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# The Evolution of the Modern Book: Understanding the Future of the Printed Word in the Context of Fine Printing Presses and Artist's Books

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*The Evolution of the Modern Book: Understanding the Future of the Printed  
Word in the Context of Fine Printing Presses and Artist's Books*

*by Elisabeth Schyberg*  
*faculty advisor: Jane Carlin*  
*Summer 2012*

### *I. Introduction.*

Since print has traditionally been a main source of information and communication throughout history, the drastic shift in the 21<sup>st</sup> century from the printed book to the digital screen is cause for some epistemological disconnect. A goal of this project was to familiarize myself with some major developments in the modern book publishing industry and to research the way in which physical books are evolving in order to be increasingly relevant to society. I began with thinking about the question whether or not the book publishing industry would soon become obsolete because of digital media. However, there is no way to provide an easy answer to the question of the future of the physical book. Even among staunch book lovers, there is much ambivalence about the place of digital publishing and e-books in the book world. Those who are most heavily involved with physical books, both in their creation and their study, seem to be those who are most willing to embrace e-books and digital information as a necessity. I was unaware of the depth of existing research was for the topic of the physical book, but as I continued my own research, I understood why so much attention is being given to it at this particular moment. In a collections of essays called *The Case for Books*, prominent book scholar Robert Darnton argues that “books need to be studied in relation to other media. The lines of research could lead in many directions, but they all should issue ultimately in a larger understanding of how printing has shaped man’s attempts to make sense of the human condition” (205). This is crucial to why the study of books is becoming an important discipline more than ever, and why one summer of research has only fueled my interest in further studying both how books will evolve in the near future and how society will transform with digital information. The more I read and talked to people, the more I realized that there does not necessarily need to be a revived interest in publishing for the physical book to survive,

there just need to be enough people who recognize the way that books have influenced humanity for centuries.

## *II. Context.*

To begin my research, I gathered as many sources including articles, books, and personal interviews of people associated with the book arts. After I explored these sources, I then went on to individual fine press visits for interviews and also to a few museums and libraries to examine fine press and artists' books for myself. Several books were very helpful as a preliminary basis for my research, including *The Case for Books* by Robert Darnton, *The Gutenberg Elegies* by Sven Birkerts, *The Art of the Book* by the V&A museum, *Penguins Progress*, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris' Typographical Adventure* by William S. Peterson, and *Double Fold* by Nicholson Baker. All of these provided important perspectives on the place of the physical book in society and history. *The Gutenberg Elegies*, in particular, was highly influential in shaping the direction of my thoughts for this project, because it deals with the social and intellectual effects of the digitization of reading. In his conclusion, Birkerts claims, "If literature is to survive, to gain back some of the power it has ceded...it must become dangerous. That is, it must throw up a serious challenge to the status quo; it must shake and provoke people even as it leads them back toward a reconnaissance of selfhood" (209). Darnton says of book history as a discipline, "It might even be called the social and cultural history of communication by print...because its purpose is to understand how ideas were transmitted through print and how exposure to the printed word affected the thought and behavior of mankind during the last five hundred years" (176). These two ideas show how the study of book history and the realm of book arts taken together have the ability to provide new life and interest in the physical book. Rather than being seen as a diminishing area of importance, the book industry has the ability to recreate its place in the world of communication. Darnton

continues, “Even if the digitized image on the computer screen is accurate, it will fail to capture crucial aspects of a book. ...Its physical aspects provide clues about its existence as an element in a social and economic system; and if contains margin notes, it can reveal a great deal about its place in the intellectual life of its readers” (Darnton 38-9). He adds, “[Foucault’s] ‘archaeology of knowledge’ suggests a way to study texts as sites that bear the marks of epistemological activity, and it has the advantage of doing justice to the social dimension of thought” (Darnton 169). For precisely these reasons, the physical book will not be obsolete any time in the near future. There are too many people who recognize the overarching importance of books for them to disappear to digital entirely. Since culture and the way people interact with knowledge are certainly changing with the shift from print to digital, it is enlightening to stop for a moment in the forward rush of electronics and examine why and how humanity communicates information, and to realize the implications of the change. All of this preliminary textual research aided me in my press visits because I was more equipped to recognize the basis upon which many fine presses operate in the modern book industry.

### *III. Research Plan.*

In order to come to a better understanding of fine press books and artists’ books, I visited a number of presses and libraries to talk to people involved the fine press industry firsthand. These are the questions I used to conduct my interviews, although at times I let the conversation lead itself, so I did not ask every question to every person. I chose specific presses that most clearly demonstrate a commitment to preserving the physical book while incorporating the idea of the book as an art form. I have included the questions and the resulting interviews so that the opinions of the people I talked to remain unfiltered.

1. What inspired you to start printing?

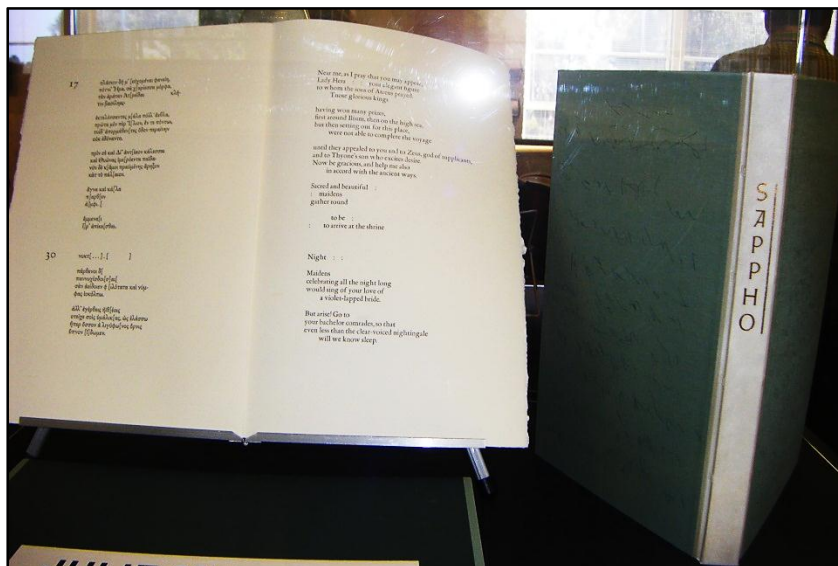
2. Where do you see your books in the realm of publishing - purely art? Conveyances of information? Literature? Some blend of these?
3. How does the computer factor into your work? Do you feel dependent on modern technology to create your products? In your opinion, is this a good thing or not?
4. Do you provide e-books or digital versions of your work? Why or why not?
5. Do you have an opinion of digital publishing? Do you think it is helping or hurting the presence of the physical book?
6. Where do you think the significance of artist books or fine press editions of books will lie in the popularity of digital publishing and e-books?
7. Do you feel that your products are more permanent than e-books? Do you think this matters?
8. In terms of the people who buy or are interested in fine press editions of books or artist books, what has your experience been? Are they interested in your products because of their artistic or literary value or for bibliophilic interest?
9. Could you define what the book is to you? Book arts? Letterpress?

#### *IV. Interviews, Visits, and Classes.*

##### 1. *Arion Press*: Andrew Hoyem

1802 Hays Street, The Presidio, San Francisco, CA 94129

<http://www.arionpress.com/index.htm>



Mr. Hoyem was always interested in books and reading; after college was when he became more interested in physical books, which was fueled by the presence of the beat poets in San Francisco.

In terms of e-books, he thinks that magazines and reference books make a lot of sense to be digitized. The Arion Press uses computers every day, as with an upcoming book about Thomas Jefferson, because it makes sense. ‘We do what’s necessary.’

Discussing the connection between e-books and Arion books, he said that many people cherish books and are now thinking about the books that give them satisfaction. Even trade publishers are making books more attractive. They had to get across the editorial and artistic process: in every book a lot of thought goes into how they present it. Their goal is to combine typography and graphics to make a unified whole; he sees this as giving their books more cultural impact than other book arts, because the aesthetics matter and the history of the book is taken into consideration.

Much of what he chooses to publish is rediscoveries; for this purpose he has kept lists of authors, artists, subjects, and titles that interest him for years.

He does not see the current world of book arts as a big exciting development like so many do. He thinks modern, young book artists are too self-focused and just want to be able to work alone and produce something that is too personal and won't have cultural relevance. Arion books are important culturally because he has done something different over the long haul; there has been an increased awareness of the physical books since the 60's and the hippies. His books aren't just a throwback - collectors want relief from e-books. The people who buy his books aren't art collectors, because books are too restrained for them, and they're not an investment.

*2. Iota Press: Andrew Johnson*  
925-c Gravenstein Hwy. South, Sebastopol, CA 95472  
<http://www.iotapress.com/index.html>

In philosophical terms, what inspired Eric to start printing was the flippancy of the culture toward reading and writing; these things are subjective. What continues to inspire him is the energy of the fusion of reading and writing and making something unpredictable. Digital doesn't mean what he does is too peripheral. Iota Press is always hand set, but he sometimes

uses the computer for layout and to see how the words will work on a more complicated project, but the computer is a very different craft from what he does, and there is a tacit philosophical difference in using a computer versus setting the type by hand. He told a story about 4 years ago when he was teaching a printing class and a woman pulled out an iPad, which was brand new then, and everyone was awed by it for about 2 beats, until they realized that technology like that is so remote from what they do. He also feels that with all the advances of technology like the iPad it leaves printers more



room to do what they want, because it leaves them behind. 'We want to be in the dust.' He sees a parallel evolution with technology and the book arts or printing, because now there is room for both. He thinks there is no competition between what he does and technology because it's so removed, and 'they're leaving us alone now so we can do our art'.

There were more presses in the 60's and 70's for poets that were dedicated to noncommercial printing, and they knew they were of service to the writing culture, and that publishing on their own was important (he mentioned the Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco, home of the beat poets). But now, the motives are no longer literary and the method is too facile, because of online services and print-on-demand. People who want to write poetry can print their own chapbooks for nothing, but some still recognize the value of hand printing; he said he gets about one a year like this.



In his opinion, book arts are so hot right now because they are filling an old need, but even with all the book arts programs so few of them are for literary and poetic motives because there is no money there. He sees his printing in the blended realm, as he hopes to create a graphic and literary connection. I asked why: for personal taste; he was first introduced to letterpress as a way to combine both his scribbles and his poetry. He likes people to read and be surprised visually; he likes things to happen while people read. In terms of his work's permanence, he said once you start printing, the very permanence of it reverberates back at you and you realize as soon as you set the type that this matters and will go out into the world as it is, so it must be perfect. He explained that the physical force of printing is philosophical as well. This reminded me of a passage from *The Gutenberg Elegies*: "The dual function of print is the immobilization and preservation of language. To make a mark on a page is to gesture toward permanence. ... This every-present awareness of fixity, of indelibility, is no longer so pressing a part of the writer's daily struggle. ... At a very fundamental and obvious level, the consequentiality of bringing forth language has been altered. Where the limitations of the medium once encouraged a very practical resistance to the spewing out of the unformulated expression, that responsibility has now passed to the writer" (Birkerts 157). He doesn't aspire to the fine press level, because he has too much respect for the craft and aesthetically there is no appeal for him because fine press editions are too refined. 'We're way out in the margins.'

One of the press collective members, Judi, was there and weighed in on e-books: she was intensely passionate about wanting books to be held and touched and smudged. She scorned the kinds of books that just stay in glass cases, because those aren't the kind that can change people with their truth. However, she did say that she would be alright with e-books in general if they were the kind of product that couldn't be any higher quality, instead of slapped together and boring. She feels the same way about trade publishing: too many books today, in her opinion,

are trash and are not made with the right amount of care and attention to detail. She wants books to be handled and to hold up under reading and being passed around and marked in. [It was her idea to have the people I interview personally define what books, book arts, and letterpress mean to them].

3. *Peter Koch Printers*: Peter Koch  
2203 Fourth Street, Berkeley, CA 94710  
<http://www.peterkochprinters.com/>



Peter has been in Berkeley at this location since 1989. He is a bibliophile before he is a printer, because of his family's rare book collection started in the 1860's. He saw his first press on accident in his friend's basement and fell in love with printing. He knew beautiful books had been made

and that anyone can print; he learned how to print in Montana and paid \$100 for his first press. He always knew he wanted his work to be literary, so he started by printing books of poetry. He was hanging out with the outsiders in Montana, otherwise known as the artists. Printing immediately became a full time passion, and he made very good business.

In terms of technology, the computer's a great tool. 'The minute I could I started designing on a computer.' However, he used the phrase 'good enough for the gov't. work' meaning that the computer is good enough for commercial projects but not necessarily artistic ones. He doesn't use any metal type, all photopolymer plates. But on the other side of the same coin, there are

many things you can't do without the computer; for instance it allows you access to fonts all the way back to the 30's. 'Syntax' was the last metal type produced. The computer makes it possible to stay in contemporary design.

Talking about e-books: they are apples and oranges compared with his work. He would never buy a Kindle; it's for information. In his opinion, there will always be people who don't know the difference between a good book and not, and the material side of things is not for everyone. He knows that he's an elitist. The electronic thing is fascinating, because it represents where information is going. He thinks that soon paper will be the wrong place to go unless you want information about art.

Electronic publishing makes sense, but not for us as artists, for those interested in the material and artisanal being. 'Our books have legs'. But the sophistication necessary for people to appreciate his books only exist at the most rarefied air. But the fact that someone like myself is interested is important, because it shows that young people are realizing that artisanal work is important; it's a work that is both manual and mental.

The future of the book lies in pushing it to its limits, which is what art is. But the other side is the world of cheap paperbacks, which involves no information in its creation except for its sheer tactility, and the actual object has no usefulness at all. What matters now are the kinds of books that go into special collections. Paperbacks are almost like food - you digest it and then throw it away. The future of the book needs sophisticated librarians. In his opinion, book arts today are aiming pretty low, but the programs are breeding like mice. The importance of these programs is that they lead so much further than simple book arts. 'Making books has the potential for deep intellectual art.'

4. *Flying Fish Press*: Julie Chen

Berkeley, CA

<http://www.flyingfishpress.com/>



For Julie the book is about the experience, which comes through the structure of the book. She got into printing through the Mills College graduate program in Book Arts. She likes the more

literary aspect of book arts. She thinks that people have some awareness of the students in the book arts programs; the program at Mills is creative writing and book arts, and there is motivation there because of interdisciplinary thinking right now. It is easier for writers to share their work online, so students are coming into book arts programs more prepared for this interdisciplinary nature because they are used to the digital process of sharing everything. In her experience, print-on-demand has mostly been confined to photographers for books, not letterpress. She believes that the book should be functional, but that the book form is just one of many art forms that deserve attention.

In terms of what she does, she has to be able to interact with the *physical* object, not just the literary, because the object itself is an important feature of the content. She does have an interest in experimenting with the e-book format. They will always be separate, however, and there will always be a place for the kind of work she does with books. She doesn't think books are going to die out. Her comments tie in to a point from the book I read about William Morris's press: "Among the intelligentsia of the day there were urgent calls to harness the machine to aesthetic and humane ends, emphasizing the importance of design in industrial production, and Morris's Luddite tendencies now seemed distinctly embarrassing. [Aldous Huxley said,] 'The sensible thing to do is not to revolt against the inevitable, but to use and

modify it, to make it serve your purposes. Machines exist; let us then exploit them to create beauty” (Peterson 293).

She did get a Kindle recently, but she doesn’t like it overall. It feels like a disembodied book and that’s creepy.

Many of her books are bought by university collections, but she’s noticed that librarians have a text focus. 15 years ago she made a book with no words, and the librarians didn’t want to buy it. But now she feels that there is more acceptance in libraries for collecting across disciplines than there was before because librarians are realizing that they need books no matter what they say.

Letterpress is one of the main languages of the artist book format, and she has seen a resurgence in letterpress because of all the digital forms. However, digital formats give so many options that letterpress can’t, and so they shouldn’t be discounted, because they make artist books accessible to so many more people. She said she would never want to give up letterpress but she can see the value of other methods. ‘I am not a big letterpress booster.’ Not having a press available shouldn’t disqualify you from making meaningful work; letterpress on its own isn’t all good. She recognizes so many different approaches to book arts because as an educator she has to think through and defend her artistic and stylistic choices. In a way, this idea relates to an argument from *The Gutenberg Elegies*: “Think of the bold boasting in Shakespeare’s sonnets, born of the recognition that so long as words survived (were read) the subject and the poet would both enjoy a kind of afterlife. Everything hinged upon the artistic power of the work itself” (Birkerts 159).

##### 5. *San Francisco Center for the Book*

300 De Haro Street, Suite 334, San Francisco, CA 94103

<http://sfc.org/>

I had the opportunity to take an introductory letterpress printing class at the San Francisco Center for the Book, which gave me an even deeper ability to comprehend the process of book-making. The Center is fairly small, and its bright blue exterior reflected the atmosphere of the whole place: enthusiasm and energy



were abundant. (On a side note, there was a small exhibit in the center called “Exploding the Codex: The Theater of the Book” which contained one of the co-founder’s personal collection of artist books. And I was happy to see the same book that was recently in the Collins Library from Chandler O’Leary’s Anagram Press.)

I was one of about 12 others who had come to learn the basics of letterpress. We were introduced to the kinds of presses we would be using – 2 Vandercook proof presses and a little tabletop hand platen press – and then we inked up the presses and got busy. To get comfortable using the press, we pulled a pre-set card from the tabletop press and a background pattern from one of the Vandercooks for our main project.

While this was happening, we were also in the process of composing a group poem, in the style of telephone pictionary...which just means that we could only see the line before ours and nothing else when writing our line for the poem. Once this group collaboration was complete, we got to pick our own tray of type from around the room and set our line. This was the most time consuming part of the process, and also the one where the most mistakes are made. To set type correctly, it must be placed upside down and backwards so that it prints correctly, making precision essential. Despite the tediousness of this part, it was surprisingly fun to make tiny

metal letters into words and figure out the perfect spacing – kind of like perfecting the spaces and sizes and fonts in a word document, but all by hand. And then, after a couple proofs, we all had the chance to pull off a few broadsides of the finished project, in a deep navy that complemented the neon pink we'd chosen for the background pattern. After taking this introductory class, I can much more deeply appreciate the level of commitment that goes into the production of a single fine press book.

To add another layer to my research, I traveled to England to study the fine press movement which emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century largely due to the influence of noted artist William Morris and his Kelmscott Press. Using the Kelmscott Press as a starting point, I researched how fine presses in England have developed in light of the digital age compared to those in North America, as England has a somewhat longer and deeper literary history than America. The libraries that I had the chance to see contain rich resources and collections about small press books and fine printing history which would have been otherwise unavailable to me.

6. *University of West England's Centre for Fine Print Research*: Sarah Bodman  
Kennel Lodge Road, Off Clanage Road, Bristol BS3 2JT UK  
<http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/>

In England, the first person I talked to was Sarah Bodman, a teacher and researcher. She recently conducted an extensive research project about the future of the book in much the same way that I attempted, by interviewing book artists and fine press proprietors, but her scope was much wider than mine. She firmly believes in the power of



the physical book, as a thing to be taught and studied to understand society. I talked to her about the kinds of students she sees at the Centre, and she thinks that students today are very capable of carrying on the long tradition of books arts with depth and skill. She has seen a huge interest among students in recent years in letterpress and fine printing, mostly because so many of my generation are born into the digital world that they want some other kind of outlet for their creativity. She notices that students really enjoy doing the manual work on letterpress that they are used to doing digitally on the computer. She doesn't believe that e-books will be taking over print any time soon, but she does feel strongly that cheap paperbacks will not survive long in the face of digital media, because there will soon be no use for them. She thinks that artists' books and fine press books will gain prominence in the coming years because people who want the experience of a book will find what they are looking for in this kind of printed matter. Birkerts talks about "the paradox of the book itself, which is to be a physical object whose value is found in the invisible play of energies entrapped by its covers" (86). She also showed me many books from her personal collection, mostly British artists but a couple American. Some of her favorites are those which use color and text and pages very simply but boldly. One particular London artist that she showed me is notoriously lazy in his printing but has undertaken huge, extended projects, so he just whips out as many books as he can. There was a definite difference in the quality of his books and others she showed me, such as those of an American artist whose books are always very political, dealing with subjects like lynching and homosexuality with powerful and unexpected artistic maneuverings. She believes books like those will cause book arts to survive because they are so simple and yet so powerful, and they manipulate the codex in ways that cannot be conveyed on a computer screen.

7. *Inky Parrot Press*: Dennis Hall

The Foundry, Church Hanborough, Oxford, OX29 8AB UK

<http://www.artists-choice-editions.com/>



Mr. Hall's press focuses mostly on art books, but he has done very few letterpress books or handmade books. Overall I did not find much that was helpful in interviewing him, because his books have an extremely narrow audience. He does not make a living from his press, as most do not, but his work is not even particularly meaningful or capable of exciting interest unless from those who are heavily invested in minutia of art. Additionally, even though I found one of his subjects fairly interesting, a book about the collaboration between composer Benjamin Britten and singer Peter Pears, the book was so long and detailed that I would never read it. His style is decent, and somewhat reminiscent of the Kelmscott Press, with red notes on the side of wide margins. But he does all the book design himself, and as he is well over 80, this reflects in the somewhat predictable book designs. He uses a computer for all the design work.

8. *Strawberry Press*: Paul Nash

8 Fairfield Drive, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 5LB, England

<http://www.strawberrypress.co.uk/>



Paul Nash is undoubtedly one of the most influential fine press printers today, involved in just about every part of the printing world that he can be. Of everyone I had the opportunity to talk to about fine presses, Dr. Nash was the most enthusiastic about the prospect of fine press books being perhaps the sole future of the physical book. He fully embodies the

Kelmscott tradition of fine printing and making books that are both functional and beautiful.

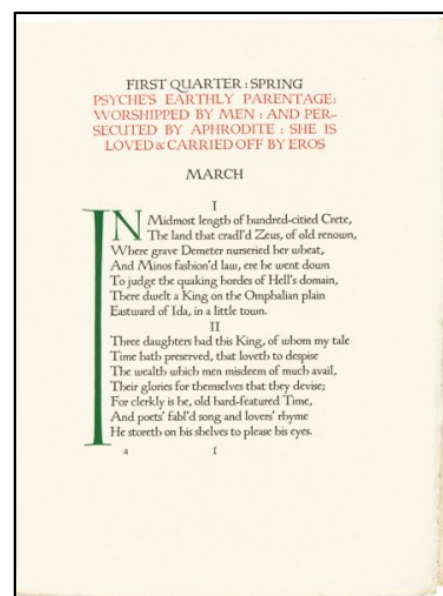
All of his books are letterpress, and more than anyone else I talked to he seemed knowledgeable

about typography, spacing, layout, and design. He uses consistent fonts and is prepared to defend his reasoning for each one. He does not use a computer for his designs or layout, and does not feel the need for technology in fine press books. He believes that the future of the printed book is in fine press books because their character and quality is so distinct. However, he acknowledged that as yet many people still want fine press books because of their form and not because of their content, which he thinks should change. He showed me many examples of fine press books, as he has a personal library that must rival most museums. Most of them are British or American, although he does have a strong collection of Italian works, and he cited an Italian artist as one of his main influences. He knew more than I could write down about the history of each type face, the history of each press and its proprietors, and even the history of his type cases. It is clear that, very much in the William Morris spirit, he is passionate to a rare degree about printing and making beautiful works of art. He also talked quite a bit about the future of libraries, as that is his current profession, and he is very adamant that libraries need to work hard to figure out how they want print and digital to coexist.

### 9. *Victoria & Albert Museum: National Art Library*

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/n/national-art-library/>

Before I found the National Art Library in the V&A, I was distracted by some incunabula throughout the museum, most of which were from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Most of the religious manuscripts were highly colorful and ornate, and it was fascinating to look at two pieces right next to each other which were indistinguishable except that one was written by hand and the other printed from a press. In the National Art Library, I saw the following fine press books:



[my criteria for picking books to study was by date, as many of the books I had been shown by

people were not from the current decade]. *The Diary of a Land Girl*, from the English Whittington Press, printed in 2002. This book was very long, but all letterpress, and I think being a diary it potentially has more literary significance than some other books I had seen, because it is historical along with being personal. The next was *Literary Recipes*, a chapbook from Foolscape Press in Santa Cruz, CA, printed in 2009. I found this one to be amateurish, with too many different fonts on the title page alone, and a total lack of a colophon. However, for its lack of physical presence, the subject of a well-known chef who was influenced toward cooking by authors like Oscar Wilde was quite interesting and could easily have been turned into a larger, more significant book. Next I looked at *The Boy and The Bird* from the Seven Acres Press in Oregon, printed by Loyd Haberly. Haberly is so far my favorite printer, but in this particular book there were none of the page-length colored initials that I love, just hand-colored illustrations at the bottom of each page. *Mirrors*, printed in 2005 by the Circle Press in London, was next. This artist book was meant to give the book back to the reader, because it consisted of two simple poems and silver paper cut in the shape of a profile that reflected the viewer, with some distortions. It was a subdued and understated work. The final one was *The Mirror of the Library*, a translated essay by the Oak Knoll Press, from 2006. Although this book was not letterpress, it was more well-made and beautifully designed than some letterpress books I have seen, due to its Kelmscott-like layout with red accents to the black type. This was a very pleasant book to read, and it was obviously very high quality even though it was not handmade. William Morris noted, “‘whatever the subject-matter of the book may be, and however bare it may be of decoration, it can still be a work of art, if the type be good and attention be paid to its general arrangement...I lay it down...that a book quite un-ornamented can look actually and positively beautiful, and not merely un-ugly, if it be, so to say, architecturally good,’ he declared” (Peterson 107).

## *V. Conclusion.*

In the course of this research, I began to notice more and more relevant, peripheral sources and items around me. I came upon an article from NPR's blog "The Two-Way" explaining that the ancient texts and manuscripts in both Oxford's and the Vatican's libraries are currently being digitized. The blog post didn't draw many conclusions from this bit of news, but it is crucial that two of the most ancient holdings of printed texts are being transformed to the screen, because what was once exclusive and rare is now as accessible as the internet. I read a news article about a new perfume created by Karl Lagerfeld and Gerhard Steidl called Paper Passion, which is 'a scent for booklovers' and is supposed to catch the scent of fresh paper. There is a website called Unbound, which claims to 'put the power of publishing in the hands of authors and readers' ([unbound.co.uk](http://unbound.co.uk)) by using a Kickstarter method to let the public decide which books it wants to publish. I watched a video called 'Designing for the Future Book' by Craig Mod, a man whose work focuses on exploring questions like "How does digital affect books?" and "What does digital mean for the core ethos of publishing?" ([craigmod.com](http://craigmod.com)). People like him are the Walter Benjamins of today, with a passion for understanding the impacts of technology on traditional culture. It is people like him who will ensure that books will not be lost entirely to digital. And it is also people like him that remind me how relevant the interaction between physical and digital printing is to today's culture: while it does very well to start the research in the rare book rooms and the fine printing presses, eventually the knowledge gathered in these places must transcend the academic sphere into the everyday one so that the twenty-first century world of publishing maintains a balance between print and digital. While fascinating, all of these marginal sources prove that, while some are claiming 'print is dead', there is still a public devoted to the idea of the physical book.

The irony that the majority of my research about the physical book was done on a computer was not lost on me. Even as I argue for the power of the printed word I am compelled to use the technology that is making it increasingly irrelevant to society. Birkerts' analysis of the page versus the screen is that "The page is flat, opaque. The screen is of indeterminate depth - the word floats on the surface like a leaf on a river. Phenomenologically, that word is less absolute" (156). Therefore, it must be acknowledged that the modern word does have less permanence than formerly, and in some sense this research is inherently more transitory since it is written on a screen instead of a page. In understanding this irony that must now characterize the creation of physical books, I feel better equipped to pursue my desired career in publishing or academics with the knowledge of how to balance digital and print.

A fascinating consequence to consider is that fine press books have the potential to turn the book back into an exclusive and fairly specialized object as it was in medieval times. However, now that there is an increase of digitization of ancient or rare manuscripts, such as those at the Bodleian and the Vatican, their exclusivity is removed. That leaves this question to be pondered: if the future of the physical book really is in fine press books, then will there be a reversion to the book as the sole property of those who have money and elevated artistic taste? "[Walter] Benjamin speaks of 'the desire of contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get a hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction'" (Birkerts 227). It is fascinating to think about e-book as making books more accessible when really from this point of view it makes them more removed and diminishes the power of books. As e-books continue to rise, will they lessen the value of the printed material because of their very accessibility? Birkert says, "As we now find ourselves at a cultural watershed - as the fundamental process of

transmitting information is shifting from mechanical to circuit driven, from page to screen - it may be time to ask how modifications in our way of reading may impinge upon our mental life. For how we receive information bears vitally on the ways we experience and interpret reality” (71-2). Will the digitization of reading cause a paradigm shift in the realm of education, both personal and public?

After examining so many books and printing presses, conclusions must be drawn which link these objects into the conversation about print and digital. It is undeniable that fine press books are artistic, beautifully tactile objects, and they do have a unique capacity to convey the printed word for those who are still interested in it. Birkerts explains, “If the print medium exalts the word, fixing it into permanence, the electronic counterpart reduces it to a signal, a means to an end” (123). Whether or not digital books will overtake printed ones, fine press books, where one can feel the letter printed onto the page, provide stability and beauty in a time when the screen is dominating media. All of the people I talked to at the presses and libraries I visited solidified the idea that the physical book is in a time of transition, but the codex is unquestionably an adaptable form, one that has the ability to transform to meet the needs of its users.

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