On The Hermeneutics of Books: How Seminary Students Read and the Role(s) of Theological Libraries

by

Anthony J. Elia, JKM Library, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Prologue: Babbitt's Historical Moment

In 1908, Dr. Irving Babbitt,[1] Professor of French Literature at Harvard University, published his first book *Literature and the American College*. Babbitt's scholarship was a commentary on higher education in early twentieth-century America, taking aim at the distinctions made between classical and romantic, ancient and modern, and conservative and liberal thinking, all leading to the construction of a cultural history of American education at that time. He was, as some have called him, a "declinist," one who preached the deterioration of culture, society, and humanity since the time of Rousseau (as evinced in his 1918 book *Rousseau and Romanticism*). And he was considered the leading proponent of the New Humanism of the early twentieth century, which was foundational for the reevaluation of classic literature and the Great Books programs at Columbia and the University of Chicago a generation later. But I begin today with Dr. Babbitt as a pivotal figure in American thinking because he exhibits a unique twist in the American intellectual discourse of the early twentieth century that is apropos to our situation in the early twenty-first century.

On a philosophical level, Babbitt's extirpations of traditional thinking about literature, history, academia, and the world in general—at the time, often misunderstood—represented a solitary opinion amid the tumult of poetic conjecture and overwrought journalism. Babbitt's approach is conveniently relevant to the contemporary discourses on textuality, specifically the discussions of physical vs. electronic textuality. As Babbitt was critiquing what he saw as an unfiltered digression of education and learning in the academy, as a direct result of Rousseau's legacy of so-called Romanticism, so, too, are we critiquing an unfiltered digression of a narrative and belief that textuality is irrevocably transformed by an electronic text and that books are passé.

In the past decade since the exponential *viralization* of digital media and the internet, both the general populace (including the news media) and the various echelons of academic institutions in the United States have been in a digital intoxication over the potential of online

---

[1] I want to thank my friend and colleague Nathan Dorn at the Library of Congress, who first introduced me to the magnificent and tumultuous life and thought of Irving Babbitt, of which now many hours of fruitful discussion have passed between us; and to Martin Marty, who told me that upon the recommendation of his *doktorvater* Daniel J. Boorstin, he was introduced to the writings of Babbitt in 1955—and came to a clearer understanding of the idea of Humanism through Babbitt's work and thought. Apropos to this discussion: it was in the pocket-cover of a library book from the University of Chicago, where a borrowers-slip still resided, that I discovered M. Marty had checked out Babbitt's *Democracy and Leadership* in late 1955—at which point I contacted Marty to verify this and ask him about his thoughts on Babbitt. Surely, this sort of historical research and artifact trail shall be dead in the future of e-textual cataloguing and borrowing.

environments, e-texts, and the mere word "digital," sending some into orgasmic fits of digital anticipation. But for what? Statements like "in twenty years every book will be online," or "we should fear the Kindle, because it's going to change reading forever," seem to be trite, simple, and undisciplined statements, without any substantive documentation to support such claims. Attempts at bolstering these claims have increased in the recent economic downturn, where claimants offer new or used book shop closings as evidence that people aren't reading books any more, rather than recognizing other market factors, such as the idea that people aren't *buying* as many books, but are *borrowing* them from libraries or friends.

The Kindle has done little to reading practices, despite the attempts by its makers to say that it will revolutionize reading; very few studies—serious or otherwise—have been conducted on "what readers want" in terms of tactility of reading objects, and the market developers appear to be only assuming that the public wants a Kindle or eReader or some other electronic-reading object, because it is "technological."[2] But they continue to fail at the real psychology of the matter, and the major part of this failure is the misunderstanding of *the human reader*, who is supposedly understood by Amazon.com as wanting books quickly, rather than substantively (or tactilely). We are enchanted by speed, access, and technological gadgetry, so think the marketers.

So, too, did Professor Babbitt live in a complex era ripe with technological advancement, a time which prompted humanity to question itself, its time, its ethics, its responsibilities, and this required new modes of interpreting the self and the world. The early twentieth century yielded literary characters like H.G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, and James Joyce, all of whom reacted to the technological advancements and ruptures of the nascent global society of the twentieth century. And in these reactions were the chief components of a heuristic coming-of-age for writers, teachers, philosophers, and librarians alike. Fundamentally, these reactions or responses have at their very core, the idea of *interpretation*: interpreting history, literature, theology, philosophy, linguistics, and more. Interpretation is both complex and imperative to anything we do, because it is part of the interactive process of basic living and being in the world, and it is the foundation for our understanding of hermeneutics today.

For our project at hand, I want to discuss the idea and experience of hermeneutics and inherent interpretive cycles, in relation to our understanding of books as objects (or book-objects). And I wish to integrate the confluent nature of human experience with the roles that book-objects play and achieve in society, while diagnosing how these interactions of human and book affect the real essence of the modern theological library. The hermeneutic of our present is to see the value of the book in philosophical, theological, historical, and cultural-social ways as a departure in the traditional interpretation of the book. This interpretation in reading, then, especially by seminary youth, affords us a new understanding of the relationships that exist between readers and books.

It is the purpose of this paper (above all) to bring into focus a discussion on "the study of interpretation" of the book, as well as its readers. Thus, I will present historical and

[2] There are two items that come to mind when considering what the Kindle can do that may be important to some readers: a) it can change font sizes, which appeals to people with sight problems, and b) it can search a text for terms, if you are looking for something specifically.

philosophical examples of hermeneutics, while integrating a score of interviews with seminary students about their reading habits as related to books (as objects) and the role that books and students' reading habits play in the role and experience of the modern, contemporary, and future theological library. Specifically, I will begin with discussing topical areas related to hermeneutics—including phenomenology, semiotics, approach, and encounter. Then in part II, I will provide a statistical offering and speak about the specific data of students' reading habits and their opinions about theological libraries; lastly, in part III, I will briefly revisit the *theology of books* in light of the present research on hermeneutics.

PART I: Hermeneutics of Books

1. Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Semiotics

Hermeneutics may be defined in a handful of ways, though most succinctly as "the study of interpretation." This, of course, has been administered and discoursed through multiple iterations by philosophers, theologians, and historians. The field of study is too broad and complicated to explicate in full today, but I will attempt to elucidate the practical issues involved with hermeneutics, the book-object, and the relationship with the participant readers of this study and the roles played by theological libraries.

Modern hermeneutics begins with Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who suggested that human readers' "understanding" of text was integral to textual "interpretation" itself. This understanding, which is measured by "symbols" and "language" in society, is imperative. In his notebooks from 1805-6, Schleiermacher begins to discuss his theories of interpretation and understanding through the examination of what "language" and "understanding" mean philosophically.[3] Through this discourse, he gives us a better view of how we approach and experience language and our world of understanding.

Approach and experience also find a home in phenomenology, and how we come to perceive the world around us. For this may be not just texts and textuality, but in the medium of a book-object, which as we come to recognize is an emblem of not simply phenomenological importance (i.e., we see, recognize, experience books), but of semiotic and ontological importance (i.e., the book-object is encoded with variant and dynamic symbolic meanings based on individual, cultural, and social indicators, which in turn provide us as readers or those in company with books a meaning toward constructing our identity).[4] Phenomenology and semiotics are thus imperative to understanding hermeneutics, because "perception" and "symbolism" are keys to our cognition and recognitions and, thus, constructions of interpretation.[5] How we recognize

---

[3] See *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, by Friedrich Schleiermacher, edited by Heinz Kimmerle (Scholars Press/AAR: Missoula, Montana), 1977.

[4] See A. Elia "Beyond Barthes . . . " conversation on "Individual and Cultural Reception Histories," pp. 107, *ATLA Summary of Proceedings*, 2008.

[5] Husserl writes in his book *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* that even with the importance of perception, there is another realm of understanding that is part of how we construct our realities. He writes: "For me real objects are there, definite, more or less familiar, agreeing with what is actually perceived without being themselves perceived or even intuitively present. I can let my attention wander from the writing-table I have just seen and observed, through the unseen portions

that which influences is part of the hermeneutical development of the individual. And when we live in a world where book-objects have philosophical, historical, theological, cultural, and social significance, so, too, do they have significance in how the book-object has formed us through these branches of knowledge.

The main tension in the modern historical discourse of hermeneutics is among the thinking of the nineteenth-century schools of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, for both of whom interpretive intent of the author was in contrast to the interpretive angles of the reader, and the twentieth-century thinkers, who brought an ontological shift to this argument, specifically Heiddegger, who suggested Being (or *Sein*) as central to our basic interpretive functions, and then his student, Hans-Georg Gadamer, who critiqued at length the historical hermeneutical enterprises of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in his *Truth and Method*. *Truth and Method*, in broad terms, outlines the conflict between "the truth of our (individual) being" and the multiple understandings of what is meant by method (specifically scientific method); it also focuses on the optimal act of hermeneutics to be "mutualized" conversation.[6] How this fits our project today is this: recognition of the very idea of interpretation—not just *interpretation of texts*, but *interpretation of textual media* and *interpretation of environments, dimensions, and locales*, which surround us and form us from infancy—must be acknowledged in multiple layers, iterations, and circumstances. It is about understanding and defining the self through understanding and defining environments. By making hermeneutics an ontological issue, Heiddeggar and Gadamar also make it phenomenological, because we are developed through experience to understand both texts and textuality—and ultimately ourselves.

Ultimately, when we speak about hermeneutics, we are speaking about the confluence of self, experience, symbols, and social objects, which create the narratives of ourselves and others. And with these narratives we conduct our lives, profess our beliefs, and construct our societies. It is no different then when we consider our hermeneutical, phenomenological, and semiotic imaginations in this regard.

The hermeneutical imagination is what we construct around our ideas and beliefs about interpretation of objects of experience, such as books, and these imaginations are very present in our seminary students. Two questions which I asked students in this study relate this imagination—a) what comes to mind when you hear the word "book" (and is it positive or negative)? And b) what do you think about books in the contexts of history . . . such as the nineteenth, twentieth, twenty-first centuries, and the future? By offering a free-association of the word "book" itself, and then a temporal contextualization, I hoped for (and found) an introduction to seminary students' thinking about the book-object. The first question yielded a 100% positive response: books were positive, extremely positive, or even more superlatively attributed, whereas some students indicated negative responses or feelings toward electronic texts (Murray 2009). The second question found a broader response, showing that some

---

of the room behind my back to the verandah, into the garden, to the children in the summer-house, and so forth, to all the objects concerning which I precisely 'know' that they are there and yonder in my immediate co-perceived surroundings—a knowledge which has nothing of conceptual thinking in it, and first changes into clear intuiting with the bestowing of attention . . . " (Husserl, *Ideen* . . . : 91-2.

[6] See Misgeld, pp. 153-159.

students constructed their imagination of books historically, while others did not (Semmler Smith 2009). One participant considered the historicity of books since the nineteenth century as becoming more interactive with technology—where in the twenty-first century, an e-book could afford interactivity with other fans of a theological text (Fry 2009). Another student astutely observed that "all centuries are necessary to put the other ones in context" (Eichler 2009). One student noted the utility of textual media over the course of the centuries, saying that the book in the nineteenth century was "one of the few forms of media for transmitting complex information," while in the twentieth century it was "an increasingly 'optional' form of media, often casualties of television," and in the twenty-first century it has become "an almost entirely optional form of media." He did add, though, that in the future "the day will come when we run out of fossil fuels. [And] the physical book will never die" (Saler 2009). One participant noted that our attitudes to books changes through the ages (Li 2009). Three participants had specific physical attributes that they associated with books from different periods, which include the following: a) nineteenth century: smelly, but intriguing (Lindahl 2009), stodgy, European, dusty (Ballan 2009), bad paper that gets a lot of brown spots (Tsakiridis 2009); b) twentieth century: old and funny to look at (Lindahl 2009), eclectic, rich, deep, exciting, (Ballan 2009), and "the kind that I have filled my collection with" (Tsakiridis 2009); c) twenty-first century: interesting (Lindahl 2009), glossy, in multitudes (Ballan 2009), and "paperback, crisp covers, clean books" (Tsakiridis 2009). And for the future of books, the responses included "I hope there still are books!" (Lindahl 2009), digital [and] cheap (Ballan 2009), and "digital books . . . maybe Kindle-type stuff" (Tsakiridis 2009). What we have captured in this exercise is the historical imagination of students' regarding books and what they understand contextually of the book in history, as well as how they have been influenced to perceive the future of the book. Now that we have conquered the imagination of students . . . let us look at the idea of approach and encounter.

2. Approach and Encounter: Leschetizky's and Breithaupt's Piano Theories and the Book

In his groundbreaking theory of piano technique and pedagogy, Theodor Leschetizky (1830-1915) gave a whole new meaning to a foundational understanding of the piano: the idea of "approach" and "encounter." According to music historian Reginald R. Gerig, Leschetizky was Polish by birth and moved to Vienna with his family, where he became a student of Carl Czerny at the age of eleven (Gerig, 271). Leschetizky absorbed much of his musical technique from observing the performers in Vienna in the 1840s and 1850s, as well as from his experience in Russia, where in 1862 he "became head of the piano department of the St. Petersburg Conservatory where [Anton] Rubinstein was director" (Gerig, 272). But as Gerig writes, even though much has been written about the famed "Leschetizky method," it is not easily defined, most notably because Leschetizky himself denied a specific method, saying "I *have* no method and I *will have* no method . . . Write over your music-room the motto: "NO METHOD!" (Gerig, 273). Yet despite this insistence, Leschetizky had profound influence on approaching and encountering the piano—an object as instrument—for all succeeding generations of pianists and teachers. His theories resound deeply with our understanding of hermeneutics as an enterprise of preparedness, as well as how we mentally, physically, and spiritually encounter an object that is destined to give us a product from that encounter—whether piano or book. It is not so much that we must take literally his ideas of positioning before an object, such as

when he says, "Sit at the piano unconstrained and erect, like a good horseman on his horse, and yield to the movements of the arms as far as necessary, as the rider yields to the movements of his horse" (Gerig, 280). Rather, it is that we are part of a continued approach, continued encounter, continued learning experience, and phenomenological event(s).

Another German theorist, Rudolf Maria Breithaupt (1873-1945) expanded the limits of the Leschetizky method of approach and encounter, developing what is called the *Weight* or *Weight-Touch Technique*. In this approach and encounter with the piano, Breithaupt revealed a kinesthetic and cognitive relationship between the person and the instrument-object that emphasized the motions basic to performative actions. As historian Gerig writes, "For Breithaupt and his followers it was almost entirely arm activity, free falling weight, and super-relaxation. Weight and relaxation became a passion, a cult, the very atmosphere pianists breathed" (Gerig, 329).

Now the appropriate question to ask at this point is, what does any of this have to do with books or the hermeneutics of books? What Leschetizky and Breithaupt accomplished in their theories of piano technique to develop a greater pianism was to renegotiate and completely rethink the ontological role of the human character in relation to the piano, and understand what the entire hermeneutical structure of not just instrumental performance was, but what the engagement of mental (or cognitive) and bodily (or kinethestic) motion and execution were as interpretive actions. Now, a book is *not* a piano. And to draw any parallels, I believe, would not be completely successful. But the parallels to be drawn are simply the existing and changing hermeneutical engagements between human and objects. In this study, I asked students if they approached a book like they approached an instrument like a piano. For most, the answer was no, but these answers were not cut-and-dry. Students had a variety of opinions about this question (and its answers), and gave thought-provoking responses that ultimately give us a sense of how the utility of a book-object relates to its performative functionality. It also underscores the relevance of the hermeneutical shifts brought about by both Leschetizky and Breithaupt.

One participant (Fry 2009) responded by saying that approaching a book gave him a sense of "anticipation and relaxation," which heralds back to the language describing Breithaupt's weight-technique of anticipatory relaxation. Yet, others make the claim that the approach to a book is not like approaching an instrument, but like approaching a person (Luft 2009). And this could bring up endless interpretations about the role of book as less of an object and more of an anthropomorphized entity, as we spoke about briefly in last year's paper. Another response gives a different dimension to the question, where the respondent noted, "The act of reading is certainly a performance—bringing critical skills to bear" (Saler 2009). Yet another student suggested, "I approach books with anticipation especially if it's a well worn, loved copy . . . but I don't relate to approaching a book as a performative act" (Lindahl 2009). Another variation on this is from a student who notes, "I derive more comfort from reading than from playing [an instrument]. There is something passive about my experience of reading that does not feel performative. I like to take breaks and look about when I read, something that I can't really do as I play the guitar" (Ballan 2009). We shall talk about this briefly in a latter section in a discussion on the public vs. private act of reading as performance. Another student began by saying that "I cannot compare reading books with playing instruments," but later suggested

that reading "poetry or classical literature" was or could be similar to playing or listening to music (Li 2009). So for her, it depends on context. Yet another (Semmler Smith 2009) said the approach to books included "anticipation," the desire to learn something, and the hope of being entertained (Semmler Smith 2009). One of the most interesting responses, though, in comparing an instrument to a book was from one student who said, "I approach my musical instruments the same as I do a book because they both serve a purpose and function . . . and have a final purpose within life" (Murray 2009). Another student noted that the approaches to instrument and text were quite different, in that one approaches a text with "an anticipation of [the] unknown," while that may not be the case with an instrument (Freier 2009). The final participant had a very descriptive comment, saying, "When I play my guitar, I usually do so because I find it to be a peaceful, joyful, spiritually nourishing experience. I read for the exact same reasons. Both experiences take me away from the moment and inspire me" (Gilbert 2009).

The comparison of book to instrument may not always work, but the responses from students evoke a certain understanding of approach and encounter, where some students found a connection and others did not. But the most important part of this discussion is the recognition that a) our relationships with specific objects (whether books, instruments, or perfomative utensils) are based on our social and cultural understandings of these objects; b) our approach and encounter are thus constructed and re-constructed by our experiences; and c) these are the foundations of the hermeneutical reinventions that individuals like Heidegger, Gadamar, Leschetizky, and Breithaupt all contributed to, either on a philosophical or practical level.

PART II: Statistical Offering—Readers and Their Libraries

1. Readers

One of the important aspects of this study that I'd like share with you today is the statistical, as well as the qualitative, data for this study. Answers to the 31-question set in the survey include details of age, gender, and educational background of students; what type of readers the students describe themselves as; where and how they read; what percentage of reading is done with physical vs. electronic texts; and how necessary it is for a student to physically browse theological library stacks. Of over three dozen surveys sent out to students, only 20 were completed and returned. Though this does not equate to parity by percentage to the number of faculty whom I interviewed in 2007, it does equal in number. I hope these data will add to our continuing conversation in a productive way.

a. Age—Gender—Educational Background

The age, gender, and educational background of participants follow: 13 women responded; 7 men responded. The categories include: Ages 20-24= 2 Total (1 M, 1 F); Ages 25-29= 11 Total (3 M, 8 F); Ages 30-34= 4 Total (2 M, 2 F); Ages 35+= 3 Total (1 M, 2 F). The largest group of those answering the survey consists of students between 25-29 years of age, who comprised over 50% of the respondents. Of those surveyed, 65% were under 30 years of age. All students were graduate students; 85% were working toward MDiv. degrees or had an MDiv. degree and were furthering their education, and 25% percent (5 students) were working on a Ph.D.

b. Types of Readers

In order to find some consistency in identifying how readers might describe themselves, each participant was offered a choice of eight options with the question "How would you describe yourself as a reader?" Respondents were allowed to choose more than one of the options. There probably could have been other options, as one participant noted. He selected "Enjoy reading, both in and outside of school," but then noted that he didn't always actually like what he read in school (Tsakiridis 2009). The categories that were given to students included: a) Don't read at all; b) Read sometimes, if necessary for school or work; c) Enjoy reading, both in and outside of school; d) Enjoy school reading only; e) Enjoy personal reading only; f) Love reading; g) Voracious reader; h) Read even in my sleep. Responses were very interesting and I have listed them below. Remember, there are more responses than participants, because participants were allowed to choose more than one option:

Type of Reader	Number of Respondents
a) Don't read at all	0
b) Read sometimes, if necessary for school or work	0
c) Enjoy reading, both in and outside of school	11
d) Enjoy school reading only	1
e) Enjoy personal reading only	1
f) Love reading	11
g) Voracious reader	5
h) Read even in my sleep	2

According to these numbers, most respondents considered themselves people who either enjoy or love reading. One respondent said they "enjoy school reading only," one said they "enjoy personal reading only," and 25% of respondents (five students) called themselves voracious readers; of those five students, two also chose (h—that they "read even in my sleep" to distinguish the hyper-voracity of their reading desires.

c. Where and How Students Read

Students, like most readers, have a variety of places where they read, either for pleasure, for school, or for work. When asked where students read, the responses included home, school, libraries, coffee shops, and outside. Perhaps the most interesting places for reading included "on swings," "while walking" (Nelson 2009), and "in cars" (Gilbert 2009). To some extent, these data demonstrate that those who participated in the study were overwhelmingly "omnilocal" readers. Yet their localities had specific needs of comfort, light, and sound.[7]

The number one place where students read is home—100% of the respondents answered with "home" or some specific room or on a piece of furniture. Seventeen of twenty students (or 85%) read in the library. Seven of twenty readers (or 35%) prefer coffee shops—for reasons

[7] Note work done by Ruth Gaba.

that include the access to beverages and the opportunity to be both studying and reading and to see or be seen by others.[8] Comfort is important for most when reading, but for some, a desk is preferred if they need to stay awake. For those who said they read anywhere (four of twenty or 20%), this included on buses and places outside of libraries and coffee shops. The "where" and "how" students read may indicate the amenability of certain reading environments, as well as the specific reading habits and abilities (distraction vs. non-distraction) of readers, as well as the psychology of these habits, which I will discuss briefly next.

d. Reading Valence and Hybridity

Part of the issues explored in this section touch upon another idea that I have encountered recently, and that deals with the values of semiotic character of books not just on shelves, but books in transport; that is, whether or not readers show off their books in public. Do people (in this case, students) read books in public to make a statement about what they are reading, thus showing what they "are knowing?" Despite the acknowledgements or admittance that students do this, what is factual is that the book continues to carry a semiotic value by demonstrating a "fact" or "symbolic artifact" between social humans; it must be recognized that on one side of the social symbiosis is the "reader" and the other is the "observer." The "reader" is by definition either a "social reader" (reads in public), "solitary reader," (reads in private), or "hybrid reader" (reads both in public and private). A "social reader" enjoys the company of others, and is not only able to read in public, but is consciously aware of what reading in public means, entails, and contributes to social symbiotic behaviors—such as how what they are reading will attract or detract the presence of the observers in a social setting. The "solitary reader" is a person who enjoys complete solitude for reading (and in some cases, this translates into learning), someone who values the intimacy of the individual relationship between human reader and book, and does not wish to be "observed" or "seen" by others in this most intimate of activities (note R. Luft response). The "hybrid reader," then, is the reader who has a place somewhere between the "social" and "solitary" reader.

On the other side of this symbiosis is the "observer." It is really in the case of the "social reader" that the observer comes into play. But it is also true for the "solitary reader" as well, because the "solitary reader" is trying to escape the prying eyes of the "observer." This brings to mind the illuminating photos of Hungarian photographer Andre Kertesz, in his work "On Reading," which in many cases secretly captures readers in action—many of them are in the process of "solitary reading," but the voyeur captures them with his camera in an almost erotic pose. Still, most of the student respondents were hybrid readers; only two of twenty (#14, #17) said they were "solitary" readers, seeking quiet, silence, and solitude, and no one said they were exclusively a "social reader."

e. Percentage of Physical vs. Electronic Reading: Tactility and Physicality Issues

In this study, I asked a handful of questions about the tactility and physicality of books. The first of these (#7) asked, "What percentage of your daily reading materials are physical texts (books, magazines, newspapers) vs. e-texts (such as reading on your laptop)?"

Of the twenty respondents, only sixteen answered, with percentages ranging from 50% physical text to 100% physical text reading. (The remaining four did not give percentages,

[8] Ibid.

but all explicitly noted that they overwhelming preferred to read physical texts.) The median is therefore 75% of physical text reading, while the average of the sixteen respondents is 75.5625%. This would surely be higher if the four participants who did not give percentages would have done so. Additionally, I do not see any clear indication of percentages correlating to type of reader, though there may be something to be discovered in this, as most readers giving higher percentages of reading physical texts did consider themselves as people who either "love reading" or are "voracious readers."

The next question (#17) asked: "How do you approach books?—do you imagine them as objects or abstractly or both? How does this compare with reading electronic texts?"

As one participant noted, the importance of books is rooted in identity and the extension and embodiment of the self in the book-object; he writes that "this becomes a sort of legacy—a tangible proof of my existence" that does not exist in or with electronic texts (Tsakiridis 2009). Respondents considered books as "objects," as "abstract," as "both object and abstract," and as "phenomena and/or experiences." Only one respondent specifically called e-texts "abstract" (Robinson 2009), though this was more commonly expressed in last year's study. Twelve of twenty respondents (60%) said they thought of books as "objects" only (1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10-12, 14-15, 18-19). Only one participant said that books were "abstract" (9). Four of twenty (20%) said books were both "objects" and "abstract" ideas, and nine of twenty (45%) said that books were phenomena or experiences.

When students were asked about how they felt when they saw a damaged book vs. an e-text carrier (such as a computer), there was a uniform response. The responses to the same question we asked last year were nearly identical to what faculty said in the previous study. Nearly all participants (90%+) felt a sense of sadness when seeing a damaged book. In fact, "sad" or "sadness" was used almost exclusively by participants to describe their feeling. The feelings that were evoked regarding broken computers or e-readers was one more of dismay and upset about how the earth would be affected—especially as a pollutant of the earth. Almost nowhere else did the ideas of ecology, recycling, and ethical responsibility toward our planet come into discussion than with this question.

Question 31 asked how students would best describe their intimacy with texts, specifically books. The answers ranged from "tactile" to "dramatic," "revelatory," and "enlightening," but, most interestingly, a term used to describe human-book intimacy was "sacred." Perhaps no surprise from seminarians, but as one student noted, the relationship and intimacy of book-objects is "more real than online texts" (Lindahl 2009). One participant wrote, "Who cares about a computer?" (Eichler 2009), while another person noted that computers are "designed to be outdated and discarded in short order" (Saler 2009). One student did note that damaged books make her feel "sad," but that she was also concerned with how these "dead objects" were disposed of—again a concern for the environment (Semmler Smith 2009). Another participant offered *therapeutics* as an answer regarding their tactile relationship with books—specifically the comfort of a hymnal during worship (Fry 2009). The palliative nature of book-objects for some can be observed in a statement like "comforting companionship" used by one participant (who described herself as an only child of older parents), where the book was not simply an object-as-friend, but something perhaps even greater (Nelson 2009).

f. How Necessary is it to Browse the Stacks: Kinesthetics and Spatiality

In an attempt to elucidate the kinesthetic, spatial, and tactile needs of students and their books, I asked the following question: "How necessary is it for you to browse the stacks . . . either for research/course work or for your own interests?" The motive in asking this question was to elicit an understanding about kinesthetic learning and cognitive psychology. The results show that the physicality of books is still integral to how we interact with textual environments. The statistics broke down as follows for the twenty participants: On a scale of 1-10 (1=completely unnecessary to browse; 10=absolutely necessary to browse), the average for research/courses was 8.5; the median was 7. The average for one's own interests was 6.83, while the median was 5.5. Eight respondents gave a score of 10/10 for research/course work, and three respondents answered 9/10. Thus, eleven out of twenty participants said 9/10 or higher. For pleasure reading or own's own interest, eight of twenty gave a score of 8 or better (10/10=four respondents, 9/10=one respondent, 8/10=three respondents). The result of this statistic shows that—at least when it comes to research and course work—the physical apparatus of the book-object, its location on shelves, and its proximity to human reach is still very important to the way we work, interact, and perform our intellectual duties and research.

2. Theological and Seminary Libraries

Now that we have come to know what seminary students' reading practices are, I will briefly detail their thoughts about seminary libraries. Several questions were designed to elicit student opinions about the uses and meaning of theological and seminary libraries, but also to understand how they might envision future theological libraries. One of the most telling and extraordinary comments was from a young woman who believed the future theological library should emphasize openness more than technology, or, as she put it, "basically a public library with a strong emphasis on Bible, faith, and church life." (Nelson 2009).

The basic questions for this section included: 1) What do you use the seminary library for? 2) What do you see the role of the theological/seminary library to be? 3) Do you think theological or seminary libraries are old fashioned, outmoded, or in need of change? and 4) What might the library of the future look like in seminaries?

Question 1: The reasons given by students for using the library include reading, studying, writing, emailing, working, and resting. All participants (save one, who did not answer the question) named the library as the place where they access resources—mostly books in regular circulation, reserve, or reference collections (100%). Eight of twenty (or 40%) specifically noted "reference" or "reference librarian" as why they utilize the library. Only three of twenty (or 15%) said they used the library for email or computing, which is a surprisingly low statistic. Five of twenty (or 25%) specifically cited "writing" or a related action (e.g., "translating") as a use of the library. Ten of twenty (or 50%) use the library as a place to study or read. Two of twenty (or 10%) use it as a place of employment. Two of twenty (or 10%) use the library as a place to rest or take a nap, and one of twenty (or 5%) cited it as a place to meet other people of like interests to speak to, though this number is likely higher, as other students mentioned this elsewhere in the study.

Question 2: When asked what the role of a theological library should be, students responded collectively, in a single voice, with three specific ideas: a) resources, especially multicultural and cross-disciplinary, from different perspectives; b) professional and dedicated staff to teach and navigate those resources; and c) adequate and amenable space for study and relaxation.

Question 3: When students were asked if they thought theological libraries were old-fashioned, outmoded, or in need of change, the responses were also very interesting. Seventeen of twenty (or 85%) said "No, theological libraries are not old-fashioned or outmoded," presumably making their claim based on their own seminary library. Of course, with these "no" answers, there were just a few recommendations to expand seating, lighting, and more coffee. Two of twenty (or 10%) said "Yes," also making a value judgment based on their specific library rather than theological libraries in general. The qualms for these respondents were about the aesthetics of the library and parts of the collection that they wanted to see expanded (e.g., theology and art). One participant answered "Maybe," saying "If libraries are not outdated, they will be soon . . . there will be no need of searching for a book on the shelves" (Li 2009). This is an interesting statement, especially having noted the tactile needs of students in browsing and searching the stacks. Perhaps she is mistaken?

Question 4: Finally, when asked about the future of theological libraries, the students' answers were quite varied. Perhaps my favorite among them was from one young woman who said, "Let me put it this way, I would die if the library didn't exist" (Eichler 2009). Another which made me pause was from a Ph.D. student, who noted, "I hope it looks very much like it does now. Theological education should resist the trendiness that infects other areas of our collective culture" (Saler 2009). One student said, "I fear that there will be fewer books and more computers. I hope for the opposite!" (Ballan 2009). Or, most bluntly, "I'd be happy if it looked similar to how it looks now" (Carson 2009). Yet with this, ten of twenty of the students (or 50%) specifically mentioned technology, even if that technology was something they believe would NOT make the library necessarily better. Three of twenty (or 15%) commented on a fusion of technology and more books. Four of twenty (or 20%) spoke about physical space. Only one person said that not much will change, since theological libraries are so slow to change in general.

PART III: Theological Categories and Hermeneutics

1. Revisiting a Theology of Books in Light of Hermeneutics

Last June, in the cavernous halls of the Ottawa Westin, I completed my paper on *The Theology of Books in the Digital Age* and was immediately tossed the most auspicious question (by John Weaver): "Where's the theology of books in all of this?" The implications of this question unfolded in many ways over the remaining hours of the conference, but also over the past year. And in the answers given by participants in this study, it was clear that many seminary students think in terms of a "theology of books." Specifically, Trinitarian theologies, theodicy, hamartiology, demonology, sacramentology (or "book as Eucharist"), and idolatry were all offered as companionable experiences of books. Students differentiated between experiencing books "spiritually" and "of the Spirit" or as specifically pneumatological, while others evoked a Paterological experience with books, noting that "typically [in the] first Person of the Trinity—there's always the possibility of creation with books" (Nelson 2009). Two students specifically expressed a Christology of books, one noting that this experience is derived from topics of incarnation (Gilbert 2009). Further studies in embodiment, textuality, and extension of the human found in the book-object, as noted by one student (Tsakiridis 2009), may elucidate the Christological nature of human experiences with the book-object, as with the example of

Ricouer's ideal of heaven, which I discussed in last year's paper. As for theodicy, hamartiology, and demonology, one student suggested that books can not only be friends, as many suggest, but enemies that should be destroyed—books that contain bad, incorrect, or worse, inflammatory and hateful information. He writes, "I do not hold them as sacred, [but . . .] as demonic" (Tsakiridis 2009). Sin in the world, our relationship to sin, and the temptations of sin are bundled up in the capsule of the book-object in these specific circumstances. One student compared reading books to taking the Eucharist, thus expressing a "sacramentology of books," where a sacred object becomes part of you as you metaphorically and metaphysically ingest the text (Carson 2009). Another student cautioned against book idolatry—noting that the message is more important than the book carrying it (Semmler Smith 2009). (Of course, if the book is not being worshipped, and instead is a pathway to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, then we mustn't have to worry about any bibliolatry!) Nonetheless, topics for theologies of books are alive among the younger generations of users and are worth examining further, and, in fact, may give us a better understanding about future readers and libraries.

2. Book-Object and Content-Object: A Clarification

In the course of this research, I have discovered that there are subtle distinctions made between our perceptions of and encounters with books. Specifically, the distinction between the so-called 'book-object' and what I'd like to call a 'content-object' (and I don't particularly like saturating you with neologisms!). But this distinction is pertinent, and can be described simply as follows: 1) A *book-object* experience describes the phenomenon when you encounter books, any books—such as when you discover a new bookstore or enter a bookshop or library and you feel a sense of (presumably!) delight, excitement, anticipation, or other visceral reaction. 2) A *content-object* experience describes the phenomenon when you encounter a specific book, a specific title. The *content-object* IS still a *book-object*, but it is a distinct experience with our holistic—and perhaps organic—understanding of books as objects.

Epilogue: Henry Conrad Brockmeyer and the St. Louis Hegelians

I cannot end today without speaking about an event that occurred in this glorious city of St. Louis 142 years ago, in 1867. It was in that year, upon the banks of this thriving river town along the mighty, serpentine, and muddied Mississippi, that the first major journal of American philosophy was established. The publication of the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy (JSP)*, according to American philosopher Morris Raphael Cohen, was the beginning of secular philosophy in America. But what makes this story remarkable, both in 1867 and for us today in 2009, is that this journal wasn't founded "by university professors, but by 'practical men who believed they had found [a] superior point of view, fruitful insight into the fields of religion, art, history, education, and even practical politics'" (Good, James Allen, 62). These individuals were called the St. Louis Hegelians. One of the main characters in this coterie was Henry Conrad Brokmeyer, a man so philosophically anguished by the Civil War that he "sought to reconcile his Thoreauean sense of personal liberty with his Hegelian sense of social obligation" (Good, 68). And so, the St. Louis Hegelians, professionals in their own fields, sought to instill *the thinking* with *the practical*. Like ATLA's new journal, *Theological Librarianship*, we as professionals in our fields may continue to pursue our interests while combining the intellectual with the practical. We may uncover the historical, the archival, the hermeneutical . . . but we

may hope to discover among all of these discourses and examinations a practical purpose that will strengthen and enliven our libraries and professions, so that in a hundred years we'll still be talking about the need for books, libraries, and librarians while actively cultivating those technological needs in the hybridity of global media and community.

Bibliography

Babbitt, Irving. *Literature and the American College*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1908.

___. *Rousseau and Romanticism*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918.

Carter, Stephen L. "Where's the Bailout for Publishing," in *The Daily Beast*. March 17, 2009. [Online]

Dilthey, Wilhelm. *The Essence of Philosophy*. Translated by Stephen A. Emery and William T. Emery. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1954.

Elia, Anthony J. "Beyond Barthes and Chartier: The Theology of Books in the Digital Age," in *ATLA Summary of Proceedings*, 2008, pp. 105-116.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. New York: Crossroad, 1989.

Gerig, Reginald R. *Famous Pianists and Their Technique*. n.l.: R.B. Luce, 1974.

Good, James A. *A Search for Unity in Diversity: The "Permanent Hegelian Deposit" in the Philosophy of John Dewey*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.

Husserl, Edmund. *Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*.Translated by James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

Kockelmans, Joseph J. *Heidegger on Art and Art Works*. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985.

___, editor and translator. *On Heidegger and Language*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972.

Misgeld, Dieter. "On Gadamer's Hermeneutics" in Robert Hollinger, ed. *Hermeneutics and Praxis*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.

Schleiermacher, F.D.E. *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*. Translated by James Duke and Jack Forstman. Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977.

Surveys-Interviews (# indicates the order in which the surveys were received. All surveys were conducted by A. Elia at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.)

Anonymous (#1). 2009. February 16.

Ballan, Anna (#17). 2009. March 9.

Binder, Jeff (#5). 2009. February 16.

Brink, Nathan (#2). 2009. February 16.

Carson, Emily (#19). 2009. March 11.

Eichler, Honna (#8). 2009. February 25.

Freese, Gretchen (#3). 2009. February 17.

Freier, Amanda (#12). 2009. February 16.

Fry, Richard (#4). 2009. February 18.

Gilbert, Melissa (#20). 2009. March 13.

Li, Natalia (#14). 2009. February 16.

Lindahl, Katie (#15). 2009. March 9.

Luft, Rebecca (#7). 2009. February 24.

Miyamoto, Arata (#13). 2009. February 16.

Murray, Christopher (#11). 2009. February 27.

Nelson, Angela (#6). 2009. February 24.

Robinson, Janai (#16). 2009. March 9.

Saler, Robert (#9). 2009. February 27.

Semmler Smith, Sarah (#10). 2009. February 27.

Tsakiridis, George (#18). 2009. March 10.

Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.