

## *Digital realms*

COMBING THROUGH half a century's worth of *Amphora* last year for the retrospective that appeared in issue 171, one couldn't avoid the ongoing discussion about the impact computers would have on book production. Today, it's not only the production but also the consumption and storage of documents and texts that generates discussion. The lives of my younger peers hang within the net of online communications that today make up the Internet; my own career began on five-inch floppies inserted into a Commodore 64. A few years ago, I managed the conversion and transfer of two decades' worth of writing so I can search and retrieve the data and memories on my Mac.

The opportunities the digital realm has made possible at all stages of textual creation and consumption are incredible. We can do more—or at least do it with fewer people—than ever before. We can map where words occur in texts and where texts occur in the world. Books have gone from being storehouses of big data to being its focus. We can not only read about Big Brother but have our activities read and analyzed by him, too.

Which brings up the question of the memory hole, and its relationship to the rabbit hole we're all too familiar with entering with a few keystrokes. Researching the Tea-Bisk logo Rod McDonald described working on during his presentation to the Alcuin Society last summer, remarks presented later in this issue, I found myself face to face with images of vintage dollar bills, anti-fascist propaganda, and disturbing images regarding the abortion stance of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. I have no idea what they had to do with a tea biscuit mix, and I quickly backed away from such a

warren of associations. Google had retrieved everything but what I was seeking, which says much about what and how we remember.

Sarah Sutherland takes up this very issue in her brief essay regarding the importance of physical books, and the decay which electronic media face. While physical forms endure, the lossiness of digital storage is in many ways greater and more insidious than that of material objects.

And yet perhaps we're learning the limits of technology, and finding an answer to the question: "Now that we can do anything, what will we do?" Rod McDonald notes how technology has allowed a seemingly endless series of weights, with each glyph in each weight requiring individual attention. The appetite, which once seemed endless, must, he feels, one day turn. There are only so many weights one needs, and certainly only so many one will ever use. Simply because a thing is possible doesn't make it necessary.

Yet the possibilities lure us on, as several other articles in this issue remind us: from the work of R.S. Sherman in early Vancouver, to the visionary professionals who in the late 1960s saw the need for an annual award recognizing excellence in book design in Canada. Scholar, poet and printer Peter Quartermain offers a keepsake that demonstrates that the craft of printing and the creative reinterpretation of the past continue. Our work is a constant act of memory, the remembering of the practices that makes it possible. This is as true in the creation of culture as in the creation of widgets. Therefore let us remember well, that we may work better.

~ Peter Mitham, editor