Acknowledgements

Now that my time in Groningen has come to an end I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those people who have made this period so unforgettable. Without them this experience abroad would definitely not have been as special and gratifying as it was.

Without much knowledge of Neuroscience or the English language (not to mention the Dutch language), my two supervisors, Johannes A. Den Boer and Gert ter Horst (better known as “Hans” and “Gert” to friends and colleagues) offered me a position in the Department of Psychiatry. I still cannot believe they did this and their motives remain a mystery to me (perhaps when they first met me they mistook me for a patient rather than a future employee). Whatever your reasons, I would like to thank both of you for providing me with the opportunity to study and learn about Neuroscience although there is much more of course! I am also thankful for the chance to experience a new reality, meet new people, and learn a new language……English, that is. I really wish I could say Dutch but after spending more than four years in this beautiful country, I am still unable to speak this “amazing” language (although, believe it or not, I did have an “8” at the end of a three-month Dutch course!). I really hope I will have a second chance one day…. Finally, I would like to thank you both for your inspiration, continuous support, encouragement, supervision, criticisms, and last but not least, your patience, which made me a better scientist.

I also wish to thank all the members of the Laboratory of Biological Psychiatry (I hope this is still the right name!) for always making me feel welcome. To the research technicians, Tineke K., and Tineke S., thank you for trying to help me improve my English and Dutch skills when I first arrived by making me repeat the expression “Thirty dirty teeth” and the word “gaasjes”. Can you believe I still cannot pronounce these terms after more than 5 years of practice? Petra, Peter, Rikje, and Kor, thank you as well for all your outstanding technical assistance and invaluable support (Kor, I hope after these four years I have progressed past a “prutser”). I am especially grateful to Folkert for helping me with literally everything I needed, ranging from the simplest chores to the most difficult tasks and always caring about me. It was a comfort to know that every time I needed help there was somebody I could count on. To my fellow PhD and “non-PhD” students, Gabor, Gea, Johan, Marieke, Marjolein, Raoul, Sonja, and least but not last, my four-year long roommate Christel, many thanks to all of you for your friendship, fruitful discussions (sometimes very heated arguments) and the good times we had together.

To the colleagues of the sixth floor Department of Psychiatry, I thank you for the good time we had together. Everybody, in his or her way, has confronted me with situations that I never experienced and taught me something that I did not know before. For this I am particularly grateful. Agnes, Anatoly, Annelies, Annemiek, Charmaine, Franske, Fokko, Jacqueline, Joanna, Jan Bakker, Kathelijne, Marieke, Margo, Marjan, Martijn, Mbembé, Minke (and all her funny stories), Peter Paul (and his good friend Sita), Sasha, Simone, Thomas and
of course, Prof. dr Korf, it has been a privilege and a pleasure to have met and worked with you all.

To all my friends outside of the Lab that made me feel less far from home. Annarita, Claudio, Ineke, Jerome, Henne and Thomas, Marjolein, Tiziana, Simona and little Gaia. Thank you.

To all of the people that I have met throughout the years. A special mention goes to my life long friend Fabio. Without your help in school I am not sure I would be here now. Grazie.

I would also like to thank the BCN (since they paid my salary....) and particularly Rob Visser, Diana Koopmans and Tinie Alma for always helping me as much as they could (even though some things were very difficult and often impossible).

To my mentors and dear friends at the Department of Animal Biology in Pavia, Italy. From the very beginning you have treated me not as a student but as an equal and friend. You introduced me to Science and taught me to be a researcher in the first place. My decision to follow this path is due greatly to you. Thank you Big, Elda (and of course your husband, the “Architect”), Daniela, Pelliccia, and Prof. Fraschini for always making me feel welcome and appreciated.

To my elementary school teacher, Miss De Michelis, and junior high school teacher, Prof. Ersilia Zamponi. You believed in my potential, pushed me harder and taught me to give more than what I thought I was able to. This important lesson accompanied me during all my endeavours and helped me to reach goals that I thought I was unable to reach. Thank you.

I am grateful to my parents, my sister (and Markus, of course), my cousin Carla and my grandmother for their continuous, kindhearted support. Thank you for believing in me no matter what and always standing by me. Without your backing, guidance and encouragement throughout the years I would not be the person I am today (but is the world a better place now because of this? Who knows?).

…..and last but not least I would like to thank one very special person (I am pretty sure that, for most of the people that I acknowledged here, this is the only part of this thesis that they will read and enjoy). You are the first person I met in the lab and since that moment you have become my best friend. There are not enough words to express all my gratitude and feelings. There are so many things I should thank you for that I do not know where to start. I could start by thanking you for being there every time I needed help (I do not think there is a number big enough to describe how many times that was!). During the past five years I also had the fortune to get to know you and discover how wonderful you are (a feeling that is shared by most of the people that know you). I am also indebted to you for your help in the beginning immediately after my arrival when I could not speak a word of English. Slowly yet persistently you helped me learn to speak and write proper (well, at least coherent) English (and if I continue to make mistakes it is not your fault but mine!). I am really grateful
for your patience. This is but one of many things I should thank you for but I would need an entire thesis just to list them all. Thank you, Sjoukje. And a special gratitude also goes to your family for their hospitality, their caring and their parently kindness that made me feel so at home.

For those of you whose names I did not mention here, I offer my apologies but know that those that have made this experience so special will never been forgotten. One final thing I would like to clarify is the following: Throughout this brief acknowledgement, I often used the word “colleague” and although it may seem impersonal, I use it as a synonym for friend. Thanks again to everybody for having been there for me and making my “Dutch adventure” so memorable and pleasurable.

Andrea