Acknowledgments

“Abstract work, if one wishes to do it well, must be allowed to destroy one’s humanity; one raises a monument which is at the same time a tomb, in which, voluntarily, one slowly inters oneself.”
(Bertrand Russell, in a letter to Lucy Martin Donnelly, May 23, 1902)

“It’s incredibly important to unthink at least once a day for the very preservation of the intellectual life.” (Allan Watts, Intellectual Yoga)

Writing a dissertation is not always easy. It is easy on a good day, but not on a bad day. On a good day, our work is not motivated by the desire to fulfil a formal requirement towards higher education, but rather by what is felt as a forbidding necessity to find answers to a flock of questions that a peculiar twist of our curiosity has excavated as, let us say, relevant. What keeps us going on a good day is the plain beauty of progress, even if imaginary, and the delight of however mild an insight, even if later to be proved wrong.

On a bad day, however, the compulsion for answers, especially for good answers, can turn out quite harmful. This is so because the ultimate authority against which we have to defend the quality of our work is essentially our own proud ideal. The main cause of stress therefore is internal, and cannot easily be shrugged off with anger or laughter: what keeps us awake and working at night is not some third-person executioner, which it would be easy to hate or ridicule for alleviation of the pressure, but it is our own heads to which we are a slave. What keeps us going on a bad day is a mystery to me, but I have some vague understanding of what fueled my motors in times of need: supportive supervisors, inspiring colleagues, friends and family.

During my whole stay in Amsterdam, my supervisor Robert van Rooij has been an inexhaustible source of inspiration. I was fortunate to have him appointed as my mentor during the Master of Logic programme and I was lucky
to win him as a supervisor of my master thesis. This dissertation was written as part of his nwo project “The Economics of Language” and I am naturally grateful for the trust he demonstrated by offering this position to me. Over the last six years, Robert has spent innumerable hours reading, commenting and discussing ideas of mine. Especially in the beginning of our collaboration, our relation was remarkably similar to a process of evolution but with clearly divided labor between us: I was producing ideas, and he was weeding out the obvious nonsense and selected the fittest of thoughts which carried hope of mutating into something interesting. At later stages, I profited immensely from his rigorous pragmatism which made me start writing in time and abandon irrelevant daydreams, a.k.a. side projects. Without his impetus, I would perhaps still be gazing at the sky from behind the window pondering what a curious beast language is after all. Thanks Robert!

I am also very happy to have benefited from numerous detailed discussions with Martin Stokhof, who I learned to respect deeply for his well-informed advice on how to fine-tune my arguments, in structure and wording, in the light of many looming philosophical pitfalls. I also remember still a dark and difficult day when I was a master student who approached Martin looking for advice on how to make logic and philosophy of language relevant for me “as a human being.” I have forgotten, funnily enough, how he did it, but he did fix me in an afternoon’s conversation, and I have never had the need for a similar logico-psychiatric session ever after. Thanks Martin!

I would also like to thank my colleague and friend Tikitu de Jager, without whose open ears, critical questioning, conversational temperament and delightful eagerness for distractions the last years would have been a lot more dull, boring and lifeless. It is he who is responsible for me using Emacs, for bringing issues of typography to my attention, and it is he who answered all my \LaTeX{} questions, most of which I would not have had if it had not been for him proselytizing me to care. Tikitu also kindly proofread this dissertation in times of utmost busyness, and pointed out a minor mistake in section 2.2.4 that fortunately has no impact on any issue of relevance. Thanks Tikitu!

Many other people have helped me tremendously with their critical thinking in many hours of conversation. Anton Benz has kindly invited me to the Zentrum für Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft in Berlin once in 2007 and once in early 2009. His theory of “optimal assertions” was of central importance to the development of the model that is presented in this thesis, and I would like to thank Anton for his renewed hospitality, many insightful discussions and general inspiration and support. I also greatly benefited from reading some of
Gerhard Jäger’s recent work, that turned out so closely related to mine at the time, it was frightening. Gerhard kindly invited me to Bielefeld and Tübingen where I was able to present late material of this thesis. Needless to say, I have learned a lot from discussions at these occasions.

But also in Amsterdam, many people have had open ears, commented on my work and helped with insightful suggestions. Here, I would like to thank especially Maria Aloni, Reinhard Blutner, Paul Dekker, Floris Roelofson, Katrin Schulz, Frank Veltman and Henk Zeevat. Merging the academic and personal, I have had many very dear and deep conversations with Sven Lauer, Magdalena Schwager and Marc Staudacher. The list of friendly colleagues who kindly helped some way or other in writing this thesis is long, and even at risk of forgetfulness, let me try to mention some of you folks out there: Judith Degen, Cornelia and Christian Ebert, Hannah Gieseler, Nikos Green, Jacqueline Griego, Yurie Hara, Napoleon Katsos, Nathan Klinedinst, Fabienne Martin, Eric McReady, Chris Potts, Daniel Rothschild, Tatjana Scheffler and Matthew Wampler-Doty.

I would also like to send out a hearty “jai” to the crowd at Svaha Yoga. I am deeply grateful to Patrick and Gösta for having realized this oasis of calm: had I not regularly cleared my head on the mat, I am tempted to say in exaggeration, I would have lost it at some point.

It is not, however, so easy to exaggerate the admiration I find for the patience and the tolerance of Julie Verburg, who has miraculously accepted my work compulsion as a part of me and made room in her heart for even that. Unbelievable!