

## Chapter 2

# On the Politics of Diffractive Reading

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In May 2019, the *Guardian* reported that more than 50 percent of Antarctica's Thwaites glacier basin has thinned considerably.<sup>1</sup> If the West Antarctic Ice Sheet alone were to melt, which is the smaller part of Antarctica's ice mass to which Thwaites belongs, sea levels are estimated to rise by about five meters. Among other things, this would likely mean the flooding of two-thirds of the Netherlands, despite excellent coastal engineering. As a resident of the Netherlands, this concerns me. At the same time, over the course of 2019, this chapter gestated in the form of several talks that I gave at different locations across Europe, to each of which I travelled by plane or train. In total, those travels produced about 0.8t of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, as I could easily calculate on the application *myclimate*.<sup>2</sup> To limit global heating, *myclimate* tells me that each of us would need to reduce carbon spending annually to 0.6t, which giving those talks already exceeded by 0.2t—not to mention the average annual carbon footprint of an EU citizen, which currently lies at 8.4t. Thus, not only is this chapter intertwined with the rising temperatures and the melting of the poles, which most of us are aware of, presenting it at conferences has also already consumed more than my annual allowance of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. And I still went to give the talks.

In what follows, I would like to reflect on this predicament, in which “mere” knowledge of the links between travel and global heating seems not enough to deter me from producing excessive CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. I will do so first and foremost as a literary scholar, not only because I also worry about the future of literature and literary studies in times of global heating and the exhaustion of planetary life when other than poetic engagements often seem more pressing, but also because it seems that a certain type of reading, which literary texts can demand, might train readers toward viscerally realizing