Autonomic nervous control of white adipose tissue: studies on the role of the brain in body fat distribution
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THANKS

In January 2000 I entered the (surprisingly small) office of Ruud Buijs, professor at the Netherlands Institute for Brain Research. I was an undergraduate student and came for an interview concerning my scientific internship from medical school. I was nervous, because I feared that it would not be long before Ruud discovered how ridiculously meagre my knowledge of the nervous system was.

To my surprise the interview went okay, and after we had made all the formal arrangements, I asked him: "You wouldn't happen to have some basic literature for me, to get to know the brain somewhat better? I did my best at the neurology courses, but I still feel I don't understand all that much of it."

Ruud smiled, stood up, extended his hand and said: "Welcome to the club, Felix - that is exactly the reason why I come to the institute every morning, the same as quite a few other people in this building".

His reaction characterizes the open and innovative atmosphere of Ruud Buijs' group "Hypothalamic Integration" at the NIBR. I am grateful for the way Ruud made me feel at home in the institute and for the way he stimulated me to develop my own approach to science. He always supported me in times of scientific despair, and when experiments or manuscripts ground to a complete halt he would come up with a refreshing, sometimes breathtaking, new idea. Ruud gave true scientific training, not just orders to conduct experiments.

Eric Fliers, professor at the AMC and promoter of this thesis, suggested the study of the innervation of fat tissue, an idea he developed together with Prof. Hans Sauerwein. Eric's enthusiasm, even at the very beginning, when we had no results at all, helped to overcome all kinds of unforeseen problems. His ideas and his critical clinical view have been a major contribution to the project. I am very grateful for the way Eric supported me in the last month of the project to finish this thesis.

Hans Sauerwein, co-promotor and professor at the AMC, would run all the way down from the outpatient clinics in the AMC - in between two consultations - to the NIBR to see the first microscope slides showing that different fat compartments receive separate innervation. With his broad knowledge and longstanding experience in the field of endocrinology and metabolism he helped us discover the direction to take. As an experienced senior scientist he often cut down my planning to a realistic time schedule, thereby maximizing the results of the project.

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group and made this book. Tini Eikelboom en Wilma Verweij helped me through the bureaucracy of the AMC, UvA and KNAW.

Finally, my special thanks go to Dick Swaab. As a first year medical student I read an interview with Dick Swaab in a students’ journal. It was inspiring; he formulated questions that stuck in my head for weeks afterwards. I don't remember these questions now, except this quote: Student's question: “Will you donate your brain to your Brain Bank when you're dead?” Swaab: “Of course, at least then I can be sure that in the end society benefits from my brains.” Reading this, I decided to wanted to be at that place where he worked. Dick Swaab is an outstanding neuroscientist. As director of the NIBR he made the institute into a non-hierarchical organization, a safe environment for everybody with significant ideas and willing to try to practice science seriously. His style is humane and relaxed and his door is always open.

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