Learning to Speak Well
New Materialisms and (Post)Humanities at the Neoliberal University

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2014

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Contents

Acknowledgments

No thesis exists without a very large and complex knot of energies folding into, onto, and through it. As Karen Barad notes—and I return to this point in the thesis—acknowledging can therefore never be about saying your thank-you's, closing a book and simply moving on to the next job. Acknowledging is extending the intra-activities that make up the work that the becoming and being of this thesis were, are and continue to be. It entails a performative enacting of the collective qualities of any 'object', so to say. It is in this light that I want to try to mention here some of the companions that were my helpers in the bringing about of this thesis, indeed in making it possible and conceivable at all.

First and foremost I wish to thank my supervisor Iris van der Tuin, without whom I would not have been in academia anymore. Thank you, Iris, for finding your way in working with me, and also for doing the things you do with and in the neoliberal university. One can only be grateful for the working conditions and environments that you create. This thesis owes much of its final form to an encounter with Peta Hinton, on a sunny day at a Berlin poolside, with curly fries and strange drinks. Thank you, Peta, for cutting across the boundaries between the academic and the non-academic in such productive ways.

None of the thinking that I have done in the last few years, and will be doing in the years to come, I reckon, would have been what it was and will be without the work that truly lit a fire of enthusiasm in me and got me engaged in many things, one of which turns out to be(come) this thesis. I can only be humbly grateful for the enlivening energy, the joyous momentum, and the love that lives in and with the work of Karen Barad. Thank you.

Also part of what was, is and will be are all the members of the reading groups that we've had over the last years, especially Jannie Pranger (laten we gauw weer fietsen!), Freya de Mink, Marko Simonovic (yes, the dots are for you...), and Kathrin Thiele. And the colleagues I have had over the past few years, of whom I should mention Charlotte Dwyer and Aletta Verwoerd—thanks for all the fun! Many thanks also to Halbe Kuipers, Arnoud Arps, and especially Joost Bolten. None of the university jobs that I have had over the past few years—and which folded into the thesis so obviously—would have been my jobs without the wonderful Eef Masson and Karin van Es. Thank you both from the bottom of my heart.

One is never a student alone, even if not all collaborations work out equally smoothly, easy and fun. Thanks to all my fellow students, and our teachers. The neoliberal chapter would not have existed the way it does without the critical interventions of Né Fink, Debby Sielert, and Domi Olivieri. Warmth also to Elisa Fiore. A special place in my heart and mind is reserved for Vasso Belia, who made my years at Utrecht University into an adventure I will never forget. I wish for you to become the intellectual I never wanted to be Vasso. And thank you dear.

If the thesis led to one conclusion, it is that no academic work exist without enfolding into it that which seems non-academic, family, friends, or (pet) animals. Throughout the thesis I ponder the question of

this boundary. If one decides to consider all the teachers, fellow students, and colleagues mentioned until now in these acknowledgments as friends in one way or another, then the friends and family I am about to mention should be considered, in a sense, academic. This is not least so in the case of my parents, Jan and Paula Hebing, without whose support none of my studying or working in the university for the last two and a half years would have been possible at all. My gratitude might best be expressed by simply acknowledging the fact that this thesis is as much their thesis as it is mine.

Thank you also to Wilma Knulst for supporting us throughout, and of course to my brother, Rob Hebing, simply for always being there, from the very start.

Lastly, and most of all, I wish to thank Reineke and Ayla Wieman. I do not have any beautiful words for you (here) dears, since it seems better to me if such things are not written up here, but lived together every day.

December 2014

Introduction

> *This beginning, like all beginnings, is always already threaded through with anticipation of where it is going but will never simply reach and of a past that has yet to come...* (Barad 2010: 244)

Today, the 26th of May 2014, I had a meeting with three colleagues, in which we discussed this week's particularities of the undergraduate course we teach, and the ways in which we would go about our respective workshop-sessions this week. At a certain point, when we were talking about the results of a mid-block discussion with our students about the proceedings of the course, the only one of us that has a tenured position remarked that 'we'—in the broader sense of all teaching staff—are 'lived' by the official student evaluations at the end of each block. Students, that is, in these assessments, can make or break the career of a lecturer. What's more, if the results of such evaluations are not 'good', then a bad light might be shed on an entire program, or even a university at large.

This brief conversation is indicative of shifting power relations in the contemporary university. In his *Report to the Academy*, Gregg Lambert[1] notes that "in many ways faculty (th[e] earlier points of authority) are very much subject to a new regime of assessment" (184). By administrators of course, but "by students first of all" (ibidem). This first development will be discussed in more detail in the neoliberal chapter,[2] but since I am myself a student, I want to take my cue from the second observation. Lambert argues that in the contemporary university students become obliged to judge the value and validity of courses, professors, lecturers, programs, disciplines, etc. This shift of authority from faculty to students has far-reaching implications, and is "a site of great confusion and disorientation" that requires "that the historical structures that define *what knowledge is* […] be re-defined" (185; original emphasis). Indeed, the student is placed in the symbolical position of 'the subject who is supposed to know', which leads Lambert to ask: "what is the state of an institution that invests the point of 'judgment' in a subject who doesn't in fact *know*?" (186; original emphasis). In this light, the current thesis engages multiple dimensions of Lambert's questions

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1   The book that I am referring to was a personal gift to me by Lambert, when he found out what the topic of my research is. The importance of such non/academic relations runs through, and will become clear in, the thesis in its entirety. My use of the "/" follows Karen Barad's use of it, indicating that the boundary between, in this case, non-academic and academic is not given, but rather a matter of continual contestation and reconfiguration. See for example Barad 2012b. I will elaborate on the boundary shifts implicated in non/academic in the neoliberal chapter. However, my use of the "/" points to a more general questioning of seemingly apparent boundaries.

2   Throughout the writing of this thesis, my different chapters were called 'the method(ont)ontological chapter', 'the disciplinarity chapter' and 'the neoliberal chapter'. I have chosen to use these names as designations throughout the thesis. Not only because they work well, but also because they reflect the process of the becoming written of this thesis. As such they are living proof of the process that a seemingly static thing like a thesis actually is (becoming).

regarding the state of the university—its history, nature and governance; the place of (post)humanistic disciplinarity in it; and the subject position of a (writing) student—by exploring the partial perspectives of a student trying to figure out what 'his place' in the contemporary university might be.[3]

During my academic education, which (provisionally) culminates in and with the writing of this thesis, I was often asked to briefly introduce myself, my (educational) background and the topic(s) of my research. This is good academic practice that takes away some of the anonymity between the people working together, even if, in my experience at least, groups often consist of too many people to adequately memorize each and every person and their details. Nonetheless, and although our meeting right now is taking place (mostly) through writing/reading, I want to introduce myself and some of my background here also, if only because it usefully frames the meditations that follow. My name is Alex Hebing. I share my life with Reineke Wieman and our six-year-old (soon to be seven!) daughter Ayla.[4] I am a student in the research master program 'Gender and Ethnicity', which falls under the department Media and Culture Studies of the humanities faculty of Utrecht University, in the Netherlands. Before I came to Utrecht to be part of this program, I completed an undergraduate program in media studies. In addition, and like so many students, I work next to studying. For these past two years I have had the opportunity to be employed as teaching assistant at the media studies departments of both the University of Amsterdam, where I have also obtained my undergraduate degree, and Utrecht University. Next to grading essays and exams, this has often meant teaching first- and second year students in seminars. And so this is me in one sentence: a loving husband and father that is simultaneously RMA student and involved in the practical execution of media studies programs from the educational side.

I have been playing my strange double role within the university for two years now. As noted, this thesis might be considered an attempt to come to grips with 'my place' in the structure of the university at large, and the way I have been attracted by the (post)humanities more specifically.[5] In addition, it will become clear that 'my place' precisely comes into being through the writing of this thesis (and its reading and rewriting, etc.). In my framing my question like this—*what is 'my place' in the contemporary university as a student writing (in) the (post)humanities?*—many things are implied, since it points to my alignment with feminist (onto-)epistemologies that stress the situated embodiment of any process of knowledge production (see for example Rich 1985; Haraway 1988; Barad 2007). In this light, the entire thesis might be seen as an exploration of the conditions of possibility for my being with/in 'my' position (and for the creation of this

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3   Partial perspectives is, of course, Donna Haraway's (1988) term. Haraway privileges partial perspectives on the basis of the argument that it is precisely because "[t]he knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see without claiming to be another" (586; original emphasis). Hence, the knowledges I produce in this thesis about 'my place' are implicated with a privileged perspective in the sense that 'my place' entails a unique set of capacities for connecting. What these are, and how knowing is entangled with this being, is precisely the question this thesis engages.

4   Although I do not pick up this line of argument right away in this introduction, it will become clear throughout the thesis that these familial and similarly 'personal' connections matter with/in and to me.

5   I will discuss my use of the concept (post)humanities in the disciplinarity chapter.

thesis as 'a place', ontologically—a place to be [in], and epistemologically—a place to know [from]). Such a feminist politics of location positions itself against the idea of a disembodied knower, the subject positions implied in positivist totalization and postmodern relativism, which both amount to "'god tricks'[,] promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully," indeed, a subject distanced from the world and able to make universal knowledge claims, irrespective of context(-of-production) (Haraway 1988: 584). Such knowledge claims are to be devalued since they inevitable are produced from a specific perspective (e.g. white, upper class, male), which is hidden through claims to objectivity and universality. 'My place', that is, denotes the "feminist practice that emphasizes the specificity of the speaking subject in order to foreground her capacity *to* speak, and also to account for the way that all knowledge claims remain situated and contingent" (Hinton 2014: 100; original emphasis). It is in this regard that this thesis entails the writing-together of a cartography of 'my place', both as a place to be (in) and to know (from). Hence, I follow Rosi Braidotti in understanding a cartography as "a theoretically based and politically informed reading of the present. Cartographies aim at epistemic and ethical accountability by unveiling the power locations which structure our subject-position[s]" (2013: 164).

There is a body of work that plays a decisive role in my being drawn into this particular line of thought, one that also urges me in the direction of critically engaging the idea of location, which is never anything simple and unitary: Karen Barad's. Barad's body of work is not only extremely inspiring and challenging theoretically and intellectually (her strand of philosophy-physics that works with/in the inseparability of cultural theories and quantum physics required a significant change of mindset in my case—and that's still happening), I also vividly remember being affectionately and emotionally struck by the acknowledgments of her book—that is, *before* I read the rest of it—especially with regards to the ways in which the personal and familial bonds that are inextricably part of her (academic) work are emphasized. These acknowledgments and bonds will be returned to in the neoliberal chapter. My being affected by Barad's work before reading the bulk of it, and the intellectual inspiration emerging through this 'posthuman interpellation'[6] proves a point that will be made in more detail in my method(ont)ological considerations through the concept of the threshold, namely that one is always already "in the middle of things" (Jackson and Mazzei 2013: 264). What I am alluding to here is the idea that my meeting Barad's body of work was not an encounter between two completely distinct things, book and reader, since in the feminist relational ontologies that I will engage throughout this thesis, such totally independent and closed-off bodies (in all senses) do not exist. Barad's neologism 'intra-action', is insightful here. Contrasted with the more usual 'interaction', which assumes that separate individual (id)entities[7] and bodies of work precede their interaction, intra-action connotes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through their relatings (2007:

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6   A wink to Iris van der Tuin's conceptualization. See Van der Tuin 2014a.
7   The notion of (id)entities is inspired by Barad's diffracting of natural sciences and social and cultural studies (or social and political sciences and the humanities), by confounding the distinction between the 'entities' that natural sciences engage with, and the supposedly socio-cultural concern with issues of 'identity'. See for example Barad (2007).

33). As a reader, I was never unconnected to Barad's book and its meanings (or vice versa). It is precisely the point that the ontologically primitive relating of her work and her reader(s), and/or of this thesis-writing and you enable the mutual co-constituting of 'I' and 'book' and 'Barad' and 'you'—a veritable writingreading.[8]

As mentioned, Barad engages with quantum physics, and 'intra-action' is pivotal to her understanding of measurements (e.g. the use of a measuring apparatus in an experiment). Barad's body of work shows convincingly that there is no inherent distinction between an object of measurement (e.g. a particle or atom) and the measuring apparatus. Crucially, Barad's understanding of apparatuses diffractively adapts Niels Bohr's body of work on quantum physics and Michel Foucault's socio-cultural notion of discursive apparatuses ('dispositifs'), in order to show that apparatuses are specific *material-discursive* configurations, in which the boundaries between the material/natural/non-human and discursive/cultural/human are not given, but constructed. That is, instead of a dualistic ontology that takes for granted a split between nature and culture, Barad's agential realism is a monist ontology, in which what gets to count as 'nature' and 'culture' is a continual process of material-discursive construction, a process in which a multitude of non/in/post/human forces are agentially significant. It is also in this sense that the question of the (post)humanities becomes pertinent. For what, if anything, remains of the idea of the humanities if the notion of the human is so fundamentally contested? This question I will pick up in the disciplinarity chapter.

In relation to the production of (academic) knowledges the confounding of the boundary between a (human) knower and the known implies that knowledges produced by humans are not descriptions of a world 'out there' that would exist in exactly the same way if humans were not present to describe it, since "we are part of that nature that we seek to understand" (2007: 67; emphasis omitted):

> the knower does not stand in a relation of absolute externality to the [rest of the] world – there is no such exterior observational point […] We are not outside observers of the world. Neither are we simply located at particular places *in* the world; rather we are part *of* the world in its ongoing intra-activity. (184; original emphases).

The doing of measurements or making of observations, then, is never about producing knowledge about a world 'out there'. Indeed, these practices are 'world making practices', to use a Harawayian phrasing. In relation to apparatuses, Iris van der Tuin explains that "[t]he idea is that instrumentation *does things*," (2011c: 18/19; original emphasis). It's crucial to see here that apparatuses "are not merely assemblages that include nonhumans as well as humans. Rather, apparatuses are specific material reconfigurings of the world

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8   In drawing together the verbs writing and reading, and thus confounding the seemingly apparent boundary between them, I am, of course, drawing on Haraway's neologism 'natureculture' (2003). Also resonating here are N. Katherine Hayles's 'mindbody' (2003), Hillevi Lenz Taguchi's 'bodymind' (2012), and Natalie S. Loveless's 'theorypractice' (2012). Moreover, in the current context it also problematizes the seemingly simple distinction between 'teachers' reading the writings of 'students', or 'students' reading the writings of 'teachers'. For in what role am I writing this writing? (And in what role are you reading it?) More on the specificities of 'writingreading' follows in the method(ont)ological chapter.

that do not merely emerge in time but iteratively reconfigure spacetimematter [i.e. the world, A.H.] as part of the ongoing dynamism of becoming" (Barad, 2007: 142). Knowing, in short, "is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part [of the world]" (185).

It is the task of this thesis in its entirety to unfold how I read and write (the consequences of) this line of thinking, especially as regards the 'human' qualities of knowledges that are produced in the (post)humanities. And then still, as may be clear from the kind of ontology proposed throughout this introduction, there won't be any definitive answers, since processual intra-activity implies that the world's becoming is fundamentally open. Indeed, what is important to take from my discussion at this point is the implication of Barad's process ontology: there is never such a thing as a stable location, nor such a thing as 'my place' that is internally coherent, unitary, and 'one'. Positions are much rather position*ings*, in the sense that they are produced through multiple apparatuses, what I will call 'apparatic movements'; that is, movements-of-be(com)ing, becoming-movements, that condition and are conditioned by the im/possibilities for a speaking of and from 'a place', being in and producing knowledge from a certain 'perspective'. I will engage these ideas more in depth in the method(ont)ological chapter and the conclusion. Crucially, then, in order to understand 'my place', I will follow Barad by not starting "with reified distinctions from the outset but to do the necessary genealogical analyses to see what the specific [material-discursive apparatuses] look like" (211). The point here is that certain apparatuses do certain things, condition and enable 'my place', and the particularities of these apparatuses will be traced, so that 'my place' might cartographically emerge.

The following chapters, indeed, map out various apparatic movements that produce 'my place':

– the method(ont)ological chapter: new materialist philosophies, *diffractive onto-epistemologies* and the way they challenge separations between human, non-human, inhuman, and posthuman, but also the challenges such ontologies pose with regard to thinking the agentiality of a place;

– the disciplinarity chapter: my place as a student in a research master in the supposedly endangered *discipline of the humanities*, but also the possibilities offered through (being in) the contemporary humanities, especially with regard to the idea of the posthumanities;

– the neoliberal chapter: my place in a *neoliberal university* as a cheap and easily disposable member of the (teaching) staff, but also the conditions of possibility of this place, in the sense of 'my place', but also as the be(com)ing possible of the neoliberal university as such.

It will become increasingly clear throughout this thesis that these three material-discursive apparatuses are not three neatly separated things, but rather co-constitutively knotted together in and with the be(com)ing of 'my place'. Each of them spills over into the other, foreclosing a sense of clearly delineated, unified apparatuses (and chapters). So, whereas the latter two chapters (the disciplinarity chapter and the neoliberal chapter) might be writtenread to respectively engage my role(s) as a worker in the university and as a student (e.g. humanistic researcher) in the (post)humanities, the method(ont)ological chapter deals with the

im/possibilities offered by my role as the writer of this thesis. Moreover, that chapter explicates a constitutive tension that is with/in the entire thesis. This tension is a guiding thematic throughout the apparatic movement that this thesis is itself (becoming), and it will be the task of the conclusion to bring together the various chapters in an exploration of the productive differing between the idea of a location, 'my place', and a processual and intra-active ontology in which "[e]xistence is not an individual affair" (Barad 2007: ix).

In fact this productive tension is a characteristically feminist concern. Not only have feminists been arguing for decades in favor of the situated knowledges and embodied subjectivities that I align myself with in this thesis, they have also been struggling with the tension between a politics of inclusion or visibility of embodied specificities and the essentialist tendencies in such a politics (e.g. the reification of the category and place of 'woman'). As Hinton explains, the (new materialist) feminist "reconfiguring of subjectivity disrupts the capacity to secure the identity of woman in any straightforward manner, while at the same time it requires something of this identity in order to ground its political aspirations" (2014: 102). In light of this thesis, it is clear that if one posits that relations are *ontologically primitive* (Barad 2007: 139), the idea of what Hinton describes as an enunciative politics—accounting for 'who' it is that speaks or writesreads— offers a paradox, since "[i]nsisting that we account for 'who' it is that speaks or organizes collectivity […] demands a self-presence of that speaking subject and its identity—the same claim for self-presence which informs the [supposedly masculinist; A.H.] rational subject's capacity to stand back from the world in order to take measure of it" (2014: 105). In other words, the demand for situated knowledges seems to suggest that one's position or place (e.g. woman) may exist prior to one's speaking or writingreading, but this runs counter to the idea that as a knower one is *of* the world, that as a woman, writer, or reader one is with/in the apparatic movements of the becoming-world, and therefore never simply 'one'.

In dialogue with Donna Haraway, Hinton develops the idea of an *an*nunciative politics[9], which explicitly keeps the dilemma of a politics of location in place. Arguing that boundaries, for example of 'a place', are not drawn from a position of distance, but come about with/in and through the self-articulation of the world in its differential becoming, Hinton is able to suggest that onto-epistemological accounts of locations, perspectives and 'places' like the one I am attempting here, walk a political tightrope that may actually be *endemic* to such projects (108). If, as feminist reworkings of subjectivity imply, the givenness of identity becomes unavailable as an enunciative position, what emerges is an account of subjectivity in which each specific location is of the world in its entirety. The specificity of 'a place', that is, is simultaneously local and dispersed throughout the entire system that is articulating itself differentially. A (political) subject therefore does not pre-exist her 'place', but is called into being as an expression of the world's differing, its differential be(com)ing. Enunciating, according to Hinton, then gives way to annunciation, which entails:

the announcement or arrival of an identity via its other. But this is an arrival that is never complete,

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9   The italics here were suggested by Iris van der Tuin, in her role as supervisor for this thesis. (i.e. they are not Hinton's.)

anticipated but never fully known, and an 'other' that is potentially constitutive of the subject's identity, leaving it open and already implicated. Annunciation […] suggests that a subject's attempt to situate herself is at the same time a process of *being situated*—a congealing of an identity that cannot be fixed and that cannot exclude the context of its production. Embodied subjectivity is, therefore, at once situated and already the entire web of what it speaks (108; original emphasis)

It is in this sense of simultaneous acting and being acted upon, of speaking and being spoken, of writing and being written, of producing and being produced through knowledge, that this thesis annunciatively explores 'my place', and the respective apparatuses that co-constitute it. This thesis is undeniably an onto-epistemology of 'my place', in the sense that it annunciates 'my place' as a perspective from which to know, whilst it is simultaneously produced through the knowledges it engages. Equally, it is an expression by the apparatuses that I am *of* (e.g. the neoliberal university, new materialist philosophies), whilst simultaneously (re)expressing the very being of these apparatuses from and with 'my place'.

At stake in the feminist tension running through the thesis, as might be clear by now, are the notions of subjectivity and (political) agency in new materialist, diffractive onto-epistemologies. That is, notions such as annunciation explore the possibilities for making (different) differences in process-oriented onto-epistemologies that foreclose the possibility of a stable position from which an individual might act. The three chapters of this thesis, then, might be viewed as case studies pertaining to these questions of individuality and agency, although I will only 're-turn' explicitly to these issues with/in the conclusion, in which I discuss my various explorations of the apparatuses with/in 'my place' framed by these issues. For example, and just briefly and suggestively, in line with Hinton's suggestions and paraphrasing Barad, I might say that I am also not *in* a neoliberal university or society, but rather *of* it (cf. Barad 2007: 185). But if I am *of neoliberalism*, is there a possibility of making a difference, of 'resistance' to neoliberalist ways of organizing education and research? This line of questioning is present throughout the thesis and picked up in the conclusion.

All in all, the thesis in its entirety explores the paradox of the idea of 'a place' performatively, opening up/closing down certain im/possibilities, not only in its becoming written, but also in its becoming read. Indeed, any writing is fundamentally open, even if it has to be performed as an academically written piece—focusing on the answering of one research question and its subquestions. This thesis is therefore an exercise in not trying or claiming to settle things down, but much more to be and stay in the middle of things[10], on the threshold with/in, in a becoming-movement. One concept might be considered my central tool in conceiving and contributing to the becoming of this thesis, a concept that, from my partial perspective, deserves special attention in a perhaps strange place of introduction, namely as the last

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10 I am here playing on Haraway's notion of 'staying with the trouble'. See for instance the lecture with this title given by Haraway at the European Graduate School: <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/donna-haraway/videos/staying-with-the-trouble/>. Last accessed 08-10-14.

paragraph of my introduction. The concept at hand is 'instauration' a concept from Étienne Souriau recently revitalized by Bruno Latour. It addresses "the *doing of making* [le *faire faire*, B.L.], the *making exist*" in the sense that an artist, scientist, writer, or reader occupying himself with/in a constructive practice "bounc[es] off the action and the reception of the work (or the autonomy of the fact)" (Latour 2011: 310). According to Latour, "the act of instauration has to provide *the opportunity to encounter beings capable of worrying you. Beings whose ontological status is still open but that are nevertheless capable of* making *you* do *something, of unsettling you, insisting, obliging you to speak well of them* (Latour 2013: 161; original emphases). Of crucial importance to my understanding of the concept is Souriau's idea that "without activity, without worries, and without craftsmanship there would be no work, no being" (in Latour 2011: 311). In other words, an instaurative act, like my writing (but also your reading!) of this thesis, entails an engagement with a becoming that is indeterminate and open, but that one is at the same time already affected by (worried in Latour's terms). As such, it requires hard work, effort and dedication to happen, to become, although we, as the writer and reader of this thesis, are not in full control of what might happen exactly. Instauration is doing a lot of work to *let something happen*. Simultaneously, it points to the fundamental openness of be(com)ing, which is an incessant instaurative process of intra-active annunciation. It will have been the work of this thesis to instauratively explore 'my place', and the many ways in which it is conditioned by, and yet opens up certain apparatic movements, including movements of knowledge production. The reader is invited to join with/in this adventure, not as the one hoping to 'get' what I (the author) mean, but as an instaurative agent furthering the entanglements, in a thinking-together/apart[11] that hopefully provokes productivity...

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11 The idea of a thinking-together/apart draws on the Baradian notion of cutting-together/apart (see Barad 2007: 179; Schrader 2010: 275; and Barad 2012: 11). The concept shows up in many guises throughout the thesis, because it so beautifully captures the sense of paradox that is implied in the double movement of becoming, as a differentiating-entangling (in one move).

The method(ont)ological chapter

*On 'my place', Situated Knowledges, Diffraction, Cloud*ing *and Apparatic Movements*

In the introduction it was established that this thesis is an exploration of 'my place' in the contemporary university. In particular, 'my place' denotes three main apparatuses: the neoliberal nature of the university today, the disciplinarity of the (post)humanities, and the implications of becoming the writer of this thesis, of be(com)ing a researcher in the contemporary (post)humanities. Each of these knots is actively shaping 'my place', simultaneously limiting and enabling certain im/possibilities. 'My place' is therefore not a simple unity, but precisely the complex mo(ve)ments of multiple structures. This chapter, then, elaborates on what is meant with the notion of 'apparatus' in this thesis. Therefore, it explores the idea of material-discursive apparatuses implicated in the production of 'my place' as a feature of onto-epistemologies, and discusses the methodological implications and resulting theoretical and practical choices that came about during the researching and writing of this thesis. Most importantly, I will engage the emerging methodology of diffractive reading, where the notion of diffraction implies not only a methodology, but simultaneously an ontology. (Post)humanistic textual practices like the becoming written (and read!) of this thesis are, through this line of inquiry, ontological practices; not 'about' the world, but *of* the world. Textual weavings, that is, are worldly weavings, through which "part of the world becomes differentially intelligible to another part of the world" (Barad 2007: 379). In short, the writingreading that this thesis is (becoming), is itself an apparatus that is annunciatively co-productive in the way the world becomes diffractively intelligible to itself. It is in this regard, particularly the ontological diffr/activity of the writingreading that you and I are currently instauratively implicated with/in that I want to suggest the notion of diffractive writing, to point to agential im/possibilities in the coming about of a thesis.

Apparatic movements: Onto-epistemological Clouds of Starlings

In the introduction we wroteread that Barad's agential realism is a monist ontology, in which determinate (id)entities do not exist independently of (human) knowledge practices, but emerge through and with/in these practices. Humans, in this scheme of things, are not outside knowers of a nature that lies waiting to be discovered, since the apparatuses used to measure (in Barad's work during quantum physical experiments) are causally significant in the phenomenon that becomes. However, this doesn't mean that humans and their measurement apparatuses produce the world *ex nihilo*: "Reality does not depend on the prior existence of human beings; rather, the point is to understand that 'humans' are themselves natural phenomena" produced

in and through material-discursive apparatuses (336). Indeed, what gets to count as 'nature' and 'culture' is a continual process of material-discursive construction, a process in which a multitude of non/in/post/human forces are agentially significant.

Let me introduce three figurations that have been shaping my understanding of Barad's onto-epistemology with/in the past few years. First of all, there is Vicki Kirby's work, mostly her *Quantum Anthropologies* (hereafter *QA*), which has been extremely fruitful for my understandings of ontologies in which relations are primitive. For what, one might ask, might an individual (id)entity (e.g. a particle, a writer, a thesis, a reading) be in such an onto-epistemology? Kirby works on the Saussurian logic pertaining to signs and meaning making to show how the relational qualities that Saussure describes for language, are actually at work in 'life at large' (the subtitle of *QA*). In the same way as the meaning of each sign is dependent on its context, any

Figure 1: An ambiguous sign. Drawing by author, based on a lecture given by Vicki Kirby at Utrecht University, in April 2013.

individual (id)entity is an instantiation of a system in its entirety. Kirby, in a seminar she taught at Utrecht University in April 2013, used an example that I will try to reproduce here. Kirby drew on the blackboard a sign similar to the one in figure 1, asking the students what it was. Various answers came up, varying from 'a visualization of a road leading into the distance' to 'an A'. Ultimately, Kirby showed by drawing different, less ambiguous signs around the ambiguous one that the meaning of one sign is clearly dependent on its context (see figure(s) 2). For Kirby, the line of thinking that is implied by this example, directs attention not
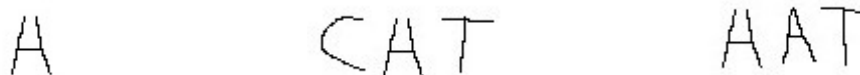
Figure(s) 2: An ambiguous sign in context. Drawings by author, based on the same lecture by Vicki Kirby.

only to how an individual is dependent on its context, but how indeed "the context is somehow within [the] individual,...[which has] a specific delimited locality as well as a global presence" (2011: 27). That is, the use of an ambiguous sign and its relations in different contexts, points to how each individual (id)entity is an articulation of a system in its entirety, in this example a system of letters. Indeed:

> […] any "unit" is not so much a separate part of a larger whole to which it remains indebted, but rather a unique instantiation of the system's own reinvention (or rewriting) of itself. Thus, every 'instance' *is* 'the whole', [creating an] imploded, holographic sense of identity […]
> (Kirby in Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012: 175; emphasis in Kirby's original).

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An individual, in short, is not dependent on its context, if this context is understood as the things that are around, but outside, that individual. Rather, context is with/in, *with*, *in*, and *within* each individual, which is a differential instantiation of the system (in Kirby's work 'nature', Barad might say 'world') in its entirety. At the same time, of course, each individual unit is (co-)constitutive of the whole, that doesn't exist without (the relations between) its parts.

Secondly, Barad uses a visualization (Figure 3) of entangled genealogies in an attempt to visually map out the idea that quantum physics (or any 'individual' phenomenon for that matter) is inextricably connected to many many things, some closer, some farther, but all tied together in a complex worldly knot. She explains that the image offered is "wholly inadequate," but still uses it to provide some sense of a "complex and lively manifold of entangled and changing practices and possibilities" (2007: 388). Crucially, the 'blobby' structure one sees is not intended as a simple three dimension object, but rather "an ever-changing multidimensional topological manifold *of* spacetimematter" (ibidem; original emphasis). Moreover, Barad emphasizes that the illustration, as a static image, fails to convey the sense of movement and continuously changing relations and multiple en/foldings that are crucial for her understanding of the world. Still, I find it a very thought-provoking image, especially with regards to connections that are visualized as

Entangled genealogies. *Illustration by Nicolle Rager Fuller and Karen Barad.*

Figure 3. Reproduced from Barad 2007: 389.

'wormholes', suggesting linkages 'in the background', thus stressing the interconnectedness of all things, even those one might never conceive of as connected. The image draws attention to the idea that things are not as far apart as they may seem (e.g. Nazi antisemitism and genetic engineering are surely more closely entangled than is visually suggested). This is very inviting in relation to the researching and drawing out of genealogical maps of, in my case, the various apparatuses that condition 'my place'.

Lastly, I want to add a visualization that I stumbled upon elsewhere, namely in the work of Dutch artist-musician-filmmaker-'story hunter' Leon Giesen, also known as Mondo Leone. Mondo Leone is a project that combines storytelling, filmic and musical material, and theater in brilliantly showing the beauty with/in everyday life in not-so-everyday ways. As part of one of his theater shows, Leon projected moving images of a cloud of starlings flying above Utrecht (his place of residence), to which he made music live. A short clip of this can be found on Youtube, and a screenshot from this video is figure 4.[12] As a visualization that for me brings together Kirby's example and Barad's visualization, moving images of a cloud of starlings, especially the way such a cloud seems to move as a self-organizing 'blob' that is endlessly changing shape but remains 'one', though made up of thousands of starlings, do (at least) two things in this writingreading.[13] On the one hand, it provides me with a very vivid moving visualization of Barad's 'blob', and the complex dynamics of the intra-active relations that are endlessly shifting, folding, and reconfigured/ing. This is the most important function of this image,

Figure 4. Screenshot from Mondo Leone's *Het Grote Gebeuren*.

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12 See: <http://youtu.be/3JNoYJVKdQ8>. Last accessed 07-09-14.
13 Unfortunately, the shape and form this thesis has taken/been given does not allow for an elaboration of the phenomenon of clouds of starlings itself. I believe that the reader is quite capable of finding more information about this her- or himself, although one thing is interesting to take note of at this point: starlings display this type of behavior in their role as 'food' for certain kinds of birds of prey. The phenomenon of a cloud of starlings, that is, does not emerge 'alone', but through relations. My attention was pointed in the direction of this relation by a lecture on complexity by Melanie Mitchell entitled 'Complexity – a Guided Tour' (see <http://youtu.be/GYChwJq0310>). Last accessed 07-09-14).

and the cloud of starlings as a figuration for the onto-epistemological dance that any knowledge practice is will be diffracting throughout this thesis. In particular, I envision 'my place' as something like a cloud of starlings, made up of various movements, dynamic flows concentrated in one place, stretching out in another, constantly reconfiguring their shapes and respective positionings, but still comprising 'one' cloud: 'my place'.

A useful notion to think such oneness that is never simply one (more below) is 'autopoiesis', a notion by Franscisco Varela and Humberto Maturana in relation to biological and neurophysiological systems, picked up by Niklas Luhman in order to work with social systems, and finding its way into this thesis via Cary Wolfe, who uses it to theorize disciplinarity as well as subjectivity, posthumanistically. In particular, the theory of autopoiesis is helpful

> to make sense of the seemingly paradoxical fact that systems are both open *and* closed; to exist and reproduce themselves, they must maintain their boundaries and integrity through a process of self-referential closure; and it is only on the basis of this closure that they can then engage in 'structural coupling' with their environment. (Wolfe 2010: 111; original emphasis)

Autopoietic systems, that is, "constantly (re)produce the elements that in turn produce *them*" (ibid; original emphasis). Any overall movement of a cloud of starlings obviously does not exist without the movements individual birds, while simultaneously the movements of each of these birds are significantly conditioned by the cloud in its entirety. Varela and Maturana describe this as recursive logic: "a process that operates on the product of its own operation" (1992: 256). It is this ontologically recursive process that I will call 'cloud*ing*', to emphasize the weird presence of the entire worldly cloud in each (local) specific individualization.

Each apparatus that I explore in a chapter, as well as this thesis itself, might be understood as a complex dynamic and autopoietic 'blob' of diffractive self-organizing movement and folding. It will be quite clear that each apparatus is not outside of the worldly cloud of starlings, producing worlding movements from outside it, but precisely "constituted and dynamically reconstituted as part of the ongoing intra-activity of the world" (Barad 2007: 146). Barad argues that apparatuses are boundary making practices, constituting objects of research and simultaneously themselves part of the differential onto-epistemological articulations of the world. One might usefully imagine an apparatus as a qualitative intensification with/in the cloud of starlings, where an apparatus is a very specific (set of) movement(s) through which a specific pattern instantiates itself. Etymologically, 'apparatus' is connected to 'preparation', and this is suggestive (cf. Hinton's notion of annunciation). The relation isn't causal in a linear fashion however (i.e. apparatuses cause object/discipline), but recursive: all individualities and system as a whole are articulated through each other. If this does not clearly delineate what an apparatus *is*, this is because, as Barad, explains,

> apparatuses are not located in the world but are material configurations or reconfigurings of the world that re(con)figure spatiality and temporality as well as (the traditional notion of) dynamics

(i.e., they do not exist as static structures, nor do they merely unfold or evolve in space and time). (146)

Apparatuses, that is, are very specific material-discursive onto-epistemological configurations, implying detailed account(ing)s of what and where they are or were (happening). Therefore, it is precisely the project with/in each chapter in this thesis to trace and map out an apparatic movement or set thereof, and articulate the specific im/possibilities it implies in the coming into being of 'my place', as simultaneously a location to be (in) and a perspective to know (from).

On the other hand, the fact that I can only reproduce a screenshot of this moving and dynamic phenomenon points to a problem that Barad also stumbles upon with the use of visualizations on paper: the fact that in our current world, saturated with moving images of many kinds, writing a thesis in paper form might not be an adequate way of assessing the progress and ability of research master students in the (post)humanities. It seems to me that the non-moving images that writing on paper implies, shows that this form of assessing can not hold its dominant position much longer, if only because through this apparatus and its particular limitations the thought and knowledges produced do not seem adequate for grasping the sheer complexity of our contemporary world. Maybe, that is, it is time to move on to (partially) other media, that might allow for the inclusion of moving or even movable visualizations. For now, however, let us explore the ways in which thinking with cloud*ing* starlings brings together Kirby and Barad, and the method(ont)ological implications this has for exploring the apparatuses that condition 'my place'.

As was stated already in the introduction, onto-epistemology entails the insight that knowledges produced by humans are not descriptions of a world 'out there', that would exist in exactly the same way if humans were not present to describe it, since "we are part of that nature that we seek to understand" (2007: 67; emphasis omitted). It doesn't suffice to imagine the world as a cloud of starlings, folding and moving in complex ways. To understand knowledge practices it is most fruitful to imagine ourselves part(s) of the cloud, with/in the dynamics as they reconfigure and are reconfigured. Indeed, the doing of measurements or making of observations is never about producing knowledge about a world 'out there', but '*world making practices*', to use a Harawayian phrasing. Any 'unit' here, (the movement of) an individual starling, is both (co-)constitutive of and constituted by the cloud in its entirety, a process that is fundamentally open-ended and non-linearly autopoietic. Crucially, an individuality is *of* the cloud, a specific cloud*ing*. Again, I think individuality through the *movements* of individual starlings, aligning with Elizabeth Grosz' conceptualization of movements:

> I have called these movements 'becomings', but what it is that becomes, and what it becomes, are less clear and less interesting than the movement itself. Movement does not attach to a stable thing, putting it in motion; rather, *movement preexists the thing and is the process of differentiation that distinguishes one object from another.* (2011: 1; my emphasis)

In relation to knowledge practices, then, and Iris van der Tuin's argument that "instrumentation *does things*," (2011c: 18/19; original emphasis), it is crucial to see that apparatuses "are not merely assemblages that include nonhumans as well as humans. Rather, apparatuses are specific material reconfigurings of the world that do not merely emerge in time but iteratively reconfigure spacetimematter [i.e. the world, A.H.] as part of the ongoing dynamism of becoming" (Barad, 2007: 142). Knowing, either through the setting up of a measurement with/in quantum physics, or through the writing of a thesis in the (post)humanities, is an ontological practice: it is a process (co-)constitutive of the worlding that is taking place, a particular movement in a cloud of starlings, co-constituting it. Simultaneously, such a process is constituted by the system in its entirety, a specific instantiation of its context, like a starling moving along with the flow of the bigger cloud. The cloud (world) and the individual (human) are not two different (i.e. distinct, interacting) things, but rather co-constitutions in an instaurative processual cloud*ing* of differing intra-activity.

Affirmative Relatings and Making Visible the Apparatus of (a) Diffractive Methodology

In the relational onto-epistemology visualized through a cloud of starlings above, knowledge practices are part of the differential dynamics constituting the world as processual intra-activity. Thesis writing, for instance, entails the (diffr)active reconfiguring of the apparatuses mapped out in the thesis. Paradoxically, of course, the same thesis writing is actively conditioned by these apparatuses. In relation to (post)humanistic[14] knowledge practices, this strangeness has called new feminist materialists to embrace a mode of relating that acknowledges worldly intra-connectedness, and to work with/in the idea that "activities dedicated to thought and writing are inventive," implicating that critical thinkers' "logical efforts feed back and add to reality, in some small, probably microscopic way" (Massumi 2002: 12; reordered). In this long quote, Kirby explains the stakes elegantly:

> the practice of doing critique involves close encounters with another person's way of thinking, with their intellectual commitments and even the temperament and personal idiosyncrasies that animate their writing style. How we manage the intimacy of these exercises, especially when the aim of our analysis might be to discount that position and take our distance from it, already rehearses [the] difficult question of identity formation and the implications of relationality [...O]ne of the most pressing issues in political analysis today [...] is the question of critique—how to engage others more generously through interconnection; how to avoid the more murderous maneuvers of dialectical reasoning that negate another's position as wrong in order to affirm our own position as right—as *the* one (and only) position. (Kirby, 2011, 82/83; original emphasis)

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14 See note 24 on my distinction between (post)humanities and posthumanities.

It is the mode of relating 'more generously' mentioned by Kirby that I am particularly interested in practicing with/in this thesis. More specifically, in my view a relationally onto-epistemological thesis in the (post)humanities should adhere to what Brian Massumi calls "a productivist approach," the idea that cultural theories and writings(readings) add to the world, and that posthumanistic cultural theorists should embrace this 'inventiveness', even if it is only a very meager addition:

> when you write you are adding something to the world, if only the enjoyment itself, and that by adding that ounce of positive experience to the world you are affirming it, celebrating its potential, tending its growth. (Massumi 2002: 12/13)

Indeed, as van der Tuin argues, "an affirmative reading does not allow for leaving a text untouched, and requires a text's readers to engage with the transformation" (van der Tuin 2011a: 23; references omitted). This engagement with a text's transformation, the adding to the world that any scholarly activity is, read and understand through the concept of 'instauration' introduced in the introduction, i.e. the doing of making, a working hard to let a be(com)ing happen. At this point it is important to notice that in each and every word or image writtenread throughout this thesis, the mode of relating is affirmative; the attempt is always to (re)configure 'my place' such that a productive folding or movement of the worldly clouding might be enabled, even if the im/possibilities for this production are conditioned by the apparatuses structuring 'my place'. In this regard, I align myself with Grosz' insights regarding critical feminist perspectives and their mode(s) of relating:

> We need to affirm the joyousness of the kind of life that we are looking for. The joyousness of art, the pleasure of thought, feminism needs to return to something that makes it feel happier as well as productive. Joy, affirmation, pleasure, these are not obstacles to our self-understanding, they are forms of self-understanding. And if life is more and more oppressive, then in a way it is only these small pockets of knowledge production, art production that provide a counter to the weight and emptiness of everyday life. So we need to affirm, we need a place where we can simply affirm. The rest of the world is bleak enough. (Grosz in Kontturi and Tiainen 2007: 254/255)

The methodology that will be used and developed with/in this thesis to engage in the joyful, productive affirmation and transformation—instauration—of the apparatuses comprising 'my place' and the bodies of work through which these apparatuses will come to be explored and mapped out, is a diffractive methodology. In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, I will therefore productively read together several *bodies of work* and the workers entangled in their beings,[15] to enhance a deeper understanding of the practice

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15 I am aware that 'workers' is a contested term, especially in relation to Marxist theory. I introduce it here experimentally, in an attempt to evade connotations that terms like 'creator' and 'maker' might have. Workers, here,

of doing diffractive readings. Importantly, I will first focus more on the the onto-epistemological implications of diffractive textual practices. In particular, this exploration provides a more detailed account of the (ways through which) the differential dynamics alluded to above through the visualization of a cloud of starlings and how these dynamics might be understood in relation to diffractive onto-epistemological readings. Diffr/*active*.

Diffraction was coined as a tool for feminist research by Donna Haraway in the 1990s, as an alternative optical metaphor for reflective mirroring and the related idea of critical self-reflexivity. She argues that knowledge practices structured around the idea of reflection mirror the same elsewhere, and as such do not allow for the creation of something new, for differences to be made. She offers diffraction as "a metaphor for another kind of critical consciousness," one that is "committed to making a difference and not to repeating" the same elsewhere in more or less distorted form (1997: 273). Instead of critical thinking being about questions of representation and the relation(s) between originals and copies, in which the process of vision often entails mis-seeing what is seen, Haraway offers diffraction as a way to envision the production of differences. Indeed, diffraction, for her, "is a narrative, graphic, psychological, spiritual, and political technology for making consequential meanings" (ibidem).

In the interview book *How Like a Leaf* Haraway invites critical thinkers to think about what diffraction entails physically:

> when light passes through slits, the light rays that pass through are broken up. And if you have a screen at one end to register what happens, what you get is a record of the passage of the light rays onto the screen. This 'record' shows the history of their passage through the slits. So what you get is not a reflection; it's the record of a passage. (2000: 103)

This 'record of a passage' is what is called a diffraction pattern. Crucially, such a pattern "does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the *effects* of differences appear" ([1992], 2004: 70; original emphasis). This, then, is where the potential of diffraction as a metaphor is situated for Haraway. For, as Jacob Metcalf notes, a diffraction pattern does not map pre-existing differences; it is "a map of the *effects* of producing difference" (2008: 103; original emphasis). Thinking diffractively does not allow for taking (id)entities and the differences between them for granted. Instead it requires recognition of "those differences and identities as *effects* of a specific difference-producing apparatus" (ibidem; original emphasis). Knowledge practices are no longer about how objects are (mis)represented by subjects for Haraway, but about articulations, understood as "practice[s] in which we construct a relation to others—not as objects but

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resonates with the term 'body of work' that I chose to designate various forms of research that might be brought together diffractively (i.e. traditions, authors, concepts, books, oeuvres, etc.). Bodies, in this construction, draws attention to the materiality of texts (see also Kirby 2011). As will become clear, intentionality and agency are not clear-cut notions with/in a diffractive onto-epistemology. As such I introduce 'workers', to emphasize the co-constitutive role of researchers in the becoming of the research(ed). Please note that when below I refer to bodies or a body of work, the worker(s) implicated in their being(s) are already entangled.

as subjects or actants" (Campbell 2004: 174). Knowing the world is engaging *with* the world, and to understand the world it is crucial to study "the patterns created by interactions" (Tanesini in Campbell 2004: 174). As a metaphor for critical knowledge production, then, diffraction shifts attention away from debates about representations as mirror-reflections, as well as from the practice of self-reflexivity. The emphasis is put on the knowledge producing apparatuses that articulate difference(s), and about mapping ('recording') these differences in diffraction patterns. Knowers, then, are not outside observers of such activities, but fully implicated and becoming with and in them.

Barad picks up and develops the use of the metaphor of diffraction in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007). There Barad considers diffraction as a methodology for knowledge production *and* as ontological phenomenon. In a diffractive reading strategy, which I consider more in depth below, Barad argues, "differing lines of thought can productively be read through one another for the patterns of resonance and dissonance that illuminate new possibilities for understanding and for being" (142). Barad, in accordance with Haraway, considers diffraction an "apt metaphor," for her method of reading and thinking insights through one another (71). Likewise, her use of diffraction is based on her history with/in quantum physics, and thus she considers it, firstly, a "physical phenomenon" (ibidem). It is interesting to explore her account of diffraction as a physical phenomenon further here, since it nuances Haraway's initial 'making visible' of the concept. After all, diffractive practices are onto-epistemological practices, hence it musn't be understood as simply, in the sense of 'only', a metaphor.

Diffraction, Barad explains, "has to do with the way waves combine when they overlap and the apparent bending and spreading of waves that occurs when waves encounter an obstruction" (74). As an example she shows an image of the shadow of a razor illuminated by a single wavelength light source (Figure 5 is a similar figure, cf. 2007: 76). This image shows that, through different combinations of the crests and troughs of the light waves that pass the various edges of the razor, a diffraction pattern of light and
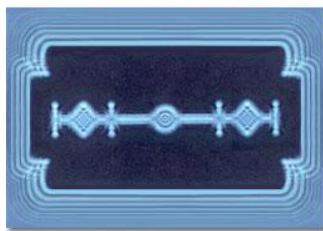

Figure 5. The shadow of a razor blade. (Grimaldi 2012)

dark lines emerges. This pattern makes it hard to establish a determinate boundary; there are light lines in areas we might expect to be dark; and dark lines in areas we might expect to be light (like for instance in the notched-out part of the blade). Indeed, one may ask where the razor ends and its surroundings begin. Now, in classical physics, diffraction patterns are characteristic of wave behavior: particles cannot overlap. However,

Barad shows that in the "highly counterintuitive theory" of quantum physics it is shown that particles also display wave characteristics under certain circumstances (81).[16] This suggests that matter, often thought of as made up out of tiny particles (e.g. atoms) does not consist of individual unities, but is also somehow caught up with/in the phenomenon of diffraction.

Throughout the entirety of her book, Barad convincingly shows the onto-epistemological dimensions of the concept of diffraction. She argues that diffraction is "more than a metaphor," and adds that "there is a deep sense in which we can understand diffraction patterns […] to be the fundamental constituents that make up the world" (72). What are commonly thought of as unitary (id)entities (e.g. atoms, but also bodies of work) are ontologically entangled in diffractive becoming, which is to say they are always already open, and come into be(com)ing through intra-active relating. For Barad, 'diffraction' stresses this ontological primacy of intra-active relations as processes—relat*ings*, in one word. This also applies to her use of diffraction as a reading strategy:

> diffraction does not fix what is the object and what is the subject in advance, and so, unlike methods of reading one text or set of ideas against another where one set serves as a fixed frame of reference, diffraction involves *reading insights through one another* in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge. (2007: 30; my emphasis)[17]

Adhering back to the quote of Kirby above, which addressed the stakes of doing critique, Barad here is also not interested in setting up one tradition, author or concept—what I have called a 'body of work'—in order to distance herself from this reference point to create her own argument. Rather, her approach is to place different bodies of work in conversation with one another. Crucially, these bodies of work are not independent entities that meet (interaction), but are intra-actively articulated through their diffractive conversation(s). Affirming this line of thinking diffraction as a reading strategy, Iris van der Tuin and Aud Sissel Hoel argue that Haraway, by introducing the concept, already sought to demonstrate that "texts and readings have a productive dimension; they *work*, which means that texts and readings cannot be seen as separate or separable from what we tend to accept as that to which they refer" (2012, 189, original emphasis).

In van der Tuin and Hoel's words, a diffractive reading strategy "aims to produce an open cartography of theoretical work to which readers also can easily contribute—moving from scribblings in the margins to new, open-ended systems of thought" (189). For the differential articulation of such map(ping)s and cartographies, *attention to detail* is of crucial importance, according to Barad. She says of her diffractive

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16 Note here that, although I write 'theory of quantum physics', Barad discusses the (material) experiments in depth in her book. 'Theory' here does not signify a domain of pure ideas, but a material practice (see Barad 2007: 55 on theorizing as a material practice). I thank Jannie Pranger for this reference.

17 Different articles on diffraction and diffractive reading strategies have pointed me to different passages in Barad's texts. All of these are resonating with/in this writing, of course. This particular passage caught my eye in Malou Juelskjær, Dorthe Staunæs and Helene Ratner (2013: 1143).

reading strategy that:

> my method is to engage aspects of each [body of work] in *dynamic* relationality to the other, being attentive to the iterative production of boundaries, the material-discursive nature of boundary-drawing practices, the constitutive exclusions that are enacted, and questions of accountability and responsibility for the reconfigurings of which we are a part. (2007: 93; original emphasis)

This description of method is resonant with Haraway's understanding of articulation as "practice[s] in which we construct a relation to others—not as objects but as subjects or actants" (Campbell 2004: 174). Reading diffractively means reading *with* response-ability[18], attending to the agential particularities of intra-active bodies of work. The transformative potential of affirmatively relating is emphasized: diffractive readings aim to be productive and not *re*ductive, although reductions are inevitably part of each and every articulation—that's why Barad draws attention to constitutive exclusions.[19]

Diffractive readings are interested in the intra-active conversation(s) between bodies (of work), and specifically in the transformative potentialities of the becoming differentially articulated of these worldly weavings. Moreover, readingwriting Barad's claim about the ontological qualities of diffraction back into the conceptualization of diffractive methodologies mapped thus far, this generative productivity concerns not only (or, merely) reading strategies and textual practices, but has to do with the nature of nature. Or, to invert this logic: diffractive reading strategies do not concern bodies of work as merely textual practices, as opposed to the material practices of (for instance) experimental physics, but rather knowledge practices such as diffractive readings have to do with the nature of nature; with the nature of what is read; with reading and writing as material and ontological practices. *Bodies* of (textual) work: *onto-epistemology.*

The process visualized through the 'blobby' cloud*ing* of starlings, then, is precisely this onto-epistemological diffractivity: the movements of each individual in the cloud are conditioned by the cloud in its entirety, while simultaneously the movements of each individual (co-)constitutes the movement of the whole, and might have far-reaching effects—the famous 'butterfly effect'. That is, any individual is always 'open', just as the whole is never 'whole' but endlessly reconfigured and reconfiguring. A cloud of starlings, at least in my head, alludes to the idea that the world is constitutively made up out of diffraction patterns: the whole *is* where an individual is expected, and vice versa (there are dark lines where we might expect light, and light ones where we might expect dark). I suggest to think the ontological qualities of such intra-activity as inherent diffractivity: the resonances and dissonances (the *differing*) through which (id)entities emerge, in what might be considered a diffractive ontology: an endless diffractive pattern*ing*.

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18 Response-ability is a (Derridean) notion that I first encountered with/in Astrid Schrader 2010. It is also diffractively present in the work of Haraway and Barad, of whom Schrader is/was a student.

19 This is a point where a discussion of ethics potentially opens up. Unfortunately, this thesis is not the place for that, so I refer to chapter 8 in Barad (2007), where Barad makes a start with thinking through the ethics only briefly alluded to here.

A Diffractive Method(ont)ology for Textual Knowledge Articulation

In the course of the textual mapping as we have writtenread it until this 'point' in this essay, the emphasis has been on the affirmative and transformative productivity of diffractive reading strategies and relatings. In what follows I want to put to work this productive dimension of diffraction, by experimentally exploring what the crucial attention to detail in relating through response-ability might entail with/in diffractively articulating bodies of work. In particular, I will let two bodies of work bring into the intra-active conversation their diffractive reading strategies with their specific focal points, in order to articulate the fundamental "exteriority-within" each and every (id)entity (Barad 2007: 93). The two bodies of work I am referring to are Alecia Y. Jackson and Lisa A Mazzei's article 'Plugging One Text Into Another: Thinking With Theory in Qualitative Research' (hereafter 'Plugging') and Steven Shaviro's book on Whitehead, Deleuze and Kant, *Without Criteria*. Both these texts offer crucial insights into what a onto-epistemological and diffractive reading practice entails. Knowing where to start a diffractive reading is difficult, however, since as will become clear below, these texts, though their terminologies differ, are already diffractively with/in each other. The diffractive practice, in other words, is already (diffr)active.

In 'Plugging', Jackson and Mazzei explore their own practice of reading diffractively, which they understand as "try[ing] to fold […] texts into one another" (2013: 267). Their research is interested in the qualitative analysis of interview data, and their project in this article is to "use theory to think *with* […] data (or use data to think *with* theory)" (261; original emphasis). As is clear from the title of the article, Jackson and Mazzei conceptualize their diffractive practice as a 'plugging in', a concept they borrow from Deleuze and Guattari. Plugging in, they explain, is a process rather then a concept. It is "a constant, continuous process of *making and unmaking*" (262, my emphasis). With Deleuze, Jackson and Mazzei articulate texts, in their work "interview data, tomes of theory, conventional qualitative research methods books […] things we had previously written, traces of data, reviewer comments, and so on *ad infinitum*," as 'literary machines' (262; original emphasis). Clearly this clicks together with the way van der Tuin and Hoel's Haraway understands the work that texts and readings do. Reading the notion of plugging as a plugging that is always already happen*ing*, the idea of plugging texts into each other, like diffractive readings, entails "a production of the new" (263). This newness Jackson and Mazzei think through with and in the concept of the threshold, which is a concept that will prove (or more precisely: has proven) very important in the becoming written of this thesis.[20]

Jackson and Mazzei introduce threshold as an architectural concept. A threshold exists as a passageway between spaces, and therefore "a single threshold can be not only an entryway, but also an exit" (264). Thresholds, that is, denote the limit of a space, but also its excess, and exceeding the threshold

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20 Diffractivity-at-work: in my intra-active encountering with 'threshold' in Jackson and Mazzei's text a body of works is resonating: recently I participated with/in a project with Rick Dolphijn, Iris van der Tuin and a group of students in which we produced writings through Massumi's elaboration of Gilbert Simondon's understanding of the threshold. The terminology of 'clicking together' that I use above comes from this relating of Massumi and Simondon. See De Boever, Murray, and Roffe (2009); and Hebing, Ferwerda, and Warmerdam *forthcoming*. Unfortunately, there is no spacetime in the becoming of this chapter to elaborate with/in this body of work further.

produces the new. The threshold is, in short, "the site of transformation" (265). By "push[ing] research and data and theory to its exhaustion" knowledges are produced differently, while the focus is "on the constitutive and generative aspects of texts" (263). Crucially, the threshold, this site where transformative potentiality resides according to Jackson and Mazzei, is "*in the middle of things*" (264; my emphasis). The work of Shaviro, already active with/in my discussions to this 'point', proves crucial in understanding this notion of a being always already 'in the midst of things'.

Without Criteria is Shaviro's reading in "conjunction [of] Kant, Whitehead, and Deleuze" (2009: xiv).[21] Reading in conjunction entails showing that "there are important affinities and resonances" between the bodies of work of these thinkers, and "establish[ing] a sort of relay between the [...] thinkers, so that each of them helps resolve difficulties in the work of the other" (xii-xiii). Again: a diffractive reading strategy. What is salient about Shaviro's conjunctive reading for my purposes here is that Shaviro's project is to show how certain aspects of the philosophical work of Immanuel Kant, who is often figured as an enemy of process philosophies such as Alfred North Whitehead's and Gilles Deleuze's, actually "pave[d] the way" for such philosophies (xiii). Throughout his book, Shaviro argues that the 'openings' that became visible through Whitehead's and Deleuze's reworkings of Kant, were already present *in* Kant. Each chapter aims to show this for various aspects of mentioned thinkers' thought. The first chapter of *Without Criteria*, for instance, focuses on how Whitehead's understanding of the non-cognitive affective experience of beauty as more fundamental than the cognitive faculties of reason and rationality that Kant is mostly associated with, are already present in Kant's Third Critique. Unfortunately, it diffracts to far astray to consider Shaviro's argument in depth here —it takes him the entirety of a book to make that argument well. There's spacetime only for a brief elaboration with/in Kant's introduction of a transcendental realm and Whitehead and Deleuze's reworkings of this realm.

Of course, Kant's famous categories of understanding seek to explain how it is possible for humans to know things in experience. Drawing on Deleuze, Shaviro shows how these Kantian a priori categories precede reality, whereas Whitehead argues that such categories are not outside or before experience but *of* it. Despite this difference, Shaviro emphasizes that Whitehead does not fully reject Kant, since he "agrees with Kant on the fundamental principle that the task of critical reason is the analysis of constructs; [even if for him, A.H.] 'construction' is 'process'" (31/32, reference omitted). Shaviro argues that Whitehead converts Kant's 'transcendental idealism'—the idea that these categories are transcendental constructions—into what Deleuze calls a 'transcendental empiricism', thus focusing on the 'how' *and* 'why' of the coming into being of particularly constructed categories (understood as processes). Whitehead, that is, focuses on the coming into being of particular ways in which the world becomes intelligible to itself, to use Barad's terms. (Note how all that came 'before'[22] with/in this thesis is already at work here.)

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21 I follow the lead of Iris van der Tuin here in writingreading 'reading in conjunction' as a diffractive reading strategy, an argument made in van der Tuin (2014: 246).

22 And also note how my 'before' here is not a linear before: what I am pointing to is how the entire thesis and the concepts within and of it is folded and folding on and through itself. If the before suggests a linearity this might be

Particularly interesting with regard to these condition of possibility for knowing is the notion of the virtual, which is fundamentally part of the ways in which both Whitehead and Deleuze have sought to find an immanent place for Kant's transcendental realm. Indeed, according to Shaviro, Whitehead and Kant are as such not arguing against Kant, but with him; Kant's thought is the condition of possibility for their process philosophies. To emphasize these connections between Kant, Deleuze and Whitehead, Shaviro describes Deleuze's notion of the virtual in Kantian terms as "the transcendental condition of all experience" (33). To see what Shaviro is after, and what how this helps to understand the work implicated in diffractive readings, let's explore the explanation of the virtual that Shaviro provides. The virtual, in Shaviro's words, is

> like a field of energies that have not yet been expended, or a reservoir of potentialities that has not yet been tapped […] the virtual is not composed of atoms; it doesn't have a body or extension […] it does not prefigure or predetermine the actualities that emerge from it. Rather, it is the impelling force, or the principle, that allows each actual entity to appear (to manifest itself) as something new […] something that never existed in the universe before. (34)

The virtual, understood as an incorporeal realm that is nonetheless "real in its own way," functions as 'a transcendental condition', in the process ontologies of Whitehead and Deleuze (35). Importantly, this ghostly and paradoxical virtual transcendency is not before, above, or outside reality but with/in and *of* it.

The transformative potential of diffraction is therefore not brought to a text by its reader, it is the fundamental openness of any autopoietic system, a threshold that is always already with/in the midst of things, an exteriority-with/in. It is in this sense that I read Jackson and Mazzei's notion of plugging texts into each other *as a process*: as a plugg*ing*; a moving-together that is always already happening, a (diffr)activity. Bodies of work, that is, are fundamentally open, in the sense that is alluded to in Massumi's explanation of a Deleuzian notion of abstract:

> abstract means: never present in position, only ever in passing. This is an abstractness pertaining to the transitional immediacy of a real relation—that of a body to its own *indeterminacy* (its openness to an elsewhere and otherwise than it is, in any here and now). (Massumi 2002: 5; original emphasis)

Any individual body, therefore, is a relational instantiation of an entire system, and through its virtualities is open to be differentially articulated by, to, and with/in this autopoietic system.

Reading diffractively, as my diffractive reading in this chapter is showing, is fundamentally an onto-epistemological practice. The annunciative bringing together of these texts that were already diffractively together that this chapter is (enacting), emphasizes how methodology is always already ontology, indeed how

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due to the materiality of the thesis and the habitual (linear) manner of reading books and theses—i.e. linearity is performatively *of* particular readingwritings.

knowing and being are always already and continually instaurating the world's becoming. Evidently by now, such differential articulation is an intra-active cloud*ing* in which each body (individual and 'whole' system) is a co-constitutive agential force, drawing attention to the fact that diffractive readings must pay attention to detail and the response-ability of any bodies of work engaged. Virtual capacities to be plugged into each other are not what enables connection between texts: it is precisely because texts and other bodies of work are always already cloud*ing*-together/apart (as one move), because they are always already connected, that they might emerge as (id)entities that seem 'closed' self-organizing sytems. Given the diffractive nature of nature, however, openings for qualitatively shifting be(com)ings are inextricably with/in the becoming of all (id)entities, even if they seem 'closed' and whole (id)entities. Dark lines are in light areas, and light lines in dark areas. Boundaries aren't clear; one is never simply one. Resonantly, Shaviro shows how (for instance) Kant is never simply Kant. A body of work, like Kant's, always carries with/in it thresholds that allow for entry, which we might read here as the very conditions of possibility for being-knowing (cf. the Kantian transcendental categories of understanding). But thresholds are simultaneously exits, the indeterminacies carried by each becoming body, a ghostly transcendency that is not outside, before, or above, but *of* and *with/in* (cf. virtual transcendency). In short, everything in the universe—literary machines included—is always 'open', since everything is always already a diffractive pattern(ing). Diffractive reading strategies are aimed at generating productivity, joyfully articulating and reworking bodies of work together, plugging them into each other, by precisely focusing on these thresholds that emerge through intra-active 'conversations', taking place with/in specifically cloud*ing* here-and-nows, like for instance the particular instaurative writingreading that this thesis *is* (constantly and endlessly becoming).

Conclusive pattern(ing)

What does all this mean with respect to what I am doing in this thesis? It is clear from the above that in each chapter a specific apparatus conditioning 'my place' is mapped out. In a diffractive onto-epistemology material-discursive apparatuses are never simply 'one', however, but fundamentally open autopoietic (id)entities. Any diffractive mapping of anything, as a knowledge practice, adds to the phenomenon discussed, working to instantiate a particular body of work in a particular way, while being conditioned by the response-ability of the bodies of work, the (id)entities, engaged. This thesis, then, is my Groszian place to 'simply affirm' as a form of self-understanding, while simultaneously transforming, through joyful Massumian additions ('if ever so meager'), the apparatuses that I explore and engage. It is a diffractively self-organizing plugging-together, in an attempt to qualitatively shift any understanding of the contemporary university, the posthumanities, and diffractive methodologies.

More concretely, the various mappings that are being produced with/in this thesis are affirmative engagements with a wide range of bodies of works from different (post)humanistic fields of inquiry, such as for example educational science (Jackson and Mazzei), philosophy (Massumi, Shaviro), feminist theory (van

der Tuin, Barad, Haraway, Grosz), and art (Mondo Leone). Through these bodies of work I explore the productive virtualities intra-actively emerging with/in each 'conversational' apparatic movement. Textual *materials* will be cloud*ing*-together/apart through diffractive writing, actively constituting and being constituted by the happening that the becoming writtenread of this thesis is. The nature of 'my' doing in this making is fundamentally instaurative, and in switching to the concept of 'diffractive writing' (or 'diffractive writingreading' more accurately), I seek to stress the becoming of this thesis as an activity. *Not my activity, but diffractivity*: the onto-epistemological folding and stretching of a worldly clouding of starlings, conditioning and conditioned in an intra-active and self-organizing attempt, attuned to details and transformative potentialities, in order to joyfully articulate 'the kind of life that we, as (post)humanists in the contemporary university, are looking for'.

The disciplinarity chapter

On Humanism in the (Post)Humanities

The nature of the humanities is a hot topic nowadays. Not only have several overarching histories of the humanities been written that sometimes trace humanistic inquiry as far back in time as Antiquity (e.g. Bod 2014, Bod, Maat, Weststeijn, ed. 2010, Høyrup 2000), at the same time the various strands of thought associated with the material turn seems to challenge the foundations of the humanities (see for example Dolphijn and Van der Tuin (2010) and/or Coole and Frost (2010) for introductions and cartographies of this turn). Increasingly, such differing 'schools' of thought as the new materialisms, speculative realisms, object oriented ontologies, and ecotheories, are fundamentally questioning the relation(s) between the human and the nonhuman world. The transversal connector cutting across these differing lines of cultural critique is a posthumanist inclination, where posthumanism "marks a refusal to take the distinction between 'human' and 'nonhuman' for granted, and to found analysis on this presumably fixed and inherent set of categories" (Barad 2007: 32). Unsurprisingly, this inclination leads to questions about the specificity of the humanities as a knowledge discipline. What, for instance remains of the humanities when the boundary between the human and the rest of nature turns out not be as clear as it was thought to be? What might a humanities be if 'Man' is not the measure of things (cf Braidotti [2013])?

Taking as my lead the new (feminist) materialist engagement with 'naturecultures' in which neither nature (the object of science) nor culture (in Wilhelm Dilthey's famous phrasing from the late nineteenth century 'the products of the human mind': the object of the humanities) is privileged, this chapter explores posthumanistic conceptualizations of the disciplinary separation of the humanities and the sciences that is so familiarly institutionalized in today's universities.[23] After providing an introduction to the concept of the posthumanities[24], two threads of conceptual material will be performatively traced, in order for a partial mapping of the posthumanities to come into existence. The first of these threads might broadly be understood as humanism-geisteswissenschaften-posthumanities, and I follow it in order to argue that the posthumanist inclination to move beyond a clear separation between the sciences and the humanities strangely signals a humanistic move. Whereas posthumanism is often defined as *post*humanist, i.e. the end of human exceptionalism, from a historical perspective one might argue that, especially with regards to disciplinary configurations, the posthumanities are simultaneously very post*humanist*.[25] In the centuries now familiar as the heydays of Renaissance humanism, that is, no clear separation between scientific and humanistic

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23 'Naturecultures' is, of course, Donna Haraway's term. See Haraway (2003).

24 I writeread the notion of the posthumanities in two ways. Whenever I write (post)humanities, this is intended as an explicit questioning of the difference between posthumanities as a concept and the idea of the humanities. (Post)humanities thus points to an ambiguity, whereas posthumanities signals a definitive need for moving beyond the idea of the humanities (in various ways, as will become clear below).

25 This play with emphases and 'post' is inspired by John Storey's expounding of post-Marxism and cultural studies (see 2009: 83)

practices existed. Indeed, the argument that the prefix 'post' in posthumanities "does not signal any kind of end, but rather the inclusion of the humanities and a gesture of moving further, beyond the comfort zones of human-centred research at large," might be read, in a sense, as not only a moving further, but simultaneously a returning to the disciplinary structures of the Renaissance (Åsberg, Koobak and Johnson, 2011: 225).

The second thread that I will performatively map out could be summarized as cultural studies-posthumanism-posthumanities. The partial readingwriting created t/here is a dance with Claire Colebrook's Deleuzian suggestion to think 'the human' as only one way of thinking the becoming-worldly of the world, as merely one tendency amongst a multitude of inhuman multiplicities-of-becoming. If in the first thread I mainly work through disciplinary (id)entities as (institutional and epistemological) historical constructs[26], this thread follows the supposed 'object' of the humanities—culture—and explores what it might entail with/in the posthumanities. It is argued (t)here that the textual *culture of nature*, its 'originary humanicity', to use a term coined by Vicki Kirby, points to a humanism with/in and of the posthumanities.

Before diving in (as if we haven't begun yet!), two things need to be noted. Firstly, these discussions on the posthumanities, and in particular the new (feminist) materialisms mentioned, are the discussions in which I grew, and continue to grow up with/in, intellectually. These are the bodies of work that 'drew me in', so to speak, that called me to 'come and engage', to respond. (And fortunately, the configuration of im/possibilities has been such that I've been able to live out my response-ability). Together, these bodies of work diffractively comprise what I call—in all partiality—'my place'. For instance, whenever I was asked to briefly describe my research over the past two years, my answer would simply be: the posthumanities (or, in certain contexts: the relationships between posthuman(ist) thought and (shifting ideas about) the humanities). Moreover, according to Rosi Braidotti, the fields of media and gender studies that I am part of as student and teaching assistant are chief examples of the 'posthuman humanities' (see 2013: 154-155).

Secondly, this chapter engages the in(ter)vention[27] of the idea of posthumanities with regard to the humanities as a *discipline* of knowledge production. With/in this, it builds on and extends Cary Wolfe's Luhmannian idea of disciplinary formation. In particular, Wolfe draws on autopoietic theory to argue that academic disciplines might usefully be thought of as "subsystems [of the social system 'education'] that follow the same systemic logic, *which both produce and depend on* their own elements for their autopoiesis (journals, conferences, research groups, protocols of advancement and recognition, etc.)" (2010: 111-112; my emphasis). As autopoietic 'individuals', each discipline would be 'structurally coupled' to an environment, deploying the fundamental distinction between system and environment, individual and whole, to reduce and

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26 See Gert Jan Johannes (2011) for the idea that "the identity of disciplines should not be sought in their object or method, but in their history" (34). Of course one might ask, and this line of thought runs through my discussion of the thread humanism-geisteswissenschaften-posthumanities below, how can one trace the history of a discipline if it takes precisely that history to delineate the discipline?

27 I take this concept from Hoel and van der Tuin (2013), since I love how it emphasizes how each and every intervention is always inventive, and similarly each invention an (active) intervention. As such, it embodies a certain ethical political call for situatedness, of accounting for the specificities that enabled a particular in(ter)vention. Cf. Barad (2007) chapter 8.

process the overwhelmingly complex environment in a unique way (112). Indeed, any discipline, as Foucault argues too, is an apparatus that (discursively) constitutes its object of research. As was writtenread also in Barad's account of apparatuses, this doesn't imply solipsism (the idea that only (human) discursive practices are real), since as Wolfe states (citing Luhman), "this selectivity" brought about through

> self-referential closure does not contradict the system's *openness to the environment*. Instead, in the self-referential mode of operation, closure is a form of broadening possible environmental contacts; closure increases, by constituting elements more capable of being determined, the complexity of the environment that is possible for the system (112; original emphasis; reference omitted)

Disciplinary *closure*, in short, *opens up* a discipline to more complexity, and performatively enacts the object (i.e. culture) of the discipline (i.e. the humanities) in an increasingly complex manner. To follow Wolfe's own example, any discipline that self-organizes through more and more journal issues, conferences, etc. is able to address the world in increasingly complex ways (if only because there are more scholars or scientists doing the work). The logic is recursive, however: the entire apparatic movement that comprises any discipline is constituted through a variety of movements by individualities (articles, papers, seminars, presentations, ceremonials, etc.). Therefore I'd like to emphasize with Wolfe that any individuality—an article, a conference, a thesis—through opening up its discipline (in the case of this thesis the (post)humanities), is also self-organizingly closing it, in the sense that any conference, journal issue or thesis inevitably enacts a delineation, is always (a) boundary work. Indeed, any intra-active articulation of and with any disciplinary object, procedure or method is simultaneously a (diffr)active reconfiguring of the disciplinary apparatus (a differential apparatic movement). It is in this sense that Kirbean 'units' (e.g. the humanities) are simultaneously instantiations of a whole and instantiating that whole (e.g. education or in my terms knowledge practices).

Therefore, this thesis attempts to trace potentialities, to tap into virtualities, and qualitatively shift (if ever so meagerly, ontologically speaking[28]) the instaurative worldly clouding that the disciplinary (post)humanities are. (I am tempted to call this diffractivism; an affirmative politics.) That's the work this mapping of the posthumanities embodies: a joyful (re)instantiation of the posthumanities while simultaneously being recursively conditioned through them, and vice versa. These threads that I trace, then, will have brought into being a very partial 'knot', precisely what I have dubbed 'my place', in the sense of a movement in thought that attracted and attracts me as well as a disciplinary location (or rather locating; a locative clouding). This knotting will by no means be untied in this chapter, since I am interested precisely in the complex connections that run across and through each other, indeed in furthering the entanglements, as Barad writes (see Barad 2007: ix; and the neoliberal chapter). In what will have to be the conclusive

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28 With the phrase 'if ever so meagerly', I am referring to Brian Massumi, see the method(ont)ological chapter.

fragment of this chapter I therefore want to suggest that in order to 'stay with the trouble',[29] posthumanistic scholars might want to follow Bruno Latour (2013) in a very humanistic attempt to 'learn to speak well' to be(com)ings tuned in various ontological keys. 'My place', it will become clear, is simultaneously a *post*humanist and post*humanist* instantiating of the (post)humanities.

The notion(s) of the posthumanities

The challenging of human exceptionalism—i.e. of the idea that the human being is a unique creature that stands apart from the rest of the word through rationality, consciousness, and above all linguistic capacities—that traverses the contemporary strands of thought listed above has been significantly influenced by work done in (techno)science studies, for example by Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway. Science studies scholars study the practices of (natural) scientists, in order to argue that, as Tyson E. Lewis and Richard Kahn note while quoting Haraway, "nature is a co-construction among humans and non-humans and in this way is both a constituted and constituting force" (2010: 35). Humans/scientists that is, do not discover a nature that passively lies waiting 'out there', nor is nature a purely socio-cultural construct ('nature') in which scientific models do not at all refer to a world 'out there' but only gain meaning in a complex web of socio-cultural conventions. It is in this light that they engage the world monistically, not in terms of an ontological dualism (nature and culture) but rather as 'naturecultures' (Haraway 2003), or a Whiteheadian total environment (Van der Tuin 2014b). Their departure point is nature's "originary humanicity," the ways in which nature *cultures* (Kirby, 2011: 20-21).[30] As such, the posthumanistic confounding of the human indeed profoundly affirms that "the difference between the humanities…[and] the sciences in regard to their respective objects of inquiry is no longer straightforward and easily defined" (Kirby 2011: 13).

It is this context of the blurring of the boundaries between C.P. Snow's 'the two cultures' that the concept of the posthumanities arises, as a conceptualization of the humanities that stresses the importance of an engagement with all kinds of non-human agentialities (such as technologies, animals, ecosystems) and the displacement of the human as the center of attention. Given the inspiration for these movements in thought by science studies, many of the (post)humanists engage scientific work from the "recogni[tion] that non-humans matter, also in cultural scholarship" (Åsberg, Koobak and Johnson 2011: 225). For example, in her work on the implications of Charles Darwin's ideas for a thinking of the humanities, Grosz seeks to explore the "place of the animal and the inhuman in our conceptions of the human, and their possible role in the humanities, those disciplines and interdisciplines devoted to the study of humans and their cultural and expressive relations" (2011: 11). Indeed, she wants "to discuss what is before, beyond, and after the human:

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29 It's Haraway yet again, see for instance <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/donna-haraway/videos/staying-with-the-trouble/>. Last accessed 08-10-2014.

30 'Nature cultures' is a phrasing inspired by Vicki Kirby, who in a seminar I attended, in which we spoke of the relation between scientific models and nature, explained her thoughts on this by saying that models are not human cultural products (in the sense of non-natural), since 'nature models' (cf. Barad's "part of the world making itself intelligible to another part" [2007: 185]).

the inhuman, uncontainable condition of the human, the origin of and trajectory immanent within the human" (ibidem). As one example, Grosz elaborates on "the most provocative and unusual element in Darwin's understanding of language," namely that language, as that which supposedly sets humans apart from all the other animals as the basis for moral and intellectual achievements, "is animal in its origins, sources, and forces" (18-19). For Grosz' Darwin, language is a tendency inherent in nature, an apparatic movement not unique in or for humans, but a tendency "that many forms of life share":

> residing within the voice and in other organs capable of resonating sound, to articulate, to express, to vibrate, and thus in some way to affect bodies, [...] [a]rticulation, vocalization, and resonance are possibilities inherent in a wide variety of organs, ranging from body parts that have no specific connection to the creation of sound to organs specifically devoted to or capable of emitting sounds. (ibidem)

Almost needless to say, this leads Grosz to assert that there is a strong connection between human language and the songs of various animals (e.g. birds, whales, dolphins). Indeed, in her scheme, human vocalization, is only one way in which nature instantiates language, "only one form of articulation, one form of language-becoming, and by no means the only path to language" (20). Directing her inquiries directly at the ways the humanities are generally epistemologically conceptualized, Grosz then asks: "What would a humanities, a knowledge of and for the human, look like if it placed the animal in its rightful place, not only before the human but also within and after the human? What is the trajectory of a newly considered humanities, one that seeks to know itself not in opposition to its others, the 'others' of the human, but in continuity with them?" (13). Indeed, it is this sense of doubt about the nature and foundation of the humanities that the concept of the posthumanities points to.

With regard to the place of the human after the human, the notion of the Anthropocene—the idea that the presence of humans on earth has such an impact on the earth ecosystem, that something akin to the geologists of a future when humanity has gone extinct will be able to induct the existence of humans from the lithosphere—is a hotly debated topic that would inspire an alternative, indeed posthuman, conceptualization of the place of humans, and thus of the humanities, in the contemporary world. As Rosi Braidotti states:

> the Humanities in the posthuman era of anthropocene should not stick to the Human—let alone 'Man'—as its proper object of study. On the contrary, the field would benefit by being free from the empire of humanist Man, so as to be able to access in a post-anthropocentric manner issues of external and even planetary importance, such as scientific and technological advances, ecological and social sustainability and the multiple challenges of globalization. Such a change of focus requires assistance from other social and scientific actors as well. (2013: 171/172)

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In this regard, Braidotti present what she calls the environmental humanities, which implies an awareness that human activity is a geological force. The resulting "collapse of the divide between human and natural histories is a very recent phenomenon and, prior to this fundamental shift, geological time and the chronology of humans were unrelated, at least within the discipline of history" (160). Again, doubting the idea that the human is fundamentally separate from the rest of the world urges a rethinking of the nature of the dominant configuration of the disciplines (at least in the Western world).

All in all, the alluring force and inaugurating movement of the posthumanities seems to have been the many ways in which nature cultures. Drawing on the inspirational activities of science studies scholars, posthumanistic scholars, as Iris van der Tuin notes, "have proven how nature is always already cultural, and how matter is always already, for instance, meaningful" (2011a: 286). The resulting confounding of the boundaries between the sciences and the humanities could be read, and it is, as a moving closer together of the two, enabling inter- and transdisciplinary knowledge practices. Braidotti's idea of a posthuman humanities, for instance, "aims at identifying points of compatibility between the two cultures" (2013: 154). In her view, a new materialist, monistic ontology "allows the critical thinker *to re-unite* the different branches of philosophy, the sciences and the arts in a new alliance" (171; my emphasis). Exploring the history of the humanities and the university more generally, I want to suggest that the 're-' in Braidotti's 're-unite' signals a humanistic move, at least if we decide to still call the scholarship of the Renaissance humanist.

Thread one: Humanism-Humanities-Posthumanities

Let us begin an exploration of the posthumanities by breaking the term down to its most basic, and most often confronted, constituent: 'humanism'. Now, humanism is a term that is notorious for its complexity, its broad usage in various and widely different contexts, and the significantly differing ideological connotations it has (cf. Davies 2007). My discussion of it here is partialized through my interest in it as a field of knowledge, and the connections it has to '(post)humanities'. A very basic, common sense definition of humanism is found in a dictionary: "a system of thought that rejects religious beliefs and centers on humans and their values, capacities, and worth" (thefreedictionary.com[31]). Indeed, as Rosi Braidotti notes "[s]ecularity is one of the pillars of Western Humanism" (2013: 32). In this regard, the metaphor of the 'Dark Ages' is telling, and interesting also because light and dark lines diffract themselves through this thesis in its entirety. In our twenty-first century ears, the expression 'the Dark Ages' refers to the Middle Ages, which started to come to an end through the fifteenth century Renaissance, and was definitely over with the

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31 I am quoting here the very first meaning given of 'humanism' at http://www.thefreedictionary.com/humanism, last visited May 29th, 2014.

'Enlightenment'. When early humanists, like Franscesco Petrarch for instance, started using the metaphor of the Dark Ages it "was of course, not at all new, for throughout the Middle Ages it had been used to contrast the light, which Christ had brought into this world, with the darkness in which the heathen had languished before His time" (Mommsen 1942: 227). In the hands of Renaissance humanists however,

> the metaphor of light and darkness lost its original religious value and came to have a literary connotation […] Men like Boccaccio, Filippo Villani, Ghiberti and others contrasted the 'rebirth' of the arts and letters which, they held, had been effected by Dante, Giotto, and Petrarch, with the preceding period of cultural darkness. With this change of emphasis from things religious to things secular, the significance of the old metaphor became reversed: Antiquity, so long considered as the 'Dark Age', now became the time of 'light' which had to be 'restored'; the era following Antiquity, on the other hand, was submerged in obscurity (227/228)

Here a shift from Christianity towards secularism, for which humanism and the Renaissance are famous nowadays, becomes explicated.

However, Walter Rüegg, a historian of science, argues that to really understand humanism, posing a hard dichotomy between the Dark Ages as religious and the Renaissance as the early rays of the secularized Enlightenment, is not fruitful. According to Rüegg humanism emerged in a time of severe economic and political crises, among which the Great Schism within the Catholic Church, the Hundred Years War in the West, and the decline of the imperial house, which all "took place against the background of a cessation of economic growth, financial crises, famine, and, not least, the Black Death" (1992: 445). All in all, the rise of humanism occurred in a time of existential menace. Therefore, Rüegg argues, Renaissance humanism must not be understood as a radical break with the Dark Ages of Christianity, since "[t]he humanists did not aim to emancipate men [sic] from the bonds of medieval religiosity and solidarity. Rather, it was their intention to overcome the religious and social crises by participating in the search for '*new symbols of security*'" (ibidem; my emphasis). It is in this regard that the revival of Antiquity that the Renaissance is widely associated with these days comes into focus. It implies that humanism is famous nowadays as a field of study that includes rhetoric, logic, mathematics and the study of Greek and Roman authors. A 'humanist', therefore, appears to be "someone who teaches those subjects or provides material for others who do so" (Davies 1997: 126). However, one should be cautious to simply equate humanism, especially Renaissance humanism, with a firm belief in the exceptional status of the human being as such. Indeed, as Rüegg notes:

> The humanity of the human being is a logical triviality and only makes sense if humanity is so much endangered that not only dignity or some human value but *humanity itself as a boundary value*

becomes the object of special endeavours in moral education. (1992: 446; my emphasis)

Humanism, that is, does not mean, as the dictionary definiton cited above states, that the human being as such is taken for granted as a special condition that serves as the foundation to subsequently think from/on. Rather, humanism, at least in the sense that it refers to Renaissance humanists and their knowledge practices, implies raising fundamental questions about the nature of humanity and its boundaries.

Importantly, however, the label 'humanism' itself is a nineteenth century 'invention' first used by the philosopher and educationalist Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, who used it to designate "a curriculum based on liberal education and the teaching of language, which dominated secondary education all over Europe since the fifteenth century and which, through expressions like *humaniora* (1617) or humanity (1484), humanities (1703), and *humanités* (1673), could be traced back to the Ciceronian idea of the *studia humanitas*" (Rüegg 1992: 443; original emphases). This latter term was taken up in 1369 to refer to "the new intellectual movement set in motion by Petrarch (1304-74) and to the content of the new academic disciplines" (1992: 443; original emphases). With regard to these new academic disciplines Michiel Leezenberg and Gerard de Vries point out, however, that "the literary worship of Antiquity, and the focus on *eloquence* and elegance that characterize humanism comprises more an attitude to life than a scientific movement" (38; my translation). In this regard, it is salient that humanism as a concept emerged only in the nineteenth century.

Although Rüegg suggests that there is enough historical evidence for it to be quite understandable "that historians designated this movement as humanism and that, after 1869, they referred to the entire epoch from 1350 to about 1550 by the new concept of 'humanism' (Rüegg 1992: 443), from an onto-epistemological being-in-the-midst-of-things it is significant that a sharp definition of humanism only came into being simultaneously with the emergence and institutionalization of science. Any clear sense of 'humanism', and the humanities as a field of knowledge in its wake, was and is produced through very particular apparatuses, often significantly structured through an opposition between the science and the humanities, that is clearly still at work in much contemporary discussions of the humanities, for example in several contemporary 'defences' of the humanities as such (e.g. Nussbaum 2010, Collini 2012), as well as in the aforementioned initiatives to write histories of the discipline that range back to at least Early Modern times, and often Antiquity. A brief exploration of the tensions between various conceptualizations of the humanities and the history of particular knowledge practices offers not only a broader context for an understanding of the humanities, but also stresses the sense in which the 'post' of posthumanities signals not only an 'after' humanism, but also, in a sense, a 'before' humanism (cf. Wolfe 2009: 121). In fact, one might readwrite my project here as an attempt to (re)claim the 'humanism' in posthumanities. This requires first dealing with some very promising linguistic ambiguities.

Geistes*wissenschaften*: Sciences of the Spirit

In Dutch there are three terms that are similar to 'humanities'. The most direct translation would be 'humaniora', which, through the common root, draws attention to the roots of these studies in Renaissance humanisms. A second term that is sometimes used is 'alfawetenschappen', which emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century to differentiate between alfa- en betawetenschappen (where the latter roughly equals 'natural sciences').[32] Much more commonly used, however, is 'geesteswetenschappen', a term deeply connected to the German tradition of thinking the humanities as *Geisteswissenschaften* (literally 'sciences of the spirit'). There are, for instance, currently four 'faculties of geesteswetenschappen' in the Netherlands (a fifth—at the Free University [VU]—is underway), while there are no faculties that have 'humaniora' or 'alfawetenschappen' in their name.[33] Despite the fact that this conceptual ambiguity is dealt with relatively unproblematically in
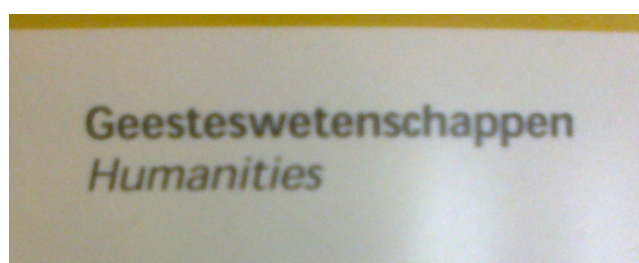

Figure 4. Sign by an office in Utrecht University. Photo by author.

Dutch debates on the humanities[34] as well as by universities themselves (for example in translating the names of their faculty of geesteswetenschappen, see figure 4), it points to a tension that is co-constitutive of 'my place' in and understanding of the (post)humanities.

In a speech given in acceptance of the office of Professor in Management of the Humanities, Max Sparreboom notes that "the use of the categorical expression 'geesteswetenschappen' […] seems to imply that the diverse areas of study at hand display similarities and kinship to a large extend" (2012: 5; my translation). Sparreboom argues that there are conventionally two options of uniting the various disciplines under one banner: 1) on the basis of a common research method, or 2) on the basis of a common object of research.[35] Defining the geesteswetenschappen on the basis of a common research method or approach is,

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32 Since it is of limited importance to my discussion here, I leave aside the 'gamma-wetenschappen' (roughly social sciences).

33 The report *Sustainable Humanities* by the commission Cohen (2009) states lists these four 'integrated' faculties of geesteswetenschappen in the Netherlands (UvA, UU, UvT, LEI). There are three further universities (VU, RUG, RU) that have separate faculties of Letters, Theology, and Philosophy, two (UM, OU) that have faculties of 'cultuurwetenschappen' [Cultural Studies], and one university (EUR) with a faculty of History and Arts and a faculty of Philosophy. See Appendix I for the abbreviations used here.

34 See for example the ease with which the term is used in the debates in the special on the geesteswetenschappen in the magazine *Groene Amsterdammer* (2013).

35 This is a common way of introducing the complexity of the concept of geesteswetenschappen. See for example Leezenberg and de Vries (2012: 22-29) and Langendorff (1990: 11-16)

Sparreboom argues, quite problematic. In this regard, Leezenberg and de Vries note that

> [i]t is easy to establish, by inspecting their respective publications, that linguists use other techniques than historians or literary scholars. The source materials differ in the same way: where one calls on the intuitions of native speakers, the other is forced to consult archives. Often even within the various 'geesteswetenschappelijke' disciplines there exists considerable variation. (24; my translation)[36]

Given the diverse nature of the areas of study that together make up the geesteswetenschappen, a common approach to the humanistic material does simply not exist in practice.

Fascinatingly, the most well-known attempt to define the geesteswetenschappen by means of a common object of research puts into place also one common research method. This attempt would be Dilthey's idea of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, from which the Dutch term is derived. In the late nineteenth century Dilthey opposed the method of the natural sciences (*erklären*; explanation) to the hermeneutical method employed in the humanities, *verstehen* (understanding). He argued that the geesteswetenschappen have their own object of research, the famous 'products of the human mind/*geist*', which can not adequately be explained by the natural sciences (that have their own object: nature).[37] Although it is clear that in the contemporary geesteswetenschappen (and humanities) more methods are employed than hermeneutical *verstehen*, Dilthey's elaborations reflect a significant development in the (Dutch) universities of the nineteenth century, which might usefully be explored through the history of the university.

Before the nineteenth century the main task of the university lay in providing a general education. In his overview of the history of universities, Jan Marten Praamsma cites Willem Otterspeer to show that before this time universities were "institutions with good teachers, but *little research*" (2006: 14; my emphasis). If pioneering research was carried out, this did not happen inside the universities. Universities, then, were not so much occupied with the production of novel knowledge about the world, but rather focused on deepening and spreading the (textual!) knowledges that were already available (e.g. the Holy Scripture, and later the Classics). Praamsma notes that already during the eighteenth century, what he calls 'realistic education' started emerging, and this trend of utilitarian and applied education, what we would today call technical and vocational education, continued in the nineteenth century (10/11). Praamsma conceptualizes this shift that took place within the university as a shift from understanding the state of the world as a static being to

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36 Original: "Taalkundigen bedienen zich van andere technieken dan historici en letterkundigen, zo valt door inspectie van hun publicaties gemakkelijk vast te stellen. De bronnen waar men zich op richt verschillen al evenzeer: waar de een zich beroept op de intuïties van moedertaalgebruikers, ziet de ander zich gedwongen archiefmateriaal te raadplegen. Zelfs binnen de verschillende geesteswetenschappelijke disciplines bestaat er vaak aanzienlijke variatie".

37 Convention leads me to add that often Dilthey uses in this context also Wilhelm Windelband's distinction between an idiographic approach to knowledge (the study of the unique, the special), and a nomothetic approach (a search for generalizable laws). It is of minor significance for my discussion here.

understanding the processes that underlie the becoming of all kinds of worldly phenomena. For example, the study of medicine was traditionally centered around the classification of the different diseases, the fitting of supposedly new phenomena into the existing scheme of things. In the nineteenth century, a shift took place towards understanding the individual course of a specific illness, in order to be able to make the right intervention at the right stage of the process. Hence, a reorientation took place from understanding the structure (anatomy, pathology) of diseases in order to add them to the existing classifications, towards producing new insights into the processes that take place in the body of an ill person (13). This shift resulted in a decline in the importance of deepening and spreading established knowledges in the form of textbooks, towards an emphasis on independent (individual) practical study and research of worldly phenomena. Now, the enormous growth of the number of practical and applied sciences during the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, resulted in an expansion of areas of study, that would initially find their places in the traditional faculties. Soon, however, specialization and disciplinarization became inevitable.

Education in the university, then, gradually became less about a general education that aimed at understanding and deepening the knowledge of the Classics, and more and more about preparing students to do academic research, to produce new knowledges in their field of specialization. As universities oriented themselves more and more towards research, questions about the practical scientific and societal use of the humanistic areas of study—the questions that are still familiar today—started arising. This is the context in which the concept of the *Geisteswissenschaften* arises, as an attempt to legitimize the research that takes place within particular faculties of the universities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and to provide an epistemological foundation for the knowledges that are produced there. What is important to take note of at this point is that, from a Dutch perpective at least, there is a significant difference between the connotations of the words 'humaniora' and 'humanities', which explicitly connects contemporary disciplines to an attitude to life that emerged in the fourteenth century and a sense of non-secular general education through literature and language, and 'geesteswetenschappen', which positions these practices as epistemologically grounded, legitimate *sciences* of the spirit.[38]

Entangled Scientific and Humanistic Inquiry in the Renaissance

Such a conclusion can be further supported by discussions currently taking place within the field of history of the sciences and the humanities. These debates surround the contemporay turning towards the writing of a comparative history of the humanities, of which argued that it is "surprising that no such history exists for the field of humanities" whereas they do for the sciences (Bod, Maat, Weststeijn, 2010: 7). A very prominent

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38 The argument in this section is confirmed by the work of historian of science and the humanities Jo Tollebeek, who writes that the "humanities disciplines emerged in the nineteenth century in a complex, contingency-driven process in which factors such as the introduction of a 'scientific principle' and the securing of the humanities' position in the universities played an important role" (2013: 79). (I am citing here from the abstract because the main text of the article is in Dutch, and I prefer Tollebeek's own translation over my own.)

presence in these debates in the Netherlands is Rens Bod, writer of 'the first overarching history of the humanities', originally published in Dutch in 2010 and recently published in English (2014) as *A New History of the Humanities*. The idea that an account of a linear evolution from *artes liberales*, via the *studia humanitatis,* to (early) modern disciplines, is possible however, is itself contested. The problem brought forward is the idea that writing a history of the humanities as we know them today (a set of disciplines) is anachronistic, since the specificity of this conceptualization (i.e. the doing of academic research) is a nineteenth century invention, as became clear above through the concept of *Geisteswissenschaften*. Juliette A. Groenland, for example, argues that if one aims to write a history of the humanities, the starting point "should be the nineteenth century, when the traditional arts curriculum was supplemented with non-classical languages and literature and the university was enlarged with social sciences […] and technology disciplines" (2010: 220).[39] In addition to this argument, there is another route via which it could be argued that an overarching history of the humanities is problematic, one that brings about, if you will, dark lines where we'd expect nothing but light (or vice versa), especially with regards to thinking a humanism with/in posthumanities. I am writing here about the suggestion that Renaissance humanists, if that is still what we want to call them, were not humanists in the sense that we, through our contemporary ideas about the humanities, might think they were.

In his history of the humanities, Bod claims provocatively that "the humanities not only preceded the natural sciences, but also shaped them to a large extent" (2014: 240/241).[40] The most important proponent of this argument is Anthony Grafton, who in his *Defenders of the Text* (1991) shows the deep historical interconnectedness of what we today know as the sciences and the humanities, by elaborating upon this intertwining in the work of figures such as Johannes Kepler, Angelo Poliziano and Joseph Scaliger. In the case of Scaliger, who, in Bod's words (2014: 154), "can be considered as one of the greatest philologists of the early modern age," Grafton shows in detail that Scaliger was "the first chronologer to have dated historical events by astronomical methods" (1991: 128). Scaliger, that is, engaged in textual criticism through what we would today call a natural science. Let me provide one more example of the purported "scientific nature of humanism," and the confounding of easy dualisms between the sciences and humanities, by engaging in a bit more detail Grafton's discussion of the inextricable entanglement of

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39 Writing an overarching history, Groenland argues, implies either starting from "the first element of the evolutionary chain: the seven *artes liberales*," which would result in "a history of that curriculum in Western education, developing into more than only the humanities," or from "the ancient idea(l) of *humanitas*, linking linguistic competence with moral standings," which could be traced through its "different shapes as the *studia humanitatis*, the *Humanismus* coined by Niethammer, or even the present-day humanities"—though not as a set of research disciplines (220/221; original emphases).

40 Bod is alluding here to the idea that 'the scientific method' is actually based on philological practices, primarily the interplay of theory and empirical data: newly found (older) texts could support or refute earlier interpretations (Bod uses the word hypotheses). This practice, in which "a theory provided underpinning of empiricism and also generated verifiable predictions about that empiricism, which in turn had an impact on the theory" (2014: 151). Interestingly, in *Truth and Method* Hans Georg Gadamer ([1975] 2013) also (already?) noted that the "scientific method is based on the model of philology" (189; emphasis omitted). Unfortunately, this thesis is not the space and time to engage these matters more in depth.

humanistic textual criticism and modern natural science in the work of a veritable 'man of science': Johannes Kepler (Pyle 2010: 40).

Nowadays, Kepler is famously known for his laws of planetary motion, and is generally considered one of the major contributors to the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. However, Grafton emphasizes that Kepler "covered his scrap paper not just with thousands of computations and successive discarded models of planetary movements but also with successive drafts of Latin poems" (1991: 181). Indeed, in his chapter on Kepler in *Defenders,* Grafton argues that Kepler's contributions to the humanistic fields of eloquence and exegesis "show so high a level of creativity and learning as to establish him as one of the most distinguished humanist scholars of his time" (182). The entanglement of the sciences and humanities is evident from Kepler's work in three ways, according to Grafton. In the first place, Kepler had to interpret references to celestial phenomena that were made in classical texts. Grafton shows at length that Kepler engaged in, and won, several debates with philologists, not by using mathematical models as an argument, but by "reading carefully, by sticking *mordicus*, with his teeth, to the words" of ancient texts (191; original emphasis). Secondly, Kepler intervened into technical philology, using astronomical expertise to date events in ancient history. In this role, Kepler helped raising "chronology to the level of a powerful tool for studying social and cultural processes" (198). Thirdly, Kepler applied the humanists' method of exegesis to the classical sources of his own discipline, confronting the work of his predecessors (186). Here, he helped accomplish the shift from a conception of truth as primeval revelation to seeing it as the result of human effort (202). All in all, Kepler's case affirms that humanists needed to know their scientific concepts and theories in order to be able to correctly interpret their sources and simultaneously that "[t]he scientist could not perform his function *without being enough of a scholar* to decode the classical texts that still contained the richest sets of data" (203; my emphasis). Indeed, we might ask how fruitful a rigourous disciplinary split between the sciences and the humanities actually is in thinking about the knowledge practices that took place before and during the scientific revolution. Like no other, the work of Grafton suggests that actually, humanists were scientists, and scientists were humanists.

These elaborations point to two things. First of all, the humanities as we know them today—a set of academic disciplines (the 'geesteswetenschappen')—are an inheritance from the nineteenth century. A term such as 'humanism', usually used to refer to a non-secular attitude to life that emerged in the fourteenth century in education with a focus on language and literature, is not adequate for understanding the actual knowledge practices that took place in the Renaissance, and even during the scientific revolution. Secondly, at least two thresholds emerge from this observation. One is that Renaissance humanism is actually a posthumanism (in the sense of 'before'). And/or: the 'humanism' in posthumanism could, and should, be reclaimed. In what follows, I aim to provide my motivation for doing just that. In this regard, it is necessary to explore the im/possibilities of 'the human' in a new materialist, diffractive and monist onto-epistemology, and indeed to trace the idea of the human and its 'culture' via the thread cultural studies-posthuman-posthumanities.

Thread Two: Cultural Studies-Posthuman-Posthumanities

The questioning of the human in posthumanities: posthuman posthumanities

Questioning the boundary between the human and the non-human, between culture and nature, like contemporary posthumanisms do, would seem to challenge the idea of human based knowledge practices fundamentally. If matter and nature should no longer be understood as mute presences, the background against which human history takes place, but as agentive processes actively co-constituting the becoming of the world, what might be the grounds on which to make a knowledge claim? Indeed, if this processual intra-activity might be best characterized by its "inherent indeterminacy" (Barad 2007: e.g. 140, 157, 334), how would the im/possibility of 'the human'—and the humanities at that—be constituted? Posthumanistic elaborations of the posthumanities seem to offer two answers to this question. These thought-movements do not necessarily appear as coherent positions with/in these debates, but much rather present two ways of relating with and to posthuman indeterminacy. Indeed, these two movements may be diffractively and productively present in one body of work. One thought-movement radicalizes the indeterminacy inherent in be(com)ing, in order to argue that the idea of a 'human place' shouldn't live on in posthumanisms (posthuman posthumanities). Hence, the humanities as we now them today would have to destructively be given up. Alternatively, there is also the movement in thought that suggests that the very idea of a humanism (albeit an a/in/posthuman humanities) might be needed in the futural landscape of academic knowledge production (a humanist posthumanities[41]). Let us explore the first position, that of a posthuman posthumanities, first.

Unsure about the usefulness of our contemporary disciplinary boundaries for the future of knowledge practices, Claire Colebrook (2014) argues for a radically posthumanist posthumanities. Pushing the idea of a posthumanities to its limit, Colebrook connects to the common idea of humanism already writtenread above, as the secularizing displacement of God, to argue that posthumanism cannot entail the simple displacement of the human, nor the emphasizing of the world as one big (eco)system in which the human finds a relatively stable place:

> the retreat to a world in which there is only man, not God, remains theological—for God has been subtracted but the world as God-less (abandoned to man) remains. The posthuman, similarly, renounces human privilege or species-ism but then fetishizes the posthuman world as man-less; 'we' are no longer elevated, separated, enclosed, detached from a man-less world, for there is a direct interface and interconnection—a mesh or network, a living system—that allows for one world of computers, digital media, animals, things and systems. There is a continuation of the humanities, which had always refused that man had any end other than that which he gave to himself, in the posthuman notion that man is nothing but a point of relative stability, connected to one living system

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41 See Wolfe (2009), where a classification of the (post)humanities is proposed, in which the concepts of posthumanities as 'humanist posthumanities' and 'posthuman posthumanities' appear.

that he can feel affectively and read. (160)

What Colebrook is after is the idea that posthumanism that is true to itself cannot leave in place a clear sense of what 'the human' entails, even if this (supposedly) posthuman is now imbricated in vast non-human networks. Posthumanism in this sense, she argues, "is an ultrahumanism precisely because once man is abandoned as a distinct system or inflection he returns to characterize nature or life in general, just as the death of God left an implicit and widespread theologism that no longer had a distinct or explicit logic" (163). Questioning the idea of nature's originary humanicity, Colebrook asserts that when the human is removed or negated, "what is left is the human all too human tendency to see the world as one giant anthropomorphic self-organizing living body" (164). In Colebrook's view, this leaves intact the notion of the human, even if it no longer designates a unique being but characterizes an entire system.

Colebrook therefore suggest that the posthuman posthumanities focus on "the inhuman multiplicities of systems" (168), and turns (amongst others) to Michel Serres, for example his notion that humanity's relation to earth as a ecosystem should be understood as a relation of 'parasitism', to show how this amounts to acknowledging that 'the human' is a Groszian/Darwinian tendency, a particular mode of becoming:

> If one abandons the concept of predator then one also abandons the concept of the good and just relation: it would not be the case that a proper humanity would use 'its' natural milieu according to reasonable or ecological needs, maintaining a balance with a world he [sic, A.H.] uses but towards which he could also contribute (by cultivating, re-planting, mitigating, adapting, capping, trading and offsetting). There would be no good humanity of reasonable predatory use that might be morally distinguished from a parasitic humanity that would be nothing more than a consumer or digester of energies not its own. For that is the nature of distinction and being: one is not a unified body that then might produce good (self-sustaining) or evil (ultimately short-term and destructive) relations to one's milieu. Let us accept that humanity is and must be parasitic: it lives only in its robbing and destruction of a life that is not its own. Our current predicament of climate change, whereby we have consumed and ingested blindly—bloating and glutting our body politic through the constant destruction of resources without recompense—would not be a late accident, nor a misjudgment of a post-industrial age. To be a body is to be a consuming body, to be in a relation of destructive consumption with what is effected as other, as resource, through consumption. Climate change would be the condition of human organicism in general. (178)

Colebrook's question here, in my writingreading, is what might happen if the fundamentally entangled nature of the world that Barad emphasizes in her relational onto-epistemology would not be held to imply that humanity's relating to its environment could be somehow recalibrated or reconfigured, but what it might mean to think of this relating as always already a destructive relating. For Colebrook, the productivity of this

move is situated in the shifting of the concept of the human, which "would be [only] one way of thinking technological, meteorological or disciplinary thresholds that create intense ruptures. Humanity would be a disturbing outcome of systemic events, not an origin" (168). Much in line with Grosz' thinking in tendencies, Colebrook proposes to think 'the human' as only one way of (fundamentally parasitic) 'world-becoming', by no means the only one. Arguing for radical changes in the organization of knowledge fields and disciplines, she suggests an inhuman approach to knowledge, which "would not extend the life of the humanities by melding it with a single interdisciplinary domain of which the sciences would also be a part, but would intensify certain dimensions of the humanities only by destroying certain majoritarian, anthropomorphic or dominant components" (176). That is to say, knowledge practices shouldn't be organized according to (pre-)established classifications of disciplines, knowledge objects, or types of methodology, but should precisely seek to 'think intensively'; to think with/in various inhuman and multiplicitous modes of becoming. Certain dimensions of what are now called the humanities might be folded into those knowledge practices, but not those that take for granted any sense of the human and its place in the entire system that the becoming-world is.

Cultural Studies and the Posthumanities

Tracing the genealogy of the posthumanities through cultural studies I want to argue that Colebrook's radical displacement of the human and all humanicity could be productively humanist. By reading her Deleuzian idea of inhuman multiplicities in tandem with Latour's 'modes of existence', I will suggest that it is nature's *textual* nature that urges posthumanistic scholars to 'learn to speak well' in as many ontological tunings as possible. In this sense, the current section explores the idea of what I above called a humanist posthumanities. To get there, this (i.e. partial) mapping of the thread cultural studies-posthumanism-posthumanities entails a performative suggestion that contemporary discussions on the specificities of the posthumanities are actually discussions about what 'culture' might actually entail. Now, similar to 'humanism', 'culture' is a very hard concept to clearly define, and Raymond Williams describes it as "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (Williams in Storey 2009: 1). In relation to (providing a definition of) the humanities, as was writtenread above, culture was and often is opposed to nature, as the objects of research of the humanities and the sciences respectively. Culture, however, is not itself the coherent field that is suggested by such a dualism. In this section, then, a very partial map will productively instaure the understandings of culture with/in the humanities as they encountered me during my studies these last five years, which is primarily in the form of cultural studies and contemporay posthumanistic philosophies. Moreover, the specificities of the relationships between these two—cultural studies and the posthumanities—will be explored.

In the first handbook on (media)theory—television studies specifically—that was ever read by me, Joke Hermes and Maarten Reesink explain that it is

characteristic for the [cultural studies] approach to advocate respect for popular amusement [plezier] and to draw attention to social power relations. It opposes approaches to culture that want to distiguish between high and low culture; and that equate culture with artefacts like paintings and books. Culture, according to cultural studies, cannot be equated with things, but has to be considered broadly as the processes of meaning making that binds us as a society (2003: 11; my translation)[42]

Hermes and Reesink are obviously drawing on the work of Williams, whose tripartite definition of culture is expounded upon by John Storey in his (hand)book *Cultural Theory and Popular Theory.*[43] Firstly, 'culture' could be understood as "a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development," through which, for example, Western cultural development could be explained by only referring to great philosphers, artists and poets (Williams in Storey 2009: 2). This, indeed, is the 'high' culture that Hermes and Reesink position cultural studies against. Secondly, a more ethnographically, antropologically inspired sense of 'culture' might denote "a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, or a group" (ibidem). Thirdly, Williams suggests that 'culture' might refer to "the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity," which Storey reads a definition of culture that centers around "the texts and practices whose principal function is to signify, to produce or to be the occasion for the production of meaning" (2009: 2). The cultural studies approach as Hermes and Reesink write it, then, draws on these latter two definitions of culture that Williams provides. Introductions to it point to cultural studies' political nature (e.g. the class struggles that are the topic of the earliest work in British cultural studies), often emphasizing how "[f]or cultural studies, 'culture' [is] not an abbreviation of a 'high culture' assumed to have constant value across time and space," like it might have been for humanists implicated in 'humanities' since the nineteenth century (During 1999: 2).[44] Cultural studies' political inclinations, that is, have been extremely important in bringing into the academy as objects and subjects of research various previously marginalized groups and cultures. Through this, culture came to be understood as a very broad category, as 'particular ways of life', that were and are understood—especially and increasingly since the second half of the 1980s[45]—as a complex of signifying (textual) practices. These two lines long to be followed to, through, and with/in the

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42 "Kenmerkend voor de [cultural studies] benadering is dat ze respect bepleit voor populair plezier en aandacht vraagt voor sociale machtsverhoudingen. Ze zet zich af tegen benaderingen van cultuur die onderscheid maken tussen hoge en lage cultuur; en die cultuur gelijkstellen met artefacten zoals schilderijen en boeken. Cultuur kan volgens cultural studies niet gelijkgesteld worden met dingen maar moet breed worden opgevat als de processen van betekenisgeving die ons als maatschappij binden." (Hermes and Reesink 2003: 11)

43 This (hand)book was and is extensively used in the undergraduate media studies program that I was part of as a student, and am currently part of as teaching-assistant.

44 There is a sort of argument running in the shadows of this thesis, on the thresholds, spilling into it through the footnotes, a question with regard to the devaluation of the concept of culture during the 20th century. Cf. note 64 in the neoliberal chapter for more on this theme, which also connects here.

45 See Storey (2009: 59-88) for an overview of the strange entanglements of cultural studies and Marxisms, and esp. 82-88 for the idea, stated by Angela McRobbie in 1992, that "Marxism is no longer as influential as it has been in the past" (2009: 82), and the post-Marxist (in Storey's terms) shift toward linguistic practices.

posthumanities: culture as 'ways of life', and culture as a set of textual practices. Neil Badmington's 'Cultural Studies and the Posthumanities' (2006) will serve as our guide.

Badmington starts his article by acknowledging Williams as one of the people that helped, in the light of a "dissatisfaction with the[ir] shape" reconfigure the humanities through arguing that culture should be understood as a way of life that is "absolutely ordinary, in every society and in every mind" (260/261; reference omitted). Recognizing the significance of the shift that cultural studies brought about with/in the humanities, Badmington argues however that a problem remains: "[a]lthough it has sought to break down a series of oppressive barriers, cultural studies has sytematically reaffirmed the hierarchical border between the human and the inhuman" (262). He cites Wolfe, to make (t)his argument a bit more polemically:

> That [this] assertion might seem rather rash or even quaintly lunatic fringe to most scholars and critics in the humanities and social sciences only confirms my contention: most of us remain humanists to the core, even as we claim for our work an epistemological break with humanism itself. (Wolfe in Badmington: 262)

In a weird resonance with the questions Colebrook asks of the idea of the posthumanities, we readwrite here that Badmington argues that the cultures that cultural studies focus on as particular 'ways of life', are always *human* cultures.[46] He elaborates on a prime example from Sarah Whatmore's *Hybrid Geographies* to challenge this presupposition: Duchess, an elephant housed in Paignton Zoo. Badmington shows that to understand this elephant only in terms of taxonomy elides the fact that "her time in captivity has spun a web of significance that makes a radical difference" (269). Indeed, as he lets Whatmore explain:

> Zoo animals like Duchess and the 30,000 or so in the herds of Chobe National Park may be kindred under the taxon *Loxodonta africana*, but in many other senses they are worlds apart. For all the scrutiny, veterinary invention and population management, the elephants of Chobe still lead nomadic, socially rich and ecologically complex lives [. . .] Duchess has become habituated to a more impoverished repertoire of sociability, movement and life skills that will always set her apart. (Whatmore in Badmington 269-270)

Crucially, in Badmington's reading, this argues that "Duchess, in short, is different in *culture* from the elephants of Chobe" (270; original emphasis). In terms of this thesis, the example of Duchess shows that culture as a particular 'way of life' is not limited to 'a people, a period, or a group', if these are read as *human*. Particular ways of living, particular histories, and particular social contexts make significant difference in the cultural lifes of elephants too, for instance.

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46 Weird because Colebrook poses this question to a thinking of the posthumanities, whereas Badmington does it to cultural studies in a general sense.

Arguing that culture "does not begin and end with 'us'," if 'us' is writtenread as specifically human, Badmington also explores what such an argument might entail for cultural studies understood as the study of culture as a complex system of textual practices (270). Interestingly, and driving home the point that we are always already in the middle of things, he cites a text that is taught in the philosophy of science course of the undergraduate program I studied and now teach in, Clifford Geertz' 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', to exemplify the dominant view within cultural studies:

> The concept of culture I espouse [. . .] is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man [sic, N.B.] is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental one in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Geertz in Badmington: 265)

The difference between 'Man'[47] and every other animal (or rather non-human, as will become clear soon) is clear. The human is for Geertz the only animal that is capable of weaving (Badmington's term) cultural webs of significance. The study of culture, therefore, pertains to the meanings generated within these intricate webs. It is interesting to note at this point that Badmington acknowledges that Geertz is not wholly humanist, since the webs of significance are transpersonal and even "inhuman" (266). Still, "behind and before those webs stands the figure of 'Man', as author, actor, and agent" (ibidem). Above you and I have already writtenread some examples of what the posthumanities might entail, but here I want to exemplify the shift that would be brought about by a posthumanistic recognition of the textuality of non-human practices by discussing a work that takes the line of arguing for natural cultures further yet.

Natural language(s)

The work of Vicki Kirby found its way into the method(ont)ological chapter of this thesis, where it's connections to thinking through clouds of starlings become. There it is elaborated how Kirby draws on the Saussurian logic pertaining to signs and meaning making to show how each individual (id)entity is an instantiation of a system in its entirety. My iteration of Kirby's brief example of the ambiguous sign on the
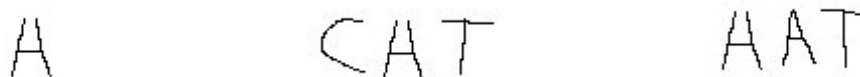
Figure(s) 5: Context is with/in the individual. Drawings by author, based on a lecture by Vicki Kirby.

left in figure 5 (figure 2 in chapter 1), and the way its meaning depends on its context proves this point, at least for linguistic signs. My thinking with starlings, that is, directs attention to how "the context is somehow

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47 For a feminist-posthumanist elaboration on the (humanist) use of 'man', see the first chapter of Braidotti (2013).

within [the] individual, [… which has] a specific delimited locality as well as a global presence" (2011: 27). Exemplifying what might follow from Badmington's critique of Geertz' limitation of linguistic practoces to the human, Kirby shows how Saussurian textual logic is at work even in (non-animal) nature, for instance in the relationship of a particular skull to its facial morphology (23). Through a detailed account of the emergence of a scientific method for facial reconstruction, known by most of us today—including Kirby—through television shows and programs dealing with forensic investigations, Kirby provocatively shows how there might be a fairly accurate correlation between the statistical predictions made by algorithms on the basis of (a small part of) a skull and the actual face that belonged/belongs to the skull. That is, somehow an entire system of skull-face relations is implicated in each individual skull-face relation. Let's engage a bit more in depth.

Current-day forensic medicine works through data of facial tissue depths, originally measured of cadavers.[48] This database, as Kirby explains, has recently grown enormously due to technological advances, especially with regards to the measuring of tissue depth on living people (e.g. ultrasound scanning). Now, in practice, an artist aims to produce a clay reproduction of a face on the basis "feel and experience, working from a knowledge of anatomy built up through muscles of the face" (24). Kirby describes two main sources of information for such an artist. Firstly, certain information can be derived quite directly from a skull itself, for example in the areas where "the activity of muscle and tendon on the bone leaves evidence of their respective size and strength" (24/25). These processes of cause and effect, in Kirby's words "local conversations between flesh and bone" are then "legible to the forensic detective" (25). Secondly, through the use of twenty-eight to thirty-two marking points which can each be compared to a statistical dataset, an artist can learn yet more about the specificities of a face on the basis of (part of its skull). Indeed, Kirby provides two examples of actual cases where such facial reconstructions lead to the successful identifications.

Two things are interesting for our purposes here. Firstly, the actual form of a skull might be reconstructed from only part of it. Kirby describes a case where "all the bone that forms the mid-portion of the face was missing. Thus all the evidence for the shape of the nose, the inner corner of the eyes and the upper lip are absent" (25; reference omitted). Still, however, through calculations from the remaining skull fragments a reconstruction was made that lead to an identification. Here it becomes clear once more how a 'whole' is implicated in each 'part': "a mere fragment of bone may express condensed and diverse information about the skull's lost integrity" (ibidem). Secondly, this same dynamic is at work in the statistical reconstruction of tissue depths:

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48 'Cadavers' is the term that Kirby uses, and I follow the use of this word, which I've never heard to describe human bodies before, in an attempt to posthumanize the human. Interestingly, in a footnote Kirby informs us that the measuring of facial tissue depths of dead people is an ongoing research practice, which suggests that either we are and never were 'human' after all, or that we always already were human in a posthumanistic sense (cf. 2011: 140, n. 2).

These harmonies of the whole within the fragment, where information from one part of the head somehow resonates with another, reappear in larger rendition in the massed tables of statistical death masks and the recent measurements from living subjects that actually 'give face' to an anonym[ous skull]. (ibid)

Indeed, an entire worldly system of skull-face relations is somehow present in each individual skull-face relation. The Saussurian logic alluded to above is therefore not something that pertains to human culture only, as we have writtenread in detail. Cultural 'webs of significance' are ubiquitous, in living organisms as well as in the very flesh and bones that make up bodies (yes, 'inanimate' matter). The posthumanities, then, understand culture in two senses. On the one hand, through the shifting—a verb like 'post*ing*' is tempting here—of the human, the object of the humanities is no longer culture as human 'ways of life', but rather culture as natural ways of life, or in Haraway's words, naturecultures. On the other hand, posthumanistic inquiry would occupy itself with the specificities of these ways of life, with the particularities of natural webs of significance, indeed with the ways in which nature *cultures*.

Conclusive: Bruno Latour and a Humanism with/in the (Post)humanities

This establishing of two posthumanistic ways of understanding culture, however, is not an endpoint. It is much more, and strangely at this point in the thesis, a beginning. As the reader, you might be wondering about my use of Kirby's work as an example of natural culture, since isn't it a human that is doing the reading here? Don't these statistical patterns only emerge through a lot of work done by humans? Isn't Kirby referring to the fact that the causal conversations of flesh and bone become *legible* to forensic detectives? Indeed, one may ask, what is 'our place'—as humans?—in this diffractive naturalcultural total environment continually articulating itself differently? Furthermore, what is the 'place' of posthumanistic inquiry in this nature-text system, if it is still to be understood as a knowledge practice taking place within the walls of contemporary universities? Considering in light of these questions the textual nature of posthumanistic practices, I want to suggest that nature's originary humanicity impels us to 'learn to speak well', a humanist move if ever there was one.

As noted above, the posthumanistic contemporary thinkers were inspired by the work of science studies scholar Latour, which they readwrite in ways that map out, and performatively bring into being the posthumanities. Interestingly, Latour, in his latest book *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2013) weaves an complex textwork around the issues raised throughout this chapter. In the book, Latour continues his long-term project[49] to challenge the dichotomies that structure modern thought by proposing ontological pluralism instead of the traditional two ontological domains (e.g. nature and culture, or non-human and human). It

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49 See for example his book We Have Never Been Modern (1993).

takes Latour 450+ pages to work through all the details of the sixteen 'modes of existence' he (provisionally) proposes, which is why my interest here is not so much in the details of these various modes of existence, but in the way Latour envisions relations between these modes, namely as a *learning to speak well* to someone about something that really matters to that person (58). Obviously Latour, who has been arguing for decades that the world consists of complex networks of associations between humans and non-humans, does not intend 'speaking' or 'person' to refer to humans only, but precisely refers to the naturalcultural textual total environment that was writtenread above. Indeed, and showing how and why this notion might prove indispensable to posthumanistic scholars, Latour argues that "to speak well of something is first of all to respect the precise *ontological tenor* of [the mode of existence one wants to speak of, with or for, A.H.]. This is surely the least one can ask of an investigator" (144; original emphasis). In my readingwriting, Latour is drawing attention to the fact that the posthumanities, in the turn that they are t/making towards the material, need to focus on ways of speaking, on the languages that are used, on respecting the particular 'ontological tonality' or 'key' of the mode of being that they are speaking of/with (cf. 310 and 329).

Crucially, with/in this argument, Latour draws attention to the humanistic nature of the posthumanities, if only because "the expression 'speak well' […] hints at an ancient *eloquence,*" the eloquence we have writtenread a couple of times above as characteristic of humanism (64; my emphasis). However, Latour explains that speaking well is not about being a gifted speaker per se, but "to take seriously both the things one is talking about and those to whom one must speak […b]y specifying the type of beings we wish to address on each occasion [and addressing them in the tonality of their mode of existence, A.H.]" (376). Thus what takes place through the facial reconstructions we readwrote above is precisely that forensic scientists and (fragments of) skulls learn to speak well to and with each other, and respect each others response-ability. Indeed, this is not about humans discovering a complex system (nature) 'out there', but about the tuning of the various natural, inhuman webs of significance to each other's respective keys of existence. If Colebrook is correct in her assertion of the existence of a variety of inhuman multiplicities of becoming-worldly, of different tonal tendencies of becoming, we might read this diffractively through Grosz' elaboration of languages as always already naturalcultural. Learning to speak well would then amount not to the generation of a mutual natural language, dissolving differences into the 'one (eco)system' that Colebrook argues against, but would entail precisely mutual intra-active and instauratively becoming-differentiated, a moving-together/apart that would entail *understanding* in the etymological sense of *standing between or amongst*.[50] Indeed, the humanistic idea(l) of learning to speak well, in its Latourian reworking, entails the very idea of being in the middle of things, on the threshold, the opening/exit, the light lines where we might expect dark, a being on the dis/continual verg*ing*, with/in and through each others tunings, in a processual intra-active be(com)ing-together/apart.

In order to speak well, Latour stresses, "one has to seek to avoid *all* category mistakes" (56; original emphasis). The word 'category' is important for understanding speaking well, and in a long quote Latour

50 See <http://etymonline.com/index.php?term=understand&allowed_in_frame=0>. Last accessed 17 August 2014.

explains that a project like this is not free of risks, but he finds reassurance in the etymology of the word 'category':

> Let us recall that in 'category' there is always the *agora* that was so essential to the Greeks. Before designating, rather banally, a type or division that the human mind, without specifying any interlocutor, carves at will out of the seamless fabric of the world's data, *kata-agorein* is first of all 'how to talk about or against something or someone in public'. Aristotle shifted the term away from its use in law—meaning 'to accuse'—and made it a technical term, subject to endless commentary over the centuries, that was to subsume the ten ways, according to him, of predicating something about something. But let us return to the agora. Discovering the right category, speaking in the right tonality, choosing the right interpretative key, understanding properly what we are going to say, all this is to prepare ourselves to speak well about something to those concerned by that thing—in front of everyone, before a plenary assembly, and not in a single [that is human, A.H.] key. (58/59; original emphases)

Re(con)figuring 'category' through its own history, Latour shows how it actually refers not to human taxonomies but to ways of speaking about or against something or someone. This seems to imply that any category refers to a conversation, albeit not necessarily to a 'speaking well'. Speaking in the right ontological tonality, choosing the right 'key' seems to be the humanist task for the posthumanities. Indeed, this is what was already writtenread in the example of Duchess elaborated by Badmington. Speaking with, about, of and for Duchess and the 30,000 elephants in the herds of Chobe National Park cannot be a speaking well if these elephants are understood as a natural kind under the taxon *Loxodonta africana*, since this excludes the natural webs of significance that both are with/in. Every (id)entity is nature cultur*ing*. Speaking well pivots around returning to the agora, nature's originary humanicity, the total environment, as a complex textual clouding that is continually instantiating itself differently, in a multitude of modes. Humans and their taxonomic categories are not distinct from this process, but differentially with/in and of it, inextricably part of the ways in which nature cultures.

Above, through the work of Praamsma, we have readwritten how the nineteenth century entailed a shift in the knowledge production from understanding structures (anatomy, pathology) in order to add them to existing classifications toward producing new insights into the actual processes taking place in, to follow the example, the body of an ill person. This shift towards independent practical study is exemplary for the broader processes of disciplinarization that took place in that century, the processes through which the humanities emerged as *Geisteswissenschaften* and more and more clearly distinguished themselves from the sciences. In a sense, the notion of the posthumanities seems to rely on this dichotomy of the humanities and the sciences, on an idea of the humanities that is inherently not scientific (in the sense of preoccupied with the natural, the animal, the nonhuman). It is only on the basis of that image of humanism that the posthuman

seems to be able to erect itself, to question the idea of the human as the center, as a unitary being in the center of everything, be it the universe, epistemological frameworks, or technological environments. Renaissance humanists, however, did not work with or through a strict division of what we now call the humanities and the sciences. What might it mean for posthumanism to claim the nineteenth century term 'humanism' not for something akin to a humanities as opposed to a sciences, but as a concept for knowledge practices in the mode of Renaissance humanists, that is, without a definitive split between a humanities and a sciences? What would it mean to dub important new feminist materialist posthumanist figures such as Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, both trained and disciplined in the sciences and the humanities, as veritable Renaissance (Wo)men[51]? What might it mean to suggest that the task of the posthumanities—indeed 'my/our task'—and to paraphrase Badmington, will have been to claim the humanism in posthumanities?

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51 Cf. Kate Aughterson (1995) for a complex mapping of the (educational) practices that women were allowed to be involved in during the Renaissance. Thanks to Iris van der Tuin for this reference.

The neoliberal chapter

On (My Place in) the Contemporary University, and its Conditions of Possibility

According to many thinkers engaging with the contemporary university, academia is increasingly threatened by an ever-growing body of bureaucracy and administrative (i.e. non-academic) personnel. Universities, once institutions governed by academics themselves, are managed, from the 1980s onward, more and more in accordance with so-called market logics, where market pertains primarily to financial and economic dimensions. Universities were and are supposedly conceived of as factories of knowledge production, and its consumers are students, companies, and the state, and universities are as such under constant pressure to produce their products ever more (cost) efficiently. The people doing academic work experience this pressure in its full force: there are fewer and fewer teaching faculty in relation to students, less time per student, more pressure on the individual teachers, pressure to 'publish or perish', the necessity to write lengthy applications for research funding. Market logic has turned the university into a neoliberalist 'machine', tuned to produce, in the Dutch context at least, as many ECTS[52] and diplomas for the lowest possible price.

These developments have not been, and are not, without consequences for the experience of working with/in universities. As Allucquére Rosanne (Sandy) Stone explains in relation to working at a contemporary university: "you will be under great and continual pressure to think of yourself as a cog in the wheel of industry. Yes, even inside the hallowed walls of the university".[53] Others note how a 'precariat'[54] has emerged with short-term contracts and no real hope for a future with paid research time, and this group of academic workers is inevitably marked by their perpetual stressed-out-ness in terms of embodied symptoms such as "exhaustion, stress, overload, insomnia, anxiety, shame, aggression, hurt, guilt and feelings of out-of-placeness, fraudulence and fear of exposure" (Gill 2010: 229). In addition, the body of academic workers appears, according to some theorists (e.g. Bousquet 2008), to reproduce a certain class logic, wherein older, tenured staff sits safely and well-paid within the confines of the university, whereas most of the junior staff is underpaid, exploited, and often has no future within the academy at all (while being fooled into believing that the work done in precarious circumstances is a preparation for a permanent job).

Neoliberalism and its bodily a/effects seems to be everywhere, at least when universities are

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52 European Credit Transfer System, a standard measuring unit for comparing the performances of students, but also programs and even departments, of higher education across Europe. ECTS were introduced with the Bologna declaration in 1999.

53 See the lecture 'A Meatgrinder Called University' part 5 of 1 (5:14-5:28): <http://youtu.be/_trcUxAk8AQ>. Last accessed 10-07-2014)

54 I draw this term from Gill (2013: 13), who uses it in relation to academic workers. This contraction of 'proletariat' and 'precarity' is used much more broadly however (cf. Wikipedia 'Precariat', <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precariat>. Last visited 11-10-2014).

concerned. Or is it? This chapter sets out to explore neoliberalism in Dutch universities today, and more specifically the ways in which the existence of 'my place' is entangled with the specific workings of the material-discursive neoliberal apparatus of (embodied knowledge) production. Simultaneously, in this chapter I am interested in the places and times where the idea and practices of the neoliberal university as intra-active apparatic movement is open, for the zones of virtuality, the potentialities for reworking a neoliberal university from with/in. Therefore, this chapter, above all an exploration of 'my place' with/in the neoliberal university and the im/possibilities of this particular situation and the ways in which it is conditioned and conditioning, unfolds in two main sections. In the first section, the idea of the neoliberal corporatization of universities will be explored in its specificity through Dutch universities, and the way certain of their policies open up the possibility of my being employed as a teaching-assistant, and teaching seminars in the way that I have been doing. (One of) its function(s), in terms of academic writing, is an exposition of the literature on, and idea therein of, the neoliberal university. The second section engages this general idea of the neoliberal university and its literatures through the question of exteriorities-with/in the structures and workings of neoliberal university. More specifically, I will explore the idea that personal (i.e. non-professional) cloud*ings* of relations are inextricably, and constitutively, *of* and with/in academic work. In this regard, I will tie in with my suggestive paraphrasing of Karen Barad in the introduction, where I state that I am not in a neoliberal university or society, but I am *of* neoliberalism. The threshold(ing) that wants to be pointed to in this section will be stumbled upon in the phenomenon of acknowledgments, those—often—marginalized sections where indebtedness of an author to contributions and contributors is voiced.

One slight move of (re)configuration is needed 'before' these sections commence though. Below I will explore the usefulness of the Derridean notion of exorbitance (through Jane Gallop's anecdotal theory), in order to make acknowledgments productive with/in my discussion of the neoliberal university. In relation to that paragraph, and especially note 68, I want to stress here that some readers might not fail to judge the movements enacted in this chapter naive, in the sense of simple, or even downright ludicrous.

My movements are in fact naive.

But what does it mean to be naive? Etymologically, naive denotes 'not artificial', 'native, rustic', and literally means 'born, innate, natural'.[55] Indeed, naive is intimately connected to 'native' (as an adjective). Suggestively one might compare native (as a noun) with the Old French *naif*, "a woman born in slavery" (see note 55). The diffractive vibrating that happens in the tension between this sense of *naif* and a sense of innateness, is furthered through the etymology of the adjective 'native':

> late 14c., 'natural, hereditary, connected with something in a natural way', from Old French *natif* 'native, born in; raw, unspoiled' (14c.) and directly from Latin *nativus* 'innate, produced by birth', from *natus*, past participle of *nasci* (Old Latin *gnasci*) 'be born', related to *gignere* 'beget', from PIE

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55 Source: Etymonline.com, http://etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=naive&searchmode=none, Last visited 11 August 2014.

> [Proto Indo European] root **gene-/*gen-* 'to give birth, beget', with derivatives referring to familial and tribal groups.[56]

Obviously, 'native' as adjective bears the potential to be closely connected with a new materialist, diffractive onto-epistemology, in the sense that naive thinking is not something human or cultural (as fundamentally *un*natural), but profoundly *of* nature. Similarly, naively thinking neoliberalism is *of* neoliberalism, within it, begotten from it. 'Naive' stresses this connection. At the same time, it carries with it the connotation of potential exploitative enslavement that being *of* a system might entail, a condition that pertains to the neoliberal university as it appears in many of the writings on it, as will become clear below. This tension between exploitation and a natural *of*-ness runs through this entire chapter. Interestingly 'naive', through 'native', has roots related to familial and tribal groups, precisely what I will argue is productively exterior-with/in acknowledgments, opening academic work up from within. Theorizing naively, then, is precisely what I will be doing.

The corporatization of Dutch universities

In providing *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey accounts for the logic referred to in many accounts of the contemporary university, explaining that

> neoliberalism values market exchange as an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs, it emphasizes the significance of contractual relations in the marketplace. It holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market. (Harvey 2005: 3; reference omitted)

The rise of neoliberal governance and forms of administration is often tied to the names of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, who have become the faces of a form of rigorous governing that is characterized by continual and major cut-backs, carried out through increased privatization and corporatization. Crucial for my interest in the topic here is that this neoliberal logic, associated with a thinking in terms like 'liberalization', 'efficiency', 'flexibility', 'excellence', 'accountability', and 'outsourcing', has simply become, as Jeffrey Nealon argues, "business and cultural orthodoxy, standard operating procedure" in the 21st century (2012: 13). Indeed, as the title and subtitle to Nealon's book indicates with a wink to Fredric Jameson, neoliberal ways of thinking have become the dominant 'cultural logic' of our time, structuring not only governments, corporations and institutions in the public sector (e.g. schools, hospitals, prisons, universities

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56 See <http://etymonline.com/index.php?term=native&allowed_in_frame=0>. Last visited 11-08-14.

etc.), but also the thoughts and actions of the individuals 'in' this system. Neoliberal logic is everywhere, in the way institutions are governed, but also in classrooms, to give one example from personal experience, where sometimes students argue that they, as the consumer of a product (i.e. education), actually pay the lecturer's salary and therefore the lecturer should comply with the students' demands (cf. Lambert 2001: 215, n. 11; it happened to me also several times in the past two years—despite the differences in the way students finance their studies in the United States and the Netherlands).[57] Accordingly, the becoming written of a/this thesis is no exception to this neoliberalist rule. Let's writeread what that might entail.[58]

The transformation of the university "from an academy to a corporation," Boomkens et al. argue, "deprives it of the possibilities to adequately perform the tasks traditionally assigned to her" (2009: n.p.).[59] A crucial moment in this neoliberalizing process that is supposedly threatening the autonomy of the university in the Netherlands is the 1997 installment of the Modernization of the Academic Governance Act [Modernisering Universitaire Bestuursorganisatie, hereafter MUB]. The MUB replaced a legislation from 1971 (the WUB, Wet Universitaire Bestuurshervorming [Academic Governance Reform Act]), in which the achievements of the 1960s were put into effect, including the abolition of the imperious Boards of Governors and the adjudication of extensive participation of students and members of the (teaching and support) staff in governing processes. The MUB, which became operational in January 1998, however, "radically broke with the grassroots logic of its predecessor" (Engelen, Fernandez, and Hendrikse 2014: 1085). With the MUB, the privatization or corporatization took a huge step forward. As Jeroen van der Starre observes, after the introduction of the MUB, "the power in universities was in the hands of managers, who didn't have to worry about scientific research or education, but had to know everything about corporate efficiency" (2012: n.p.). The MUB implied a fundamental power shift from the faculty level to the board level: "[i]n one big legislative sweep, staff and students were disenfranchised, as decision-making power was concentrated in the hands of a small number of professional managers" (Engelen, Fernandez, and Hendrikse 2014: 1085).

Interestingly, the discourse of these managers is influenced by cybernetic discourse[60] as can be seen in this statement by Yvonne van Rooy, president of Executive Board of Utrecht University from 2004 to 2012, about the installment of the MUB in 1997:

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57 Unsurprisingly, the explorative discussion that is to follow is mostly a tracing of the Dutch system of higher education, centered around the two universities I study and teach in, Utrecht University (UU) and the University of Amsterdam (UvA). Here and there, however, international literature folds into the mapping, especially where it proves to be productive. Nonetheless, whenever I refer to the neoliberalization of the university, this explicitly denotes the Dutch university, and when necessary—because of differences in policies or working conditions for instance—I will explicitly state about which university I am writing.

58 The discussion below slowly narrows from a more general idea of the university to a discussion about academic education and its specificities. This is due to the fact that this is where my main experiences with academia lie, so these details matter to the constitution of 'my place' in important ways. It would be interesting to think through and extend the ideas I develop in the direction of research or the university in a more general sense also, but that is not my goal here in any sense whatsoever.

59 All translations of Dutch literatures in this chapter are mine, except where otherwise indicated.

60 I am following the lead of Gregg Lambert here (see 2001: 8). Cf. Lorenz 2012a: 186ff.

> As Minister [of Education, Cultural Affiars, and Science], Jo Ritzen accomplished something very good with the installment of the MUB. He deserves a statue for that. We [the UU, A.H.] have *a highly efficient system*, with *effective participation* and with a board of directors, by means of which the national government was increasingly kept at a distance [from university decision-making, A.H.]. (Achterberg 2012: n.p.; my emphases and translation)

Governing universities, as we writeread here, is governing a process, production processes in the words of historian Chris Lorenz. Mapping out the Dutch policies that are designed to optimize these production processes of the universities, Lorenz explains that privatization is constituted through three different types of practices: decentralizing, budgeting, and economizing. *Decentralizing* entails the devolving of state regulated collective properties and (managerial) practices to individual universities. A prime example of this practice in the Netherlands is "the 1995 decision to transfer the ownership of public real estate wholesale to universities (and schools, hospitals and other semi-public organizations)," which made managers responsible for the real estate. This extra task virtually forced universities to hire non-academic managers, with specific experiences and knowledges that were never needed in the administration of universities before (Engelen, Fernandez, and Hendrikse, 2014: 1076).

The features of *budgeting*, especially 'lump sum financing', are implicated in the same logic. Lump sum financing entails the fixing of a certain amount of money that will be spent on education and/or research in a given year by the government, and the subsequent dividing of this money among various institutions for higher education. It is clear that with establishing such a fixed amount, all policy risks and problems are passed down to the institutions themselves, clearing the national government of these risks as well as responsibilities (Lorenz 2000: 197). Moreover, this lump sum is divided according to so-called 'output financing', which implies that universities get paid per diploma and/or ECTS that they 'produce'. This policy is hotly debated because it would "effectively [kill] the professional autonomy of scientists and scholars, since they are no longer able to apply their own professional qualitative standards to selection and quality assurance" (Lorenz 2008b: 50). Boomkens et al. argue that "in this way the university is tempted to ensure, or even increase, an income by delivering as many students as possible" (2009: n.p.). This, they add, is usually achieved by lowering the level of education, in short, diploma inflation (about which there were several scandals in the Netherlands in recent years, most (in)famously the case of InHolland). Lastly, lump sum financing has structurally gone hand in hand with cutting the budgets. How to organize universities with ever more students and less and less budget becomes a problem for each individual university, faculty and department (in this order) instead of a problem for the state.

The third policy that co-comprises the privatization of Dutch universities is *economizing*, which entails the idea that "every public institution can be treated as a financially self-sufficient enterprise, selling products in a competitive market" (ibidem). For universities this implies that they are figured as situated in a market for education and research, where they compete with other universities that are trying to sell similar

products. Lorenz argues that in this way the complexity of the real world of universities, is fundamentally reduced to three groups of (f)actors, three 'categories of people', in to make the production process manageable.[61] Firstly, Lorenz mentions what he calls the 'producers', "formerly called the faculty" (ibidem). I will have more to say about these 'workers' below, specifically my place as one. Secondly, there are the 'consumers' of the products, students and consumers of research that pay a certain price for this product (e.g. tuition fees). The relation between these two groups, and the ways in which it structures actual educational practice in the contemporary university was already alluded to in the introduction. Thirdly, there are managers that 'organize' the production process. Concretely these consist of local boards of directors (Colleges van Bestuur), which are organized on the national level as an employer's organization (VSNU, Vereniging Samenwerkende Nederlandse Universiteiten [Association of Universities in the Netherlands]). It is interesting to note that the managerial category is hierarchically organized, which means that "all members of crucial governing bodies are appointed by a superior body. This means that the supervisory board appoints the executive board, the executive board appoints the deans, and the deans appoint the head of schools" (Boer, de et al. 2007: 39). All in all, the executive structures within the university are centralized, setting up a control system that intensively monitors and assesses the so-called market transactions and the results of the production taking place.

Quantification and its implications for academic content

Let us follow Lorenz' conceptualization of the university as 'production processes' one step further. For him as well as others the most fundamental problems with the privatization of the university pop up through the fact that "it is absolutely essential to be able to quantify all services and products within this process in order to specify their prices" (ibidem: 198; emphases omitted). To take the example that I am most familiar with, both as student and teaching assistant, the basis of the current model for all educational processes is the reduction of all kinds of qualitative and fundamentally open-ended processes (i.e. learning and teaching) to measurable quantities.[62] This takes several forms. Most obviously, at least from the perspective of a student, is the way in which most educational practices and performances are measured in ECTS. One ECTS equals 28 hours of study in the Netherlands.[63] By the same token, a BA program is done in three years, an MA takes one, an RMA two, and PhD-dissertations are is written in three years. The advantages for the Dutch state are obvious: they pay universities for teaching BA and MA students for a maximum of five years (the four

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61 For narrative purposes I am changing the order of presentation of these three 'categories of persons'. See Lorenz (2000: 197-198).

62 The Bologna-process, understood as a European policy aimed at neoliberalizing the universities, is of course involved here, but there is unfortunately no timespace to treat it more in depth here. For more information, see for instance van der Starre (2012), (Keeling, 2006), Lorenz (2008a), Lievers (2008), Liesner (2008), and Ramboer (2008).

63 For a comparison with other countries see Wikipedia (Last accessed 04-07-14): <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Credit_Transfer_and_Accumulation_System>.

nominal years for the program and one addition), and they distribute student finances in the same way.

The development of such standard measurement units is necessary to enable the continual evaluation that is going on in the contemporary university. As Mary Evans explains in her account of British universities: "The academic machine has to be assessed on an almost daily basis, and there are very few aspects of the process of running a university which are free of surveillance" (2004: 70). This dominance of evaluative surveillance, what I would like to call here, 'assessment culture', has important consequences. Firstly, the very idea of what teaching and learning entail change fundamentally. Modularization, the practice that requires it to be spelled out for each course what a student will learn there (the 'aims and objectives' of the course), and what the place of the course is in the program as a whole, turns teaching and learning into a mechanized process through which "not only the teacher becomes an automaton, but also the student, for he or she is obliged to live up to the 'learning outcomes' set down in advance, in other words in a sense not to *live* at all, merely to 'receive deliver'" (Royle in Evans 2004: 49; original emphasis). It entails a fundamental de-humanization of the process of (academic) learning and teaching. Moreover, as Evans notes, the actual content of courses or modules are of minor importance: "it simply doesn't matter if the subject is making sand castles or quantum physics, since the curriculum is marginalized by the process" (63).[64] That is to say, it doesn't really seem to matter what is taught to students, or how, since the actual content and its quality do not necessarily influence circulation in the system and on the market: "the quality of education and research is only controlled by the university in terms of quantitative 'efficiency' and 'loss of production' (Lorenz 2000: 200)

Many things might be said about this (presentation of the) structure of the neoliberal university, but let me highlight a few points that are important with regard to 'my place'. In terms of being a student the modularization and loss of importance of the actual content offers the possibility (to a certain extent) to put together one's own program. During my undergraduate program in media studies, for instance, I took courses in several other departments and faculties, including philosophy (a department in the faculty of humanities), gender studies (at the UvA co-organized by the political science and social science departments), and quantum physics in the science park. It is all possible, as long as one makes sure to have earned the correct amount of ECTS at a certain point in time. Indulging in various knowledges in this way was an amazing experience, but also leaves me fragmented; I do not know to which (inter/trans)discipline I would belong. This, indeed, is indicative of the idea that the actual content of academic disciplines seems to matter less and less (if at all).

The fact that the actual content of courses doesn't really matter anymore is also an important condition for what I take to be 'my place' as a teaching assistant. That is, I am a student in an RMA (in

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64 It would be interesting, with regard to the coming into being of the posthumanities, to connect this observation of Evans with Bill Readings' claim that "[t]he very fecundity and multiplicity of Cultural Studies is enabled by the fact that culture no longer functions as a specific referent to any one thing or set" (1996: 17). Indeed, according to Readings, the vision of culture that is presented by cultural studies, and extended with/into 'naturecultures' by posthumanistic theories (as I show in the disciplinarity chapter), is a perfect match for a neoliberalizing university, because the term no longer has "*any specific content*" (ibidem; my emphasis).

Gender Studies) that is not directly connected to the BA (Media Studies) that I welcome first year students to in their very first seminars ever, without any teaching experience whatsoever, and without any guidance or help with regard to teaching skills. What does all this say about disciplinary standards? Moreover, the way education is understood in the neoliberal scheme outlined above (as the transfer of a certain set of information into the (supposedly empty) minds of students for which the content and its context do not really matter), makes it seem quite unproblematic that the cheapest possible person that might have this information in his or her head, albeit lacking active research experience, plans, or even future, does the teaching work. It makes the system in its entirety more efficient, doesn't it? I am, I just want to writeread, well aware that 'my place' in the various teaching assistant jobs that I have had over the last two years were significantly made possible by a so-called 'vacaturestop' [job halt], which prohibited various departments to hire any teaching personnel, that was put into practice by the faculty of humanities just months before I was hired (indeed, as an emergency solution).[65]

The role of the graduate employee in the contemporary university

There's more to this position of being a graduate student that is employed by his or her university though. In his alarming studies, Marc Bousquet has thoroughly theorized the position of students that do this type of work, but will most likely never work in a university after graduating, especially with regard to universities in the United States. In line with what we wroteread above, Bousquet argues that casualization, the transformation of a workforce from employed mostly on permanent contracts to one engaged on a short-term temporary basis, jeopardizes true academic activity since tenured staff is increasingly replaced with students and avocational labor, hence the lowering of the level of undergraduate studies, since students have a limited amount of courses to choose from (mostly very general courses that might be taught by graduate employees), and reduced access to faculty actively working in a certain field of scholarship (2008: 43). In Bousquet's view the neoliberal system governing academic education in the United States at the moment

> cannot run without people who are doing or who have done graduate study, quite frequently persons who can be represented as on some long trajectory toward the[ir...] doctorate. As presently constructed, the academic labor system requires few if any new degree holders—but it gasps and sputters when there is a tiny interruption in the steady stream of new graduate students […] The system 'really needs' a continuous flow of replaceable nondegreed labor. (24)

As will be clear from the above, this pertains also to 'my place' in the Dutch university and to some of the teaching experiences that I've had over the last couple of years, in particular those occasions in which I felt

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65 For more information about this job halt, see "Nieuwsbrief bestuursteam" (16 September 2011), Last accessed 13 August 2014. <http://www2.hum.uu.nl/nieuwsbrieven/bestuursteam/110916-nieuws-bezuinigingen-bestuursteam.htm> and Bronkhorst (2011).

inadequate to provide thorough introductions, feedback, or elaborations of particular topics. (One wonders, though, if this doesn't happen to many teachers [early in their career, or even throughout]).

For Bousquet these kinds of situations are alarming, and therefore his project is aimed towards increasing unionization of graduate employees (again, in the US). Not only are academic standards jeopardized because "flexible teachers" who are " imperfectly attuned to disciplinary knowledge" cannot really "afford to provide an obstacle to the advancing administrative ideal of an ultimately education-free transfer of cash for course credits" because they will simply not work in the university anymore if they do (42). At the same time, Bousquet is concerned with the precariousness of the people doing this work:

> With occasional exceptions, most of this cadre of students and former students serving as term workers figure as the ideal type of labor power 'in the informatic mode'—they can be called up by the dean or program administrator even after the semester has begun, and they can be dismissed at will; they have few rights to due process; they are frequently grateful to 'have the chance to do what they love'; like Wal-Mart employees, most rely on parents or a traditionally employed partner for shelter and access to health care, day care, and so on. (71/72)[66]

Indeed, according to Bousquet graduate employees typically need either (one of) their parents, a traditionally employed and well-paid partner, or some other kind of (familial or personal of various natures) support to be able to do this kind of work (cf 23/24 and 43). Reading this struck me: indeed my parents and mother-in-law support me and my family, so that I am enabled to have these jobs, finish my studies, and live a relatively good life with my dears simultaneously, without being aware that this is a structural condition that pertains to many people in comparable jobs. It is unsurprising that many people would be worried about this, since if family or other financial support is so often indispensable for graduate employees to do their work without getting into real trouble, "how do factors such as class and the racialized wealth gap affect the composition of the professoriate?" (43). (Although I will have something to say about the class dimensions structuring 'my place', I will have to leave the full complexity of these questions to future research, and here follow through Bousquet's argument, since he has something urgent to say with regard to the neoliberal university as a system.)

Bousquet argues that the existence of this particular type of graduate employee labor, as it exist in American universities at least, marks the natural "waste product," of a finely tuned and perfectly operating system (21-29). Importantly, this "excremental condition" (27) of the system is structural:

> What needs to be quite clear is that this is not a 'system out of control', a machine with a thrown rod or a blown gasket. Quite the contrary: it's a smoothly functioning new system with its own easily

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66 For a sustained critique of the 'do what you love' ethic that seems to characterize many working environments, including the university, these days, see Tokumitsu (2014).

apprehensible logic, premised entirely on the continuous replacement of degree holders with nondegreed labor (or persons with degrees willing to work on unfavorable terms). (24)

Indeed, according to Bousquet, the entire educational apparatus of the neoliberal university functions such that an easily disposable (and disposed) workforce is the "constitutive exterior" of the system (28). The many graduate employees that work in positions like mine, often with the hope of finding a way into a permanent job in the university understand their situation incompletely according to Bousquet, often feeling 'treated like shit', without grasping "the systemic reality that *they are waste*" (ibidem; my emphasis). That is, where as these students might believe to be working on and training for their future, what actually happens when they graduate is that they will simply be replaced by new and fresh graduate students. The tenured positions many of these workers dream of simply do not exist (they are in Bousquet's words, a "collective fantasy" [ibid.]). It is on this basis that Bousquet would want to organize the academic 'precariat' in unions, so as to work on improving the structurally problematic position of this labor force (which doesn't mean he idealizes unions per se, see Bousquet 2011).

In sum, then, the neoliberal logics structuring the university nowadays is not only threatening scholarly work through the omnipresent assessment culture, bite-size chunks of ECTS and diplomas, and the declining importance of the actual content being caused, but also by the changing composition of the teaching staff, in which more and more tenured staff—which would supposedly be able to 'secure' certain disciplinary and academic standards—are replaced with temporary staff with absolutely no position to argue against the wishes of administrators. The image that theorists like Lorenz and Bousquet sketch is, at least to my readingwriting, rather bleak. Although I would agree that the logics as they are functioning in the university today might be of a questionable nature, and would have to subscribe to many of Bousquet's observations simply from experience, one wonders if the hard dichotomy between academia and administration, between the scholars doing the academic work on the one hand and the managers and their staff on the other, a binary that functions in many of the works cited above is ultimately productive for changing 'the system'. That is, presupposing a neoliberalism 'out there' in opposition to academia 'in here', and subsequently voicing the complaint that too much power is in the hands of administrators and the way they configure the system, fixes academics as fundamentally non-neoliberalist, at best as non-neoliberalist in a neoliberalist environment.

With regard to this, and in preparation for the discussions on individuality and agency with/in the conclusions of this thesis, it is instructive to writeread Bousquet's ideas about the self-image of graduate employees and their possibilities for making a change. Bousquet argues that graduate employees

can maintain the fantasy that they really exist elsewhere, in some place other than the overwhelmingly excremental testimony of their experience. This fantasy becomes an alibi for inaction, because *in this construction agency lies elsewhere, with the administrative touch* on the flush-chain. The effect

of people who feel treated like waste is an appeal to some other agent: please stop treating us this way—which is to say to that outside agent, 'please recognize that we are not waste'. (26; my emphasis)

Bousquet here repeats the logic of opposing academia and (neoliberal) administration, while at the same time ascribing a certain inactivity to graduate employees, that would hold that all agency for governing (and changing) the system lies in the hands of the administrative managers. In many ways, such an inactivizing assignation of agency to a (neoliberal) other seems to apply to the way the academics discussed above, most notably Lorenz, Boomkens et al. and Bousquet himself, position themselves with regard to the neoliberal university. Indeed, narrating in a dichotomy as they do makes me wonder who in their scheme supposedly has agency, and who simply has to comply with the choices of the powerful. Isn't it so, as Bousquet suggests, that in these accounts agency lies with the administrative touch, a dirty hand that threatens clean, and pure 'academia'?[67] Might we, academics of all types, not more fruitfully accept, and start to think from the idea that 'neoliberalism' and 'university' are not two distinct (id)entities, but rather an intra-activity, indeed, the *neoliberal university*?

On the conditions of possibility of the neoliberal university

In the following, I want to begin exploring what an understanding of contemporary academic scholarship as inextricably and intra-actively connected with, indeed, *of* neoliberalism, might produce. In particular, I want to suggest two things. One of them is the idea that the de-humanizing tendency of increased modularization and output control via measurable units (ECTS for example), and especially the loss of attention for the actual content in courses and classrooms that these entail, carries with/in it certain potentialities to work with/in neoliberalism in ways that many (post)humanistic scholars might ascribe to. Firstly, however, I will engage the phenomenon of acknowledgments in order to propose that graduate employees are not the natural 'waste' of the neoliberal university, but rather the very things that makes the neoliberal university possible, it's condition of possibility. In this regard, many connections, many non/academic connections, are crucial to the be(com)ing of academia and of neoliberalism.

Intra-actively, there is no other place to be started from but the midst of things. It is crucial though that a threshold, this being in the middle of things, simultaneously an entry and an exit, the light lines where we might expect dark, is not necessarily the center (the middle ≠ the center). To make visible the productivity of this insight let us writeread with Jane Gallop's writingreading of Jacques Derrida's "exorbitant theorizing" (2002: 7). In her book *Anecdotal Theory*, Gallop seeks ways to theorize with and through anecdotes,

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67 It is telling in this regard that Lorenz' many writings on the neoliberal privatization of the university map out these developments in detail, but hardly ever begin to suggest any possibility for change or course of action (see for example, 2000, 2008a and 2008b).

particularly to wedge open her own "theoretically predictable discourse," in order to "leave open the chance for something to happen," both to theory and the anecdotal (157). Indeed, Gallop challenges any easy boundaries between the anecdotal and (academic) theories, arguing that the "usual presupposition of theory is that we need to reach a general understanding, which then predisposes us toward the norm, toward a case or model that is prevalent, mainstream" (7). Drawing on Derrida's association of exorbitance "with exteriority, with exits, departures, attempts to get out" of the orbits of normativity, of the mainstream, she quotes Joel Fineman, who writes on the history of the anecdote, to argue that the anecdote is excessive of its literary status and "by that excess introduces an opening" that "gives the anecdote its pointed, referential access to the real" (8; reordered and citations omitted).[68] Using anecdotes and theorizing exorbitantly, that is, challenges one's own theoretical 'mind in a groove', and simultaneously taps into potentialities to open up any mainstream theorizations.[69] It is in this exorbitant spirit that I now turn to acknowledgments as an exteriority-with/in the center that the clear division between academics and administrative personnel within the (literature on) neoliberal university is in the aforementioned literature, since something is bound to happen there, to 'my place', as well as to neoliberalism.[70]

A/effectively implicated: Karen Barad's acknowledgments.

I'm quite sure that we, in the sense of you and I, have seen many acknowledgments, either in the early pages of books, or towards their last pages. And let's not forget footnotes. That's where they are often situated: in the margin. A lot of these acknowledgments, at least in (post)humanistic academic spheres, take similar form and content; the author thanks colleagues, peers that were helpful in revising (parts of) the text at hand, students that one might have been working with, and the institutions that provided the funding that made possible taking the time to write a book. Usually, especially in recent publications, acknowledgments also include a list of where (parts of) chapters were previously published and gratitude for the permission to re-publish these parts is expressed. Often, but it is not standard operating practice, an author takes time to thank family and friends, including non-human life-companions every now and then, stressing the invaluable support and wealth of particular partnerships. Indeed, acknowledgments are the place where a sense of indebtedness to a wider world of discussion and scholarship, funding and fellowships, family and friends of various kinds is made explicit.

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68 Gallop explains that Derrida muses over the term 'exorbitant' in a move that anticipates criticism of the weight that he gives to a certain "relatively rare and marginal" text, by stating that "We are preparing to privilege, in a manner that some will not fail to judge exorbitant, certain texts" (Derrida in Gallop 2002: 7). According to Gallop, Derrida brazenly embraces this term ("Our choice is in fact *exorbitant*") that he first imagines being used against him, "a rhetorical move often used by militant marginal groups, as in the recent adoption of the term queer, amongst others" (ibidem). One might like to consider (some of) the rhetorical moves I make throughout this thesis in precisely this manner.

69 The phrase 'minds in a groove' is Alfred North Whitehead's, but I draw it from Dolphijn and Van der Tuin (2012: 89).

70 Another genre of exorbitant texts that undoubtedly offer many interesting 'openings' would be foot- and endnotes, which I draw on from time to time in this thesis in ways that might allude to the treatment of acknowledgments in this chapter.

In light of the feminist idea(l) of situated knowledges and the particular embodied nature of any apparatus of knowledge production elaborated upon in the method(ont)ological chapter, acknowledgments, these marginalized writings that hardly anyone ever reads—at least not 'closely'—suggest, from my partial perspective, openings. Indeed they function as thresholds, where at the very least two things happen. Firstly, even if (post)humanistic scholars (and scientists are not excluded here per se) largely seek to keep financial and economic conditions of possibility outside of their main work (the theories, conceptualizations, discussions, etc. in the main body of a book), acknowledgments are the places where these structuring forces inevitably enter bodies of work. Acknowledgments, that is, prove that any type of knowledge production is a material practice that is shaped by and shaping a large field of forces, a clouding of movements that is causally significant in the coming into being of any type of knowledge. As such, they explicitly enact a network of indebtedness implicated with/in the be(com)ing of any book, including the apparatic movements of what we might broadly call neoliberalism, which is constitutively worked and working into any book, even those without acknowledgments, and is inevitably *of* it. Acknowledgments, most obviously through the mentioning of particular funds, point to this 'excessive' spilling over of neoliberalism into academic work(s). Secondly and simultaneously, acknowledgments suggestively seem to carry with/in them one of the many answers to the question of the conditions of possibility of neoliberalism. As stated in the introduction, this is a line of thinking, a movement, that structured/s my thought through and 'before' my reading of Karen Barad's acknowledgments in *Meeting the Universe Halfway.* Strictly speaking, Barad's book starts with a 'preface and acknowledgments', but it is one that engages the idea of acknowledging fully, if diffractively. Let's writeread it in some detail.

Barad begins her acknowledgments with a brief exploration of her relational diffractive ontology, as I have explored in the method(ont)ological chapter, after which she asks herself what it means to write an acknowledgment. Writing an acknowledgment, she argues,

> cannot be matter of simply committing to paper key moments and key individuals identified and selected from various scans through the book of memories written into and preserved in the mind of an author […] Remembering is not a replay of a string of moments, but an enlivening and reconfiguring of past and future that is larger than any individual. Re-membering and re-cognizing do not take care of, or satisfy, or in any way reduce one's responsibilities; rather like intra-actions, they extend the entanglements and responsibilities of which one is part. (2007: ix)

For Barad, there is not a discrete individual that glosses a book of memories, page by page, to make a list of the most important contributors and contributions. Indeed, in her scheme of the universe, the making of such a list is not an endpoint that simply (if only partly) pays debts, since it furthers entanglements, and as such constitutes a cloud*ing* 'moving-together/apart'. Since there is no simple beginning or endpoint, not simply an 'I' (author) and book, but only "the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each intra-

action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly" (x). Barad stresses the ethical dimensions implied in intra-active relatings, musing about the "thought of my mother reading this and thinking that I have made things unnecessarily complicated once again" (ibidem). But it is a "passionate yearning for justice enfolded into the core of my being—a passion and a yearning inherited from and actively nurtured by my mother—that I cannot simply say what needs to be said (as if that were a given) and be done with it" (ibid.). It is this strong commitment to living justly that leads Barad to write that:

> My gratitude encompasses more beings than can be listed on any number of sheets of paper. Lists simply cannot do justice to [intra-active, A.H.] entanglements. I can only hope that anyone (from my past or future, known to me or perhaps not) who looks for her or his name in this acknowledgment and is disappointed not to find it will understand that she or he is nonetheless written into the living and changing phenomenon that rightly deserves the name 'book', which is surely not the simple object one can hold in one's hands. (xi)

The list of acknowledgments, in short, is open (as is every 'individual' on it), not merely epistemologically but ontologically, towards the future as well as the past. Hence the questioning of the nature of a book.[71]

Barad then starts listing students and fellow-students, teachers, friends and colleagues, many with a brief but personal comment. Effortlessly transgressing boundaries between professional and personal, human and non-human, and various types of conversations, Barad overflows with gratitude (for example) for colleagues such as Joseph Rouse, Donna Haraway, and Vicki Kirby and her canine companion Robbie ("whose furry body almost made it through the writing of this book") all in the space of one paragraph. The list-y cloud*ing* that comprises the acknowledgments continues in a way that opens up academic systematicity (supposedly increasingly neoliberally structured, as we have writtenread in the previous section), or more precisely, performatively enacts the exteriority-with/in it. (I quote at length, as above, to do justice and not to reduce Barad's gratitude to platitude(s); as stated in the method(ont)ological chapter as well as my discussion of anecdotal theory, details matter.)

> I am immeasurably grateful to my parents, Harold and Edith Barad, for believing in me, no matter what. My mother's unfaltering faith in the goodness of all people and her insistence on seeing the best in each person is a rarity in this world and an inspiration. My heartfelt thanks to my father for teaching me to throw a baseball and sink a basket better than any boy in the neighborhood; the days we spent playing ball together were founding feminist moments in my life that taught me remarkably useful lessons and skills that I have carried with me. My first really important insights about the nature of measurement and value came from my parents; I feel very fortunate indeed to have been

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71 Cf. N. Katherine Hayles's *Writing Machines* (2002).

raised with working-class values, which refuse to measure the value or worth of a person by their profession, accomplishments, education, wealth, or worldliness.

Roanne Wilson gave generously of herself throughout the writing of this book, offering warm meals, companionship, love, flexibility in co-parenting, abundant support, and hot chocolate at just the right moments. There is no 'thank you' that can speak to all the tangibles and intangibles that she has given me.

My daughter, Mikaela, has in many ways been my closest collaborator. The way she meets the world each day with an open and loving heart-mind has taught me a great deal. Her insatiable sense of curiosity, unabated ability to experience pure joy in learning, wide-open sense of caring for other beings, and loving attentiveness to life (taking in the tiniest details and textures of the world, which she re-creates through poetry, drawings, paintings, sculpture, stories, dance, and song) are key ingredients to making possible futures worth remembering. This book is dedicated to her.

Barad tries to do justice in her acknowledgments to something akin to a Latourian 'collective' that comprises the process of the becoming written of her book. And I believe that she does. *Naively*, I cannot help, even after reading this short piece many, many times, to be touched and moved by the sheer humbleness and modesty, especially as regards the indebtedness to family, lovers, parents, (non-human) friends, and child. I want to suggest that Barad's acknowledgments exorbitantly pay homage to the conditions of possibility of any academic writing—especially the book (which is still the preferred form of publication in (post)humanistic disciplines). These conditions are inextricably *of* and *with* every piece of 'academic' work, even of those who do not explicitly acknowledge. Indeed, the intra-active cloud*ing* network of family and friends inevitably condition, enable, and make possible academic work, whether writing, teaching, administrative, studying or otherwise. In this light, the indispensable support of parents or partner that Bousquet has pointed to as a necessity for the existence of the neoliberal university and its educational practices might be affirmed. Let me work through 'my place' and the way it's structured to take this point home.

From waste to condition of possibility: my cloud*ing* of indebtedness

Due to the fact that I had been studying for four months right after secondary school in the early 2000s (something I didn't like at all and quit before Christmas), after I had finished my undergraduate studies I was no longer eligible for Dutch student financing [studiefinanciering]. Since this was a fairly substantial amount of money that I would be missing now (because of my being married with children, it included a partner grant and amounted to almost €1500, only a third of which was a loan), this made me panic about my academic future. Fortunately, I was able to find jobs within the university and thus stay where I wanted to be. As we have seen, however, my continuing of my academic 'work' (education and career), was contingent on

support from family.

It is therefore at this point in the thesis, somewhere in the midst of it, that I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to those people that perhaps comprise a center in the be(com)ing of this thesis: my parents, without whom none of this would have ever been possible. Their unremitting energy in supporting me and my family, emotionally and financially, is simply amazing, and I cannot but feel extremely thankful for the gift that this life 'with' and 'of' them is (becoming). Mama en papa, deze scriptie is minstens net zoveel jullie scriptie als de mijne, en ik ben eindeloos dankbaar voor alles wat jullie hebben gegeven, nog steeds geven, en voor de mogelijkheden die jullie scheppen. Ik geloof niet dat ik jullie ooit adequaat kan bedanken, maar toch: dank jullie wel.

Reineke and Ayla, I am quite sure you are both entirely aware how much you are inextricably of this thesis, and of the work that I do in academia more generally (see figure 6). This is not because you were simply there in the room when I was doing my (supposedly important and serious) work. Diffracted through the inescapable work in and around our housekeeping that you do so generously, Reineke, are our conversations, often over coffee or beer, that have undoubtedly made me the thinker that I am. Your intellectual inspiration, stimulation, and nourishment humble me, and I thank you with all that I am. Let's spend our lives together. En zonder jou, Ayla, en je eindeloze enthousiasme om het leven met mij te delen, en

Figure 6. Non/academic life. Picture by Reineke Wieman

het zich niet achter een bureau te laten afspelen, en zonder jouw vreugdevolle drang om in het moment te

leven zou deze scriptie overduidelijk nooit zijn geworden wat ie is. Dikke kus voor jullie, liefstes.[72]

Clearly, familial relations, and not only mine of course, are not outside of contemporary academia as a professional environment, but are precisely that which makes it possible, at least in the case of 'my place', but, so I suggest, also as a structural condition for the neoliberal university as we have writtenread through Bousquet. In this sense, what he dubs as the excremental 'constitutive exterior' of the system is not outside of it, but constitutively with/in it, a "constitutive inclusion," the "radical un/doing of [the] identity" of the neoliberal university; a "new [realm] of in/determinacy" that challenges the assumption of academic life as a 'pure', professional realm (Barad 2012a, 214). In phrasing it as if the neoliberalizing university absorbs and destroys academia proper, the agency and power of the neoliberal system is confirmed, while academic thinkers position themselves outside of the reality of the contemporary university, in many ways incapable of making any (real) difference. Academia, however, is not 'pure'. In my lived experience of it, there is no clear boundary around academia as such. In staying with the trouble, in mapping out the complex boundary workings and reworkings that constitute and condition 'our places' as academics, might we not more fruitfully ask how we are always already of neoliberalism, and where we might be able to take academia from there? Humbly and naively, by way of conclusion to this chapter, I want to briefly explore an exteriority-with/in 'my place' as I have been mapping it out here. Unsurprisingly, it appears in a place quite similar to the sense of academic work I try to convey through figure 6, namely on the shop floor, in the middle of the activity.[73]

Conclusive: The nature of learning and the humanicity of neoliberalism

As a teaching assistant involved in the execution of between two to four courses each semester for the past two years, my experience in teaching is very limited. In addition, apart from a copy of one chapter from a book on (a specific) educational theory, me and my colleagues were not offered any type of guidance with regard to our teaching tasks. This fits the image that Lorenz and Evans sketch—that the academic educator is merely a cog in the wheel of educational industry—quite perfect. For the system in general, it is only more efficient that the cheapest possible employee guides students through the information exchange that undergraduate programs seem to become to be. In the idea of Nicholas Royle, quoted above through Evans, that students as well as teacher become automatons, in a sense 'not living at all', a certain de-

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72 It is unfortunate that the way I enact my argument here is violent in many ways. Notwithstanding my shift in language, the reader should realize at this point that my 'traditional' acknowledgments and everybody there (and not there) folds into this thesis in a specific and special way, even if I don't bring up them in this particular passage.

73 To be clear: by no means do I want to suggest that everyone should embrace this (or *a*) familial condition of possibility—and heterosexual at that!—as an exteriority-with/in neoliberalism, as a way to joyfully affirm it, and open it to be entered and exited by and through itself. Possibilities, as will become clear especially in the conclusion, open up and close down through intra-activity, and come to matter at specific 'places', suggesting that particular positionings bring with them particular thresholds, in the sense of im/possibilities. In particular, with Peta Hinton (2014) I will suggest that (feminist) politics are precisely about capacities for identity, that is, capacities for claiming and having 'a place'.

humanization of education is implied.[74] Learning is reduced to machinic work, and teachers are simply the workers standing by these machines (in 'my place'), replaceable and cheap. This resonates with the view of new media theorist Evgeny Morozov, whose work was part of courses that I have been teaching in, that neoliberalism leaves out 'the human factor' and is only about market transactions, irrespective of the well-being of the many beings implicated in this critique.[75]

Learning, as any attentive learner or teacher knows, it not such a simple and linear practice. People learn at differing speeds, differing intensities, and with/in differing environment (see Lenz Taguchi 2010 for more on the processes implied in learning and teaching from an intra-active perspective). Even if 'the neoliberal university' is said to want to organize these processes efficiently through modularization and increasing measurability, my experience is that in the situatedness of classrooms, on the shop floor[76] so to say, one is still intra-actively implicated with/in a collective that functions with/in different speeds and slownesses. These didn't leave academic buildings from the 1980s onwards. Therefore, I would want to suggest that it is through enacting and being enacted by the work of teaching and learning, in and through the specificities of the ways in which these practices play out that different differences might be made. That is, in my experience with undergraduate students, the person that has the teaching role is positioned very much as an authoritative presence in the classroom, the one who is supposed to tell the students what to do or not. Even if one actively tries to displace this role, for instance by reconfiguring access to the technologies in the room and making students responsible for setting this up for presentations, positioning oneself at different places in the room, and many other practices, the role of the teacher is still enacted as the one that ultimately judges (grades), and thus the one that should provide definitive answers.

For me this situation enables a certain amount of agential responsibility, although I would never claim being in control of the processes taking place in the classroom. And it is right here that the teaching could take the form the system seems to want to push me in: a simple exchange of information that I have and that needs to be put in the supposedly empty heads of the students. But it needn't per se. 'My place' as a teaching-assistant, a teacher in the eyes of undergraduates, is undoubtedly an instantiation of the neoliberal university as a whole, in ways spelled out above. Simultaneously, however, 'my place' instantiates the system in its specificity, its specific embodied situating, right there on the shop floor. This is an instaurative process in the sense that a lot of hard work has to be done to make it happen, to be in 'this place', while at the same time one (as teacher or student) is not in full control of what it is that might come about, what might be happening. The shop floor is always 'spilling over', there's always the (anecdotal, familial, personal, [non-/a-/in-]human) excess that is a threshold, an opening. Without the work, however, nothing would be

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74 It would be interesting to explore the dis/connections between the dominant neo-liberal ways of thinking and stucturing the world and the various posthumanisms and posthumanities much in vogue with cultural theorists today. That will have to be done elsewhere though.

75 See especially the Backlight [Tegenlicht] episode 'Evgeny Morozov: The End of Internet Utopia', 34.00 min. and after. <http://tegenlicht.vpro.nl/afleveringen/2011-2012/evgenymorozov.html>. Last accessed 14-08-14.

76 The notion of the 'shop floor' I draw from Barad (2007), chapter 6. Barad herself references Leela Fernandes (1997) with regard to this concept.

happening. It is through this instaurative process that possibilities and impossibilities for the educational process to materialize differently are made and unmade. As a teacher one could never totally undo or keep out 'de-humanizing' tendencies in the university's structures, but is it necessarily so that 'my place' as a specific 'unit' instantiated by the system as a whole implies that my teaching fully embodies or incorporates these tendencies? Or, as I would want to suggest, is there a shifting field of im/possibilities to instantiate and be instantiated by the whole differently, and differently, and differently? Might a person in the 'place' of a teacher, for instance, *work* to let a certain humanicity of the neoliberalist academic education happen? Might she or he not be (en)able(d) to somehow fold into the be(com)ing of the neoliberal ECTS that she or he is attending the network-ish cloud*ing* of indebtedness that comprises, pushes, and conditions any (id)entity, be it that of the teacher, the university, an academic in general, new media, posthumanisms, philosophies of science, or any other topic that might be at hand?

At the same time, I want to suggest that my explorations in this chapter hint towards an alternative politics for graduate employees. Why, I want to ask, would an argument for unionization have to based on the assertion that graduate employees are the excremental waste of the neoliberal university? Might we not more fruitfully argue that they are the conditions of its possibility, and in that light deserve a certain set of rights, protection, and respect with/in the system? Moreover, might an argument for the improvement of the place and role of graduate employees not be made out of the idea that instaurative practices, the doings of making, are worlding practices, the bringing about of the neoliberal university in its humanizing and de-humanizing (indeed posthumanizing) tendencies? For it is on the shop floor that the university materializes, that different differences are made, that neoliberalism comes about in its various specificities. Who would we want to do this neoliberalizing work, and through which conditions?

Conclusion

New feminist materialists stress the agentiality of matter, the activity of the world and the differences made by non- and posthuman (id)entities through the continual intra-active annunciation of the world in its entirety and specificity. Diffractive onto-epistemologies point to how this ongoing recursive clouding is an instaurative process: an activity that implies a lot of work to let something happen, without ever being in control of what might be(come). This urges the question what 'my place' is as the writer of this thesis. The becoming written of many theses (and other writings at that) is a long process that in its diffractive clouding folds in a lot of energies, places, times, animals and people. Many, many movements-together shape, and continue to shape this particular writingreading, which is not closed yet, not even after it has been read and graded. In many ways it is a privilege to be able to be part of this becoming writtenread, indeed to be in 'my place' as the writer of the thesis at hand. At the same time, a becoming written of an academic piece, as I suggest in the neoliberal chapter, is always already spilling over into, and is co-constituted by what we might consider non-academic life, in the sense of family and friends of various kinds. This movement is not a movement from academia to what is outside it, but rather *with* an exterior-with/in and *of* it. Academia is with/in friendships and the familial, and friendships and the familial are with/in academia. This thesis is living proof of that.

If these 'last' pieces of readingwriting of my thesis are supposed to be a conclusion, an endpoint at which I recount the achievements of my different chapters and bring them home in light of my main question(s); a production of boundaries around my work so that it can be read in its 'final' version, graded, and put on a (virtual) shelf somewhere for the records, this thesis—and hopefully any thesis—might 'end' differently/diffractively. That is to say, the becoming written of this thesis is not contained within the bounds of this pile of paper or heap of digits. It lives on, spilling over into the becoming of lives, at least mine and my family's, and possibly the lives of my fellow students, colleagues, and students. Even if many of my family members never read this thesis, and never will, the existence of it entails differences. (Post)humanistic academic writing, in some ways, is not dependent on reading (being read) so much, as it is on living-together as a moving-together, on clouding intra-activity. It is in this sense that I have suggested that my (our?) place as a (post)humanist is a place that is calling me to learn to speak well in different tonal tendencies of worldly becoming(s). So if this is the conclusion of my thesis, and it undoubtedly is, it will be (again and again) the performative enactment of a boundary, of the boundaries of 'our' engagements as the writerreaders of this becoming written. Boundaries, however, are thresholds, the exits that are also entries, exteriorities-with/in. Suggestively, I want to account for this 'end', (an ending that undeniably runs through the thesis in its entirety, see for instance the introduction) and how it came about. As expected, the entanglement that this ending is, is crucially non/academic.

As any writer knows, there are many moments during the instaurative process of a becoming written

that as (one of) the worker(s) implied in such a process, one feels 'stuck'. Not in the sense of writer's block, but in the sense that there is so much going on at the same time, so much (diffr)activity around and of and with/in you that it nothing worth reading wants to happen on the screen (or paper for that matter). Nothing readable comes out. It is inevitably part of becoming-writtens that this happens every now and then, especially if one dares to try to push one's limits, to answer to the callings of theories, phenomena, thoughts, or other vocations that one doesn't really speak a language of or with. If such a getting stuck happened somewhere in this thesis, it was through and with the neoliberal chapter, which was written in dialogue with some of my fellow-students (thank you Vasso, Debby, and Né!). These colleagues challenged me to engage the university as a neoliberal be(com)ing, and I felt this was a be(com)ing that I was already with/in, so that it couldn't not be in the thesis (indeed that is one of the points I make in the result*ing* chapter).

The neoliberal chapter, however, was also where I got hopelessly stuck multiple times, to the point of giving up the entire current project of this thesis to pursue something different in many ways (something 'new'). The main 'despiring' (as opposed to inspiring) force that my studies of the neoliberal university entailed centered around ideas of agency in relation to a system that one is in (e.g. a neoliberal economy). In many ways, 'my place' started feeling like Marc Bousquet's description of it as excremental, a position of non-mattering in the system as an entirety. In his argument, graduate employees, people in 'my place', are the natural waste of the neoliberal university. In a system that functions, as I have shown through the work of Chris Lorenz and others, as a production process managed through decentralization, budgetting, economizing and the making measurable of everything related to the educational process, graduate employees—who think they are training for a future in the university but will never find a permanent job there—are, in Bousquet's words, the "actual shit of the system" (2008: 27). This implies, as I argue in the neoliberal chapter, a conceptualization of agency that separates academia 'pure' from its neoliberal other, a move that, from my perspective, is unproductive with regard to discussions on the neoliberal university. Let us writeread the quote again here slightly differently. Discussing the place of graduate employees in the current system of the university, and the sense of agency that is supposedly tied up with this, Bousquet notes that

> [graduate employees] can maintain the fantasy that they really exist elsewhere, in some place other than the overwhelmingly excremental testimony of their experience. This fantasy becomes an alibi for inaction, because *in this construction agency lies elsewhere, with the administrative touch* on the flush-chain. The effect of people who feel treated like waste is an appeal to some other agent: please stop treating us this way—which is to say to that outside agent, 'please recognize that we are not waste'. (27; my emphasis)

If in the neoliberal chapter I argue about this quote that Bousquet separates academia from administration, in order to argue through the phenomenon of acknowledgments that the university is not some 'pure' (id)entity strictly separable from either personal, familial and many intimate bonds, nor from neoliberalist apparatuses,

by way of conclusion to the thesis I want discuss his notion of agency, and work it through with the movements from the various chapters, in order to diffractively writeread the idea of agency in new materialist, diffractive ontologies, and to explore the possibilities and impossibilities with/in 'my place' more specifically.

The Annunciative Politics of 'my place'

This thesis, as a typed up (id)entity at least, came about mostly during the summer of 2014, in two rushes: one of three weeks at the beginning of the holidays (the final part of the preceding academic year), and one at the end of the holidays (the most of August). In between these two rushes was a moment of total blockage, of sheer despair with regard to the neoliberal chapter, in which I was completely stuck. Quite literally, there didn't seem to be a way out of neoliberalism, no light in the dark (indeed, just before this getting stuck, and drawing on the metaphor used by Rennaissance humanists with regard to the Middle Ages, I rewrote the neoliberal chapter title and intro as 'The Dark (P)ages'). It was during the weeks in between the writing, in the middle of things so to say, that this being stuck in 'my place' changed, with and through an encountering with my dear friend Peta Hinton, while on holidays with my family in Berlin. I first met Hinton during a conference (also in Berlin) a couple of years ago, but this time our meetings didn't take place in any academic buildings. That's not to say our meetings weren't academic...

During our conversations this last summer (the summer of 2014) in Berlin, Hinton and myself discussed the problems that I have expounded upon in the introduction of this thesis, the constitutive tension between an ontology of difference/diffraction and the necessity of 'a place' (especially with regards to (feminist) politics). Let's take up the article she sent me a couple days after our meeting, and that I discussed in the introduction, again, to continue the dialogue (that was never really 'over' anyway). In Hinton's terms, an enunciative politics—the idea of accounting for one's location as (for example) a knowledge producer— seems to imply a pre-existing 'place' that one could be aware of and speak from. To speak as a situated subject requires a situation, so to writeread. This idea runs counter to new materialist feminists' diffractive ontologies, in the sense that diffraction implies that one is never simply one. It is in this regard that Hinton introduces the idea of an annunciative politics, which keeps this "dilemma of a politics of location" in place, by suggesting that any (id)entity is at once diffractively dispersed *and* specifically located (2014: 104). Indicating how writings come about (namely as continual, fundamentally non-linear reworkings of every 'point' in the thesis, a process that I suspect continues in its becoming read, which might not happen so linearly as the materiality of books seems to suggest), I want to engage Hinton's suggestions through the chapters of my thesis, and vice versa. As announced in the introduction, I will focus on the problematics of agency in new materialist diffractive ontologies.

If, as we have writtenread in this thesis, "[…] any 'unit' is not so much a separate part of a larger whole to which it remains indebted, but rather a unique instantiation of the system's own reinvention (or

rewriting) of itself[,]" then what is the possibility of or for agency, of making a difference[77] in the intra-active instauration of the world in its becoming? (Kirby in Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012: 175; emphasis in Kirby's original). For it is easy to see how in such a relational ontology agency is not an affair of individual choice and action in relation to a system that one is only 'part' of, in the sense of a traditional notion of agency tied to the idea that one stands in 'a place' that is somehow outside the system or environment one is acting on (cf. Bousquet's 'elsewhere'). Nor is agency so easily given to an other, for instance to the neoliberal administrators that Bousquet suggests are given full control by graduate employees. Agency rather becomes "a distributed, implicated eco-logy with no central, organizing origin" (Kirby 2011: 84). Hinton suggests that agency is significantly reworked in new materialist onto-epistemologies, since it accounts "for the production of embodied differences as they continue to morph and sediment" (2014: 106). In Haraway's terms, these are the "[p]rotean embodiments of the world as witty agent and actor, embodiments of which we […] are not in final control" (Haraway in Hinton 2014: 106; references omitted).

Agency, in short, is that which accounts for the making of differences, it is intra-activty, it is diffractivity, it is activity. This was hinted to in the conclusion to the neoliberal chapter, where I suggest that the activities taking place at the educational shop floor are instaurative processes, in the sense that they are articulated through and by the neoliberal university in as cheap a fashion as possible, with a view of the learning process as a simple exchange of information. Simultaneously, however, 'my place' as a teaching assistant teaching certain courses instantiates the system in its specificity, its specific embodied situating, right there on the shop floor. The neoliberal 'system' is not outside of the classroom and/or my activities as the one with the teaching role, but with/in them. My being specifically situated with/in the becoming of this system implies that differences might be made in the specificities of each and every moment and what comes to matter in it, even if one (as teacher or student) is never in full control of what it is that might come about, of what might be happening.

This is where the notion of instauration is salient, for it suggest that without the work of students, teaching assistants, and teachers, nothing would be happening. And so it matters how certain work is done, since it is in the *how* of things where (differing) differences might be made. Not by humans in full control of the situation, but by a situated grappling with the specificities of a being situated, in the sense of learning to speak well in all its (post)humanistic forms in order to tune into the particularities of the continual becoming of 'a place'. As Karen Barad notes, what is at issue with regard to agency "are the possibilities for the iterative reconfiguring" of the be(com)ing of the world (2007: 177). In this,

> agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has.
> It cannot be designated as an attribute of subjects or objects (as they do not preexist as such). It is not
> an attribute whatsoever. Agency is 'doing' or 'being' in its intra-activity. It is the enactment of

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77 Strictly speaking, I should be writing 'different difference', since any be(com)ing is already the differential becoming of the world, is already the making of difference, Cf. Barad 2007: 394-396.

iterative changes to particular practices—iterative reconfigurings of topological manifolds of [the world] through the dynamics of intra-activity. Agency is about changing possibilities of change[, in the sense that … p]articular possibilities for (intra-)acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail an ethical obligation to intra-act responsibly in the world's becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering. (ibidem; emphases omitted)

Agency, in the terms that this thesis is writtenread in, is about movements, about particular movings-together/apart, and about the im/possibilties of these types of movement. In terms of the classroom shop floor, this implies that it matters precisely how the neoliberal university is brought about, since one is always already implicated in this intra-active clouding. It is in this sense that one is not free to do whatever one wants (as student and teacher) but obliged to respond to the differing im/possibilities ('places') for the annunciative making of different differences, right there, again and again, in 'my place'.

As Hinton explains, annunciation "suggests that a subject's attempt to situate herself is at the same time a process of *being situated*—a congealing of an identity that cannot be fixed and that cannot exclude the context of its production" (108). The stakes of a feminist politics, then, have not so much to do with 'woman' as a pre-existing category, but are a "form of inquiry that needs to address *the capacity for identity* as a political gesture" (110; my emphasis). The stakes in annunciative politics, that is, are in the possibilities and impossibilities for claiming *and* receiving—annunciating—an (id)entity: "A *responsible* feminist politics, then, appears to be less of an attempt to resolve and 'make good' political asymmetries than a matter of attending to the politics of the production of embodied specificity" (ibidem; original emphasis). It is in this sense that I want to iteratively repeat/rewrite my questions with regard to the im/possibilites of 'the place' of a teaching assistant in the contemporary Dutch university: Might a person in the 'place' of a teacher, for instance, *work* to let a certain humanicity of the neoliberalist academic education happen? Might she or he not be (en)able(d) to somehow fold into the be(com)ing of the neoliberal ECTS that she or he is attending, the network-ish cloud*ing* of indebtedness that comprises, pushes, and conditions any (id)entity, be it that of the teacher, the university, an academic in general, new media, posthumanisms, philosophies of science, or any other topic that might be at hand? Might the academic shop floor not be 'the place' where (post)humanistic joyfulness, inspiration, and affirmation might take place?

In many ways, what I have tried to do in each chapter is perform an annunciative politics of a particular 'my place'. Hence in the method(ont)ological chapter I argue for the idea of a diffractive writing, which emphasizes how writing is always already a becoming written, a riding of the resonances and the dissonances that are already connective of the works one engages. And in the disciplinarity chapter I point to the need for humanism in the posthumanities, even if these are to be posthumanist posthumanities. That is, I argue for the necessity of 'learning to speak well', not as a search for a mutual language, but as a relating with and across differences, a cloud-y moving-together/apart that entails a standing between or amongst (indeed, an *under*standing). Throughout the thesis, then, I haven't been speaking from an established idea of what 'my

place' is, enunciating something given, but aiming to instauratively bring into be(com)ing a diffractive sense of 'my place' and the agentialities with/in it. As an 'attending to the politics of the production of embodied specificity', I have tried to show how 'my place' comes about, and to suggestively account for possibilities and impossibilities of this 'place'. In particular, I have tried to show the differing that 'my place' might be(come), in the sense that annunciative work, as instaurative work, is a place where differences might be made. For instance, this thesis would never have happened without a lot of dedication on my part, even if I was equally becoming with the thesis, co-constituted by it, and never a unitary (id)identity in control of what was happening. I want to thank the thesis for its work, which enabled me to do mine. Our (diffr)activity was already calling me through, for instance, Barad's acknowledgments (see the introduction and the neoliberal chapter). It is in this sense that we—the thesis and I—chose to add to reality (if ever so meagerly) the joyfulness of engaging the many works mentioned throughout this written 'place', and to try to affirmatively bring about light lines where we might expect dark, virtual potentialities and thresholds through which to enter and exit simultaneously. Diffractive writing as a concept points to this activity, intra-activity, the collective articulation that nonetheless is 'my place' in all its specificity.

To my body-mind, the Renaissance entanglement of the sciences and humanities as a general field of knowledge practices I have elaborated upon in the disciplinarity chapter should inform the (post)humanistic practices of new materialists with onto-epistemological tendencies. Indeed, the (post)humanistic Latourian project of learning to speak well is crucial in this regard. If the world is a naturalcultural becoming-together/apart, in which exteriorities are always already exteriorities-of and exteriorities-with/in, then there is no Bousquetian 'elsewhere', where agency is turned over to the ones in charge of a system's functioning, but rather a be(com)ing always already implicated and differentially response-able in the cloud*ing* of the world. I am, in other words, agential in the becoming of the world, in the double sense that I am already making a difference, simply by be(com)ing and being constituted by the articulative instantiations of the system (e.g. nature, the university, the (post)humanities) as a whole, but I am simultaneously *making* a difference, as a co-constitutively entangled diffractive (id)entity, instantiating the system as a whole differently, over and over. This entails "an ethical obligation to intra-act responsibly in the world's becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering" (Barad 2007: 277); a continuing challenge to learn to speak well with and in a multitude of ontological tunings be(com)ing-together/apart through intra-activity. This challenge to make different differences hinges on the specificities of one's situatedness, the particularities of one's location and its potentialities for instauratively annunciating 'a place', *my place*, as a differential thresholding full of articulative and affirmative exteriorities-with/in, productively, joyfully, and with response-ability to and through the capacities for (id)entities to matter, and to matter differently.

Appendix I

Abbreviations

EUR Erasmus University Rotterdam

OU Open University

RU Radboud University Nijmegen

RUG Rijksuniversiteit Groningen [University of Groningen]

LEI University Leiden

UM University Maastricht

UU University Utrecht

UvA University of Amsterdam

UvT University of Tilburg

VU Vrije Universiteit [Free University] Amsterdam

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