The philosopher Andy Clark has explored the relationship between cognition and environment through an extended meditation upon the predicament of the mole cricket. These creatures attract their mates through song, but their minute size renders them incapable of producing sounds loud enough to travel. However, they solve this problem environmentally: by creating underground burrows that greatly amplify their songs, thus allowing them to be heard over long distances. For Clark, the mole cricket prompts consideration of where the organism ends and the environment begins; indeed, this distinction may be too starkly drawn, since the two elements can be seen to form a single acoustic system, an extended phenotype consisting of biological and environmental components.\(^1\) Human beings, Clark argues, likewise create ‘cognitive singing burrows’ (2005: 236), environments and artifacts that extend our reach beyond the ‘ancient fortress of skin and skull’ (Clark 2003: 5). So accustomed are we to our environmental and artifactual surround, ‘the ubiquitous presence’ of cognitive artifacts such as ‘pen, paper, models, words, numbers, blueprints, compasses’ that we overlook ‘the depth and importance of their role in distinctively human thought’ (2005: 236). Moreover, our cognitive burrows do not remain static; instead, we refine them over time, teach others to use them, and ‘we make the burrows themselves (books, oral traditions, software) do double duty as their own encodings for production by future generations’ (2005: 241). In a process that has been called ‘epistemic engineering’ (Sterelny 2003: 157), humans extend thought into the world, altering their surroundings to construct ‘problem-solving environments’ (155) that compensate for such ‘cognitive resource bottlenecks’ (155) as our relatively limited capacity for working memory.\(^2\) Such views emphasize ‘cognitive extension’
as a ubiquitous human form of 'niche construction' (Wilson and Clark 2009: 56).

We recognize that not many books about early modern religion begin by thinking about mole crickets. We start in this way in order to pose the question whether this general propensity to engineer our environments has any historical purchase. Clark writes compellingly of the ‘extended cognitive physiologies achieved by progressively fitting an open-ended sequence of technologies to somewhat plastic human brains’ (2005: 237). Can such models move us closer to what we might term a cognitive cultural history of early modern religion? This book examines the English Reformation as a test case to explore such questions. English Reformers show a canny sense of the importance of engineering the environment, building and re-building their cognitive burrows to establish new forms of memory and attention. Drawing upon recent work in philosophy known as Extended Mind theory, as well as research in the social sciences under the rubric of Distributed Cognition, this book uses Reforming practices as a test case for an ecological approach to the question of the relationships among memory, cognition, and culture.

We argue that models derived from Extended Mind and Distributed Cognition have the potential to open new windows on how people remembered. Both Extended Mind theory and Distributed Cognition posit that the mind is both embedded in and extended into its worlds. Rather than seeing ‘cognition’ as a set of interior trans-historical mental processes, extended and distributed models hold a hybrid and integrative view, in which the realm of the mental extends into physical and social systems.

Extended Mind theory arose from challenges to computational models of cognition that modeled thought as ‘the rule-governed manipulation of internal symbolic representations’ (Van Gelder 1995: 345). Instead, Van Gelder and others proposed a model of ‘dynamical systems’, a holistic approach that situates cognition within contextual and dynamic context. Philosophers such as Clark, John Sutton, Michael Wheeler, Susan Hurley, Richard Menary, and Rob Wilson have further challenged internalist models inherited from dualist frameworks of thought within the philosophy of mind. They critique individualistic conceptions of thought that erroneously posit that ‘cognition takes place inside the head, wedged between perception (on the input side) and action (on the output side)’ (Wilson and Clark: 2009: 56). In such internalist models, ‘the mind is a kind of sandwich, and cognition is the filling’ (Hurley 1998: 401; see Wilson and Clark 2009: 56). In challenging views such as these, Clark distinguishes between ‘brainbound’ models of mind in which thought