This book opens a new field – box studies – and serves as its first field guide. It does this in a performative way: in mobilising elements of natural history like taxonomies and identification keys, this book makes space for a generative critique of western epistemologies and their orderings. As an open-ended experiment with an impossible ‘natural history’ of boxes, this field guide invites a change in our habits of valuing and observing, and of how we are involved and connected to our environment. Setting off with a multivocal introductory section, we organized the book into 11 sections, which is but one of possible orderings. Indeed, this book calls for perpetual reassembling and provides a range of tools to do so, for example in the keywords featuring box practices and the taxonomies that precede each essay.

The boxes in this book have gathered contributors across disciplines, from art history to technology studies, from archaeology to musicology, from computer science to history of medicine – providing tools for unlearning academia’s disciplinary ‘boxings’. We thank all the participants in the conference ‘Knowledge in a Box’ held in Kavala in August 2012. Discussions at the Kavala conference inspired us to stay with box studies, a project that has since turned to the study of box practices.

The editors wish to thank Timo Roßmann for his dedicated proofreading and formatting of every essay in this book before submission. We thank OPO-Foundation Zurich and Collegium Helveticum at ETH Zurich as well as Goethe University Frankfurt am Main for funding and support. At Mattering Press, we thank our editors, Endre Dányi, Julien McHardy and Joe Deville, and our copy editor Steven Lovatt. Many thanks to the two non-anonymous reviewers Geof Bowker and Claire Waterton, as well as to Sandra Widmer, Helen Verran, Berti Schulte and Liz Martin for their support at various stages of this project. Last but not least, we thank all authors who responded to our call for box studies and for the enthusiasm and commitment they brought to this project.