

Testing the Limits

THE MOST WHIMSICAL project of summer 2013 must be Kenneth Goldsmith's initiative at LABOR gallery in Mexico City. Goldsmith invited people to participate in *Printing Out the Internet*—the title being the very description of what it seeks to achieve. By the end of July, Goldsmith had received approximately 10 tonnes of paper bearing online content.

But his goal is elusive, no matter how many people enlist in the effort. One of the more fascinating claims regarding our propensity to generate data is that of San Francisco social media consultant Rick Bakas, who regularly reminds his audiences that more content is generated every 48 hours today than in the entire period prior to 2003. Truly, there's no end to bookmaking, as the Preacher said in Ecclesiastes—or content generation.

Indeed, news of Goldsmith's project came to my attention via a post on Harriet, blog of the Poetry Foundation, which in turn linked to a post at the online journal *Lemon Hound*. The project itself has a blog that's updated regularly, adding to the amount of content that would have to be printed out to achieve Goldsmith's goal.

Kathryn Mockler, author of the post that brought the project to my attention, suggests an ulterior motive, however (the full post is available at <http://bit.ly/15QuB4s>).

Printing Out the Internet asks us to look at something right in front of our faces that we don't talk about in a meaningful way. It asks us to look at how being online plays a role [in] our lives and what it means to make something as intangible and all encompassing as the internet into something tangible (a printed sheet of paper) in an era when everything is digital and many are lamenting the death of the book as physical object.

Mockler notes how she, like many of us, wrestled in the 1990s with what to print out as online communication began reaching

beyond universities and corporations into the mainstream:

I printed out all my significant email correspondence and organized it in binders by the name of each sender.... Paper was concrete while computer data seemed abstract. I carted those binders around for several years and eventually threw them out—recycled them, which is what Goldsmith plans to do with the content he receives at the culmination of his project.

But the decision to print—whether it's a book or the latest blog post—entails an editorial decision. What are we willing to keep and hand on? What are we willing to lose control over, through the act of publishing or the decision not to publish and forget?

This issue of *Amphora* focuses on the design and packaging of books—from century-old padded bindings to the latest innovations of book design students in Montreal—but none of the work has meaning if there's no content to be printed, packaged and passed along. Although digital media have accelerated the distribution of knowledge, the analog printed word remains among the most accessible means of storing and disseminating knowledge.

Sure, book collectors lay up for themselves treasures “where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal”—to tap another scriptural passage relevant to publishing—but this is the way of the world. “We're writers; we kill trees; that's what we do,” observed Daniel Nester in a November 2011 blog post.

The challenge is making the most of the resources available, ensuring that the trees killed and the books made pass along something of lasting value that doesn't waste the precious time we have—really, the one resource each of us never can recover.

~ Peter Mitham, editor