Acknowledgements

Four years as a PhD student concluded by writing this thesis has been a great learning experience for me, both as a scientist and as a person. I have had the great luck to work and collaborate with a lot of very inspiring, competent, and nice people and I am happy to be able to use this space to thank them.

First of all, Inga, I could not have hoped for a better supervisor. I never had any problems talking to you about ideas, plans, worries or other issues connected to my thesis work. Your enthusiasm and passion for science is contagious for anyone working with you and the dedication you put into your work is impressive. You were always available or reachable when I had scientific questions and you also had time and interest when I needed or felt like talking about non-scientific issues. You had full understanding for all the complications that come with having a full family (kids and husband) on the side of a PhD study and never expected me to bend or push aside my ‘family-hours’. One example of this was my first meeting with you, the PhD interview, which took place on Skype due to the recent arrival of my then two week old baby (Blanka). You also had great patience and understanding when I returned from maternity leave after having my second child (Fleur) and needed a slower pace. Along with the fact that we always had a good collaboration on the planning and organisation of the thesis work, I think this understanding has been an essential part of my making it the full way through my PhD. Also thanks for many BBQs with great food and great hospitality organised by you and Ulli in your back yard.

Rens, thanks for an always enthusiastic response to all new results, ideas, and projects. Meetings with you were always very encouraging and inspiring. You often brought new unconsidered ideas or perspectives to the table, that I or Inga had not thought about before. Your general overview and knowledge of the field was always impressive to me. Also thanks for the many ice creams to sweeten the meetings.

Mario, thanks for a great learning experience on Paranal and thanks for all your good advice on career and science and other less serious chats that we had during the observing run. Thank you also for your always useful comments and ideas for my paper drafts and for always extremely thorough and beyond light speed replies on emails with scientific questions.

Gerrit, you provided me with the most heavily used reading material throughout my PhD period (your thesis book). It was so heavily used that both two copies that I received have disintegrated into parts. Thank you for the many collaborative hours and for scripts and tools used throughout my thesis. Also thank you for nice food and company in Santiago.

To Peter Woitke and Wing-Fai Thi, thanks for many useful comments and ideas for my papers and thanks for help and support on the usage of ProDiMo.

Andres, thanks for many inspiring and useful scientific discussion and also thanks for less serious chats and jokes.

To the reading committee Floris van der Tak, Ewine van Dishoeck, and Sean
Brittain, thank you for your many useful comments, ideas and encouraging remarks on my thesis manuscript.

Maarten, thanks for translating my thesis summary to dutch and Hans thanks for performing the second edit on the translation.

Thanks to all the past and current members of the disc group, Linda, German, Giamba, Stefano, Antonio, Aaron, Silvia, Martina, etc for many interesting, inspiring and ‘gezellige’ meetings. I think we had a great privilege to be often such a small group. Also thanks to the ISM group, for many interesting meetings with a bit of a broader perspective than the disc group.

Many thanks to the computer group, Wim, Eite, Martin, for providing the necessary support during my PhD time. Wim, also thank you for many nice chats about kids, grandkids and life, and thanks for providing me with tools to cope with my RSI problems.

Many thanks to the secretariat, Christa, Martine, Gonda, Jackie, Lucia, Gineke, and Hennie, for providing another very necessary part of the support at Kapteyn. Hennie, thank you for offering me (and many other PhD students) a very warm welcome at the institute. Thanks for nice visits in Winsum and thanks for many very nice chats. As others have also pointed out, I think you have been like a mother of the Kapteyn Institute during the time that you were here and I know that your presence will be dearly missed. Lucia, thank you for your relentless help on many bureaucratic aspects especially when I did not fit into the typical boxes. You have saved me lots of time with your phone calls to the right people.

Steph, you have been my perfect match for an office mate. Sometimes we are a bit like an old married couple, and sometimes we are more like two teenage girls. We mostly agreed on the right balance between bullshitting and working focussed and serious. For some reason the serious work was usually performed shoulder by shoulder using one small patch of the full office space. I think this is how you can tell if you are truly comfortable with someone, when you can do that and not fell disturbed. Thanks for countless scientific advice, massages to save my RSI suffering writing arm, for letting me crash in the cave, for the silly talk, ‘Puppy love’ and much much more. Your are a most rare combination of a brilliant scientist, a great mom, and one of the most lively and fun people I know.

Stefano, thanks for many nice discussions and chats, about CO or water in discs, about ProDiMo, about training, about the frustration of referee or co-author comments, or about life in general. I am glad that I had you to go to when I needed to talk to someone. Also thanks for your company on travels to Chile and Heidelberg and for motivation and company to ACLO. I hope you find out during the next year that all of your struggles with new ideas, models, and especially paper drafts will actually turn into a quite nice thesis (I am sure it will). I also hope you figure out some good plan for your future whether it will involve science or some kind of craftsmanship.

Burcu, thanks for many nice chats about pets, work, travelling, movies, cooking, eating, the general love of food and much more. Thanks for taking good care of Lakrids on several occasions and for spoiling him like mad. Thanks for many
tips and advice on the finishing thesis steps. I wish you the best in your next career move and hope that we might be able to get you to visit us in Copenhagen.

Veronica, thanks for many nice chats, lots of fun outings with the kids, and thanks for babysitting both our kids on several occasions. Not many people would dare take on the fearful task of bedding two two-year olds and one four year old in one evening, but you did and succeeded. Also thanks for arranging several nice parties and cooking lots of nice food, and for the biggest hallway-smiles at Kapteyn. The best of luck for you and your family, and I hope we can continue to meet up in Copenhagen, Groningen or other places. We might have to, for the sake of Evelyn and Fleur.

Hans and Koshy I also want to thank you guys for the one year we shared as office mates. I think the closest I have been to experiencing a part of what it is like to have brothers was in connection with our ‘disagreements’ on office planning. Thank you for always being ready for a chat, on more or less serious topics, about science, life or other things (even after I moved out of the office). Thanks also for some nice ‘gezellige’ dinners. I wish both of you the best of luck in life and science.

Stefania, you are such a warm, genuine, and vibrant person and it was a pleasure to share lunches, coffee breaks, and other things with you.

Katinka, thanks for introducing me to your sport and thanks for nice chats, training, and common teasing of Stefano and his ambitious training plan.

Aleksandar, thanks for chats and advice about the thesis finishing bureaucracy and other things. I wish you the best of luck for your defence.

Esra, from your warm and kind personality it was clear that you would be a good mother. It was great to get to know you while you were here in Groningen and see your little family grow. I wish the best for you and your family, and hope you are doing well in Dubai.

Thanks to all the Kapteyn parents, Stephanie, Veronica, Silvia, Hugo, Vibor, Mariya, Maarten, Aleksander, Esra, Matthijs, German, for chats about babies, sleepless nights, kindergarten, etc.

Thanks to all the Kapteyn women for showing everyday that women in astronomy, while being intelligent, talented, and ambitious, are not necessarily any less feminine, beautiful, or generally awesome than in other places.

And a general thanks to all the great people at Kapteyn (past and present), Parisa, Robyn, Shoko, Leon, Manolis, Harish, Ivona, Seyit, Gergö, Steven, Johan, Hugo, Eva, Patrick, Tjitske, Niels, Beth, Gisela, Federico, Jan, Antonino, Anastasia, Filippo and many more for making the Kapteyn community a social and friendly place to work and for providing my coffee breaks and lunches with thoughtful, cheerful, hilarious, serious, or inspiring conversations and company.

Last but definitely not least, Toby, thank you for following me through this adventure of a PhD degree in the Netherlands. You provided me with the support and companionship that can make this kind of experience work out. You are my love and my best friend, I could not have done it in any other way. Fleur and Blanka, you kept me from becoming a workaholic, from getting bored, from losing daily structure, and from forgetting about more important things. I love you for
all of it and for many things more. I would have quit it all for you guys if it were necessary, but I am glad that somehow I ended in a situation where I could have both.

Til sidst, tak til mine forældre for at have givet mig inspiration, støtte og frihed til at vælge den vej jeg selv fand rigtig. Den vej som har førte mig til dette punkt, en færdig PhD afhandling.

Rosina Pisecka Hein Bertelsen
Birkerød, 30 December 2014