



## Acknowledgments

**T**his book has been catalyzed by two major forces: my life-long love of books and my intellectual engagement with the concept of cognitive assemblages. Growing up in very small town in northeast Missouri (population 1,014), I had few resources to satisfy my curiosity about the world, nature, and science—no theater, no symphonies, no scientific instruments at home and barely any at school, no stimulating lectures by public intellectuals. In this preinternet era, the one resource I did have was print books. I devoured those at home before I was ten and then turned to the minuscule town library, which lasted until I was twelve or so. Then puberty struck, and my interests turned elsewhere for a while. Leaving that small town for college sparked my curiosity and widened my horizons; I would often read far into the night until the letters blurred on the page and dawn began to break. Books for me were objects of veneration, doors that opened onto vistas much broader, stranger, and more enticing than I could experience in person. So it was inevitable, I suppose, that I would one day write a book about print books.

It was not until I had developed the concept of cognitive assemblages, however, that I was able to bring together my affection for print with my intellectual interests in computation. I was fortunate to witness firsthand the enormous technological changes as computation came of age, from the first mainframe

I worked on in college (fed by IBM cards and large enough to fill a room with all four kilobytes of memory) to microcomputers, word processing, desktop publishing, and then the amazing growth of the web. Through it all, I was fascinated by the technical devices themselves and even more by their implications for what it means to be human. Print books, too, in all their variety have also affected not only our ideas about the human but also the neuronal and synaptic pathways by which we understand the world and ourselves. The conjunction of print and computation, a configuration that I call “postprint,” thus presents a potent opportunity to explore through multiple registers, diverse historical events, and resonant metaphoric clusters our contemporary condition in developed societies.

On this journey, I have benefitted from many fellow travelers who have offered insights, stimulations, responses, and corrections. I am grateful to Matthew Kirschenbaum and John Maxwell for reading a draft of chapter 2 and offering comments as well as for their own excellent publications on print and computation. My colleagues at Duke University, including Rey Chow, Markos Hadjioannou, Mark Hansen, Mark Kruse, Carlos Rojas, Victoria Szabo, and Priscilla Wald generously shared ideas and initiated collaborative projects. Many former students, who have now become well-known scholars in their own right, have continued to challenge me to up my game, especially Zach Blas, Nathan Brown, Melody Jue, Kate Marshall, and Jessica Pressman. Francesca Farrando, Danuta Fjellestad, Patrick Jagoda, Todd Presner, and Rita Raley have been valuable sources of inspiration and collaboration, as have the research and books by Amarath Borsuk, Lisa Gitelman, Frank Romano, Garrett Stewart, Ted Striphas, and Edward Webster. I am grateful to the Literature Department of Duke University for support and help and to the English Department of the University of California, Los Angeles, for office space and computing support.

A version of chapter 2 was published as “Human and Machine Cultures of Reading: A Cognitive Assemblage Approach,”

*PMLA* 133, no. 5 (October 2018), and I am pleased to acknowledge *PMLA*'s permission to publish it here. I am very grateful to the Estate of Mirtha Dermisache and to Sigilio Press for permission to reproduce in chapter 5 three plates from Martha Dermisache, *Selected Writings*, ed. Daniel Owen and Lisa Pearson (New York: Siglio/Ugly Duckling Press, 2017), © Estate of Mirtha Dermisache, Buenos Aires, 2020, images courtesy of Siglio/Ugly Duckling Press, New York. I also appreciate Amaranth Borsuk and Brad Bouse's cooperation in reproducing images from their collaborative project *Between Page and Screen*.

Finally, I am very grateful to the editors and professionals at Columbia University Press for their invaluable help in preparing the manuscript for publication. This book originated as a series of three René Wellek lectures at the University of California, Irvine, in the spring of 2016, and I am grateful to the Department of Comparative Literature and UCI for sponsoring my visit. Wendy Lochner has been a supportive and patient interlocutor as the book gradually took form from this early venture. Annie Barva made many improvements in her copyediting, and Lowell Frye gently and persistently shepherded the manuscript along. Special thanks are due to Michael Haskell and designer Lisa Hamm for their generosity and willingness to help me create the "X-ray" pages, even though it meant considerable extra work for them to do so. I hope that my readers will agree it was worth the effort.

These acknowledgments would not be complete without recognizing Nicholas Gessler's contributions to the book. His name appears explicitly on several pages, but his influence and vast technical knowledge are subtexts for many more. Not everyone is fortunate enough to have a technical genius for a spouse; the only downside is that he is (almost always) right whenever we disagree!



Postprint

