wall surveys’ and ‘agree clubs’ (*mee eens clubs*). In the latter case, students are asked to give their opinion about a statement by adding a tally mark. Examples include statements such as “Studentenverenigingen moeten worden afgeschaft” or “Brabanders zijn kut” followed by two possible answers: “eens” (in agreement) and “oneens” (in disagreement). Like agree clubs, wall surveys are charts in which students can add tally marks. Instead of statements and possible answers, however, they center around physical conditions or bodily needs:

Te veel bier	III
Niet te veel bier	IIII II

(b) Thematic Content

In the examples of form and linguistic patterns presented in the previous section, I touched upon some of the content of the graffiti from the LB corpus. Texts about scatological issues, spelling mistakes, and pharmacists, as well as drawings of famous cartoon characters and dubious internet celebrities have all passed in review. Chicago based scholar Quinn Dombrowski (2011) composed a classification system to categorize and compare different corpora of (student)graffiti (see Figure 7).²⁴ In the remaining part of this section, I shall pass through Dombrowski's entries in order to provide a rough overview of the thematic content of the Utrecht corpus. In next section, I will elaborate on the problems of thematic classification in graffiti research. Some of these problems should already be clear by now. In the first place, most graffiti in the LB corpus are part of dialogues and only make sense in their interactional context. By listing them as individual entries according to a certain theme, the whole communicative aspect of graffiti gets lost. Secondly, individual graffiti's may fit into different categories at the same time. The text "Het enige dat uffen willen is een corpspik tussen hun billen", for example, may be grouped under 'greek' as well as 'sex' in Dombrowski's system. The following overview, therefore, only serves as a means to illustrate the thematic diversity of the graffiti from the attic of Drift 31, and, more theoretically, to show the artificial nature of classification systems.

- Advice
- Classes
- (Intellectual) commentary
- Despair
- Drugs
- Greek (fraternity/sorority)
- Insults
- Love
- Meta (about graffiti, the surface being written on, etc.)
- Orthography and/or grammar
- Politics
- Presence (variations on "X was here")
- Quotes (direct quotes from other sources)

²⁴ See also her beautiful website about student graffiti at the University of Chicago: www.crescatgraffiti.com/.

- Reference (making reference to another source without quoting from it)
- Religion
- School
- Self
- Sex
- Social issues
- Time (most often, not having enough of it)

Figure 7: Dombrowski's classification system

- *Advice*: Advice graffiti only formed a minor part of the LB corpus. I encountered examples of inspirational advice (“Hoi Lotte, komt goed!”) and commanding encouragements (“studeer of sterf honden”). Masculine advice to improve one’s sex life (“Tip: Doe je vriend een lol laat je nemen in je hol! Scheer je ook je kut kaal dan vind hij je de liefste van allemaal”) led me to suspect that we are in fact not dealing with well-intentioned advice here, but rather with male fantasies.

- *Classes*: Some students express their intellectual love for certain classes or academic subjects: “I ♥ Chemie”, “Farmacie is cool”, “GESCHIEDENIS IS EEN LEUKE STUDIE. DE JUFFEN EN MEESTERS ZIJN ERG AARDIG!”, while others stick to complaints: “Rechten is saai”.

- *Commentary*: Political commentary (e.g. “Capitalism = War”, “Stalinism = tyranny” or “ISRAEL = TERROR STATE”) would also fit under the label ‘politics’. The same goes for commentary on different student types (e.g. “USC = ZIELIG EN TRIEST”), which also belong to the entry ‘Greek’.

- *Despair*: In the LB corpus despair is caused by study-related activities: “Ik zal zoou blij zijn als die klote criptie af is”, “Scriptie schrijven... zucht ..”, “IK WIL NAAR HUIS”, and “Ik wil ook vakantie!”. Zealous Christians sometimes seize such opportunities to make converts: “Zit je in de knoop en zie je geen oplossing meer?! Vraag of God in je leven komt. Als wij zwak zijn, is Hij sterk Hij wil jou leven ook leiden I pray for you!”.

- *Drugs*: Dombrowski found several references to drugs in graffiti collected at the University of Chicago. I only encountered one drugs-related graffiti: “Only users lose drugs”. Hedonistically, Utrecht’s students, it seems, are more preoccupied with drinking (“BLIK BIER U R BEAUTIFUL”) and sexual intercourse (“Ik heb zin om van achteren genomen te worden”).

- *Greek*: ‘Almost all fraternity graffiti’ Dombrowski states, ‘is either the name of a fraternity, or a simply-phrased insult directed towards a fraternity’ (2011, 9). At Utrecht University, in contrast,

graffiti dealing with student unions forms the largest and most diverse category of the corpus. Next to 'society adverts' (e.g. "Spiritus '97 USV", "Parsifal '96") and often terrible insults ("UVSV weg ermee" or "Krijg de bloedKANKER VUILE KANSLOZE KOORBAL"), the LB corpus contains lengthy chain responses in which students from different unions participate. Such polemics often take visual forms: fraternity students made drawings of their association building ("Het Gele kasteel"), while students from other unions portrayed stereotypical representations of *corpsballen* on the wall. Important metaphor in such discussions is the "Knor", an insulting nickname for students who are not a member of Utrecht's oldest and most elitist student union: the Utrechtsch Studenten Corps (USC). Dombrowski's 'Greek' category seems to be the most fruitful to university historians who aim to reconstruct 'the mental world of students'. A fair bit of Part Two of this essay, therefore, is devoted to this form of graffiti.

- *Insults*: If effing and blinding were an art, Utrecht's students would be true masters, as one used to find strong and insulting language on the walls of the former LB. There are insults directed at individuals (Balkenende is een keeeenkerhomotje"), insults which are part of heated arguments ("Domme lul" or "hou je KANKER bek ROTTE TERING APPEL LELIJKE GRAFTAK!!!"), and even brawls in which multiple opponents or whole social groups are insulted: "Wat zijn jullie KANKERNERDS allemaal" and "ALLE VROUWEN ZIJN HOEREN!!!!". Profanity indeed! Like *Greek* graffiti, I will deal in more detail with gender-related insults in the second part of this essay.

- *Love*: Next to terrible insults, one finds expressions of love in the LB corpus also. Students declare love to each other ("Jessica!!! ♥ Jorrit!!" or "Ik vind jou mooi 14-03-03"), to movie stars ("I ♥ Brad Pitt"), to cities ("Nous aimons Paris") and to their favourite academic subjects ("I ♥ Lexicale cohesive"). Others are still looking for affection ("Lana zoekt haar droomman") or share pieces of wisdom about it ("Alles is echt liefde.. voor wie echt durft te kijken").

- *Meta*: Dombrowski uses the 'meta' entry to categorize graffiti about graffiti, and comments about the space in which the graffiti is written. Some graffiti are about graffiti: "Niet op de muur schrijven aub" or "Er is niks poëtischer dan schoonschrift op een WC deur". Other graffiti are about the surface and space on/in which the graffiti are scribbled: "Wanneer wordt deze muur weer geveerd?" and "Wat een armoedige rotzooi hier!". In the unisex toilet students inspire their colleagues to write on the walls: "Neem de volgende keer ook eens een pen mee naar de WC".

- *Orthography and/or grammar*: I already discussed the urgent need that some students feel to correct another's spelling mistakes. This process is not unique to graffiti; it corresponds to so called 'grammar Nazis' in internet subcultures. Examples from the LB corpus include response statements such as: "je

kunt niet eens schrijven knor”, “als je graag iets wil schrijven, schrijf het dan wel goed homo” and “Waarom kan niemand normaal Nederlands??”.

- *Politics*: Utrecht’s students who frequented the LB took a passionate interest in Politics. The majority of political graffiti consists of symbols and texts referring to left-wing political systems and anti-capitalistic groupings (e.g. “They rule you loose / fight the bosses” followed by a crossed out dollar sign), and right-wing reactions to such statements (“De VVD werkt tenminste! Links = werkschuw”). Some graffiti refer to elections in Dutch politics (“STEM VERDONK! VOOR NOG MEER DODE ASIELZOEKERS”, “STEM HALSEMA! VOOR MEER MENSELIJKHEID” and “Pim for president”). A subtle pun pokes fun of the 2008 presidential elections in the United States: “OSAMA 4 president”. One also finds comments on the Arab–Israeli conflict (“Free Palestine”, “ISRAEL = TERROR STATE”) and anti-Bush/America statements (“Bush lied. People died” and “Bush: When love fails, kill each other”).

- *Presence*: Allen Read already suggested that one of the principal reasons for writing graffiti might be ‘the well-known human yearning to leave a record of one’s presence or one’s existence’ (1935, 17). The most common way to ‘leave a record of one’s presence’ takes the form of a simple formula ‘X was here’. The most well-known representative of this form of graffiti is, without a shadow of a doubt, James J. Kilroy, who, during the Second World War, wrote the famous line ‘Kilroy was here’ on every single armament he inspected for an American steel company (Skilling 1963). Graffitiists in the Kilroy tradition have been identified as ‘Cartesians’ following the simple maxim: ‘I write, therefore, I am’ (Hougan 1972). Examples in the LB corpus include: “J.H. Frima was here!”, “Olivier was hier” and “Ik was hier en jij?” More extensive ways to mark one’s presence entail: “Lana en Meike hebben hier vandaag zeer goed geleerd!!!”, or more critical responses such as: “We zijn allemaal stom dat we hier zitten en niet ergens anders”.

- *Quotes*: The LB corpus contains several direct quotes, and a fair amount of references to well-known statements - some in their original language, others in Dutch translation - from literati, philosophers, musicians, poets, and scientists. Some of these quotations seem to be directly related to the academic subjects of the students who inhabited the LB (e.g. “Historia magistra vitae est” from Cicero’s *De Oratore*). Other texts provide parodic allusions to quotations of famous people: “Als ik niet scoor, scoor ik eigenlijk wel - Johèn Crojff”.

- *Religion*: Although religion is not the most debated topic in the LB corpus, references to it definitely spark off intense discussions. The “God is dead/Nietzsche is dead” text, for instance, generated a lengthy polemic to which both Christians and atheists contributed. Some tried to provide extensive pieces of evidence in favour of the existence of God (“Ooit van een dode God gehoord? Denk ff na

een echte God kan niet doodgaan (tenzij Hij weer opstaat natuurlijk). Man er zijn overtuigendere bewijzen voor Jezus opstanding dan voor het bestaan hebben van vele historische figuren als keizers enzo..”), while others limited their responses to fiery statements (“EUROPA’S GROOTSTE NARCOTICA: ALCOHOL EN CHRISTENDOM” and “Van de Bijbel krijg je zieke nachtmerries”). The Christians-versus-atheists polemics also took a visual form as ‘atheists’ scribbled drawings of “Darwin’s Ichtus-vis”, a parody of the Christian Ichthys symbol equipped with four legs, on the wall. Christians, in their turn, made a drawing of the Annunciation captioned with “Blijde boodschap”. Further discussion of such textual and visual debates about the existence of God remains beyond the scope of this essay. I am convinced, though, that they – and the same goes for political graffiti – provide an interesting point of departure for further research.

- *School*: Dombrowski’s ‘school’ entry features graffiti referring to ‘students’ feelings about the institution, and/or school in general’ (2011, 11). I did not find a single text or drawing in the LB corpus which can be grouped in this category.

- *Self*: Personal statements beginning with the pronoun ‘I’ include signs of existentialism (“Ik ben”), stereotypical traits of being a student (“Ik studeer niet; ik ben student”), confessions (“Ik ben een jongen van 12 en heb op mijn ene bal meer haar dan op mijn andere ik”), sexual outpourings (“Ik wordt echt geil van al die kontjes hier op de bieb”), and expressions of pride about certain identities (“Ik ben een KNORR en ik ben er trots op”).

- *Sex*: In quantitative studies of student graffiti and latrinalia, ‘sex’ or ‘erotic’ are often the largest categories (Dombrowski 2011, 11). It is exactly for this reason, as I pointed out above, that sexologists like Alfred Kinsey visited lavatories for academic purposes. Similarly, the LB corpus contains a great many graffiti – both texts and drawings – which are sexual in content. A common form of sexual graffiti are, referring to Laud Humphreys’ (1971) controversial study of impersonal sex in public places, so called ‘tearoom trade graffiti’, that is, advertisements ‘which attempt to arrange a sexual contact’ (Gonos et al 1976, 43). Examples from the LB corpus include: “Leuke mannen bellen 06-72828844”, “Ik ben Marloes bel me 0640311058” and “TONGEN? 06-18191720”. Another form of sexual graffiti in the attic of Drift 31 consists of shabby rhymes: “Wie de poes niet scheert is de wip niet weerd” and “Tussen Drift en Wittevrouwen heb ik nooit mijn kennis kunnen ontvouwen, want ik zie op elke pagina jouw opengesperde vagina”. Less creative texts include random expressions of sexual excitement (“Ik wil neuken!”, “Ik ben nat zo geil”). I also found over thirty drawings of penises and a few visual representations of the objectified naked female body. In Part Two, I shall devote some attention to phallic graffiti.

- *Social issues*: ‘Social issues’ is a very broad and hopelessly vague category. In Dombrowski’s taxonomy it includes statements concerning sexuality, race, and the economy. I already discussed anti-capitalist and sexual graffiti above. I found two longer chain responses that centred around racial issues, to which I shall return at length in Part Two.

Finally, Dombrowski found multiple graffiti ‘that comment on, or somehow mark, the passage of time’ (2011, 12). I did not encounter any example of this category in the graffiti from the attic of Drift 31. Interestingly, though, the LB corpus contained quite a large amount of graffiti dealing with ‘sport’ (most often football), which is not a distinct rubric in Dombrowski’s taxonomy. In addition, long standing social categories like ‘race’, ‘gender’, and ‘class’ could also be separate categories in regard to the LB corpus. I will deal with these concepts below.

In addition, in this section I have analysed the LB’s graffiti in accordance with techniques of interpretation (e.g. analysis of form, discursive patterns and content) which are common in qualitative social science research on graffiti. As such, this section provides a casestudy which I can juxtapose to and compare with the new materialist interpretation of graffiti in Part Two. In the rest of this chapter, I will set forth a new materialist cartography to analyse student graffiti historically. In order to do so, I shall first discuss in more detail some of the models which other scholars, both in the social sciences and the humanities, have used to interpret graffiti. This will lead, in due course, to a series of questions that I have tactically avoided so far. The most important of these are: What exactly *are* graffiti? And where are the historians? If social scientists have been mad about graffiti, surely some historians must have been using it as a source?

2.3. Graffiti Research

Although I have naively, but consciously, used the term throughout this chapter, it is reasonably fair to say that there is no such thing as ‘graffiti’. There are only various writing practices, and all writing practices are historically and culturally specific. This matters because a great many scholars have uncritically adopted the term and used it to generalize about and compare practices which have little or nothing to do with one another. Although we call both practices ‘graffiti’, the spray painted tags and murals we find today in our streets, for instance, are not comparable to latrinalia without qualification. Spray paint graffiti – the colourful pieces and artistic tags in urban public space - are a relatively recent phenomenon and only exist since the 1970s (Gomez 1993). The practice is part of the hip hop subculture with its own distinct customs, objectives and rules (Powers 1996). The prime motivator behind ‘hip hop graffiti’ or ‘graffiti art’, as this form is often called, is the pursuit of ‘fame and respect’ (Macdonald 2001, 65). Graffiti ‘writers’, furthermore, often participate in deviant subcultures and the art world (Lachmann 1988). Toilet graffiti, on the other hand, as we have seen above, already existed in the 1920s and even before. Unlike hip hop graffiti, latrinalia consist of texts and drawings,

not single nicknames. They are written with biro and markers in private spaces, not with aerosol paint on trains, subways or other public properties.

The point I want to make through this example is a double one. Firstly, 'graffiti' means different things in different studies. The term is an umbrella referring to a wide range of practices. Conceptual clarity, therefore, is in order, and I shall devote the first part of this section to definition and types. Secondly, and related to the first point, approaches developed to study, say, spray paint graffiti are not necessarily applicable to other types of graffiti. Lisa Gottlieb's (2008) art theoretical system to analyse and classify the 'iconology' of hip hop graffiti, for instance, does not make any sense in the case of latrinalia and student graffiti. Contextualisation is of vital importance and it is here that the discipline of history provides useful tools.

So, have historians bothered to look at graffiti at all? Unlike the social sciences, historical research on graffiti has been meagre. Only a small group of classical scholars, and early modern (art)historians, have been, often from sheer necessity in the absence of written sources, interested in wall writings and other inscriptions. Two historiographical traditions dominate the field. Firstly, following Raphael Garucci's influential *Graffiti de Pompei* (1856) archaeologists and classical historians have collected graffiti from the ancient world, predominantly from Pompeii and Herculaneum, where an abundance of inscriptions have been preserved. Recently, however, the corpus has been supplemented with texts and images from other locations. In a critical volume, edited by Jennifer Baird and Claire Taylor (2010), classicists from different disciplinary backgrounds, who draw from state of the art approaches in social and cultural theory, rethink the 'Pompeian scholarship on graffiti' (2010, 1). Unlike many of their predecessors, Baird and Taylor warn against simple analogies between ancient and modern graffiti. They make a plea for the importance of contextualisation: 'we must acknowledge that graffiti-writing was configured differently within different communities' (2010, 16). The contributors to the volume analyse graffiti not only in their temporal, spatial and cultural context, but also pay attention to 'context within broader understandings of both the practice and materiality of writing and of literacy and orality in the ancient world' (2010, 7).

Another stream of graffiti research in the study of history came through George Gordon Coulton's *Art and the Reformation* (1928) and Violet Pritchard's *English Medieval Graffiti* (1967). Both scholars provided catalogues with inscriptions from medieval and early modern churches and private dwellings, but did not theorise about methods to interpret the material. Or, as one reviewer remarked about Pritchard's book: 'There are good illustrations, but many readers will find themselves lost in the somewhat automatic, "encyclopedic" ticking off of churches and their graffiti' (Philips 1969, 263). More systematic attempts to interpret early modern graffiti have been made by Juliet Fleming (2001) in a compelling book about a wide variety of writing practices in early modern England. Drawing, among others, on the work of French poststructuralists like Derrida, Foucault and Jacques Lacan, Fleming argues that writing texts and drawing images on walls, both in public space and in domestic environments, was a widely accepted habit during the Renaissance. Indeed, writing

graffiti was not yet a distinct, unlawful or dubious activity. In early modern England, Fleming states, 'there is no difference between painting and writing; no difference, again, between writing on paper, a wall, copper, wood, a body or an axe; and no difference, finally, between writing and other visual patterns' (2001, 25). People used the walls of their own houses, or pews in the church, as 'notice boards' or 'memory aids', and such practices were perfectly legitimate. In late modern societies, on the other hand, writing graffiti is considered an illegal activity. Caretaker Paul van der Lugt, for instance, who looked after Drift 31 and its attic, was far from happy with the student scribbles in the LB. When I interviewed him in 2009 he said: 'If I ever catch someone writing graffiti, I will call the police and let him or her pay for the damage, just to make an example of it' (quoted in Schouwenburg et al 2009, 22).

Historical studies of graffiti, more specifically of *writing practices* in classical antiquity and the Renaissance, demonstrate - and this is, I think, where historians can contribute in a unique way to the scholarship on contemporary graffiti that has been, hitherto, dominated by social scientists - that contextualisation matters. Early modern graffiti from England, for example, differ fundamentally from modern graffiti, and, more importantly, modern graffiti practices themselves are far from homogeneous. The point to note here is that writing practices we now call 'graffiti' take different forms in different times, places and (sub)cultures. Social scientists missed this important insight and naively used student graffiti to generalize about human behaviour, everyday language, and social events in general. The texts and images they collected in toilets and libraries of their own universities, however, belonged to a very specific context: that of student culture. They were written by students for students, and, consequently, are barometers of - and I recall Friedman's words here - 'the mental world of students' and of the various ways in which students 'attempt to find and create meaning in their everyday lives'. For this very reason, the social scientist's graffiti corpus is an exceptionally valuable source to university historians. The question is whether university historians can draw on the same methods that social scientists developed to interpret this corpus. First, though, we need to clarify exactly to which *types* of graffiti these methods have been applied. In order to do so, I shall quickly elaborate on contexts.

Every single graffito is uniquely situated in multiple contexts. Firstly, there is a *temporal context*. It matters, as I indicated above, if a text or drawing was scribbled in 1500, AD 70, or 1968. Secondly, the *spatial context*. In social scientific literatures a generally accepted distinction exists between 'public' and 'private' graffiti (Schwartz and Dovidio 1984). Private graffiti, like latrinalia, are found indoors, while public graffiti, like spray can art, are written in public spaces. Student and prison graffiti - the latter consists of scribbles in penal institutions - are difficult to classify because they are neither located in strictly private nor strictly public spaces. Both are, however, clearly intended for a specific audience, i.e. students and prisoners. Toilet graffiti, on the other hand, are indeed written in private circumstances, but, especially in the case of public restrooms, address a broad audience. It is therefore important to consider a third context, that of the author and the subculture in which s/he

takes part. The *authorial context*, then, determines the social group to which a graffitist belongs. Notable social groups that are involved in the writing of graffiti are, next to students and inmates, gang members, street artists, political activists, and ‘writers’, as members of the hip hop graffiti subculture call themselves (Brighenti 2010). Unexpected groups include civil servants, who produce ‘official graffiti’, that is, traffic and warning signs, and other symbolic ‘instances of government at a distance’ (Hermer and Hunt 1996), and adolescent girls, who, as an ethnologist in the 1970s discovered, often scribbled texts and drawings – or ‘postal graffiti’ - on envelopes (Gelman 1978). Finally, every graffito is also part of a *textual and material context*. Individual graffiti relate to the surface on which the text or drawing is scribbled (e.g. tree, subway, toilet door), to a set of writing tools (e.g. aerosol can, marker, lipstick, knife), and often to other graffiti, as I demonstrated in the case of response chains in student graffiti above.

If one takes these different contexts into consideration, it becomes clear that the term ‘graffiti’ refers to a wide range of different practices. In the case of (late)modern graffiti alone it would already be possible, without being exhaustive, to discern the following:

- Toilet graffiti or ‘latrinalia’
- Student graffiti
- Prison graffiti
- Personal graffiti (e.g. tattoos)
- Postal graffiti
- Gang graffiti
- Hip hop graffiti, graffiti art or tagging
- Street art (e.g. stencils, stickers, posters)
- Political or protest graffiti (e.g. murals in Northern Ireland)
- Tree graffiti
- Corporate or commercial graffiti (e.g. buttons, book covers)
- Official graffiti

This essay is concerned with student graffiti and a particular type of latrinalia (i.e. student toilet graffiti). What methods, then, did scholars from the social sciences, and related disciplines, adopt to interpret these practices? Three distinct methods have dominated the scholarship on student/toilet graffiti since the graffiti mania in the social sciences broke loose in the late 1960s. First, psychologists and some folklorists, who dominated the debates during the 1970s and 1980s, used *qualitative content analysis*. Before the era of the computer, this method was a time-consuming but rigid process. Researchers started by formulating a hypotheses. Following Kinsey’s (1953) pioneering study this could be, for instance, ‘men write more graffiti than women, and men’s graffiti is predominantly erotic in nature’. Next they selected a couple of toilets or study booths for data collecting. Graffiti were

photographed or recorded into notebooks. Back in the office, researchers transcribed individual texts on index cards according to pre-determined content categories. In some cases the categorization system depended on the hypothesis, in others 'independent judges' were asked to establish categories (e.g. Wales and Brewer 1976). Researchers then performed statistical analysis, often in the form of percentages and chi squares. The results were presented in tables, statistical symbols, or mathematical language. Thus, following this process, researchers in the social sciences transformed student graffiti from texts and drawings in toilets and study booths into what Burno Latour (1979) would call 'inscription devices'. One example from a paper by Solomon and Yager (1975) may suffice:

The mean F Scale score of the Low graffiti writers ($\bar{X} = 88.0$) was significantly lower than that of the High graffiti writers ($\bar{X} = 100.87$; $t = 2.55$, 80 *df*, $p < .02$, two-tailed).

Quantitative content analysis is not without its limitations. Indeed, the idea that quantitative data reflect the truth has been seriously troubled during three decades of 'postmodern' critique. One of the problems of this method is that it can only give a random indication at a given moment in time. Student/toilet graffiti are a variable medium; texts and content are constantly changing. When one returns to exactly the same toilet a month after the initial analysis, the ratios between content categories will be different. This would not create a problem if the results are treated as unique cases. Social scientists, though, have used their statistical results to generalize about human behavior in general (e.g. 'men write more graffiti than women'). When Kinsey's study was replicated in some restrooms at a university in Chicago, his hypothesis was gloriously confirmed (Sechrest and Flores, 1969). Data from a university in a 'conservative Western city' and from the University of Massachusetts, however, 'proved' that women wrote more graffiti than men (Wales and Brewer 1976; Bates and Martin 1980). Such results only show that there was more graffiti in a certain female restroom in comparison with a certain male toilet at a certain university at a given moment in time. It might all have been different if the data collecting had happened a week later, as graffiti enthusiasts, who frequently visit toilets in university buildings, know well. It becomes really embarrassing when such results are used for sexist generalizations. John Bates, who found that, according to his predetermined content categories, women write less humorous graffiti than men, stated in an interview that 'women might be viewed as generally hostile, sexually confused and humorless individuals, far less able than men to cope with stresses common to the human condition' (quoted in Greenberg 1979, 268). Content analysis of student/toilet graffiti, quantitative or not, can be helpful to give a general indication of a particular corpus' content. The inbuilt generalizations, and positivistic pretensions of qualitative content analysis, however, did graffiti research more harm than good.

Second, other folklorists used *formal analysis* to describe certain types of graffiti. In this case, not the content but the form provided the object of study. I already discussed 'sequential parody

graffiti' (Longenecker 1977) at some length above. Third, from the 1980s onwards *linguistic approaches* became more dominant. In the 1970s, Frank D'Angelo (1974) had already elaborated on the 'rhetorical aspects' and 'figures of style' in public toilet graffiti. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed semiotic analyses of the different levels of meaning of student/toilet graffiti (Bruner and Kelso 1980) and discourse analyses of the interactional structures between texts (Rodriguez and Robin 1999; Whiting and Veronika 2007). Although formal and linguistic methods illustrate the communicative aspects and chain characteristics of student/toilet graffiti, they are, like quantitative content analysis, not without limitations. All three methods, different as they may look, focus on the content/text of graffiti. Pictures, drawings, symbols, in short, all non-textual representations, are neglected. John Bates, for instance, stated that 'picture graffiti were excluded to increase the reliability of content categorization' (quoted in Greenberg 1979). For folklorists and linguists, who did not knock student/toilet graffiti into random categories, drawings were less interesting because they focused on the 'language' of graffiti. In similar vein, all three methods neglect the materiality of graffiti. What is needed, therefore, is a method that pays attention to the different aspects of student/toilet graffiti, from content, form and language, to visual and material characteristics, and to the ways in which these are related. Drawing on my new materialist framework, I will propose such a method in the next, and final, section of this chapter.

2.4 A New Materialist Cartography

Content, formal and linguistic analyses of student/toilet graffiti all isolate single texts or chains of texts, which are transcribed on index cards and taken to offices, computer rooms or other locations for further interpretation. A new materialist approach, on the other hand, stays in the toilets and study booths where all the action takes place. It is, like cultural/linguistic turn theorists like Michel de Certeau (1988) interested in *practices and doings* through which student/toilet graffiti are produced. It shifts the research focus from closed controversies to *graffiti in the making*. A new materialist approach, however, not only looks at graffiti as a 'rhetorical practices', rather, it focuses on both semiotic *as well as* material aspects of wall writing. Semiotic because texts, drawings and symbols communicate different layers of meaning. Material because language and meaning are always constructed and mediated through material means (e.g. writings tools, and a physical surface on which graffiti are scribbled). Material also because a living human body is involved in the production of graffiti. It, therefore, provides tools to map all different human and nonhuman actors involved and investigates how they relate to each other.

Graffiti form an assemblage, a rhizome, or a network of relations, with writing tools, physical surface, writers and researcher. This network *is* graffiti. Importantly, different actors are involved in different practices. Thus, one graffiti may assemble a white painted plasterboard wall, a biro and a fraternity student, while another consists of a wooden toilet door, a waterproof marker and two

students who are not involved in a student union at all. Also, different boundaries, meanings, and identities are differently produced in different student/toilet graffiti practices. Take for instance a response chain graffiti that I found on one of the doors in a men's restroom in the Marinus Ruppertgebouw at the Uithof:

- (a) FUCK CORPSBALLEN
- (b) ALLEMAAL KNORREN! (drawing of a pig/knor-symbol)
- (c) Korps = zielige homo's
- (d) Jaloerse knor
- (e) Blijf jij corps met een K schrijven, dan wordt ik in die tijd directeur van de Rabob**amk**
- (f) Rabob**ank**??
- (g) Jongens denken jullie aan je spelling? (een bezorgde docent)

The materialsemiotic practice in which this student/toilet graffiti chain is produced consists of a network of multiple actors, including a response chain of texts and images, different students clearly belonging to different social groups, writing tools, physical surface, space, time, and a researcher who encountered the graffiti and used it as an example in his MA thesis. In what rests of this chapter, I will briefly elaborate on each of these actors.

The graffiti proper consists of a response chain involving texts and a drawing. The polemic starts with a clear statement (a) which invites multiple responses and counter statements. Suddenly, in the heat of the discussion, in which non-corps students (a) (c) and corps students (b) (d) call each other all sorts of names, the response chain takes a surprising turn. A corps student (e) points out that *knor* (c) wrote *corps* with a 'k' instead of a 'c'. To authorize his claim, he – the polemic takes place in a male restroom – proudly appeals to the stereotyped idea that fraternity students, gentlemen in the making who know the rules (*knor* can be read as an acronym for *kent niet onze regels* [does not know our rules/traditions/customs]), will acquire important positions in the future, because of their background. In so doing, however, he commits – consciously or unconsciously - multiple spelling mistakes himself (e.g. Rabob**amk** instead of Rabobank and *wordt ik*). After two spelling errors in a row, a grammar Nazi feels the need to interfere (g). He does not contribute to the polemic by taking sides with either the *corpsballen* or the *knorren*, but only points at linguistic blunders. With this move, he abruptly breaks off the discussion.

In this wall polemic, words and drawings are clearly actors, they make others do things. When a student enters the lavatory, and locks the door behind him, there are no other human actors present. It is graffiti that make him act, that influence his actions. Like John Austin's (1962) speech acts, student/toilet graffiti are *performative*. The difference with Austin's 'words that do things', however, is that the performativity of graffiti does not take place directly at the moment of utterance. The life expectancy of graffiti lasts longer; it sometimes stays on a (toilet) wall for years and makes different

actors do different things. Contrary to human speech, moreover, which is transmitted through the lungs and vocal tract, student/toilet graffiti are mediated through moving human hands, writing tools and a physical surface. The first statement and responses (a) until (d) are scribbled with blue biro on bare wooden skirting-board next to the toilet door. The next responses are written on the grey painted surface of the toilet door itself with a black permanent marker (e), a blue biro (f), and a red permanent marker (g). It matters what type of writing tool, including the colour of the paint/ink, is used. Permanent markers generate bold letters that are clearly visible. Similarly, big red or black capitals are immediately noticeable, and invite more responses than obscure scribbles with pencil. In many instances, the medium *is* the message. Writing tools and physical surface are actors – or *actants* as nonhuman actors are usually called (Latour 1999) – too. They resist and shape the actions of the graffitist. Writing with a biro, for instance, on a surface of wood is no easy task, as wooden skirting, with all its rough edges, resists stubbornly. The grey painted toilet door, with its smooth surface, on the other hand, acts as an ally. And so does the black permanent marker, until its ink dries out and it becomes an opponent as well. In addition, texts and drawings are actors because they change shape, they are *fluid* so to speak (De Laet and Mol 2000). The chain extends as graffiti invite responses, some texts and drawings are crossed out, others become invisible because the surface swallows the ink. Student/toilet graffiti, then, do not sit still. And the same goes for the physical surface and space on/in which the graffiti are scribbled.

The students who, in interaction and intra-action with writing tools and physical surface, write the graffiti are driven by biocultural forces. In the example, students clearly represent two distinct social groups: fraternity members (*corpsballen*) and non-union students (*knorren*). The grammar Nazi provides a third identity category. Each social group carries its own histories of shared customs, rituals, conventions, mores. These narratives are enacted into being in the practice of writing student/toilet graffiti. In addition, the graffitists draw on a broader cultural repertoire of late modern, Western, capitalist society. Fraternity student (e), for example, identifies and affirms capitalism as he expresses his socially fuelled future ideal of working at the Rabobank. Next to cultural drives, provided by historically and culturally situated subcultures and social groups, students are biologically constituted. Their doings are driven by bodily experience, emotions, and evolutionary and unconscious drives. Quite a prosaic example of such bodily drives is the ‘call of nature’ which drove the students to the lavatories in the first place. Similarly, (graffiti) writing itself is not solely a cultural activity; it also fulfils psychological and biological needs to express oneself. All these factors need to be taken into account of one wants to understand the practice of writing student/toilet graffiti. And so needs the physical space in which the graffiti are scribbled. Space may act as an actor in the sense that it actively influences and alters human behavior. People, for instance, behave differently in the solitude of a private restroom than in the public space they share with others. Like the students, the toilet inherits its own history, the building history of the Uithof, for instance, which symbolizes the urge for expansion of Utrecht University in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Finally, the researcher. As soon as the researcher interferes by copying graffiti, and translates them to new locations (e.g. digicam, laptop, MA thesis), s/he becomes part of the network of relations. Without me, or any researcher, for example, there would not be such a thing as 'student graffiti'. Researchers, after all, collect, interpret, order and label graffiti. In doing so, they not only describe realities, they actively *produce* them as well. This has profound ethical implications: if scholars actively enact realities into being, then realities can be unmade and reproduced in different fashion. By writing this essay, in other words, I interfere in the world, and in doing so I make a difference. The question is: what kind of difference do I want to make? Do I want to reaffirm and reenact the status quo, or am I going to create diffraction patterns?

In sum: different actors or actants (nonhuman actors) are intra-actively involved in the practice of graffiti writing. Together they form a complex web of relations, and this web is student/toilet graffiti. Importantly, in practice these actors are no distinct phenomena: each is embedded in others. In Part Two, I will test my proposed cartography to map student graffiti in the making via a series of empirical casestudies. I shall provide a historical travelogue of different practices and locations in which student culture at Utrecht University is being enacted.

Part Two: A Historical Travelogue through Utrecht's Student World

The practice of history is a performative pursuit: historians bring realities of the past into being. Contrary to postmodernists, who argue that there are no decisive criteria to determine which pasts are preferable, new materialists state that some worlds *are* better than others, and that it is of vital importance to enact these better realities. In Part Two of this essay, therefore, I am going to take sides with new materialist posthuman feminism(s) (Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Coole and Frost 2010; Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012). This is both an epistemological and an ethical choice, and this choice *matters* for two reasons. In the first place, the picture of the world as chaotic, contradicting, nonlinear, and unpredictable which new materialists draw, in short, a reality that corresponds to recent insights from both critical cultural theory and the natural sciences, brings us closer to reality than (post)modern historians' oversimplified, dualist and pre-ordered narratives about the past. Secondly, in the light of the environmental crisis it is crucial to take nature and nonhumans seriously. If (cultural) historians want to make a difference in the world, if they want to conduct research which is relevant in the twenty-first century, they need to rethink their concepts of 'culture' and 'the subject'. New materialism(s) provide tools to write much-needed posthuman stories.

The aim of Part Two, then, is to produce diffraction patterns, to interfere in 'conventional notions of history' (Munslow 2010), and to take 'responsibility for an imagined elsewhere that we may yet learn to see and build here' (Haraway 1992, 295). In the context of this essay, however, this exercise also serves a theoretical goal. I will write new materialist university history in order to test its relevance to the study of history. What follows are four case-studies of practices and locations in which student culture at Utrecht University is being produced. Throughout these case studies, I shall transversally/diffractively read 'conventional' historians (i.e. Pieter Caljé in chapter I), or paradigms from neighbouring disciplines (postsubcultural studies in chapter II), or theories that shaped the cultural/linguistic turns (Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* in chapter III, the critical semiology of Roland Barthes in chapter IV) through new materialist ideas in order to investigate and show what is 'new' about the latter.

Following Donna Haraway (1992, 1997), Part Two takes the form of a 'mapping exercise and travelogue', that starts necessarily 'in the middle, between things' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 25). There are no beginnings and no ends in a chaotic, unpredictable and ever-changing world. I will, therefore, 'walk and tell stories' about different locations and practices in which Utrecht's student culture is enacted into being. Rather than looking for illustrative representatives of totalizing cultural regimes, as Pieter Caljé (2006) does with his 'pre modern' and 'modern' forms of student culture (on which I will elaborate below), I shall treat each case I encounter as unique. Drawing on John Law and Annemarie Mol (2002), my aim is to 'ask questions about difference and similarity, about what alters in moving from one place to another' (2002, 16). In accordance with the complex and contradictory reality that I am trying to invoke, the four casestudies do not necessarily form a coherent story and are

not organised according to a linear script. As a result, there is no particular way to proceed: the reader may start with either one of them. This does not mean, however, that the chapters which follow are entirely chaotic and unpredictable. Different 'lines of flight' or entanglements of ideas and theorists run through all four chapters.

I. Rapier Fights and Pen Wars: On the ‘Birth’ of Student Graffiti

In the early evening of 1 June 1806, a group of ten students loudly strolled down the Maliebaan, the former paille-maille court to the east of Utrecht (’t Hart 1995). In the early nineteenth-century, the Maliebaan, although still enclosed by fences and encircled by linden trees, served as a beloved esplanade where Utrecht’s burghers went for a gentle walk along the broad unmetalled avenue. The time when the local upper class played paille-maille on the court together with the students was definitively over (Van de Graft 1967). The Maliebaan, however, still attracted students as the boisterous visit of the group of ten suggests. The youngsters in question caused a lot of trouble that particular evening. They were engaged in a violent walking practice, causing havoc in an otherwise tranquil place. The students first encountered a seventeen year-old boy, who, because he watched them passing by, suffered a punch on his chest: ‘Waar kijk je na?’, one of the students shouted, ‘Je mag geen studenten na zien’ (‘What are you looking at? You are not allowed to look at students’, quoted in ’t Hart 1995, 124). Then the students violently bumped into two burghers, Jan Willekes and Machiel van Zutphen, who were enjoying their evening stroll. When Willekes indignantly remarked: ‘Ik denk dat de weg voor mij zoo goed is als voor de Heeren’ (‘I believe the road belongs to me as much as it belongs to you gentlemen’, quoted in ’t Hart 1995, 124), he and his companion received a terrible beating. Machiel suffered a powerful blow on his head, and a passer-by, who tried to interfere, endured the same brutal treatment, accompanied by a hail of curses.

When the students arrived at Het Boompje, a local tavern at the far end of the Maliebaan (near the current Oorspongpark), they assaulted an unknown female. Customers at the inn hastened to help her, which resulted in a mass brawl. The students were no match for the burghers at the tavern, who exceeded them in age, and tasted defeat. One student, however, rushed to the nearby house of a gardener, took an iron spade, and tried to attack his opponents in the inn. After the gardener reclaimed his shovel the students took flight. Later that evening, though, around midnight, an even bigger group of students returned to the scene to smash the poor gardener’s windows. The students, who carried rapiers and sabres with which they wildly bashed around, generated a deafening noise, demolished the garden fence and knocked violently on the gardener’s door. They shouted that they represented the city’s court of justice and came for an investigation. The gardener’s wife peered out of the upper window, started screaming and loudly banged on a tin box, until the students left. Two hours later, the group shamelessly returned to the tavern to slosh themselves on brandy. The innkeeper was told that he had chosen wisely earlier that evening not to involve himself in the brawl.

Almost two centuries later, somewhere around 2000, a corps student wrote a satirical verse about non-corps students, or *knorren*, on the wall of one of the study booths in the Utrecht University’s *Letterenbibliotheek*:

Ik heb een kamer op de IBB

En een zwart-wit tv (> en een snor)
Ik ben een echte vent
Niet zomaar een student
Ik ben een KNOR!

On the same wall, next to this jingle, another student responded with an anti-corps statement:

USC-ers zijn dik, lelijk, vadsig, ze stinken, hebben geen conditie, kunnen niet sexen, impotent, hebben geen reet te melden, dom, kunnen alleen maar drinken en blowen

This statement, in turn, invited two corps students to take up their pens. One of them (b) appealed to the long and rich history of his union by enacting and applauding the year in which USC was founded:

- (a) Wij kunnen tenminste iets
- (b) en dat sinds 1816 'vo

What we have, then, are two materialsemiotic practices in which boundaries, temporalities and identities are intra-actively produced. The agencies which are involved in each practice, however, differ significantly. The first consists of a group of ten students, all belonging to the same rag club (*ontgroensenaat*) carrying rapiers and violently attacking burghers in public space. The second practice, on the other hand, assembles corps students as well as *knorren*, and takes place within the private space of the LB. The first practice, furthermore, consists of a violent charivari ritual through which students define themselves against burghers, while the latter draws on seemingly playful parody through which corps students and non-corps students show how they differ from one another. Rapiers, in short, have been exchanged for pens, while *knorren* took the place of burghers.

One could argue that these practices each represent a different cultural 'regime', and that somewhere in between a profound transformation occurred that redistributed the entire organisation and *mentalité* of the student world.²⁵ This is indeed what university historians have tried to demonstrate. Pieter Caljé (2006), for example, detects a 'decisive shift' around 1815, when modern or

²⁵ Caljé's organising principle, in which the culture of a certain group forms a homogeneous whole or regime which is suddenly replaced through a cultural revolution by a new regime, is a well-trying formula in cultural historical research. Such an approach is based on the structuralist conviction that cultures are bind together by a 'deep structure', a set of features which everyone consciously or unconsciously shares. In spite of its totalizing claims, this particular style of doing cultural history was, among others through the work of Michel Foucault, adopted by many new cultural historians. Famous examples include Foucault's histories of madness (1965), human sciences (1973) and punishment (1977), which all centre around two shifts, one from the 'Renaissance' to the 'Classical Age', the other from the 'Classical Age' to the 'Modern age'. A much-praised recent example includes Dror Wahrman's (2004) *The Making of the Modern Self*, in which he finds a 'radical change' in the history of the self, a transformation from an 'ancien regime of identity' to a 'modern regime of identity'. In this essay, as will become clear, I treat each practice as unique practices, rather than trying to knock them into 'cultural regimes'.

middle-class forms of student culture replaced their premodern or aristocratic counterparts. In Caljé's Ancien Régime, a student identified as *civis academicus*, an inhabitant of the academy, subjected to academic laws and exemptions. He joined a student nation, a fellowship of students from the same region, or, at the end of the 18th-century, after city councils in the low countries and elsewhere prohibited nations because of continuous violence, a rag senate, i.e. *collegia* of older students who ritually initiated freshers in the student world. Students from competing nations and rag clubs defended the honour of their unions through 'ritual conflicts', which often resulted in lethal duels or mass brawls. At the same time, students, as a youth (sub)cultural group, defined themselves vis-à-vis the academic senate and the local citizenry. Fights between students and civic guards, harassment of women in public space, and violence against burghers belonged to the order of the day. Rag senates, according to Caljé, should be seen as a continuation of the nations, without the latter's particularism (2006, 339). Real transformations only occurred after 1815, when in Groningen and Utrecht (in 1816) competing *collegia* merged into one single student union.

Caljé's modern forms of student culture, which took shape after 1815, were manifestly middle-class (*burgerlijk*) in nature. Influenced by Kantian ideas about good citizenship and notions of romantic sentimentalism, students forged and embraced 'new identities' for themselves as future burghers and valuable members of the community. Freshly constituted student unions pursued multiple goals: they tried to achieve and preserve harmony and unanimity among students, they regulated ragging practices, and they attempted to civilize and prepare students for future leading positions in society (2006, 356-357). The merging of competing rag senates into one coordinating student union, coupled with new cultural forms and identities, started a threefold process which would determine Dutch student culture as we know it today. In the first place, the corpora regulated and controlled all forms of public violence which had characterized student life for decades. Drawing on Norbert Elias' civilizing process, Caljé detects a 'transformation from *Fremdzwang* to *Selbstzwang*' (2006, 359). As a result, a new breed of self-controlled and emphatic students emerged, who distanced themselves from aristocratic codes of honour and let down their rapiers. Secondly, and paradoxically, the students, who followed middle-class ideals, at the same time isolated themselves from civilian life. A new student ideology (*studentenideologie*) gained prominence, which contained the idea that students exceeded burghers in every way imaginable (Caljé 2006, 360; Otterspeer 1992, 514-519). This feeling of superiority became evident in epithets to designate burghers (e.g. 'filistijnen', 'ploerten' or 'rundvee'). Student-like behaviour, mores and other symbolic practices (e.g. student songs) helped to construct an 'esprit de corps' and defined students against the adult world and other youth groups. The unanimity which was epitomised in 'esprit de corps', however, remained a mythical beau ideal. During the nineteenth-century different fractions of students with conflicting ideas opposed one another. What started with pub students (*studentikozen*) versus *Bildung* students (*brave Hendrikken*) in the 1830s, and aristocrats versus democrats in the 1840s (2006, 391-392, 424), culminated in a schism which irreparably disrupted the student world. The third process which

characterizes the modern regime of student culture consisted of elite formation within the existing corpora accompanied by mechanisms of exclusion and ultimately the creation of non-corporal student unions. From 1876 onwards more and more students from lower social backgrounds came to the university. Many of them lacked the cultural and economic capital to join the student corps. Female students, on the other hand, were excluded because corps students refused to abandon their masculine habits of binge drinking and intercourse with girls of easy virtue. These excluded groups founded their own unions, while, as a result, the corpora lost their exclusive rights in the student world.

Thus, according to Caljé, around 1815 a dramatic shift occurred which would herald a new era in the history of student culture in the Netherlands. Three processes in particular changed the behaviour of students: they became civilized and self-controlled, they isolated themselves from society at large, and, at the end of the century, they created competing unions based on different convictions about life. These three processes together, it might be argued, created the conditions in which corps students and non-corps students could fight their seemingly playful and parodic pen war in the LB. Following Caljé, it would be possible to interpret the practice of writing student graffiti as a civilized, self-controlled, and *studentikoze* form of identity formation. In the modern regime of student culture, students do not knock the brains of burghers out anymore, and they do not duel one another with rapiers. Instead, they are engaged in innocent rituals which take place within the confining walls of their own world.

Drawing on my new materialist framework, I will embrace Caljé's interpretation, discuss it critically but affirmatively, and supplement it in different ways. Firstly, Caljé puts the transformation from a premodern to a modern regime of student culture in a broad historical context. In doing so, he convincingly recalls the wider social and intellectual circumstances in which student identities could change. The *practices* through which students within each regime produced identities, and the various ways in which 'new' and 'old' identities have been performed, though, has given too little attention. How exactly are boundaries between students and burghers (premodern regime) and between students from different unions (modern regime) produced? What actors were involved in such practices? What, in short, matters in the practices which produce student identities and student culture? In this chapter, I shall travel along different locations and map certain practices through which student culture has been performed. In the chapter that follows, I will show how students in late modernity construct and reconstruct identities through graffiti writing practices in the LB. I shall argue, in due course, that Caljé's civilizing process in the history of student culture is problematic; the writing practices in the LB are far from innocent and civilized. Underlying premodern student violence against burghers lies a discourse of class justice, an unequal balance of power which puts the dominating class above the law. In (late) modern graffiti writing practices in the LB power relations are still unequally distributed. Ritual practices are only playful and civilized if all participants are treated equally. In the LB, though, as we shall see below, not everyone has the 'right' to speak. These practices are still violent, but in a much more subtle and covert way, which makes them look civilized and innocent on the surface.

The Practice of Student Culture

Let's return to the eighteenth-century. The students who violently opposed burghers in the Maliebaan were members of the *Senatus Veteranorum Glirium* ('the senate of old stagers'), a rag club, and predecessor of the current Utrechtsch Studenten Corps, which was founded in 1793. *Veteranus* referred to those students who had completed a full course with a professor, who, around that time, taught groups of students privately at his house (Vredenburg 1936). *Veterani*, or 'oude rotten' (old stagers), hierarchically exceeded the students who had yet to complete their first full class. They often formed rag senates in order to teach greens the mores of the student world. Carl Anton Wilhelm Grafen von Wedel, a student from Göttingen who moved to Utrecht in 1809, witnessed and underwent one of the initiation practices of the *Senatus Veteranorum Glirium*. In his diary (reprinted in Van Vredenburg 1914, 239-255), he described how his fellow students ignored him during lectures when he first arrived. The German von Wedel, on his part, felt superior to Utrecht's students because he had heard that they only fought with fists and not with rapiers. One day a fellow student who identified as 'Pedell des akademischen Senats' visited him in his room. The beadle asked Von Wedel on behalf of 'rector magnificus' Isaacq de Brauw and his assessors to present himself to the senate within half an hour. When Von Wedel arrived, De Brauw - who was one of the participants in the violent walk along the Maliebaan three years earlier - stated that the academic senate, the official governing body of Utrecht University, recognized and protected the authority of his *Senatus Veteranorum Glirium*, and that his *parium iudicium* enjoyed high prestige. He further explained that in the Netherlands freshly arrived students were called 'groentjes', and that they needed to take off their hats if they encountered already inaugurated students. Greens could sign a list to become members of the student body. They had to take an 'official' examination by the senate on Saturday evening in a building which was hired for the occasion while wearing a fool's cap with bells. If they failed to give the right answer to the senate's questions, the green would receive a blow with a wooden sword by a rag club member who was dressed as Hanswurst.

Von Wedel refused to take the degrading examination because he had already studied in Göttingen for two years. He nonetheless went to the initiation ceremony on Saturday evening, where the beadle of the rag senate led him through dusky rooms and up a stair to the door of an attic on which he knocked three times. A voice at the other side of the door uttered: 'Who knocks?', the beadle answered: 'A friend who is looking for wisdom', followed again by a response from the other side of the door: 'Open'. Then the door opened and Von Wedel looked into a brightly lit room, in which the senate, dressed in black robes with red lining, and wearing red lined hats and full-bottomed wigs, sat down at a table covered with red cloth. Their faces were painted to make them look old and dignified. The rector wore a fake red nose, muttonchop whiskers, and livery collar, while the secretary carried a swan quill behind his ear, and the beadle was dressed in a short black cloak and wore a short black wig. After a speech in Latin by the rector, Von Wedel received a certificate which admitted him to the

degree of ‘doctor’ in the liberal arts (*docter artium liberalium*). He was now qualified in three arts, all with corresponding privileges: the art and right to clasp girls in one’s arms, to drain bottles of wine, and to smash windows of burghers (who were described as *philstaeus phlegmaticus*). The latter, according to the certificate, was necessary to break through the smugness of the bourgeoisie. In another document, which is preserved at the Corpsmuseum, the privileges of the student are described as ‘fenestras iniiciendi, puellam persequendi, frigidus faciendi’, that is, smashing windows, chasing girls and legally knock someone off (Vredenburg 1936).



Figure 8: Seal of the Senatus Veteranorum Glirium

The degree certificate also contained the grand seal of the Senatus Veteranorum Glirium (see Figure 8). The thematic content of the seal is composed of two symbolic representations: in the background students cross swords with civic guards, while the picture in the forefront displays a mouse which outsmarts a mousetrap and eats cheese without being caught. The maxim at the top - ‘quo non nocet arripe’ (‘grab it without losing out’) – unites both representations: like the mouse grabbing cheese, students can safely fight guards, or play other tricks, without being caught. The allegory as a whole, moreover, corresponds to the student rights, the three *artes liberales*, which students are allowed to practice without suffering legal or adverse consequences. Interestingly, *glirium* in Senatus Veteranorum Glirium derives from *glis*, which is a species of mouse. Glis-glis, as this mouse species is called, or ‘relmuis’ in Dutch, are nocturnal animals which produce a lot of noise. Indeed, the Dutch prefix ‘rel’ derives from ‘rellen’ or ‘rullen’, which has been defined as ‘producing a rattling sound’ (WNT). Thus, material culture, and the semiotic meaning it communicates, contains references to the practices in which students around 1800 were involved, from nocturnal noise to rapier fights with guards. And no one put the slightest obstacle in their way.

After the presentation of the degree certificate, the beadle passed a silver goblet to the rector, who administered an oath of obedience to Von Wendel. The rector then took a sip and passed the

chalice down to the freshly initiated doctor. Von Wendel, on his turn, promised to obey the rules of the senate on penalty of exclusion from the student world and emptied the beaker. Everyone in the room started singing: 'Io vivat, io vivat doctoris sanitas! En poculum amoris, antidotum doloris; io vivat, io vivat doctoris sanitas'. Thereafter followed a dinner party on the costs of Von Wendel with all the attendants, where the senate, in their normal clothes again, tried to drink the new doctor under the table.

My suggestion is that Von Wendel's rag ceremony and the violent walk along the Maliebaan are both materialsemiotic practices. Contrary to Caljé, I will treat these two events not as illustrative representatives of a particular cultural regime, but rather as unique cases, which do not necessarily fit into larger schemes. In each practice a complex network of relations, in which not only human actors are involved, is enacted into being. In Von Wendel's rag ceremony, for example, next to the students, non-human actors, ranging from a mysterious premises with different rooms, stairs, and furniture, and candles which brightly lit one room and curtains which darken the others, to a beaker, table cloth, clothes, masks, wigs, a fake nose, and parchment with a seal, all play an important role. Contrary to cultural/linguistic turn approaches, I will take the material and corporeal features of these actors and actants seriously. The bodies of the students, and the clothes they wear, for instance, are inscribed with cultural meaning, and can be read as texts, but biological flesh constitutes these bodies too. Wine, for instance, plays an important symbolic role in Von Wendel's rag practice, which is a parody of official rituals of the academic senate and the Eucharist. At the same time, however, wine has effects that transcend the mere symbolic, as quite a few students of the *Senatus Veteranorum Glirium* asked for a doctor's certificate and requested exemption from boozing because their bodies could not cope with the alcohol (Van Vredenburg 37-38).

Both Von Wendel's rag ceremony and the violent walk along the Maliebaan are practices in which boundaries and identities are being produced and reproduced. By parodying official inauguration rites students define themselves against the academic senate. The certificate with the three *artes liberales*, furthermore, symbolically separates the students from civilian life. It even gives them the 'right' to smash the windows of burghers. Such rituals, in which the identity of one group is defined in contrast to others, create a sense of community. Identities, collective and individual, however, are never given; they constantly need to be affirmed and reproduced through different practices. The violent walk along the Maliebaan provides but one example of a practice in which a group of students, who all followed the same rag ritual, re-enact their collective identity by loudly defining themselves against another group, *in casu* burghers. In doing so, they drew on a broader cultural repertoire of the mock serenade or charivari (Muir 2005, 106-111). The students, while making a lot of noise, posed as the city's court of justice, and symbolically punished the gardener because he had violated their privileges. The rag ritual, which followed a clearer 'script' than the violent walk, drew on a cultural repertoire which derived from practices in the chambers of rhetoric (fool's cap) and the puppet theatre (Hanswurst). Like the rag ritual, nonhuman actors played an

important role in the violent walk too: rapiers, wooden sticks, shovels, the bricks of the inn, the grass of the gardener's garden, and the soil of the Maliebaan may seem mundane and unimportant from a humanist point of view, but they were part of the practice and need to be included in the analysis.

Let's take a look at a practice from Caljé's 'modern regime'. The *Utrechtsche Studenten-Almanak* of 1834 contains a map of the 'Stichtsche Academie-Land' (Figure 9). This map provides an extensive visual representation of Utrecht's student world and takes the form of a symbolic route which students are expected to cover in the course of their student days. The journey starts in 'Vader-Land' on the far left, with capital city Patropolis, and proceeds through the Gymnasium and Pons Rectoris to Groen-Land and Terra Eleusinia (the land of inauguration mysteries). After the initiation rites, students arrive at a crossroad, where they can either turn left to the fields of temptation (*Velden der Verzoeking*), the domain of Bacchus, a route which fatally ends in the swamp of debts (*Moeras van Crediteuren*) and the guilt pool (*Schuld-Plas*), or they can turn right into the land of study (*Studieland*). To enter the study land, however, students first need to cross the mathematical mountains (*Bergketen der Mathesis*) before they can travel lands and places which represent different faculties, fields of study, and scholars. The academic journey ends with one final obstacle in the land of horror (*Land van Verschrikking*) where the daunting task of examination or thesis defence awaits the travellers. After this last hurdle is taken, graduates can go to one of the watchtowers in the country of prospect (*Land der Vooruitzigten*), where Eldorado, the land of gold, glitters on the horizon.

Interestingly, civilian society (*Land der Philisters*), located in the far right of the map, is hermetically sealed from the 'Stichtsche Academie-Land' by the black sea (*Pontus Axenus*). The students' domain and the world of burghers are strictly separated. Like the violent walk and the rag ritual, this map can be seen as a material-semiotic practice in which boundaries and identities are produced. Material because an almanac is a material artefact, which is not only read but also touched. Semiotic because the map, through words, pictures, and symbols, communicates different layers of meaning: it provided a playful representation of the student world, full of references to the faults and virtues of student life, but it also produced boundaries between students and the *Land der Philisters*. *Philister* as an epithet for burgher has a long history (De Coster 2007). The term originated in the German city of Jena when, after a student was killed in a fight between students and burghers in 1693, a certain G. Götze re-employed *Philister*, Luther's translation of the biblical *Philistinoi* (Philistines), in his funeral oration (Vercoullie 1925). *Philister*, the name of the long term enemies of the Kingdom of Israel, God's chosen people, then became a standard expression through which the other chosen people, the students, could insult their enemies: burghers. This history is enacted in the map of the 'Stichtsche Academie-Land', an example of student ideology (*studentenideologie*) in the making. Bits and pieces of this nineteenth-century student ideology still survive in the late modern student world. On the walls of the LB, for example, one student quoted Horatius with: "ODI PROFANUM VULGUS ET ARCEO" ('I hate the uninitiated crowd and keep them far away'). Another student wrote: "Wie

een kuil graaft voor een ander is een arbeider”. Such graffiti writing practices enact a long history of student rituals and ridiculisation of civilian society.

In this chapter I carefully read some of the insights of new materialist scholars through Caljé’s work on the history of student culture. Instead of treating sources as ‘illustrative representatives’ of a certain cultural regime, I focused on some actions and doings through which students in Utrecht defined their identities vis-à-vis burghers in the nineteenth-century. I argued that the violent walk along the Maliebaan, the rag ceremony of Von Wendel, and the map of the ‘Stichtsche Academie-Land’ are materialesemiotic practices in which human and nonhuman actors mutually constituted each other, and boundaries and identities are intra-actively produced. My point is simple: cultural regimes are never given; they constantly need to be produced and re-enacted to stay intact. I therefore switched from premodern and modern forms, to student culture in the making. The historical travelogue continues in the next chapter with late modern identity-making practices in the LB.

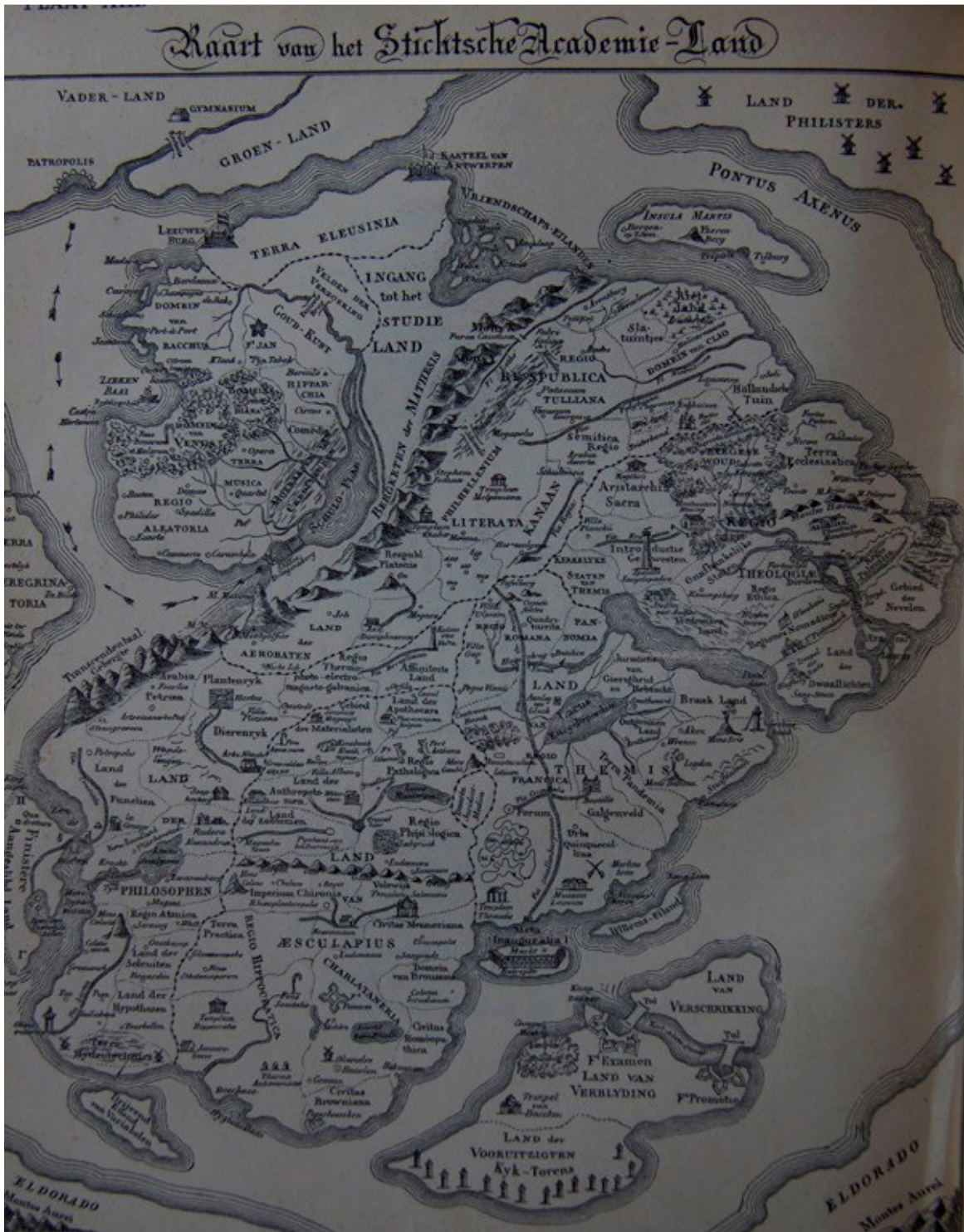


Figure 9: Map of the 'Stichtsche Academie-Land'

II. *Corpsballen*, *Knorren* and *Nihilisten*: Utrecht's Student Types



Figure 10: 'Knor met snor'

In 2008, students from Veritas' *jaarclub* 'moustache' left a giant pig made of cardboard in front of the entrance of the yellow castle, USC's union building at Janskerkhof (see Figure 10). The characteristic snout of the pink paper pig sported an elegant moustache, while the back of the sculpture carried the inscription: 'Beter knor met snor, dan lid bij het corps!!' (rather a pig with a moustache than a corps member). This practice provides but one example of an on-going playful battle between corps students and *knorren*. The term 'knor' as an epithet for non-corps students originated at the end of the nineteenth-century. Students who did not join the corps for financial or ideological reasons were initially called 'nihilisten' (*nihilists*), a term of abuse which came into being during the French Revolution and referred to people who stood aloof from politics (De Coster 2007). Corps students, who ought to avoid any contact with nihilists and excluded from student life, adopted this term and applied it to non-union students. When groups of nihilists decided to form their own unions in the 1880s, corps students tried to emphasize their self-proclaimed superiority by calling them 'varkens' (Amsterdam), 'knorren' (Leiden and Delft), 'boeven' (Utrecht), or 'boenders' (Groningen) (Vredenburg 1936, 425).²⁶ When students in Amsterdam founded the Amsterdamsche Studenten Bond (ASB) in 1885 and celebrated the formation with a cavalcade, for instance, corps students, dressed as butchers, sabotaged the festivities. They involved themselves in the procession and distributed pamphlets to burghers who watched on the sideline:

²⁶ According to Pieter Caljé, the term 'boenders' may refer to the German town Bunde, from where students came who refuse to become members of the Groningen Studentencorps.

H.H. VEEKOPERS EN VARKENSSLAGERS wordt medegedeeld, dat heden in rijtuigen een extra fijne collectie Varkens zal worden rondgeleid. Keuring heden avond te 11 uren, Vijgendam. De Amsterdamsche burgerij wordt gewaarschuwd dit bespottelijke rondrijden slechts als een NAMAAK der gewone studentenrijjolen te beschouwen (Hagendijk 1980, 59).

‘Varken’ as a derogatory terms knows a long history. In our Western culture pigs have been treated as unclean animals since antiquity (Rieter 2003). The word ‘pig’ carries negative connotations in different Germanic languages. The Dutch *zwijn*, like the German *Schwein*, for example, refers to a dirty, unpleasant or contemptuous person, while the English ‘pig’ functions as a term of abuse for police officer. Dutch proverbs like ‘hij is met de varkens groot gebracht’ or ‘zo dom als het achtereind van een varken’ both refer to uncultivated and stupid persons. When corps students called non-union students ‘varken’ or ‘knor’ they drew on a broader cultural repertoire. At the same time, moreover, corps students used the very techniques and practices against nihilists and *knorren* with which they had stressed their own superiority in relation to civilian society - burghers had already been called ‘rund’ or ‘rundvee’ at the beginning of the nineteenth-century (Caljé 2006, 419). Around the turn of the century, then, corps students defined their identity vis-à-vis groups within their own world. As a result, the *Land der Philisters* disappeared from the map, and the ‘Stichtsche Academie-Land’ became divided into different kingdoms of which the borders were difficult to cross.

The symbolic borders between corps-land, *knorren*-land, and *nihilisten*-land are still being enacted and re-enacted today. Contrary to 1900, however, *knorren* are now much more organised, established, and self-conscious. They developed their own symbolic practices to confront *corpsballen*, and proudly adopted their *knor* identity, as the cardboard pig illustrates. Yet, one of the arguments of this essay is that boundaries and identities are never given. Rather, they constantly need to be affirmed and reproduced to stay intact. The materialsemiotic practices through which students from different unions and nihilists at Utrecht University establish and re-establish boundaries and identities are many. They range from cardboard pigs to internet blogs, where one can find anti-*knorren* posts (e.g. “Mijn zoooon is de allergrootste KNOR, men herkent hem aan zijn sokken en zijn snor. Woont niet in een Kroeghuis, maar op de IBB. Hij is een mislukkeling in spé.....”)²⁷ to fancy dress parties, where sorority students wear fake pig snouts to ridicule *knorren*. Another location where such practices take place is the LB. Students use the walls of study booths and toilets to produce identities for themselves and their peers. In this chapter, I shall analyse how these identity-making practices proceed. Drawing on tools from the cultural/linguistic turn, I will first focus on the content of the LB’s graffiti corpus as a whole. In due course, though, I shall read some of the ideas of new materialist scholars through these approaches.

²⁷ Blog: <http://www.soggen.nl/?p=1052>.

Image and self-image

For years on end, *knorren*, *corpsballen* and *nihilisten* fought seemingly playful pen wars in the LB. At Utrecht University the corps party consists of fraternity students from USC and their female counterparts from U.V.S.V./N.V.V.S.U. The *knor* group includes unions like C.S. Veritas, Unitas S.R., and Biton, while nihilists are students who are not involved in any union at all. If one considers the content of the graffiti corpus as a whole, it is possible to establish a range of qualities which nihilists and students from different unions attribute to themselves as well as various vices they ascribe to others. USC members, for starters, see themselves as “koningen” (kings) of Utrecht’s student world. These “mooie bazen” (nice chaps) praise themselves, or the actions of their peers, with a distinct catchphrase: “b’vo” or simply “vo”, which is short for bravo. One corps student emphasized the superiority of his union with a crude summary of some of the different groups which inhabit the late modern ‘Stichtsche Academie-Land’:

USC = koningen v/’t Sticht

VERITAS kerels = flikkers + obscuur + te laf om lid te worden

VERITAS wijven = prima voor de WOO

UVSV = rete ‘va

UNITAS = zowel de wijven als de kerels bagger; heb je niks aan! Wat wil je met een bestuur dat zichzelf elk jaar uitnodigt op ’t USC om keihard laag te gaan... en mooi vinden!! Rukkers

Corps students construct their identity along two pillars: hedonism and materialism. They boast about sexual adventures with sorority girls and the size of their male members. They also brag about the quality of their beer and the quantity of their consumption. Corps students, furthermore, take pride in their prominent social-economic position: “Het corps: voor mensen met euro’s”. They see themselves as members of the aristocracy, as people of old money, who identify politically with the conservative-liberal VVD. These very qualities, however, are ridiculized by others. *Knorren* and nihilists describe USC’s materialistic and hedonistic self-image as “simpel” (simple), “saai” (boring), “leeg” (mentally empty) and “dom” (stupid). Corps students are “ballen” (conservative snobs) and “brallers” (braggers) without an opinion of their own. Binge drinking makes them “dik” (fat), “lelijk” (ugly), “vadsig” (shabby), “lui” (lazy) and mentally incompetent. They deceive themselves by thinking that they are socially important and the kings of Utrecht, but in reality, according to *knorren* and nihilists, most corps students come from insignificant provincial towns. USC members are not able to make real friends, they need to ‘buy’ them if they want to gather a retinue.

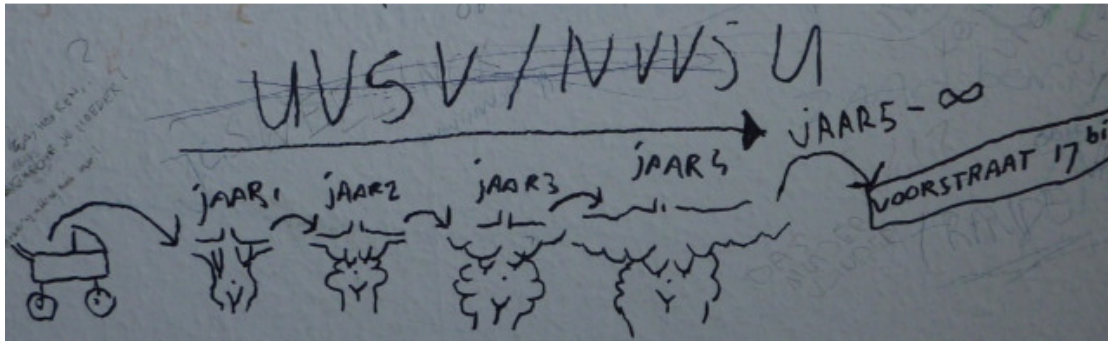


Figure 11: Evolution of the *uf*

The female counterparts of Utrecht's fraternity students call themselves "uffen". They use "va", the feminine form of "b'vo", to praise each other's doings. One *uf* proudly wrote: "UVSV = het allermooiste wat er is!" In contrast to USC students, though, the graffiti in the LB does not display a clear worldview of *uffen*. This seems to indicate that not many sorority students participated in the wall polemics (I will return to this observation in chapter IV). Other groups, however, do have clear opinions about *uffen*. For USC students, they ambivalently are "rete 'va" but nonetheless only serve one purpose: they give free rein to the sexual desires of *corpsballen*. One fraternity student scribbled: "Het lid van het lid moet in de fluf van de UF". Another: "Het enige wat uffen willen is een corps pik tussen hun billen". As objects of sexual desire, the rightful place of *uffen* are the so called "apenrotsen", a couple of wooden benches in USC's discotheque the Woolloomooloo, where, according to corps myth, girls can present themselves if they are looking for a 'wild night' with a *corpsepik* (Albers and Versteeg 2010). The verdict of *knorren* and nihilists on *uffen* is mainly directed at their hedonistic way of life and presupposed nymphomaniac behaviour. They are described as "sloeries" (skanks), "sletten" (sluts) or "goedkope hoeren" (cheap whores). *Uffen* sleep around and carry all kinds of nasty sexually transmitted diseases as a result. They frequently hit the bottle, which makes them flabby and bulky. One student vividly illustrated this vice in a drawing of the evolution of the *uf* (see Figure 11). According to this picture, *uffen* go from slim to obscenely fat in the course of their student days, and ultimately end up in sex club Huize Mona at Voorstraat 17-bis.

Corps students, in their turn, describe students from other unions in the first place as *knorren*. Of all the nineteenth-century derogatory terms for non-corps students (i.e. 'varkens', 'boeven' and 'boenders') 'knor', at least in Utrecht, proved to be the most successful. On the walls of the LB it refers to non-corps students and nihilists as well as corps students who are not really involved ("corpsknorren"). Although initially an offensive epithet, non-corps students proudly adopted *knor* and now use it as a honorary nickname ("Ik ben een KNORR en ik ben er trots op"). For corps students, however, *knorren* remain inferior. They are "arbeiders" and "paupers" who belong to the working class and cannot afford to rent an apartment in the city centre. As a result, they are forced to live in a small room in the IBB, the cheap student flats in the east of Utrecht. *Knorren* are badly dressed, and

distinct themselves in a negative way from corps students with their moustaches and their habit to socially get-together on Wednesday (e.g. “knorren zijn woensdagborrelaars”). They can look forward to a colourless social career as employer in one of the companies of which a corps student will become manager. *Knorren*, furthermore, are ill-equipped to sexually satisfy women. The qualities, in short, which corps students attribute to themselves – sexually active, wealthy – are negatively applied to non-corps students and nihilists.

In Utrecht’s student world there are different types of *knorren*. Two drawings on the walls of the LB make this clear. One picture juxtaposes a Biton *knor* with a Veritas *knor*. The Biton *knor*, who smokes a joint, has long hair and a nose ring, while the Veritas *knor*, who is much fatter, looks discontented. A text below the drawing indicates that he regrets his decision to become a member of Veritas instead of USC. The Veritas *knor*, therefore, is a “spijtknor”. Another drawing hierarchically displays the ‘symbols’ of three student types. A crown with jewels and accompanying caption “King” represents USC. A mortarboard with the text “arbeider” refers to Veritas, while a chef’s hat (“kok”) symbolises Biton. Some Veritas *knorren* playfully draw on corps rhetoric in order to show who are the ‘real’ kings of Utrecht: “VO VERITAS”. A student from Unitas stressed the strong bond between him and his peers: “Een UNITARIËR ben je niet voor even maar voor het leven!” Non-union students, or nihilists, another type of *knorren*, are accused of being indifferent and deadly dull (“KNOR KNOR KNOR Jammer dat ik nergens bij hoor”). One nihilist describes union students as “geplaagde Vwo’ers uit de semi-hogere nouveau riche klasse van beneden de rivieren, zonder eigen gezicht / mening, die een goois accent aannemen”. Another one states: “studentenverenigingen moeten worden afgeschaft”.

Materialsemiotic Games

During the 1990s and 2000s different groups of students – *corpsballen*, *knorren* and *nihilisten* – used the walls of the LB to produce and reproduce identities. This process followed a recognizable scheme: students highlight the superiority of their own group by defining themselves against ‘other’ groups, who are placed outside or in opposition to their norms and customs. A parodic hyperbole of the identity of the ‘other’ (e.g. “dom”, “dik”, “arm”, “impotent”) becomes symbolically central to the constitution of the group’s own identity. Parody, caricature, hyperbole, and animalisation are among the symbolic techniques which are employed in these playful pen wars. But there is more. In Part One of this essay I argued that one of the distinguishing characteristics of student/toilet graffiti is their interactional nature. I then suggested that ‘wall polemics’ only make sense in their intertextual and materialsemiotic context. Until now I focused on the ‘language’ of individual texts. Student identities, however, are produced and reproduced in ‘response chains’ in which texts and drawings interact, and colours, writing tools, and physical surfaces matter.

Ideologically charged graffiti invite responses. Consider the drawing of the Biton *knor*, which was meant as a playful insult. The corps student who made the drawing exaggerated some stereotypical features of Biton students – long bushy hair, nose ring, marijuana cigarette – in order to

stress what his group is not. A Biton student, however, joined the game and drew an even bigger joint in the mouth of the pig. In doing so, s/he turned an imposed vice into a virtue, and symbolically neutralized the insult. Take another example. After a corps student drew a *Unitas knor*, a pig with the text “Unitas” on his torso, with a graphite pencil, a *Unitas* student responded by extending the drawing with a ballpoint pen. S/he equipped the pig with two giant legs and massive trotters, which trampled the yellow castle, depicted with the “USC” flag and the “WOO”, into pieces. Again: attack repelled. The symbolic trampling of the corps’ union building by a *knor* was an act of immense importance, because the yellow castle embodies USC. Corps students frequently drew pictures of their yellow castle on the walls of the LB. I encountered multiple examples made with yellow felt-tips (here the colour of the graffiti communicates meaning). Such drawings can be seen both as visual advertisements and territory markers (Ley and Cybriwsky 1974; Adams and Winter 1997). They are a form of ‘appropriation’, in the sense that corps students use graffiti in order to symbolically take possession of space (Frijhoff 1997, 103). Other examples of territorial advertisements include names of year clubs (e.g. “Spiritus ’97 USC”, “Jaguar UVSV/NVVSU ’94”). Through such graffiti students create a double identity both as members of a union (“USC”, “UVSV/NVVSU”) and within their unions as members of a year club (“Spiritus ’97”, “Jaguar 94”). Some corps year club adds invite affirmative responses (e.g. “vo” and “va”). Others, both corps and non-corps, are parodied with references to gruesome events: “SS ’44”, “DUTROUX ’96”.

In some cases students who share the same ideology group together and produce lengthy response chains in which another group is ridiculed. Consider a list of alternative meanings of UVSV:

- (a) Utrechtse Verzamelaars van Stramme Varkenspijken
- (b) Uitmuntende Vulgaire Schijtende Vuilnisbakken
- (c) Urker Vissers Samen Vissen
- (d) Unaniem Verkozen Sloeries Vereniging
- (e) Ultiem Vuige Sperma Vreters
- (f) Utrechtse Vette Sletten Vereniging
- (g) Uw Vertrouwde Soa Vrienden
- (h) Uitermate Vraatzuchtige Seropositieve Viswijven / Nieuwe Vereniging Van Sletten te Utrecht

Seven writers contributed to this ‘sequential parody’ which produces a hyperbole of the identity of *uffen* as “sloeries” and “sletten”.

Next to textual interaction and response chains, students interact with and creatively make use of physical space. Plug sockets, for example, feature in visual and textual practical jokes. One student discovered that the two holes in a wall plug resemble a pig’s snout, and used it in a *knor* drawing (see Figure 12). Due to the bright pink colour of his/her pen, which is in stark contrast with the surroundings black and blue ballpoint graffiti, and the socket that sticks out the wall, which gives it a

three-dimensional appearance, this picture easily attracted attention, and formed a highly effective symbolic weapon in the pen wars between *corpsballen* and *knorren*. Next to another wall socket a corps student wrote: “Wie heeft deze knor ingemetseld?”. It proved difficult for *knorren* to neutralise or invert such parodic attacks. One of them tried to counter a plug joke by ridiculizing the corps’ self-proclaimed fertility and sexual skills:

- (a) Steek hier je vingers in knor [next to a plug socket]
- (b) En jij je pik. Misschien gebeurt er dan eindelijk wat stomme corpsbal!
- (c) ~~Pik~~ Wij plachten te spreken van een dikke CORPSLUL!

By crossing out “pik”, and playfully replacing it by “dike CORPSLUL”, corps student (c) re-affirmed the sexual superiority of his group, and turned insult into virtue.

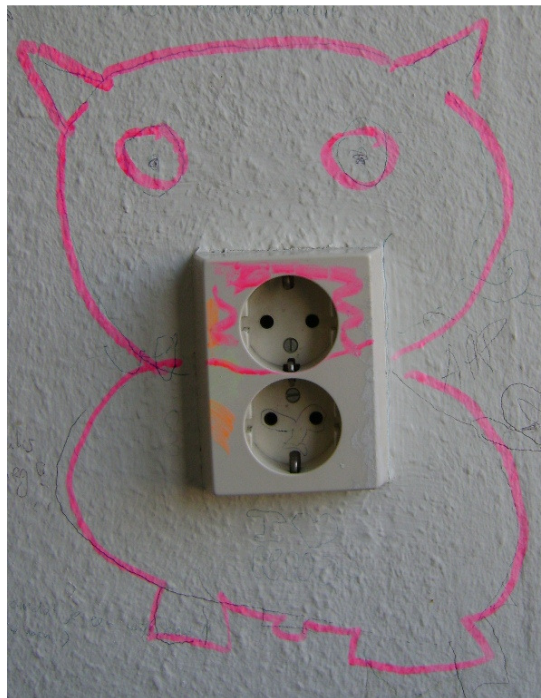


Figure 12: Wall plug knor

Sometimes, when tensions really run high, students are unable to control their emotions and abandon the playful script. In such cases, student-like games lose their ritualistic character and end up in cheap slanging-matches involving serious insults. I will provide but one example:

- (a) Vuile kaknor
- (b1) Krijg de bloedKANKER VUILE KANSLOZE KOORBAL
- (c) zanggezelschap! Toch?

(b2) hou je KANKER bek / ROTTE TERING APPEL / LELIJKE GRAFTAK!!! FUCK HET KK
USC

While entrances (a) and (b) are involved in a serious brawl, corps student (c) points at the spelling mistake that (b) committed (i.e. “Koorbal” instead of “corpsbal”). This, in turn, made (b) even more angry with a barrage of abuses as a result. This practice, then, and others which I will not discuss, has definitely lost its innocence, and undermines Caljé’s civilizing process.

Fluid Identities

This chapter focuses on three ‘identity categories’ which are of vital importance within the ‘boundaries’ of Utrecht’s student world: *corpsballen*, *knorren*, and *nihilisten*. Students, however, as Caljé (2006) suggested, should be seen as a youth subcultural group, and contemporary youths, as sociologists have demonstrated, ‘perform’ a wide range of identities (Valentine, Skelton and Chambers 1998; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003). Following, among others, Erving Goffman (1990 [1959]) and Judith Butler (1990), they argue that subcultural identities do not pre-exist as such; rather, individuals play different roles in different situations (Burke 2005). Identities, as a result, are ‘fluid, plural and part-time’ (Weinzierl and Muggleton 2003, 12). If one considers the LB’s graffiti corpus as a whole it becomes clear that the identities of Utrecht’s students are fluid as well, and that one person is never only *knor*, *corps* or *nihilist*. Careful comparison of writing tools and handwritings indicates that some students participate in different wall polemics. A corps student, for example, may define his identity against a *knor* in one graffiti writing practice, while playing the role of “Brabander” and PSV supporter in a polemic between fans of different football clubs. In the LB, then, next to *studentikoze* games, fierce pen wars were fought between capitalists and anti-globalists, Christians and atheists, men and women.

Another important point that Caljé raises is that students as a youth subcultural group, although they symbolically define themselves against the adult world, are never isolated from society at large. Political, religious and sport polemics, and all the references to internet, television and popular culture (see 2.2a), indicate that Utrecht’s students are as passionate about profane matters as they are about union affairs. Like identities, the boundaries between inside (student world) and outside (society at large) are fluid. Contrary to what sociologists like Weinzierl and Muggleton (2003) argue, however, anticapitalist texts and drawings on the walls of the LB (see 2.2b) demonstrate that some youth subcultural groups in late modernity *are* politically engaged and, through graffiti, still symbolically resist neoliberalist capitalism. This ‘revolutionary’ potential of wall writings has hitherto been neglected by scholars of graffiti.

The idea that different individuals perform different identities in different situations, and the insight that boundaries between youth subcultures and society at large are not very clear, raises methodological problems for sociologists and cultural historians alike. How is one ever going to

conduct research into subcultural groups whose members constantly reshape their identity? Is it possible to generalize about such groups if individuals hold multiple identities at the same time? And how can researchers determine where student land ends and the world of adults begins when the boundaries between these two domains are fluid? By focusing on materially heterogeneous webs of relations which are intra-actively enacted into being in different practices, new materialists provide valuable tools to overcome such problems. Let us briefly recall: drawing on insights from the humanities as well as the natural sciences, new materialists argue that reality is in essence chaotic, unpredictable, non-coherent and fluid. Western epistemology, however, developed in such a way that researchers, including historians, are looking for clarity rather than complexity. Our methods *make* reality clean and neat, and in doing so, they not only describe, say, the past, but actively shape it. Bruno Latour (2005), therefore, argues that we should let the actors themselves shape reality for us. And John Law and Annemarie Mol (2002) urge scholars to abandon their totalizing claims, avoid artificial dualisms (e.g. human/nonhuman, nature/culture), and keep the world ‘open’. They, and other new materialist theorists, developed tools to come to terms with these complexities.

In order to do justice to the unpredictable and fluid nature of reality, new materialists shift the research focus from ‘beings’ to actions, doings, and unfinished processes. Applied to the history of student culture the argument runs as follows: instead of presenting ‘illustrative representatives’ for a certain regime or episteme, as Caljé does in the case of premodern and modern student culture, scholars need to treat each practice as unique. In the words of Mol and Law: ‘list rather than classify.. tell about cases rather than present.. walk and tell stories about this’ (2002, 16-17). In a thought-provoking book on the ‘entanglement of matter and meaning’, Karen Barad (2007) discusses a wide range of practices in action, ranging from laboratory measurements to identity-making practices in a Calcutta jute mill. In the jute mill, for example, identities of female workers and male supervisor are mutually produced in intra-action between humans and nonhumans (*in casu* machines). In each practice entanglements between different entities are enacted into being. The same goes for graffiti writing practices in the LB, in which identities and differences between groups are constituted and determined in intra-action between students, texts, writing tools and walls. Importantly, different practices enact different webs of relations, and produce different identities. In some practices, for instance, it matters to be *knor* or *corps*, while in others it is important to preach the Gospel or draw on Nietzsche in order to deny the existence of God.

To sum up: this chapter started with the LB’s graffiti corpus as a whole, and first focused, following approaches associated with the cultural/linguistic turn, on the language of individual graffiti. It then considered the intertextual nature of texts and drawings and some of the material aspects of graffiti. It concluded by arguing that new materialism’s turn to single practices and unique cases may help scholars to map fluid identities. The relational approach of actor-network theory, furthermore, can show how actors themselves shape reality. Throughout the first two chapters, I listed, while carefully avoiding totalizing claims, different materialsemiotic practices in which Utrecht’s student culture is

being produced. The next two chapters attempt an 'about-face' of a different kind. I will first experiment with posthuman performativity before turning to the biocultural forces which mutually intra-act in the practices of writing penis graffiti.

III. Walking in the Utrecht University Library

Utrecht's students are 'walkers' (De Certeau 1988). But many of them are also keen bike-riders. Like Merleau-Ponty's (1976) walking stick, as soon as Utrecht's students get on and ride in the direction of the LB, the bike becomes an extension of the body, and the body an extension of the bike. Until 2009, the main entrance of the LB was located at the Wittevrouwenstraat. Students who came from the city centre or the Uithof, therefore, first needed to cycle the Drift. When one enters this stately street, and leaves the traffic of buses and lorries behind, it feels like an island of tranquillity. In the summer, when the green trees at Janskerkhof are in full bloom, one can even hear birds twitter. Cycling the Drift, though, is a daunting task. While monumental premises emerge at both sides of the roadway, bike-riders have to manoeuvre the wheels of their bicycle over the uneven surface of paving bricks. At the same time, they need to avoid other bike-riders and groups of students who are waiting in front of lecture buildings. In the distance, one can still hear the noise of buses. Shoes and heels which interact with the cobble stones of the Drift make clicking sounds nearby.

Bike-riding the Drift is a material and a bodily practice. Technology of the bicycle, flesh of the human body, and bricks of the road interact and intra-act in a hybrid posthuman dance. Scholars in the social sciences and the humanities, however, have long neglected material objects and bodily experience. Internal developments in these disciplines, and the dualist inheritance of Greek philosophy and the scientific revolution, make us believe that people are more important than paving bricks and that the mind is superior to the body. As a result, we take culture and the subject seriously but miss masses of nonhuman objects. 'When a bicycle hits a rock, it is not social', Latour recapitulates, 'but when a cyclist crosses a "stop sign", it becomes social. This is an artificial division imposed by the disciplinary disputes, not by any empirical requirement' (2005, 83). Recently, though, scholars in the field of Science and Technology Studies have devoted attention to everyday technologies such as bicycles (Bijker 1997), while feminist researchers, and others in their wake, made a 'corporeal turn' and now take the flesh of the human body seriously (Sheets-Johnstone 2009). But what about paving bricks and all the other mundane actants *who* play such an important role in our daily lives? What do these nonhumans contribute to the world?

This chapter focuses on 'posthuman tactics' and experiments with a semioticmaterial phenomenology of walking in the Utrecht University Library. It takes cultural/linguistic turn hereo Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988) as point of departure. In this fascinating book, De Certeau argues, contrary to Michel Foucault (1977), that ordinary people in their everyday practices or 'ways of operating' are able to creatively manipulate the disciplinary mechanisms imposed upon them by the elite. In a famous chapter - 'Walking in the City' - he describes how New York looks highly structured from the top floor of a skyscraper, and this is exactly how planners and politicians see the city. Ordinary users in the streets, however, are 'walkers' who 'reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production' (1988, xiv). Walking, according to De

Certeau, is a speech act, a rhetorical practice; by ‘turning a phrase’ the weak are able to turn or re-employ the disciplinary techniques of the strong to their advantage. By reading ideas about ‘nonmodern ontologies’ through the work of Michel de Certeau, I will show how actants ensure their own victories over ordinary users, and argue that these ‘victories’ matter.

Following Bruno Latour (1993), who described how the ‘modern constitution’ separated nature from culture and object from subject, as I discussed above (see 1.1a), continental philosophers like Levi R. Bryant (2011; see also Bryant, Srnicek and Harman 2011), have tried to ‘decentre the human’ in their nonmodern or object-oriented ontologies. Rather than replacing things for people, Bryant argues that humans are ‘objects among other objects’ (2011, 251). He is, therefore, interested in ‘collectives’, that is, assemblages in which humans and nonhumans are entangled. In this chapter, I am interested in the various ways in which humans and nonhumans, students and stuff, are mangled together in the LB. This might seem trivial, but I argue that it is important to ask such questions for two reasons. In the first place, breaking through artificial distinctions between subject/object and culture/nature brings us closer to reality. Secondly, and this is an ethical point, in the light of the environmental crisis it is crucial to take nature and nonhumans seriously. As Latour programmatically stated: ‘One of the tasks of sociology is to do for the masses of nonhumans that make up our modern societies what it did so well for the masses of ordinary and despised humans that make up our society. To the people and ordinary folks should now be added the lively, fascinating, and honorable ordinary mechanism’ (Latour 1988, 310). Michel de Certeau dedicated his book to ‘the ordinary man, the common hero’. This chapter is dedicated to all objects and actants, mundane nonhuman actors like buildings, walls, doors, security gates, and pens, *whose* role and tactics in the practice of everyday life has hitherto been neglected.

Nonhuman Ways of Operating

Like the violent stroll along the Maliebaan in 1806, writing graffiti in the LB is a walking practice. Before students reached the attic of Drift 31, they already had covered quite a distance. Psychologically, the playful games begin as soon as they approached the Drift area, the university quarter, filled with buildings belonging to Utrecht University. Here students encounter other students. However, if we think away all the nature/culture hierarchies, and imagine that the Drift is socially ‘flat’, it becomes apparent that students, as objects among other objects, come across many other entities. The first nonhumans they meet are stones: the cobbles of the street and the age-old bricks of the buildings at the Drift. Students read these stones as ‘texts’; the exterior of the different premises carry all kinds of connotations, from architectural styles to political histories. Old and stately premises, moreover, command admiration, as Sandra, one of the security guards at the Drift explains: ‘Since I work at Utrecht University, I buried myself in the history of the University’s buildings. All the premises at the Drift have their own history. Take, for example, the library, which once belonged to Napoleon. I never realised that before I came to work here, although I am born in Utrecht. It makes me

proud to work in such beautiful premises. I just uploaded a picture on Facebook of one of the buildings at Janskerkhof!’ (quoted in Kuipers and Schouwenburg 2011). For most people buildings remain static objects that fulfil a particular function to them. The LB, for example, is a place to lend books, or to study, or to produce identities. But are buildings really inert? Are they just standing there, passively, waiting to be read and used by ordinary people with all their ‘tactics’ and ‘ways of operating’? Might it be that buildings use people? Do they walk themselves?



Figure 13: Drift 31 in 1934 and 1985

Consider two pictures of Drift 31, the first dates from 1935, while the second was taken in 1985, the year in which the attic where I found the graffiti, located behind the windows of the dormer at the roof, came to serve as a place for self-study (Figure 13). The exterior of the building has changed dramatically over time. The whole roof is remodelled, the chimneys removed, and the dormer replaced. The façade underwent a redecoration as well: the window shutters are gone, the cement between the bricks is suddenly visible, and the Venetian blinds behind the windows are changed for curtains. The door is not a real door anymore, while the postoffice box is replaced by another model, and traffic lights, road signs, steel bollards, and white chalk now illuminate the street scene. Even paving bricks in the street are substituted. These alterations have been the work of people, to be sure, but as soon as a traffic light, an example of ‘official graffiti’ or government at a distance (Hermer and Hunt 1996), jumps from green to red it acts like an actor on its own. The behaviour of students, who head towards the LB by bike, is influenced by this humble actant. Technology, politics, humans and

nonhumans are mingled together here. But buildings also change shape without human intervention. They interact and form a rhizome with other nonhumans, with the sun, rain and wind, with pigeons and rats, with fungus and moss, with groundwater, topsoil and mineral deposits, and many more 'natures' that cultural historians usually neglect (DeLanda 2006, 105). Buildings, in short, are very much alive. They are 'mutable immobiles' or 'fluid objects', *who* gently change shape although their physical structure remains relatively stable (De Laet and Mol 200; Law and Singleton 2005, 338).

Students, as bike-riders and walkers, can tactically ignore the traffic light's red sign as they turn the corner into the of the Wittenvrouwenstraat. Then they are suddenly in the *Land der Philisters* again. Cars not bikes rule the roost here. When they make another turn, however, through the white gate, that once belonged to Lodewijk Napoleon's palace, it becomes all silent again. The white gate, an 'obligatory passage point' (Callon 1986) for every student who wanted to enter the LB before the renovations, symbolically marked the border between burger Utrecht and the *Academie Land*. The bike-rider can store his bicycle in the sheds next to the canteen. From here it is only a few steps to the entrance of the old *Letterenbibliotheek*.

Obligatory Passage Points

'Walls are a nice invention', Latour says, 'but if there were no holes in them there would be no way to get in or out' (1988, 227). Doors and walls play an important role in the life of Utrecht's students. They help them to create a private space in their rooms or in the bathroom. They also serve as a physical surface to draw graffiti on. In fact, most students have to open and close more entrance and dividing doors when they walk to the attic of Drift 31, than they can carry books on their way back. But has any cultural historian concerned him/herself with these nonhuman actors? Why don't they deserve consideration? Walls, and closed doors for that matter, are 'strategies' in the vocabulary of Michel de Certeau, or governmental instrumentalities as Foucault would say. Their goal is to 'control' people by controlling space, they are dividing technologies or 'boundary-creating objects', *who* restrict the possibilities of movement. Walls 'enable the demarcation and separation of a within and a beyond; they reshape the distribution of inter-visibilitys, define flows of circulation, set paths and trajectories for people and, consequently, determine the possibilities and impossibilities of encounters' (Brighenti 2010, 322). As such they are actors because they 'modify a state of affairs by making a difference' (Latour 2005, 71).

At the same time, walls and doors create 'tactic' possibilities for 'walkers' (Brighenti 2010, 323). The walls in the attic of the LB, for example, confine students the space in which they can walk and study, but students, on their turn, use these *dispositifs* to create identities for themselves and their peers. Walls and doors provide a surface to play games, or to rage out, in short, to produce student culture. But do walls and doors *use* tactics of their own? They definitely do resist human action. Some walls are too ragged to write graffiti on. Doors got stuck, they creak, are difficult to open or close and frustrate our intentions. But their most important contribution to Utrecht's student culture is the fact

that they bring students together in a particular way. All students, for instance, have to enter the building at the same place. When they walk through the door, there are two routes to the study booths in the attic: right past the copy machine and toilets, or left up the stairs. In both cases students need to pass through the security gates in front of the porter's lodge ahead.

Technologies of all kind play an even bigger role in the life of Utrecht's students than old fashioned doors. Security gates, copy machines, mobile phones, laptops. Communication technologies in particular dominate their daily lives and affect their social relations. The study booths and toilets in the LB testify this. Some students wrote their mobile numbers on the walls hoping to find a (sex)date ("Ik wil zaad! Nu! 0641207695"), others propagated certain web addresses. In fact, as Donna Haraway (1991) argued, humans and machines are so tied up with one another that the boundaries between the two are starting to blur. 'High-tech culture challenges these dualisms in intriguing ways. It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. It is not clear what is mind and what body in machines that resolve into coding practices. In so far as we know ourselves in both formal discourse and in daily practice, we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras' (Haraway 1991, 177).

The security gates form another 'obligatory passage point'. Everyone who wanted to go to the study booths needs to go through, but not everyone was allowed to do so. The guards in the porter's lodge took care that only students, librarians and academic staff enter the LB. Behind the security gates lied a restricted space, the space of the epicentre of the *Stichtse-Akademie Land*.

Disciplinary Space/Free Space

The exterior of the premises at the Drift carry an air of gentility. Everything breaths history here. Inside the LB, the atmosphere is little different. Already in 1894, when Drift 31 housed the Military Court of Justice, its interior was described as 'dignified' (*Utrechts Nieuwsblad*, 17-03-1894, 3). In contrast to the Utrecht University Library City Centre, where everything looks bright, lively and modern, the old LB was a silent place. One student described it as an 'oasis of books in a deadly boring environment' (*U-blad* 2.32, 07-09-2000). Another characterized the LB as follows:

Het is een archaisch gebouw. Ongemakkelijke gietijzeren trappetjes, boekenkasten die te dicht op elkaar staan. Etages lopen schuin in elkaar over, zonder dat hier een architectonische filosofie achterzit, zoals bij veel gebouwen op De Uithof. De etages lopen schuin in elkaar over omdat het gebouw de afgelopen decennia talloze keren in het wilde weg is verbouwd. Door de gebrekkige ventilatie ruikt het er altijd muf, maar zoetig muf, naar vergeeld papier (*Ublad* 17.38, 25-01-2007).

Archaic, deadly dull, and mouldy: the LB is produced as an 'adult space' (Valentine, Skelton and Chambers 1998). Students, at least in their perception, are being disciplined by librarians, doorkeepers and guards, who carefully watch their every movement. When one guard told a student that she was

not allowed to study at the musicology section at the second floor, she wrote in *U-Blad*: ‘zoals Baardmans de hokjes zuiver houdt.. Ik zou het bijna werkverschaffing willen noemen’ (*U-blad* 26.30, 18-03-1999). Everyone needs to observe silence; exuberant bodily movements are not permitted. Even students themselves keep a close eye on each other: talkers are silenced, silence is fostered: “Koester de stilte”, on graffiti says, “straks gaat er weer iemand mobiel bellen - ‘Ja, ik zit in de bieb!’” The LB is a disciplinary institution, a Panopticon, where everyone is under close surveillance (Foucault 1977). But behind this panoptic façade, all kinds of sociological processes proceed: students watch each other in disciplinary fashion, but they also play ‘watch-me’ games of a different kind. ‘What book is my neighbour reading’, students ask themselves, ‘is he studying German?’ Or: ‘that blond girl wearing *uggs* is definitely an *uf*. I’ll pretend that I’m studying, but I make sure that everyone can see my commission jumper’. Tensions increase, students want to express themselves, but the space restricts them to do so. Is there any way out?

To reach the attic, students needed to walk a bit more. They needed to climb stairs until they arrived at the third floor. A balustrade brought them to a door – does this nonhuman resist or can they go through? Finally, they reached a small passage way, unisex toilet at the left, four study booths at the right, and three more straight ahead. The attic of Drift 31 at last. Tim Driessen, former student with literary ambitions, discovered this place in 2000, when he was looking for a spot to write poetry: ‘Op de zolder van de Letterenbibliotheek [heb ik] de perfecte plek gevonden om te schrijven. Donker, afgezonderd en introspectief dus’ (*U-blad* 26.31, 09-03-2000). This was no ‘adult space’, ‘baardmans’ did not have authority here. Utrecht’s students, therefore, could release all their tensions. The pencils that they used minutes before to make lecture notes, now came to serve as a ‘weapon’ in pen wars, as tools to make identities. It is no coincidence that some sociologists of youth subcultures see graffiti as a practice to ‘resist adult orientated space’ (Valentine, Skelton and Chambers 1998, 8).

The aim of this chapter was to map the ‘integrated networks’ in which humans and nonhumans are mangled together. By imagining the Drift as socially flat, and Utrecht’s students as ‘objects among other objects’, I described how they are entangled with a wide range of mundane actants as they cycle the streets and walk in the library. I argued that Utrecht’s students are creative ‘walkers, *bricoleurs*, who developed tactics with which they ‘reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production’ (De Certeau, 1988, xiv). One of these ‘tactics’ is graffiti. But nonhuman actors have tactics of their own: they are very much alive and actively shape and resist the behaviour of humans. Pens that refuse to work, doors that do not close or open, traffic lights that turn red, and security gates that start beeping, are all ‘victories of the “weak” over the “strong” (Certeau 1988, xix).

IV. The Visual Reign of the (En)tangled Phallus

Somewhere around 2000, a student illuminated one of the study rooms' pillars at the LB with a giant cock. Almost four foot in size, this detailed image of a circumcised and erected penis, complete with blood vessels and hairy bollocks, contrast sharply with the childish and minimum forms of the figure who owns the monster (see Figure 14). The four foot phallus provides one of the most explicit illustrations of a penis graffito at the LB, but is certainly not the only example. I encountered almost fifty phallic symbols, in different colours, sizes and forms. Some were soft and hairy, the majority erected and ejaculating in thin air or on different objects, ranging from sheep to *uffen*.



Figure 14: The Four Foot Phallus

Phallic graffiti is a gendered phenomenon. Previous studies on student/toilet graffiti in university restrooms and libraries showed a huge variety of phallic symbols in men's toilets but none in women's stalls (e.g. Sechrest and Flores 1969; Sechrest and Olson 1971). Thus, empirical evidence, collected over a period of more than forty years, suggests that it is men who draw phallic symbols on walls while women do not. A small quantity of vagina symbols have been found, but only in men's lavatories, and almost always accompanied by sexually-laden subtexts. My own comparative analysis between male and female restrooms in the Uithof's Educatorium Building and several university premises in the city centre substantiate these findings: drawings of penises, vaginas and naked female bodies only exist in men's lavatories. Against this background, then, this chapter attempts to answer the following questions: Why did Utrecht's male students scribble phallic symbols on the walls of the LB? And what were they trying to communicate?

I will argue that the four foot phallus, like all graffiti, has a story to tell. People write and draw things for a reason. In order to 'read' this penis graffito, I will draw on the critical semiology of

Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (2009 [1957]). According to Barthes, all cultural artefacts (e.g. texts, pictures, objects, performances) carry two different layers of meaning. On the one hand, there is the surface text or denotative meaning, on the other the underlying text or connotative meaning. The latter, which Barthes calls 'ideology' or 'myth', is constituted by the 'dominant values of a given historical period' (Silverman 1983, 27). The function of 'myth', according to Barthes, is to make ideological norms (e.g. the ideology of the bourgeoisie, or gender norms) look natural. In his own words: 'myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal' (2009, 168). To clarify his approach, Barthes provides the example of a cover photograph of *Paris-Match* of a young Negro in a French uniform who salutes to the French national flag. This is the simple, denotative meaning of the picture, but for Barthes it signifies something else also: 'that French is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors' (2009, 139). Colonialism, nationalism and militarism, then, are the myths of this picture, which aims to justify and reaffirm these ideologies. The underlying meaning of the four foot phallus, as will become clear below, has to do with gender norms and hegemonic masculinity.

Such a cultural/linguistic turn analysis of phallic graffiti, however, only tells one part of the story. Erected and ejaculating penises clearly refer to bodily practices; the penises in the LB, moreover, were scribbled on the wall by real human bodies, and human bodies are the product of both culture and biology. 'Focusing exclusively on representations, ideology, and discourse', new materialists like Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (2008) state, 'excludes lived experience, corporeal practice, and biological substance from consideration' (2008, 4). Following Susan Bordo (1999; 2002), therefore, who wrote extensively on masculinity and the penis, I will argue that humans are 'creatures of biology and of the imagination' (2003, 33) and that their ideas, fears and practices are constituted accordingly. Hence, to fully understand why Utrecht's male students drew over fifty phalluses in the LB's study booths, and why men are so obsessed with penises in the first place, we need to dig deeper into their biological and unconscious drives.

The Visual Reign of the Phallus

The denotative meaning of the four foot phallus is clear: a male figure displays his gigantic erect penis. The surface level is concerned with sex; its content is explicitly sexual in nature. And this might be perceived as achingly funny, slightly shocking, simply shabby, or even absurdist because of the childish forms of the human body in contrast to the graphic details of erect penis. There is, however, a second underlying level of meaning to this drawing which is not funny or absurdist at all. The myths of the four foot phallus are not colonialism, nationalism or militarism, as in the case of Barthes' cover photograph of *Paris-Match*, but sexism, male dominance and subordination of women. It is driven, in short, by discourses of gender and power. According to Barthes, myth transforms 'history into nature'

(2009, 154), that is, values which developed historically and vary from culture to culture are presented as statements of fact in myth. Our contemporary late modern society is still largely dominated by men, and the ideology of male supremacy is communicated through popular culture, among which graffiti. As Brunor and Kelso (1980) explain: graffiti functions to reassert male dominance, to reaffirm the existing power structure. 'Men write graffiti to tell themselves and other men that they have maintained their superior position and are still in control' (1980, 249). And this goes for the four foot phallus as well. On the level of depth semantics it forms a visual tool for men to reaffirm their dominance. Its signification? Men are the dominant sex and by drawing symbols of their erect sexual organs on walls they are symbolically reaffirming the status quo. In reference to Eva Keuls' (1985) book on phallicism in fifth-century Athens we may call this 'the visual reign of the phallus'.

Let's take a closer look at how the phallus reigns over the LB. Like *uffen*, women in general are described as " hoeren". Even more worrying, however, is the fact that they are denied the right to speak. Consider the following response chain:

- (a) Ik snap helemaal niks van jongens! Aarg!
- (b) Word pot slet!!!
- (c) Jij snapt helemaal niks, omdat je een wijf bent (net ontwikkeld genoeg om je benen wijd te doen)

The polemic opens with a shout of confusion by a female student (a), followed by two responses by male students. One of them (b) recommends her to become a lesbian, while another (c) not only states that women are ignorant because of their sex, but also notifies that their only purpose in life is to 'open their legs'. This polemic painfully shows that female students are clearly not allowed to criticize their male counterparts. Another example unites gender with students culture, and shows that the two are closely related in the LB:

- (a) Een man is als een video: vooruit achteruit vooruit achteruit stop eject! En na een tijdje gooi je hem weg!
- (b) Vuile hoer
- (c) Vrouwen zijn net als videorecorders! Alleen nuttig als ze slikken
- (d) Gevaarlijkste combinatie ter wereld: een vagina en een eigen mening
- (e) 'vagina' > koorbal
- (f) ALLE VROUWEN ZIJN HOEREN!!!!

After a female student (a) wrote a joke about men's sexual performances on the wall, three male students responded. One of them (c) tried to counter the attack with a sexual gag about women, in which he stated that they are only 'useful' if they 'swallow'. The other two responses, though, are

much more hostile and clearly serve to aggressively reaffirm the status quo. One male student (b) simply calls the joker “vuile hoer” (filthy whore), while another (d) writes that women (i.e. “vagina’s”) with an opinion of their own are ‘dangerous’. When another female student (e) dared to cross out “vagina” and replace it by “koorbal”, which clearly indicates that some women associate *corpsballen* with anti-female behaviour, a fourth male student (f), instead of pointing towards the spelling mistake (“koorbal” instead of “corpsbal”), aggressively reduced her to silence: “all women are whores”, inferior beings, who do not have the right to make jokes about men’s sexual performances.

The mechanisms that are at work in these two practices, clearly differ from the playful games in which *corpsballen*, *knorren* and *nihilisten* produce identities. While non-corps students bear ‘knor’ as a honorary nickname, terms like “hoer” and “slet” are deeply denigratory. More importantly, such terms reproduce long histories of violence against women and discrimination on the basis of gender. Contrary to the playful games, in which every party is equal, women, who are disputing the reign of the phallus, are violently silenced. How can it be that one finds such graffiti at a university library – a place where one hopes to find educated and broad-minded people? Why is sexism perfectly legitimate at the walls of the LB? This is worrisome to say the least, and surprising also because racism is not tolerated at all. When someone wrote: “Als je een neger ziet: altijd je kastje op slot, ze jatten je spullen” (if you encounter a nigger, lock your locker, they nick your stuff), people responded with: “KNEUS” (idiot) “ZWAMNEUS” (twaddler), “BEKROMPEN!” (narrow minded), and “Doe niet zo kansloos” (don’t be stupid). As soon as women stand up for their sex, however, they are disparagingly called “vuile hoer” and “slet”. Apparently, racist graffiti is a bridge too far for Utrecht’s students, while sexism is not disputed. Something is definitely not right here.

Social scientists in the United States found causal connections between fraternity membership and belief in male dominance, aggression against women, and hypermasculinity (Bleecker and Murnen 2005; Murnen and Kohlman 2007). One study concludes that ‘fraternity members have more stereotypical gender attitudes and are more likely to ascribe to male-dominant and female-submissive roles’ (Robinson, Gibson-Beverly and Schwartz 2004, 875). Although there is no evidence that only corps students are involved in visual and textual aggression against women in the LB, these practices certainly expose the darker sides of student culture. But we need not run ahead of things. Let’s return to the four foot phallus and analyse penis graffiti from a male point of view.

Biometaphors

What role does the penis play in the bodily life of men? From the perspective of real live experience, a man’s penis is a source of enormous (sexual) power *as well as* great vulnerability and severe doubt (Horrocks 1994). On the one hand, the erect penis symbolizes male sexual potency and power. On the other hand, however, the fact that the erect penis performs this symbolic role puts tremendous pressure on men. If they fail to get an erection, or when they are unable to satisfy women, their source of power disappears. Thus, for a man the penis is ‘the site of a number of emotions of weakness and strength,

pleasure and pain, anxiety, conflict, tension and struggle' (Segal 2001, 108). The nonerect penis, furthermore, epitomizes fragility. 'To be exposed as "soft" at the core is one of the worst things a man can suffer in this culture' (Bordo 2002, 55). Synonyms for the male member, therefore, tend to emphasize its greatness and ability to perform at any moment. Feminist linguists (Cameron 1992), for instance, who interviewed men about the terms they used to describe their penises, found references to authority figures ('the chief', 'the mayor'), symbols of personal authority ('sceptre', 'rod of lordship'), heroic characters ('the Hulk'), powerful weapons ('pink torpedo') or large animals ('King Kong', 'Python'). Above, I described how some corps students talked about their "dikke CORPSLUL", and used it as a trope to define their identity as extremely potent skirt-chasers against other groups. Such metaphors, according to Cameron (1992), function as defence mechanisms against fears of being vulnerable or soft. The four foot phallus might well be a visual equivalent of such verbal synonyms.

Related to fears about soft or impotent penises is the deep-seated conviction that size matters. Like the hard and constantly performing penis, a large penis symbolizes strength and sexual power. Penis size-wise men want to measure up to their peers: 'Men begin at an early age on the lifelong habit of surreptitious cock-watching. In public lavatories, swimming baths, gyms, even at the ballet, they will always compulsively check out the opposition' (Miles 1991, 105). Susan Bordo (1999, 2002) investigated if penis size matters from a biological point of view. She refers to studies on 'sexual selection' in nonhuman animals. In the natural world – to which human animals belong as well – sexual selection is driven by the 'principle of sexual dimorphism', that is, females are attracted to males who are bigger, longer, more colourful, or stronger than their congeners. The bodies of males from a variety of species, moreover, function as biological 'advertisements'. Specific body parts, such as horns, tails or the sexual organs, are used to attract females and to impress rivals. Males who physically outstand their congeners, therefore, have an evolutionary advantage. Bordo (1999) utilizes the term 'biometaphors' to describe how this process takes a cultural form in humans. 'Biometaphors' are 'verbal counterparts to the physical hyperboles of other species' (1999, 88). An example of a biometaphor is the large penis, which stands for 'the superior fitness of an individual male over other men'. It 'symbolizes qualities (such as sexual or reproductive potency, superior aggressiveness, the capacity to give pleasure) whose value is not unique to human cultures but is shared by many other species' (1999, 89). 'Sexual potency' and 'the capacity to give pleasure' are the very qualities which *corpsballen* used in the wall polemics against *knorren* and *nihilisten*.

From the perspective of lived experience and biological substance, then, the physical penis is a source of both sexual power and vulnerability. Biologically, the penis has a reproduction function. In a more symbolic and less functional way, however, the physical penis, or a symbolic substitution, is used by men to advertise their superiority over other men in order to attract potential mates. Such biological forces may drive, to a greater or lesser extent, the practice of writing graffiti. Perceived from this angle, then, the four foot phallus becomes a visualized version of the 'biometaphor'. And as

biometaphor, penis graffiti fulfils a double function: on the one hand, it serves as a defence mechanism against fears of impotency or shame about ones penis size, while on the other hand, it is a way to display ones physical and sexual qualities.

Tales of Humiliation

Be that as it may, the troubling fact remains that sexually confused male students use graffiti to denigrate women. Female students, and *uffen* in particular, are time and again depicted as ‘fuck-objects’ (Jensen and Dines 1998, 100). Take, for instance, the following text: “Fuck je G-spot, als ik je maar lekker kan volblaffen!!!” For the male student who wrote this graffiti it clearly does not matter if women enjoy sexual intercourse, while the G-Spot, which is associated with female sexual pleasure, is deemed unimportant (“Fuck je G-spot”). For him, the only goal is to reach his climax. Feminist scholars have stressed that this is how sex works within patriarchal societies: it all revolves around the male orgasm. Women are treated as objects to fulfil this aim, an idea that has been strengthened on a major scale by the rise of internet pornography (Dines, Jensen and Russo 1998). The majority of penis drawings in the LB were erected and ejaculating. Such pictures do not only stress the fertility of men, or their bodily uncertainties, but also reflect and reaffirm the sexual subordination of women. Even more telling are drawings of female bodies, which are all naked and clearly focus on the parts that can be penetrated. One example will suffice:



The picture displays a typical representation of the naked female body, depicted in a sexual position with spread legs, as an object of sexual pleasure for men. An arrow points at the anus, which indicates that some students seem to be obsessed with anal sex. A great many texts confirm this preference. Some only refer to the pleasure of the act itself: “KONTNEUKEN IS EEN PLEZIERIGE BEZIGHEID”, while others place it explicitly in the context of student culture: “Het enige wat uffen willen is een corps pik tussen hun billen” and “Ik heb een meisje uit RISKANT ’97 in haar kontje geneukt! (na het almanak feest)”. Why does anal sex matter so much to Utrecht’s students? It has, I

think, to do with pornography and power. Studies have showed that people who watch pornography – some graffiti in the LB referred to pornographic websites (see 2.2a) - are more likely to experience with anal and oral sex (Johansson and Hammaren 2007, 64). More importantly, anal sex, which combines both pleasure and pain, is one of the most subordinate sexual positions. It creates a clear hierarchy between the ‘giver’ who controls a submissive ‘receiver’ (Jensen and Dines 1998).



Figure 15: *Knor* versus *corps*

The denigrating power of anal sex is used by *knorren* in their playful games with *corpsballen* (see Figure 15). Two drawings show how a *knor* humiliates two *corpsballen* while smoking a fag. In the first picture, a *corpsbal*, with “USC” on his jacket and his hands tight behind his back, is forced to give the *knor* a blowjob. In the second image, the *knor* fucks the *corpsbal* in his ass. This drawing shows how denigrating anal sex can be, and how the ‘giver’ exercises total control over the ‘receiver’. In terms of playful games, one might say that the *knor* attacks the *corpsbal* with his own weapons. Underlying this practice, however, lies a discourse of humiliation which is also applied to female students, who are not authorized to defend themselves. The four foot phallus epitomizes this discourse.

The Visual Reign of the (En)tangled Phallus

This chapter, then, approached the practice of writing penis graffiti from different angles. Following new materialist feminists such as Susan Bordo, I interpreted the four foot phallus as a material-semiotic practice, as a product of both culture and bodily experience. In theoretical terms one could say that this penis graffiti intra-actively produces multiple boundaries. First, it (re)produces sexual differences between men and women. An erect penis or phallus, the symbol of the superior position of men in society, is used to (re)affirm the existing power structure and to indicate that public space is the domain of the phallus. At the same time, however, the four foot phallus produces differences between men. It shows that its owner – the graffitist – has a hard and gigantic penis, a penis which bio-symbolically functions to attract potential mates and chase off other males. It indicates, in other words, the superior fitness and sexual or reproductive capacities of some men over others. Such biological processes, take a cultural form in the playful polemics between different groups of students. *Corpsballen*, for instance, use their self-proclaimed sexual superiority and fertility to define themselves against others. In the practice of writing penis graffiti both masculinity and student culture are in the making.

In addition, the four foot phallus propagates that it matters for men to own – symbolically or physically – a hard and large penis. The idea that size matters causes severe doubts and emotional tensions within individual men. Drawing a four foot phallus on the wall, therefore, also serves as a defence mechanisms to deal with such fears. Thus, different meanings, boundaries and differences are mutually enacted. The four foot phallus, in short, is (en)tangled in multiple ways. In the first place, it is (en)tangled - in the sense of 'knitted together' - with multiple agencies and processes: a physical body, lived experience, biological substance, writing tools, wooden surface, physical space, and ideological and semiotic narratives about sexism, male dominance over women, masculinity and student culture. In the second place, the four foot phallus interacts in 'contentious or conflicting ways' – another meaning of (en)tangled. It is driven by feelings of dominance and vulnerability, weakness and strength. This is the visual reign of the (en)tangled phallus.

The practice of writing penis graffiti led right into some of the more dodgy alleys of Utrecht's student world. A journey that seriously troubles Caljé's civilizing process. The modern regime of student culture, he argues, produced a new breed of self-controlled and emphatic students. The denigrating sexual language of the graffiti in the LB, however, which subordinates women and reaffirms male dominance, shows that the emancipation of women has a long way to go. As long as female students are treated as mere 'fuck objects', and as long as they are denied the right to speak, Utrecht's student world remains a patriarchy.

Conclusion: Towards a New Materialist (University) History?

Throughout these pages I attempted to do several things. (I) Point of departure were two closely related methodological/theoretical issues in the subdisciplines of university history and cultural history. Robert Friedman pointed out that three groups/themes (student culture, gender relations, and non-academic personnel) received too little attention in the narratives of university historians (*Friedman's problem*). This problem has to do with method. During the last decades, most university historians adopted quantitative approaches from the social sciences. With quantitative methods, however, it turned out to be difficult to 'bring students to life, make gender visible, and let non-academic staff speak' (Friedman 2000). In fierce opposition to the social science paradigm, scholars associated with the cultural/linguistic turn provided critical tools to generate data about subaltern groups which had remained outside the historical record, and to expose hidden power relations. The cultural/linguistic turn, though, possesses weaknesses of its own. Because of its ethical and epistemological relativism, this paradigm seems unable to accurately respond to the problems with which our late modern/late capitalist Western societies are confronted, i.e. climate change, financial crises, the rise of fundamentalism, and a turn to the right in politics. The question is: how to move *beyond* the cultural/linguistic turn? In 2008, Peter Burke predicted three possible scenarios – a return to social science approaches, a return to the paradigms which preceded these approaches, or a continuation of the cultural/linguistic turn - which are all highly problematic and undesirable (*the problem of Burke's scenarios*). The question is: how to move *beyond* the cultural turn?

In order to engage with these two issues, I asked: is it possible to write a history of the university that brings students to life, makes gender visible and lets non-academic employees speak without simultaneously drawing on problematic theoretical approaches of the cultural/linguistic turn? To answer this question, I combined a 'non-traditional' source – student/toilet graffiti – with a new materialist methodology. New materialism(s) are a series of movements in contemporary continental philosophy, which present themselves not only as a 'commentary' on the cultural/linguistic turn, but also as *the* 'cultural theory for the twenty-first century' (Van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010, 167). (II) This all served the broader purpose of this essay: I wanted to *test the relevance* for the study of history of this new methodology. So, rather than treating new materialism(s) as panacea for the problems of cultural history, I considered it a 'problem' that needs to be tested and thoroughly discussed.

Because new materialism(s) are currently in-the-making, (III) I firstly contextualised the movement and discerned two schools (Lancaster and Utrecht) and *three distinct features* in order to apply it to the study of (university) history. These features are: a diffractive/transversal cartography; a turn to matter, naturecultures and material semiotic practices; and a methodological engagement with complexity, multiplicity, and ethics. I then (IV) proceeded by introducing my 'non-traditional' source: *student/toilet graffiti* from Utrecht University's old *Letterenbibliotheek* (LB). Following interpretative techniques developed by social scientists, folklorists and linguists, who have been conducting research

on graffiti since the late 1960s, I analysed the LB graffiti's form, content and discursive patterns. (V) Part One ended with a *new materialist cartography to interpret student/toilet graffiti* historically. This cartography contributes to research on graffiti in important ways. First, graffiti writing is seen as a historically and culturally specific materialsemiotic practice. A new materialist cartography not only aims to investigate form, content and discursive patterns, but also looks at graffiti in the making. It maps, in other words, not only what graffiti-as-text communicates, but how it works in action. Secondly, and related, next to semiotic aspects (i.e. different layers of meaning in texts and pictures), a new materialist cartography devotes attention to material aspects of graffiti, i.e. the moving body, writing tools, and physical surface. Importantly, it argues that material and semiotic forces are knitted together, they co-shape one another. Thus, and drawing on the jargon, a new materialist cartography focuses on how the practice of writing graffiti intra-actively *enacts* heterogeneous networks of relations into being. Underlying idea is that individual agencies, subjects and objects, do not pre-exist as such, entities only emerge as collectives or assemblages through specific practices. A new materialist cartography, therefore, aims to map how different actants and actors, including the researcher, are entangled. In so doing, it shows that there is no fundamental difference between humans and nonhumans. Human actors are always already mangled together with things. Finally, there are no fixed social categories in a world that is full of action. Different practices performatively produce different boundaries, meanings, bodies and identities. Hence, a new materialist cartography compares single practices, rather than making totalizing claims.

After I introduced methodology and source in Part One, I (VI) tested my cartography, and the different features of new materialism, via four case-studies of the history of student culture at Utrecht University in Part Two. While transversally/diffractively reading different literatures through one another, I walked and told stories about different practices and locations in and through which student culture has been enacted into being. The first casestudy looked at how identities were produced and performed in specific practices within Caljé's premodern and modern regimes of student culture. The second casestudy, focused on three identity categories – *knor*, *corpsbal* and *nihilist* – which were being performed and reproduced through graffiti. Within these identity making practices nonhumans, like pens, walls, and doors played an important role. The third casestudy, therefore, investigated how actants interact with and shape the behaviour of human actors in the LB. The last casestudy focused on gender and exposed hidden power relations through a detailed biocultural analyses of penis graffiti. One 'final problem', however, remains unsolved: does new materialism, 'an emerging trend in 21st century thought that has already left its mark in such fields as philosophy, cultural theory, feminism, science studies, and the arts' (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012), work for the study of history as well? What do we gain and what do we lose by adopting this new methodology? In what follows, I will elaborate on these questions.

Evaluation

New materialism(s) may help university historians to ask new questions and to adopt fresh approaches and innovative interpretive strategies. In Part Two of this essay, I demonstrated how student culture is produced in and through different material-semiotic practices. University historians may also ask in what practices and locations 'the university' is enacted into being (e.g. in a publicity brochure or in a board meeting etc.). Following Annemarie Mol (2002), they can argue that in theory there is one, say, Utrecht University, but in practice it is multiple. New materialism(s) may also help university historians to see posthuman interactions, intra-actions and connections. At universities humans, nonhumans and machines are constituted together. Two of 'our best' university histories - Willem Otterspeer's (2000) *Groepsportret met dame* about the history of Leiden University, and *De stad op de berg*, a collaborative history of the Catholic University of Leuven by Jo Tollebeek and Liesbet Nys (2005) – pay attention to students, gender relations, and non-academic staff, but nonhumans, which also inhabit the university, are neglected. Teaching hospitals and science laboratories keep a great many animals, from apes and rats to various fish species and microbes. Some universities even have faculties of Veterinary Medicine which house hundreds of animals. And what about the pigeons and other birds which interact and intra-act with university buildings? Or the goldfish in the students' union room? Aren't all these 'companion species' (Haraway 2003) part of the university too? Otterspeer elaborates on anatomical preparations, 'skeletons of humans and animals, bird species and fish', but reveals nothing about interactions between living nonhuman animals and human animals, although several dogs are depicted on illustrations in his book (2000, 182, 190). New materialism(s) may help university historians to see and analyse these encounters.

In addition, new materialism(s) can help cultural historians to rethink 'postmodernism'. Instead of the negative dialectics of the cultural/linguistic turn, new materialism(s) offer a much more positive and affirmative diffractive/transversal cartography to read different (inter)disciplines and paradigms through one another. This can bring the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences closer together, and really opens grounds for inter- and transdisciplinary research projects. In the four casestudies, for instance, I read insights from the cultural/linguistic turn (e.g. Barthes' semiology, De Certeau's 'ways of operating') through new ideas from continental philosophy, phenomenology, psychology, and feminist studies. In the end, all scholarly disciplines pursue a common goal: they want to understand the world in all its facets and make it a better place to live. We might as well learn from each other instead of robustly defending our own territories.

New materialism(s) are but one symptom of a broader shift in the social sciences and humanities towards practices, material culture, matter, corporeality, biology and even neuroscience. As such, they provide to cultural historians, who are interested in these developments, a set of critical tools and concepts to think with. These include notions such as transversality, diffraction, agential realism, matter, actor-network, enactment, intra-action, posthuman performativity, nonmodern ontology, collectives, assemblages, nonhuman actors, complexity, multiplicity, fluidity, ethico-onto-

epistemology, and many more. At the same time, new materialists try to retain the most important insights of the cultural/linguistic turn. By theorizing nature and culture, matter and meaning together they really provide an extensive programme for research to come.

Most importantly, however, new materialism(s) can help cultural historians to write histories that are engaged. The biggest challenge for our late modern/late capitalist societies, it seems to me, is to find ways to respond to the environmental crisis. If cultural historians want to contribute to these debates, if they want to make a difference in the twenty-first century, they need to rethink their notions of culture and the subject. The term 'cultural history' reproduces and affirms the very dualisms (nature/culture, object/subject) that we need to unmask. What we need, instead, is a thorough understanding of how nature and culture are always already intertwined. New materialist concepts like 'naturecultures' and 'materialesemiotics' might be helpful here. A *history of naturecultures*, rather than cultural history, would not only break through the artificial subject/object dichotomy, but also takes matter, nature, and nonhumans seriously without neglecting the importance of culture.

New materialism(s), though, are not able to solve all the problems the cultural/linguistic turn. For historians who want to grasp society as a whole as scholars within the social science paradigm aspired (Burke's 'problem of fragmentation'), for example, may not find it very helpful. The Lancaster school's efforts to 'pay tribute to complexity' by treating every case as unique, make it impossible to get the bigger picture. In a chaotic, unpredictable, non-coherent and ever-changing world, totalizing interpretations, John Law and others would argue, do not describe reality, but rather bend the truth. Indeed, for new materialists, patterns and order are never given, they need to be explained. This might be hard to swallow for (cultural) historians who recently put microhistory behind them. However, as I demonstrated in the first casestudy of Part Two, 'totalizing claims', in the form of Caljé's regimes of student culture, and new materialist ideas about unique cases can complement one another.

There are more considerable problems. Firstly, for scholars who are educated in 'the age of man' (Foucault 1973), new materialist theory goes against the very foundations of their knowledge claims. For 'humanists', nonhumans, like doors and traffic lights, are not agents but 'means' used by human actors. They will persist in the idea that there are considerable differences between humans, animals and objects. The point of new materialism(s), however, is not so much that there are no differences, but rather that these entities are always mangled together. What sense does it make to distinguish humans from machines if, as Donna Haraway (1991) convincingly argued, the boundaries between the two are thoroughly blurred, and why would we make a distinction between nature and culture if most cells in our bodies are not human at all? (Ackerman 2012).²⁸

Secondly, the attempt of new materialists to bring 'nature' into cultural theory, and their efforts to read different (inter)disciplines through one another, is both a strength and a possible weakness. Inter- and transdisciplinary research has its advocates and opponents. Some would argue

²⁸ 'Bacterial cells in the human body outnumber human cells 10 to one' (Ackerman, Jennifer 2012, 36).

that scholars from the humanities have no business in the natural sciences. During the cultural/linguistic turn, when cultural historians turned *en mass* to anthropology, anthropologists were not always happy to open the borders of their discipline for them. Indeed, in the polemics that followed these exchanges, one anthropologist noted: 'all varieties of social history have largely used anthropology in the worst possible ways' (Sider 2005, 171). This might be even more problematic if historians turn to quantum physics and neurobiology. At the same, historians themselves have not always been the most open-minded scholarly breed. When literary scholars and deconstructionists applied postmodern philosophy to the study of history, for example, some historians called their ideas 'the ultimate heresy' and 'the intellectual equivalent of crack' (Evans 1997, 7). To a certain extent, new materialists – John Law calls the movement 'material poststructuralism'- carry on with postmodernism, albeit without its epistemological/ethical relativism, and dualist/negative foundations. Some historians might prefer to return to the archives, rather than continuing 'science wars' with feminists and critical philosophers. In this essay I tried to do both.

So, new materialism(s) are definitely not for everyone. More research is needed to find out if it really works for the study of history. Following Robert Friedman's attempts to 'provoke discussion' and 'stimulate further thought', this essay made a start by experimenting with a new materialist history of student culture at Utrecht University. To everyone who is not convinced, it nonetheless provided a preliminary introduction to this new movement, and, more importantly, it gave university historians a promising and amusing new source. Indirectly, therefore, this essay makes a plea in favour of 'alternative sources'. The truth about the past lies not in archival texts alone.

Illustrations

Front page: *Ublad* 41.4, 15 October 2009, photo by Pet v/d Luijtgarden.

1. Interviewed by RTV Utrecht on 22 October 2009. Source: <http://www.rtvutrecht.nl/>.
2. Teletext, RTV Utrecht, 22 oktober 2009. Own collection.
3. The large Study Room. Own collection.
4. One of the study booths. Own collection.
5. The walls of the study booths covered in graffiti. Own collection.
6. Kees kachel. Own collection.
7. Dombrowski's classification system. Source: Dombrowski 2011, 5.
8. Seal of the Senatus Veteranorum Glirium. Reprinted in: Vredenburch 1914, 129.
9. Map of the 'Stichtsche Academie-Land'. Reprinted in: Vredenburch 1914, 193.
10. 'Knor met snor'. Source: http://trajectum.hu.nl/nieuws/veritas_haalt_grap_uit_met_usc.
11. Evolution of the *uf*. Own collection.
12. Wall plug knor. Own collection.
13. Drift 31 in 1934 and 1985. Reprinted in: Von der Dunk, Heere and Reinink 1986, 219.
14. The Four Foot Phallus. Own collection.
15. *Knor* versus *corps*. Own collection.

All photographs from my own collection are available for further research. Everyone who is interested may contact me: H.schouwenburg@uu.nl.

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