

Houses of Knowledge

SOME OF THE CONVERSATIONS leading up to this issue revolved around questions of Vancouver's book culture. The idea of the "house of knowledge," a moniker variously ascribed to libraries and other repositories of a culture's understanding of itself, is a compelling one. My hunch is there's a different mansion for each person that fits the individual's memories and conceits. Indeed, text is close to ubiquitous, outstripping our ability to house or contain the information and culture it expresses in any traditional sense. A variety of structures are required, contributing to the diverse architecture of the city of letters.

This issue of *Amphora* delves into some of those different types of text, from the ground up. Graffiti writers see the city as a blank page fit for scribbling that may make as much sense as grade-school babble but which (as Phyllis Reeve hints) evokes the loftier writing placed on a wall in Babylon a couple of millennia ago.

Then there is the packaging of consumer products such as beer, which Jonathan Shipley discovers offers fertile ground for collectors of printed ephemera as well as a trove of cultural imagery akin to packing crate labels and film posters. These are the basic printed texts that many of us bear in memory, everyday texts we see often enough that they become icons of a moment in time. (Douglas Coupland, pace the editor's letter in the last issue of *Amphora*, does capture the importance of these kinds of icons in his *Souvenir of Canada* books.)

Then there are the variations on words and the devices that deliver them to us, which Margaret Lock and Jan Kellett explore in their discussions of recent exhibits and events.

Speaking of the devices that deliver words to us for consumption, a few hours before writing this, I scored a first printing of the Douglas & McIntyre edition of Joanna Skibsrud's Giller Prize-winning novel *The Sentimentalists*. Sure, not as wonderful as the first printing of the Gaspereau Press edition, but still pretty cool given the madness that went into getting it on store shelves. Although the text was available in electronic format during the heady days following the book's win, and Gaspereau stood by its presses ready to produce the kind of books it has become known for, the Douglas & McIntyre edition shows that a) books remain in demand despite the Kindle and other readers, and b) more than one format—and more than one print format, even—is needed to serve contemporary readers. So much for the end of the book.

And speaking of awards, Robert Desmarais elicits some strong opinions from Vancouver collector John Meier Jr. regarding his collection of English-language books honoured with the Governor General's Literary Award for Fiction. The collection is now on tour, but to get the stories associated with them—some of which dwarf the tale of *The Sentimentalists*—Meier is the man to ask.

~ Peter Mitham, editor

ABOUT THE COVER

Photo by Aaron Harvey, www.flickr.com/photos/comeupins. "I have always been fascinated with old things, especially decaying buildings with or without graffiti, or art, added. Out on a photo hunt, I stumbled across this abandoned office building and wanted to capture a moment of the visual conversation taking place here in the absence of the type of activity originally meant to take place in this space."