



**MONASH** University

**Decorative and Democratising: How the Coffee-table Book  
was Popularised in the Post-war Era**

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## Abstract

Coffee-table books are largely recognised for their large format, photographic content and decorative status. However, they had a central place at the intersection of post-war social change, advances in colour printing and cultural entrepreneurship. Increasing affluence from the 1950s saw an upturn in home acquisitions, consumption of furniture and home decoration as Americans, Britons and Australians were emerging from post-war austerity. Coffee tables became a space for expressing taste by “dressing” them with objects such as photobooks. Although the idea of appropriating books for decorative purposes was not new, this practice flourished with the addition of coffee tables in post-war living rooms. The convergence of coffee tables and photobooks saw the term “coffee-table book” come into common usage as the mass-consumption of these books increased. This development was fueled by advances in colour printing technology, which enabled the mass-production of high-quality, full-colour photographic books.

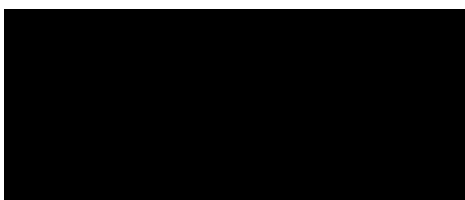
However, social change and technology do not alone account for the emergence of the coffee-table book. It also required the agency of publishers such as David Brower in America, Paul Hamlyn in Britain and Lloyd O’Neil in Australia who championed and popularised the medium by bringing subjects such as the environment, architectural heritage and art, and landscapes to a general readership. This thesis demonstrates that the popularisation of the coffee-table book is symbolic of an era when social change, advances in colour printing technology and entrepreneurship and innovation converged and seeks to understand the context for the development of the coffee-table book, asking the following questions: When did coffee-table books emerge? What is their cultural function, given that the field of publishing is dominated by text-filled books? Why are they called coffee-table books? And, why does the term “coffee-table book” have derogatory overtones?

Since most research focuses on text-filled books, the coffee-table book has been largely absent from book history and therefore inadequately addressed. This thesis aims to address this gap in the research. It examines the coffee-table book within a single study, taking an interdisciplinary approach which views the phenomenon through a prism of book history, cultural studies and sociology. Drawing on historic archival material, interviews and textual analysis, the research takes an international perspective, focusing on America, Britain and Australia, countries who share comparable publishing, cultural and social histories.

## Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature:



Print Name: Christine Elliott

Date: June 29, 2018

## **Achievements during candidature**

### **Conference presentations**

During my candidature I presented papers at two conferences:

Christine Elliott, “The Coffee-table Book: A Genre Not Limited by Language or Purpose.” The Tenth Annual Conference, Canadian Association for the Study of Book Culture—“Books without Boundaries”, Brock University, St Catharines, Ontario, Canada—May 27 and 28, 2014. I was also invited to participate in a roundtable panel, “Studying Book History Across Borders” along with other international PhD students.

———, “The Sierra Club’s Exhibit Format Series: The Appearance of Nature on Post-War American Coffee Tables.” Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand (BSANZ) Inc. conference, “Turning the Page: Bibliographical Innovation and the Legacy of Aldus Manutius”, the University of Melbourne, November 26 and 27, 2015.

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When I began my PhD in 2013, Monash University introduced a component of coursework and training hours to their PhD programs. The Film, Media and Communications HDR coursework program, facilitated by Associate Professor Mark Gibson, provided an important grounding in conceptual frameworks and theories, presentations by other academics and our group was a vital means of connecting to a cohort of PhD students. Also thank you to Dr Kate Cregan for facilitating the GRiP Thesis Writing Workshops and to the participants, particularly Jocelyn, Angela, Jim and Prue. Kate is a supportive advocate to PhD students wanting to receive feedback on their writing in a collegial atmosphere. GRiP is also another valuable way of connecting with PhD students. A big thank you must also go to Monash University for providing funds to PhD students for their research and professional development. During my candidature I was able to travel to America, Canada and the UK to conduct interviews, access archival material, attend the 2015 London Book Fair and had the invaluable experience of presenting a paper at an overseas conference and participating in a roundtable panel.

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# Contents

List of figures	x
List of tables	xii
List of appendices	xiii
Introduction	1
Chapter One	Conceptual and Theoretical Framework 23
Chapter Two	How Did Coffee-table Books Come into Being? 52
Chapter Three	The Reception of Coffee-table Books 86
Chapter Four	The Domestic Sphere, Coffee Tables, and Gifts 124
Chapter Five	At What Cost, the Earth? <i>The Exhibit Format Series</i> 155
Chapter Six	Breaking the Mould: Conspicuous Commodification 190
Chapter Seven	A Publishing Turning Point: <i>Australia in Colour</i> 225
Conclusion	263
Bibliography	273
Appendices	286

## List of figures

- 1.1 The Communications Circuit, 1982 by Robert Darnton.
- 2.1 Page 117 illustrates Hurley's best-known photograph of the wreck of *Endurance*, reproduced in Alasdair McGregor's *Frank Hurley: A Photographer's Life*.
- 2.2 Page 6 depicts three images of Australian life and a Koala along with text in *Australia in Natural Colour* by John Hurley.
- 2.3 Dust jacket, *Drawings of Leonardo and Michelangelo* by Jaromir Pecirha.
- 3.1 Pages 8–9 illustrate the High-Tech movement style in *High-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home* by Joan Kron and Suzanne Slesin.
- 3.2 Pages 24–25 illustrate the High-Tech movement style in *High-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home* by Joan Kron and Suzanne Slesin.
- 3.3 Pages 62–63 illustrate the High-Tech movement style in *High-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home* by Joan Kron and Suzanne Slesin.
- 3.4 Dust jacket, *The Art Book* by Phaidon Press.
- 3.5 Pages 206–207 illustrate the alphabetical juxtaposition of Hamilton with Hammershoi, reproduced in *The Art Book* by Phaidon Press.
- 3.6 Pages 252–253 illustrate the alphabetical juxtaposition of Klimt with Kline, reproduced in *The Art Book* by Phaidon Press.
- 3.7 Pages 274–275 illustrate the alphabetical juxtaposition of Lichtenstein with Limbourg, reproduced in *The Art Book* by Phaidon Press.
- 3.8 Dust jacket, *The Australians* by Robert Goodman and George Johnston.
- 3.9 Pages 90–91 illustrate images of Australia along with text and captions, *The Australians* by Robert Goodman and George Johnston.
- 3.10 Pages 118–119 illustrate images of Australia along with text and captions, *The Australians* by Robert Goodman and George Johnston.
- 3.11 Page 46 illustrates a section of the Bayeux Tapestry, reproduced in *The Bayeux Tapestry* by David M. Wilson.
- 4.1 Page 352 of *Notes and Queries* Journal dated November 14, 1925 is an example of a query about books becoming furniture.
- 4.2 Page 25 of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated April 1960 shows that books were being used to decorate homes.
- 4.3 The front cover of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated September, 1961 illustrates a 1960s living room layout with coffee table as a central focus of the room.



- 4.4 Page 5 of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated August, 1965 illustrates a coffee table located in a living room decorated with coffee table books and a large ceramic dish.
- 4.5 Page 29 of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated August, 1965 illustrates a coffee table located in a living room decorated with a bottle of alcohol, two glasses and two coffee cups.
- 4.6 Page 20 of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated December, 1966 illustrates a coffee table located in a living room decorated with a soda syphon and two glasses.
- 4.7 Page 28 of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated December, 1966 is an illustration of guests being entertained around a coffee table located in the living room.
- 4.8 Page 11 of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated March, 1967 illustrates two girls reading picture books in front of a coffee table located in the living room, decorated with one large open coffee-table book and a closed coffee-table books.
- 4.9 Page 93 of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated March, 1967 illustrates two adults sitting in a living room watching television with a coffee table placed between themselves and the television.
- 5.1 Pages 4 and 5 of *This Is the American Earth* show the juxtaposition of Nancy Newhall's text with Ansel Adams' black and white double-page photograph.
- 5.2 Frontmatter chapter titles, *This Is the American Earth* by the Sierra Club. [Not paginated].
- 5.3 Text and an image of Spring, *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World* by the Sierra Club, [not paginated].
- 5.4 Text and an image of Summer, *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World* by the Sierra Club, [not paginated].
- 5.5 Text and an image of Autumn, *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World* by the Sierra Club, [not paginated].
- 5.6 Text and an image of Winter, *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World* by the Sierra Club, [not paginated].
- 6.1 Front covers and dust jackets, *World Architecture: An Illustrated History* by Lloyd Seton; *Buses, Trolleys & Trams* by Charles Dunbar; *Art Treasures in the British Isles: Monuments, Masterpieces, Commissions and Collections* by general editors; *Dictionary of Needlework: An Encyclopaedia of Artistic and Plain and Fancy Needlework* by Sophia Caulfeild and Blanche C. Seward.
- 6.2 Dust jackets, *Illustrated History of Rock Music* by Jeremy Pascall and *Cigarette Pack Art* by Chris Mullen.
- 6.3 Dust jackets, *Larousse Encyclopedia of Prehistoric* edited by Rene Huyghe and *Ancient Art* and *Larousse Encyclopedia of Byzantine and Medieval Art* edited by Rene Huyghe.
- 6.4 Pages 58–59 show a selection of The Paul Hamlyn Group Australia books advertised in *The Australian Book Scene*, 1978-79.

- 7.1 Front cover, *Australia in Natural Colour* by Frank Hurley illustrating images, text and layout of the book.
- 7.2 Four pages from *Australia in Natural Colour* by Frank Hurley illustrating images, text and layout of the book, [not paginated].
- 7.3 Dust jacket, *Australia in Colour* by Robin Smith. Portrait orientation.
- 7.4 Text and plate 11– Snow Gums in Mount Hotham, Victoria, *Australia in Colour* by Robin Smith, [not paginated]. Portrait orientation.
- 7.5 Text and plate 14–Loch Ard Gorge, Victoria, *Australia in Colour* by Robin Smith, [not paginated]. Landscape orientation.
- 7.6 Text and plate 30–The Devil’s Marbles, Northern Territory, *Australia in Colour* by Robin Smith, [not paginated].
- 7.7 Text and plate 32–Ghost-gums, Central Australia, *Australia in Colour* by Robin Smith, [not paginated]. Portrait orientation.
- 7.8 Front cover and stock list, *Lansdowne Press Catalogue*, 1969/1970, [not paginated].
- 7.9 Front cover and pages 41–44 of stock list by titles in *Lansdowne Press Catalogue*, 1972
- 7.10 Front cover and pages 45–46 of Stock List by Titles, *Lansdowne Press Catalogue*, 1970.
- 7.11 Pages 551–552 of the 1964–1969 *Australian Bureau of Statistics Census* show book publishing figures from that period.

## **List of tables**

- 2.0 A curated list of coffee-table books published in newspapers and magazines 1960–1980 from the databases of *The New York Times* historical newspapers archive (1851–2008), *The Times Digital Archive* 1785–1985 and *Trove*, Digitised newspapers and more, National Library of Australia.
- 3.0 A curated list of quotes about coffee-table books published in newspapers and magazines 1960–1980 from the databases of *The New York Times* historical newspapers archive (1851–2008), *The Times Digital Archive* 1785–1985 and *Trove*, Digitised newspapers and more, National Library of Australia.
- 4.0 A curated list of coffee-table books aimed at the Christmas market, including prices, published in newspapers and magazines, 1960–1980 from the databases of *The New York Times* historical newspapers archive (1851–2008), *The Times Digital Archive* 1785–1985 and *Trove*, Digitised newspapers and more, National Library of Australia.
- 7.0 A sample list of Australian titles, authors and cost from the 1972 *Lansdowne Press Catalogue* stock list.

## List of appendices

Appendix 1: Curated list of coffee-table books published in *The New York Times*, New York, USA 1960–1979

Appendix 2: Curated list of coffee-table books published in *The Times*, London, UK 1964–1980

Appendix 3: Curated list of coffee-table books published in Australian newspapers and magazines 1965–1979

Appendix 4: Curated list of quotes about coffee-table books published in *The New York Times*, New York, USA 1960–979

Appendix 5: Curated list of quotes about coffee-table books published in *The Times*, London, UK 1964–1980

Appendix 6: Curated list of quotes about coffee-table books published in Australian newspapers and magazines 1965–1979

## Introduction

In 2009, I co-authored a coffee-table book *Custom Bicycles: A Passionate Pursuit*. When the publisher handed me a first copy of the book I gently peeled away its protective cover to reveal the smell and feel of a freshly published book. This coffee-table book represented more than its eye-catching cover and its material attributes. This 27 cm, 240 page, large-format photographically illustrated book was the culmination of months of research, 24 face-to-face interviews over three days at the “North American Handmade Bike Show” in Portland, Oregon, the writing of approximately 700 words per 39 chapters and numerous hours of project management involving bike builders who resided in North America, Europe and Australia, to make sure that all requested materials were received in a timely manner to meet the publisher’s deadlines. Then it was over to the publisher’s design team, coordinating editor and marketing manager to produce what I now held in my hands, which was destined to reach North American, European and Australian markets.<sup>1</sup>

The history and role of the coffee-table book piqued my interest during the publishing experience just described. Questions that came to mind were: When did coffee-table books emerge? What is their cultural function, given that the field of publishing is dominated by text-filled books? Why are large-format photographically illustrated books called coffee-table books? And, why does the term “coffee-table book” have derogatory overtones?

To begin, what are coffee-table books? The answer to this question may seem straightforward. However, I argue that coffee-table books are a discursive object, which leaves them open to vague interpretations. The term emerges at a particular historical moment, for certain identifiable reasons. It is not without meaning, but it is difficult to pin it down with a precise analytical definition. When photobooks became commercialised in the post-war era, they gained popularity within a new book-buying market and the term “coffee-table book” gained currency. The kind of object that has most often been in mind is easy enough to describe: casebound, square format (26.5 cm x 26.5 cm, depth

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<sup>1</sup> Christine Elliott and David Jablonka, *Custom Bicycles: A Passionate Pursuit* (Mulgrave, Australia: Images Publishing 2009).

4.5 cm-500 pages) or portrait format (32 cm x 25 cm, 3.5 cm depth-340 pages), making its weight to cause a decent thud when put on a coffee table. It may comprise some double opening page photographs bled to the edges, with single-page photos framed by empty space with accompanying captions and text on the opposite page. The images would be printed on heavy gsm, gloss-coated paper to augment the tactile and visual experience that is expected of a coffee-table book. While many of the post-war coffee-table books did have these attributes, not all of them were as polished or consistently gargantuan as modern coffee-table books, but they were impressive at the time. Apart from this archetypical description of a coffee-table book, what often comes to mind is how popular culture has played with the idea of the coffee-table book. The most famous example being the two well-known *Seinfeld* episodes in which Kramer proposes the idea of a coffee-table book about coffee tables; legs included,<sup>2</sup> then promotes the coffee-table book after its publication.<sup>3</sup>

Why then do I describe coffee-table books as discursive? Because judgements of what *is* or *is not* a coffee-table book has much to do with value systems associated with the binaries of “legitimate” and “popular” tastes and these types of judgements are often applied not so much with regard to the object as to the social relations within which it is inscribed. A good example is Parr and Badger’s case for omitting coffee-table books from their three-volume history of photobooks, despite the fact that photobooks and coffee-table books share similar physical and content characteristics:

There is a genre of photographic books that we all know as the ‘coffee-table book’, a term that denotes those large, lavishly illustrated publications describing exotic places and enviable lifestyles. Most of these books are photographically competent rather than inspired, and tend to be superficial, inherently cautious and conservative in their view of the world, and for these reasons fall outside our brief.<sup>4</sup>

As photobook scholars, Parr and Badger apply a narrow, often default, assessment of coffee-table books by viewing the genre through a photography lens. They judge coffee-table books as

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<sup>2</sup> The Fire. “*Seinfeld*“, directed by Tom Cherones, season 6, episode 84, Columbia TriStar Television, May 5, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> The Opposite. “*Seinfeld*“, directed by Tom Cherones, season 6, episode 86, Columbia TriStar Television, May 19, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, *The Photobook: A History volume II* (London, UK: Phaidon Press 2006), 20.

photographically superficial due to a lack of artistic essayism. By contrast, I argue that if coffee-table books are examined through a more generous book history lens, then their emergence and popularisation can be recognised for their significant contribution to post-war visual culture and an important development in the history of illustrated publishing.

In this thesis I argue that the coffee-table book sits at the convergence of three post-war developments: advances in full-colour printing technology, social change, and entrepreneurship and innovation. To take the first of these, the advance in colour printing technology disrupted the ability to mass-produce high-quality, large-format, full-colour photographically illustrated books. Offset printing technology allowed the printing of images and text on the same page and the reproduction of colour photographs improved. Turning to the second development, social change, suburbanisation changed the nature of the home and lifestyles. A renewed interest in domestic beautification and the proliferation of mass-produced commodities such as coffee tables provided a new, central space for displaying and reading large-format books. As books became more integrated into the domestic sphere in the post-war era, the conspicuous display of lavishly produced, large-format books on coffee tables saw the term “coffee-table book” become part of the vernacular and gave coffee-table books a new place in the culture. However, advances in printing technology and post-war social change are but two parts in the story of the popularisation of the coffee-table book. The genre was also aided by a third development: the entrepreneurship and innovations of publishers such as David Brower in America, Paul Hamlyn in Britain and Lloyd O’Neil in Australia. While the American, British and Australian book publishing industries had had its fair share of entrepreneurs and innovators, Brower, Hamlyn and O’Neil, along with others, seized opportunities, particular to the post-war era, in which coffee-table books played a key role in democratising book ownership by creating new markets of book-buyers.

## Research questions

As this study is examining a book genre popularised within the context of a particular social era, it is located at a point of intersection within the fields of book history, sociology and cultural studies. The study takes an interdisciplinary approach and draws on the work of key theorists such as Darnton, Bourdieu, Christensen, Appadurai and Mirzoeff.

Without knowing it at the time, my questions arising from the publication of my own book aligned with key questions that Robert Darnton urges book historians to confront when undertaking book history research: How do books come into being? How do they reach readers? And what do readers make of them?<sup>5</sup> As this thesis is focused on the coffee-table book, a genre recognised for its decorative attributes, I would add one further question: What did people *do* with coffee-table books? Book historians, Finkelstein and McCleery et al. view book history as placing an “emphasis upon print culture and the role of the book as a material object within that culture.”<sup>6</sup> If we apply Darnton’s book history lens to this study of the coffee-table book, it allows for a broader analysis beyond content alone. As Darnton points out, examining books as material objects creates a “*histoire totale*”.<sup>7</sup> Darnton’s key questions and his communications circuit provide a framework for examining the coffee-table book as a commercial and cultural phenomenon within a particular cultural and social era. A more comprehensive perspective on how the coffee-table book, as a cultural and material artefact, was popularised in the post-war era is gained in this thesis by examining its genealogy, reception, production processes, role in the domestic sphere, its commercial properties, and publisher and author motivations.<sup>8</sup>

This thesis necessarily draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s theories on judgements of taste and how fields operate. The importance of taste in influencing the coffee-table book’s status as a cultural

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Darnton, “‘What Is the History of Books?’ Revisited,” *Modern Intellectual History* 4, 3 (2007): 495.

<sup>6</sup> David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, eds., *The Book History Reader*. (London, UK: Routledge, 2006), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Darnton, “‘History of Books?’ Revisited,” 496.

<sup>8</sup> Darnton, “‘History of Books?’ Revisited,” 497–498.

artefact can hardly be in doubt and, Bourdieu's typology of *Legitimate taste*, "*middle-brow*" taste and "*popular*" taste offers one of the most obvious theorisations.<sup>9</sup> I also draw on his field theory in considering how coffee-table books have been influenced by the field of publishing and the acquisition of *capital*. However, the thesis is not, in a narrow sense, a "Bourdiesian" thesis. It also considers a number of contexts where Bourdieu's theories do not obviously apply. In considering disruptive technology and innovation, for example, it draws instead on the work of Clayton Christensen. Christensen's theories on technologies as both "sustainable" and "disruptive", and the inherent characteristics exhibited by disruptive innovators, provide insights into how these factors can change or reshape an industry or organisation. The development of full-colour offset printing in the post-war era was both a "sustainable" and "disruptive" technology. It was "sustainable" because it improved the production of books in general but for coffee-table books, offset printing disrupted the ability to mass-produce high-quality, photographically illustrated books. This led to the mass-consumption of these books coinciding with the emergence of the term "coffee-table book".

Observing that the coffee-table book has become a well-established part of the commercial market of gift-giving, the thesis also draws on Arjun Appadurai's ideas on the biographical nature of commodities, and the concept of gift-giving. His theories help to contextualise the coffee-table book as an object that proliferated at a particular moment in time. Finally, the thesis examines the nature of visual culture and uses the theories of Nicholas Mirzeoff et al. to explain the coffee-table book's function as a visual medium within a field largely dominated by text-filled books.

## **Contribution to the field**

The history of "the book" comprises a vast body of research that focuses on the significant developments that have occurred since ancient times regarding its materiality, format, the written word, illustrations, printing, publishing, status and various genres, which continue to contribute to

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<sup>9</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 16.



our understanding of the cultural role of “the book” to this day.<sup>10</sup> While Lyons points out that “the history of books has embraced niche-interest and low-status genres such as science fiction, Japanese graphic novels and romance novelettes”, to date the coffee-table genre book has not been adequately embraced.<sup>11</sup> A review of the literature reveals some references to the coffee-table book in some of the literature but it is either partial in nature or dismisses the coffee-table book altogether. Given a lack of focus on the coffee-table book within book history and publishing studies, it is remarkable that a more comprehensive study has not yet been undertaken, especially in light of their proliferation. Hence, my thesis aims to address this gap and make a significant contribution to book history by examining the coffee-table book genre within a single study.

## Background

Advances in full-colour phototypesetting and offset lithography transformed the ability of publishers to mass-produce large-format books with high-quality, colour photographs more cost-effectively because it enabled text and colour images to be photographed onto cylindrical metal plates and printed in the one process allowing greater freedom for layout, editing and amendments.<sup>12</sup> This technological change occurred alongside a new mass-market of home owners who embraced photographically illustrated books for leisure reading, gift-giving and as decorative objects when they became more affordable and accessible. The idea of appropriating books for decorative purposes flourished in the post-war period and even though using books for purposes other than reading was not a new phenomenon, Tebbel notes that the practice shifted to be viewed as superficial in the post-war era.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See the following books for an overview of the history of the book: Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose, eds., *A Companion to the History of the Book*. (Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007). Leslie Howsam, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*. (Cambridge, US: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Martyn Lyons, *Books: A Living History* (Farnborough, UK: Thames & Hudson, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Lyons, *Books*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Rob Banham, “The Industrialization of the Book 1800–1970,” in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, eds. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 288.

<sup>13</sup> John William Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States. Volume IV: The Great Change, 1940–1980* (New York, USA: R. R. Bowker Co., 1981), 455.

As previously stated, technology and social change did not alone account for the emergence of coffee-table books. It required the agency of publishers who championed it as a medium for a broader, general market. For example, the founders of both Thames & Hudson and Phaidon Press, who were part of a large cohort of émigrés who fled to America and Britain from the rise of Nazism in Europe, brought with them a legacy of art publishing and an aim to make art more accessible. This approach had a democratising effect on how fine art was consumed by a wider non-specialist audience. Of the many publishers who published coffee-table books in the post-war era, this thesis includes case-studies on three publishers who exemplify how the convergence of technology, social change and entrepreneurship helped to popularise the coffee-table book and find a broader cultural function for this medium. David Brower in America, Paul Hamlyn in Britain and Lloyd O’Neil in Australia each had different publishing motivations when they tapped into their entrepreneurial publishing instincts.

Brower championed the coffee-table book as a medium capable of delivering an essential environmental message to Americans in their own homes. However, he did more than this. When he published the first full-colour *Exhibit Format* book, *In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World*, one of his colleagues notes, Brower had tapped into a market that no commercial publisher had previously realised was there.<sup>14</sup> Hamlyn was motivated to publish attractive, affordable and accessible books for people not in the habit of purchasing books. And, in Australia, O’Neil sought alternative solutions to the publishing constraints placed on independent Australian publishers and booksellers by Britain as well as more cost-effective ways to publish Australian stories for a population that was becoming increasingly interested in its post-war national identity. These three publishers are significant to this study because their influence reached far beyond the coffee-table

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<sup>14</sup> August Frugé, “A Publisher’s Career with the University of California Press, the Sierra Club, and the California Native Plant Society,” interview by Suzanne B. Riess, *University History Series*. (Berkeley, USA: University of California, 1997–1998). Online published transcript, 80. Accessed August 12, 2014. [http://content.cdlib.org/view?docId=kt596nb0t2&brand=calisphere&doc.view=entire\\_text](http://content.cdlib.org/view?docId=kt596nb0t2&brand=calisphere&doc.view=entire_text).

books they published. Their accomplishments highlight both the commercial and cultural success of the coffee-table book in the post-war era.

As the title of this thesis suggests, the coffee-table book is most often seen in terms of its decorative attributes but it also played a major role in post-war processes of democratisation. The lavishly produced full-colour coffee-table books occupy a central place in attracting a new book-buying public in the post-war era. It is one of the more significant cultural artefacts to emerge from the economic boom of the second half of the twentieth century, sitting at the centre of complex developments including home acquisitions, consumption of household goods and furniture, and a renewed interest in home decoration, leisurely pursuits, and national identity, as Americans, Britons and Australians emerged from the austerity of the war years.

## Scope

This thesis comprises a broad but not exhaustive international study of the coffee-table book, focusing on America, Britain and Australia, which concentrates on their shared publishing, cultural and social histories. With regard to the span of the post-war era, the exact end point is variable. The immediate post-war period was the “‘golden age’ of twentieth-century capitalism”.<sup>15</sup> It would make sense, in this context, to see the story as finishing with the end of the boom. “Conventional wisdom among economists dates the end of the ‘golden age’ by the first oil shock, OPEC, in 1973.” This was followed by a second oil shock, OPEC II in 1979, which is generally seen as ushering in the next economic phase known as Neo-liberalism.<sup>16</sup> As the economies of America, Britain and Australia varied, the end of the “golden age” would have occurred at different points in the 1970s. That being the case, much of the discussion in this thesis regarding the popularisation of the coffee-table book does focus on the “golden age” era of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Nonetheless, some coffee-table books published after the 1970s are included in this study, provide additional examples

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen A. Marglin and Juliet B. Schor, eds., *The Golden Age of Capitalism: Reinterpreting the Postwar Experience*. (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Marglin and Schor, *The Golden Age*, v–vi.

of innovation in this genre and their publication contributes to a broader understanding of the coffee-table book as a cultural medium

## Literature review

This thesis adopts an approach introduced by Greetham, who suggests that “[t]he book is an extremely productive site for showing how the means of production and consumption affect and inform our concepts of literature, of genre, of meaning, and of authoriality itself.”<sup>17</sup> As stated earlier, a publishing, social and cultural history of the coffee-table book has not been previously undertaken within a single study. As stated, this thesis focuses on the coffee-table book through a book history lens and begins by contextualising the genre within the inclusive and exclusive definitions of “the book”, as determined by various book historians.<sup>18</sup>

Lyons definition of “the book” is inclusive in that he embraces all forms from “cuneiform script to the printed codex and the digitized electronic book.”<sup>19</sup> This inclusiveness is further developed by McKenzie, by including the expressive forms of communication, “verbal, visual, oral and numeric data.”<sup>20</sup> Nord, Shelley et al, define their inclusiveness to the book being “a unique blend of form, content, function, and evocativeness” and the “quintessential objet d’art.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, “the book” is an object capable of pleasing the eye and the mind. On the other hand, Robson categorises “the book” by its contribution to culture because of its ability to record and transmit a “culture’s intellectual traditions.”<sup>22</sup> So, written text is a tangible record of a culture’s cerebral capacities.

Brown looks beyond how paper and ink have played their role in actually recording culture, and

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<sup>17</sup> David Greetham, “What is Textual Scholarship?,” in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, eds. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 30.

<sup>18</sup> See, Robert Darnton, *The Case for Books: Past, Present, and Future* (New York, USA: PublicAffairs, 2009). Eliot and Rose, *History of the Book*. Finkelstein and McCleery, *Book History Reader*. Frederick G. Kilgour, *The Evolution of the Book* (New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 1998). Lyons, *Books*. D.F. McKenzie, “The Book as an Expressive Form,” in *The Book History Reader*, eds. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (London, UK: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Lyons, *Books*, 12–13.

<sup>20</sup> McKenzie, “Expressive Form,” 37.

<sup>21</sup> David Paul Nord, Joan Shelley Rubin and Michael Schudson, eds., *A History of the Book in America: The Enduring Book: Print Culture in Postwar America Volume 5*. (Chapel Hill, USA: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 494.

<sup>22</sup> Eliot and Rose, *History of the Book*, 67.

defines “the book” as a creative process, which is undertaken by inspired authors who produce books that take on a life of their own.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from the form, materiality and function of “the book”, according to Finkelstein and McCleery, it is the mobility of “the book” that has been central to numerous cultures and civilisations.<sup>24</sup> It is the ease of portability that has enabled the storehouse of human knowledge to be passed down through history.<sup>25</sup> Although large in format, part of the coffee-table book’s democratising role is its ability to disseminate reproduced images of fine art to a general audience by liberating works of art from the confines of museum and gallery walls to the pages of coffee-table art books.

While historians may embrace many forms of “the book”, it is and remains, an object that evokes various opinions as to its central function as a cultural medium. Therefore, Raven remains sceptical that the inclusiveness claimed by book historians is more a label than a discipline because it is not readily apparent in practice.<sup>26</sup> Yet, despite a diverse range of opinions amongst book historians on the definition of “the book”, Darnton prefers to connect all books to a shared experience via his Communications Circuit, which demonstrates the lifecycle that all books undertake and helps to address the fragmentation of book history.<sup>27</sup> Darnton’s Communications Circuit is valuable to this thesis because it intrinsically links the coffee-table book to all books and renders it worthy of a closer reading.

Book historians such as Harthan and Lyons have documented the history of illustrated books and have provided insights into the evolution of images in books and their supporting role to written text. These studies generally focus on the history of handcrafted illustrations in books prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but stop short of the post-war era. Alternatively, they include a limited discussion on

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Brown, ed. *Consuming Books: The Marketing and Consumption of Literature*. (New York, USA: Routledge, 2006), 135.

<sup>24</sup> Finkelstein and McCleery, *Book History Reader*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Kilgour, *The Evolution of the Book*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> James Raven, “Reviews: The Past in Print, Sound and Vision,” *History Today* 60, 9 (2010): 55.

<sup>27</sup> Darnton, “‘History of Books?’ Revisited,” 495.

books illustrated with photographs within a broader study of book history.<sup>28</sup> Scholars such as Parr and Badger, Di Bello et al., Stafford, Roth and Eskildsen, examine the history of photographically illustrated books, or photobooks, through the lens of photography as a serious art form rather than within the context of book history. As their discussions focus on photography as a way of examining the history of photobooks, they draw distinctions between photobooks and coffee-table books based on this criterion.

As already noted, definitions of “the book” involve inclusivity and exclusivity, which also applies to assessing the efficacy of photographically illustrated books. For example, Parr and Badger, Di Bello et al., and Stafford draw a clear distinction between the status of the photobook and that of the coffee-table book by casting the photobook as a vehicle for “serious” photo essayism.<sup>29</sup> According to Parr and Badger, the divergence between serious and superficial photobooks (coffee-table books), occurs at the point of narrative intent where a photobook’s photographic essay is capable of reaching the equivalent status of a literary novel. That is, “the capacity to display a distinctive *photographic* or *book* voice.”<sup>30</sup> It is therefore worth noting that Parr and Badger’s three-volume history of the photobook does not include coffee-table books based on the type of photographs they regard as evoking aspiration rather than inspiration. They emphasise that their history of the photobook is examined through a “specific kind of photobook and a particular breed of photobook producer.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Roth’s *The Book of 101 Books: Seminal Photographic Books of the 20th Century* is a collection of commissioned essays by a range of

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<sup>28</sup> See, John Harthan, *The History of the Illustrated Book: The Western Tradition* (London, UK: Thames & Hudson, 1981). Lyons, *Books*, 193.

<sup>29</sup> See: Parr and Badger’s three volume *The Photobook: A History* provides a comprehensive survey of the photobook where the photographer is considered the auteur. *The Photobook: From Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond* by Di Bello, Wilson and Zamir, draws together several contributors to focus on specific photobooks and discuss their various characteristics. While Stafford’s, *Photo-texts: Contemporary French Writing of the Photographic Image* concentrates his focus on exploring the existence of the ‘photo-text’, something between the photo image and the written word. Roth’s *The Book of 101 Books: Seminal photographic books of the 20th Century* brings together a number of essays featuring the inception and dissemination of ‘great’ photobooks.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, *The Photobook: A History volume I* (London, UK: Phaidon Press 2004), 9.

<sup>31</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook*, vol. I, 6.

experts, including art dealers, artists, critics, curators, historians, publishers and technicians, with the intention to concentrate on photobooks by renowned image-makers.<sup>32</sup> Parr and Badger, Di Bello et al., and Stafford's assessment of coffee-table books, suggests an inherent hierarchy among photobooks based the artistic merit of photographs.

Nonetheless, Stafford does devote some discussion to what he calls "the phenomenon of the coffee-table book", in which he supports his claim that photobooks are distinct from coffee-table books based on "artistic value". He does this by illustrating how a photobook can veer towards becoming a coffee-table book by analysing Debray's *L'œil naïf* anthology (1994), which in his opinion is not a good direction to take if a photobook is to be taken seriously.<sup>33</sup> Although Stafford acknowledges that inferring intentions in photography is highly contentious, he describes Debray's anthology as "insidious or insipid", arguing that Debray produces a "cosy photobook" with his choice of photographs and sequencing of subjects.<sup>34</sup> For example, Debray employs images linked to the Holocaust alongside "Elliot Erwitt's famous image of a tiny dog standing next to two human legs and to a large dog's legs, 'Central Park New York' (1974), framed by a discussion of humour in photography."<sup>35</sup> Stafford argues that Debray's attempt at humour, regarding an empty page as his favourite portrait is also rather trite, as is the claim that the Shroud of Turin be regarded as the earliest-known "photograph".<sup>36</sup> What lies at the heart of Stafford's critique of *L'œil naïf*, is that Debray has failed to execute his own mediological method<sup>37</sup> by not translating his theory into

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<sup>32</sup> Andrew Roth, Richard Benson, Vince Aletti and David Levi Strauss, eds., *The Book of 101 Books: Seminal Photographic Books of the 20th Century*. (New York, USA: Roth Horowitz, 2001), 1.

<sup>33</sup> Andy Stafford, *Photo-texts: Contemporary French writing of the Photographic Image* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 82-83.

<sup>34</sup> Stafford, *Photo-texts*, 80-81.

<sup>35</sup> Stafford, *Photo-texts*, 80-82.

<sup>36</sup> Stafford, *Photo-texts*, 82.

<sup>37</sup> Mediology is a method developed by French theorist, journalist, government advisor, and professor Régis Debray. Drawing upon a range of disciplines such as semiotics, communication, art history, sociology, history of technology, linguistics, psychology, anthropology, theology, and philosophy, he formulated his approach as a means for framing problems and conducting research about relationships among culture, media, and the transmission of ideas. Melinda Turnley, "Towards a Mediological Method: A Framework for Critically Engaging Dimensions of a Medium," *Computers and Composition* 28, 2 (2011): 127.

practice.<sup>38</sup> For example, Debray's less sequential approach adopted in *L'œil naïf*, compared to that of the chronological sequencing of Roche and Szarkowski's anthologies, leads Stafford to conclude that "Debray's effort loses hands down; or wins the wooden spoon of the photobook—that is, the 'coffee-table book' of the year award!"<sup>39</sup> Stafford's assessment of *L'œil naïf* as a coffee-table book leaves us in no doubt of the position that the coffee-table book holds within the cultural hierarchy of photobooks—at the bottom of the photobook stack.

Thus, this study will determine the coffee-table book's own unique contribution to book history and to the history of photographically illustrated books. Notably, Parr and Badger acknowledge relative neglect in documenting the history of photographically illustrated books. While recognising that publishing is a team effort, they argue one reason for this neglect may be that "the instigators, the editors and often the financiers of many photobooks are the photographers themselves," which becomes the paramount view within the medium.<sup>40</sup> Stafford's critique of *L'œil naïf*, along with Parr and Badger's noted exclusion of the coffee-table book from the history of the photobook, aptly illustrates Bourdieu's theory of *prises de position*. That is, within the literary field of cultural production, the dominant product determines the positions of objects in the field.<sup>41</sup> In this case, the "literary photobook" has determined the position of the coffee-table book as a sub-category of the photobook, at best, or is not regarded at all.

With regard to affording a higher status to one photobook over another, Stafford asks "what makes one photobook pleasing, pleasant and placatory, and another challenging, subversive and non-recuperable?"<sup>42</sup> Stafford's question demonstrates a tendency towards a binary argument by comparing "literary" photobooks presumably aimed at a specialist market with the more

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<sup>38</sup> Stafford, *Photo-texts*, 82.

<sup>39</sup> Stafford, *Photo-texts*, 81. Here Stafford is referring to the phenomenon of the 100 picture photographic anthologies including the anthologies of Denis Roche, *Le Boîtier de mélancolie* (1999) and John Szarkowski, *Looking at Photographs* (1973).

<sup>40</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook*, vol. I, 10.

<sup>41</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed\*," *Poetics* 12, 4–5 (1983): 312.

<sup>42</sup> Stafford, *Photo-texts*, 82.



popularised coffee-table book. Responding to this tendency, Gunn and Brummett have identified two sets of binaries when discussing popularised objects. Firstly, they argue that “the popular is haunted by the high culture-low culture binary” and secondly, that “there is a perceived opposition between authenticity and commercialisation or globalisation.”<sup>43</sup> The question is, why should a commercial, mass-produced, popular object, such as the coffee-table book, be less regarded than something considered more niche or specialised, which is regarded as more authentic or high-cultured? Gunn and Brummett state that “popular” continues to signify general availability, particularly artefacts such as films, music, fashion and television.<sup>44</sup> Certainly, the general availability of the coffee-table book was a key factor in its popularisation in the post-war era.

Coffee-table books have sometimes been seen as descendants of “nonbooks”, which according to Tebbel, can be traced back to the period after the American Civil War.<sup>45</sup> Tebbel notes that during that period these elegantly bound “nonbooks”, filled with a collection of images and text such as pictures, cartoons and poetry, were considered fashionable to display in the parlour but it was assumed that they were also for reading. However, an 1887 article in the *Publishers' Weekly* signified a shift in attitude towards such books, when the article compared ornamental books to a gravestone. “[T]hey serve very much the same purpose that ornamental tablets do in the family mausoleum—and. . . they are read just about as often.”<sup>46</sup> According to Tebbel, this idea emerged again in the 1950s when a *Time Magazine* article noted an increase in “nonbooks” consisting of images and text, which were aimed at a specific market deemed solely for display purposes. Tebbel claims that this further perpetuated the idea of superficiality by the “arbiters of literary taste” who

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<sup>43</sup> Joshua Gunn and Barry Brummett, “Popular Communication After Globalization,” *Journal of Communication* 54, 4 (2004): 706–707.

<sup>44</sup> Gunn and Brummett, “Popular Communication,” 707.

<sup>45</sup> G. Philip Altbach and S. Edith Hoshino, eds., *International Book Publishing: An Encyclopedia*. (New York, USA: Garland Publishing, 1995), 63.

<sup>46</sup> “‘Ornamental’ Books,” *The Publishers' Weekly* XXXI, May 14 (1887): 640. See also: John William Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States. Volume II: The Expansion of an Industry, 1865–1919* (New York, USA: R. R. Bowker Co., 1975), 518.

applied the term to other kinds of popular literature they deemed unworthy of their admiration.<sup>47</sup> Who were the above mentioned “arbiters of literary taste”? The term “coffee-table book” sat comfortably in the vernacular of American, British and Australian book reviewers and social commentators, who wrote for newspapers and magazines in the post-war era. They would sometimes use the term to make derogatory asides, which contributed to the coffee-table book being stigmatised because it was regarded as a symbol of one’s cultural taste, rather than functioning as a book to be read:

In the 1950s however, ‘coffee-table books had come to mean large, handsomely bound art books, picture collections, and various kinds of picture-text combinations that were intended to be evidence of culture when displayed on living room coffee tables.’<sup>48</sup>

This post-war change in attitude towards the role and status of coffee-table books may reflect the increasing mass-production and commercialisation of photographically illustrated books. Despite claims made that the divergence between photobooks and coffee-table books occurs at the point of photographic narrative intent, Stafford does acknowledge that the “nature of photography itself” may not be the only avenue to pursue the status of coffee-table books.<sup>49</sup> As the aim of this thesis is to examine the coffee-table book through a book history lens, it endeavours to pursue its role and status in the context of advances in full-colour printing technology, social change and the visionaries, innovators and entrepreneurs who published and popularised the coffee-table books in the post-war era.

A review of the literature has revealed that the coffee-table book has largely been inadequately addressed, sidelined or excluded from book history, and more specifically the history of photobooks. Nonetheless, two studies have provided noteworthy post-war accounts of the role coffee-table books played in raising awareness of the need to save the American wilderness, and in helping to

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<sup>47</sup> Tebbel, *History of Book Publishing in the U.S.*, vol. IV, 455.

<sup>48</sup> Tebbel, *History of Book Publishing in the U.S.*, vol. IV, 455.

<sup>49</sup> Stafford, *Photo-texts*, 82.

shape the Australian publishing industry. They have provided a valuable starting point from which to approach this thesis.

In his book *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform*, Finis Dunaway details how David Brower, Executive Director of the Sierra Club a renowned environmental organisation, specifically employed the coffee-table book genre as a visual medium to help form images of the American wilderness in the hope that Americans would support environmental preservation.<sup>50</sup> Dunaway's overview of the publication of the twenty environmental coffee-table books in *The Exhibit Format Series*, emphasises the central role Brower played in realising his vision for the genre, the Club and the environment. Dunaway provides insight into how the coffee-table books were capable of delivering a powerful environmental messages to American families from the coffee tables of their living rooms. Although, Dunaway's focus is limited to a single organisation framed within a broader discussion on how images in books and film helped to shape the environmental movement in America, it nonetheless provides a serious analysis of the genre and its potential as an agent of change.<sup>51</sup>

Focusing on the rise and fall of the Australiana coffee-table book genre to analyse the post-war Australian publishing industry, Jenny Lee's article, "Australia in Colour", provides a detailed analysis of the economic and social impact of the Australiana coffee-table books on the Australian publishing industry as well as their influence on post-war Australian national identity. For example, the printing of *Australia in Colour* in Japan by Lloyd O'Neil in 1963, played a central role in helping independent Australian publishers, booksellers and writers to overcome Britain's colonial and territorial dominance of the book industry by paving the way for book publishing to become more cost effective by sending printing jobs to South-east Asia.<sup>52</sup> The offshore printing of *Australia in Colour* and other Australiana coffee-table books was significant because it meant the book was

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<sup>50</sup> Finis Dunaway, *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform* (Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 117–193.

<sup>51</sup> Dunaway, *Natural Visions*.

<sup>52</sup> Jenny Lee, "Australia in Colour," *Southern Review: Communication, Politics & Culture* 40, 1 (2007): 53.

affordable. It attracted a new book-buying market and disseminated a social commentary on the growing interest in Australia's post-war national identity.<sup>53</sup>

Together, Dunaway and Lee offer important insights into the broader function of the coffee-table book beyond its decorative attributes and provide a foundation for this research into the status of the coffee-table book as a significant photographic medium.

## Methodology

The thesis examines the coffee-table book through a book history lens in the context of the cultural and social environment of the post-war era. In doing so, it draws on a range of methodologies. Information gained through existing academic studies and research on the topic has guided me towards key people to interview, accessing published interviews, retrieving publishing archives and special collections and the selection of particular coffee-table books for analysis, in order to seek insights into their popularisation and role as a visual medium in the post-war era. While much has been written about the people and organisations discussed in this thesis, the lack of a comprehensive focus on the coffee-table book meant that all archives, sources and resources were examined with a more synoptic view.

The thesis has also drawn on face-to-face, semi-structured interviews in America, Britain and Australia with some of the people who have a working knowledge of publishers from the post-war era or have shed light on the publishing background of the coffee-table books discussed in the thesis. Their comments and reflections, which have been incorporated throughout the thesis, provide a connection to the publishers, coffee-table books and social environment of the post-war era. Additionally, the face-to-face interviews, as well as email interviews with contemporary authors, publishers, designers, booksellers, distributors and consumers provided general background information on aspects of publishing photographically illustrated books, which brought a greater understanding to the significance to the popularisation of coffee-table books in the post-war era.

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<sup>53</sup> Lee, "Australia in Colour," 41–42.

Online published interviews and oral histories with publishers and people who worked with Brower, Hamlyn and O’Neil have also been accessed. These resources have provided insights into the personalities, motivations and machinations of publishing. They have included: Sierra Club Oral History interview transcripts published by the University of California, Berkeley, USA, audio interviews with Paul Hamlyn and some of his colleagues accessed through the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, London website and Alec Bolton audio interviews with Lloyd O’Neil published by the National Library of Australia.

Archival material and special collections have also played a central role in this thesis. The research has required a level of lateral investigation to garner information on the coffee-table book from a range of disparate sources, in order to bring them together into this single body of research. These archives and special collections include: *Sierra Club Bulletin* archives and *Exhibit Format* books held at the Sierra Club William E. Colby Memorial Library at their headquarters in San Francisco, USA; the Sierra Club publishing archives held at University of California, Berkley, USA; Grove Press archives on the publishing of *The Americans* held at Syracuse University, Syracuse, USA; oral history of the British book trade consisting of interviews recorded on cassettes held at the British Library, London. I spent four consecutive days in a soundproof room in the British Library Rare Books and Music Reading Room listening to and transcribing interviews with people from the British book trade; the *Shell Guides* archives held at the National Motor Museum, Beaulieu, UK; Rigby Press publishing archives and ephemera held at the State Library of South Australia, Adelaide; *The Australian Home Beautiful* special collection held at Swinburne University, Hawthorn; and a collection of Lansdowne Press catalogues and *The Australian Book Scene* magazines in John Currey’s personal collection (former publishing colleague and business partner of Lloyd O’Neil).

One of the benefits of including a case-study on the publication of the Sierra Club’s *Exhibit Format Series*, is that it has allowed me to draw on the Club’s extensive and well preserved

archives. As their website states, “[t]he Sierra Club has maintained a library since its beginnings more than a century ago.”<sup>54</sup> Hence, I was able to create a more complete narrative of David Brower, the operations of the publishing committee and the publication history of specific *Exhibit Format* books. As a not-for-profit environmental organisation, they have not been subjected to a sale of the organisation, takeovers or mergers like the publishing industry. This feature of the publishing industry meant that small publishing houses, subsumed in corporate takeovers or mergers, their early documents and records were often discarded, misplaced or lost. This was the case with both Lansdowne Press and Paul Hamlyn. As John Currey, former colleague of Lloyd O’Neil, wrote:

What happened to the Lansdowne files is a mystery. I have tried to find out myself without success. They would contain some fascinating correspondence with notable Australian authors and literary figures: Martin Boyd, Max Harris, Geoffrey Dutton come to mind, and also of Australian painters: Albert Tucker, John Perceval, and James Gleeson. Their loss may be innocent, given how many other publishers subsequently became owners of the Lansdowne publications. At the same time, it is unlikely the files would help you much with *Australia in Colour*. When the book was published Lansdowne had no production department. The only staff were Lloyd and his assistant Patricia Phillips.<sup>55</sup>

I have also accessed the online archives of newspapers and magazines such as *The New York Times*, *The Times*, *Trove*, *Picture Post*, *Time* and *The Australian Women’s Weekly* to identify book reviews, articles and images from the post-war era. Interviews, oral histories, archives or special collections have enabled me to gather evidence of the decision-making processes around inception, content, production processes, publishing issues, personalities, motivations, sales figures, and titles and commentaries on the coffee-table book from reviews and articles.

The coffee-table books discussed throughout this thesis have been selected on the basis that they best illuminate aspects of the inception, production, distribution or consumption of coffee-table books and shed light on their publishing, social and cultural history in the post-war era.

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<sup>54</sup> Sierra Club, *Sierra Club*. “William E. Colby Memorial Library.” November 26, 2017. <http://vault.sierraclub.org/library/>

<sup>55</sup> John Currey, e-mail to Christine Elliott, July 23, 2015.

## Thesis content and organisation

This thesis comprises seven chapters, three of which are case-studies. As an artefact popularised in the post-war era, the chapters and case-studies discuss the coffee-table book in the context of the convergence of cultural production, disruptive technologies and behaviour, consumerism and material culture, globalisation, culture, space, and visual culture inviting perspectives from book history, sociology and cultural studies. As Adrian Johns puts it, the creation of a book requires the convergence of a number of people, machines and materials but its story does not end at the point of creation. A book's identity is determined by "how it is put to use, by whom, in what circumstances, and to what effect?"<sup>56</sup>

Accordingly, Chapter One, "Conceptual and Theoretical Framework", outlines the interdisciplinary approach this study undertakes, which has allowed it to draw on a wider body of concepts and theories in order to understand the coffee-table book's function as a visual medium produced during a generative period in America, Britain and Australia.

Chapter Two, "How Did Coffee-table Books Come into Being?" traces the genealogy of coffee-table books in relation to the significant innovations that firstly enabled the development of photobooks. Once improvements to full-colour printing technology occurred in the post-war era, the commercialisation and popularisation of photobooks ensued and the "coffee-table book" emerged into the book markets of America, Britain and Australia, which each had their points of distinction.

Chapter Three, "The Reception of Coffee-table Books". The nature of the transition of the coffee-table book was based on commercial appeal and popularity. In this context, "arbiters of taste" often appropriated the term "coffee-table book" to differentiate "legitimate" taste from "popular" taste. This chapter examines a range of examples to determine how language used by book reviewers projected the cultural status of coffee-tables. The chapter also draws on three examples of coffee-table books where their cultural significance was evident in the post-war era. These are

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<sup>56</sup> Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago, USA: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 3.

examined in light of the technical and creative processes involved in their inception, production, publication, distribution and reception. And, in response to the idea that coffee-table books require little skill or effort to produce, the chapter highlights the technical and material challenges needed to produce these *objets d'art*.

Chapter Four, “The Domestic Sphere, Coffee Tables, and Gifts”, examines the coffee-table book in the context of the role of books as status symbols, its relationship to the coffee table and visual culture in the domestic sphere, as well as its role in the culture of gift-giving. It also addresses my question: what did people *do* with coffee-table books? This chapter demonstrates how the consumption and enjoyment of coffee-table books was enabled by an era of prosperity and leisure. This period was symbolised by growth in home ownership, acquisition of furniture and goods, and interest in home decoration and aesthetics, and conspicuous consumption. Along with growth in affluence, gift-giving periods were further commercialised and coffee-table books became popular within this market.

Chapter Five, “At What Cost, the Earth? *The Exhibit Format Series*”, is the first of three case-studies focusing on the publication of *The Exhibit Format Series*, twenty environmental coffee-table books produced in the 1960s, produced by David Brower as Executive Director of Sierra Club. This chapter assesses the implications of advancing the Sierra Club’s environmental message through expensively produced coffee-table books, in the context of undertaking an ambitious publishing program within a grassroots, not-for-profit environmental organisation in their effort to change the way Americans thought about the wilderness.

Chapter Six, “Breaking the Mould: Conspicuous Commodification”, examines the fundamental role Paul Hamlyn played in challenging the established practises of British publishing. In his effort to publish affordable full-colour large-format books for a general audience he experimented with new ways of producing and disseminating books. The chapter demonstrates that Hamlyn’s



innovations, underpinned by business acumen, validated his new approach to publishing and selling books, which democratised book ownership and ultimately changed the British publishing industry.

Chapter Seven, “A Publishing Turning Point: *Australia in Colour*”, concentrates on the first commercially successful full-colour Australiana coffee-table book, *Australia in Colour*, published by Lloyd O’Neil in 1963. As this chapter will demonstrate, the publication of *Australia in Colour* played a central role in the development of a more viable Australian publishing industry when O’Neil travelled to Japan to seek more cost-effective, high-quality colour printing. The full-colour images depicting the Australian outback and urban landscapes in *Australia in Colour*, tapped into the public psyche of a nation questioning its post-war national identity.

Finally, the Conclusion brings together key findings on how the coffee-table book was popularised in the post war era through an examination of its emergence, reception and function, and providing working examples of these phases in the three case-studies. It also offers an opportunity to suggest further areas of research to bring further understanding to the cultural significance of the coffee-table book beyond the post-war era and in other countries.

# Chapter One

## Conceptual and theoretical framework

The name of an artefact may certainly depend upon symbolic and subliminal evocations, but artefacts themselves do not come from their names.

Henry Petroski<sup>1</sup>

Two people stand in a living room where, among other things, several large-format illustrated books are arranged on the coffee table. One takes in the scene and dismisses this conspicuous display of books because they are “coffee-table books.” The other person views them as material artefacts with a creative, social and commercial history that has transported them to the place and space in which they both stand. Although the term “coffee-table book” has certain connotations, the coffee-table book symbolises processes of creation, production dissemination and response, which often belies its role as a popular cultural phenomenon. This thesis takes the perspective of that second person and proposes that the coffee-table book has had a more substantial role than might generally be recognised.

As stated in the Introduction, the conceptual and theoretical framework for this thesis is an interdisciplinary approach located at a point of intersection within the fields of book history, sociology and cultural studies. As a material and commercial commodity, the coffee-table book is an expression of creativity, enterprise, technology, mass-production, mass-consumption and visual and material culture. Accordingly, this chapter outlines the conceptual and theoretical framework in terms of the lifecycle of the book, cultural production, disruptive technologies and behaviour, consumerism and material culture, globalisation, culture, place and space, and visual culture. Bourdieu’s theories on judgements of taste and fields of cultural production are frequently referred to in this thesis because, as I have argued, the judgement of coffee-table books in the post-war era was based on value systems dependent on discernible variations of class and taste. Coffee-table

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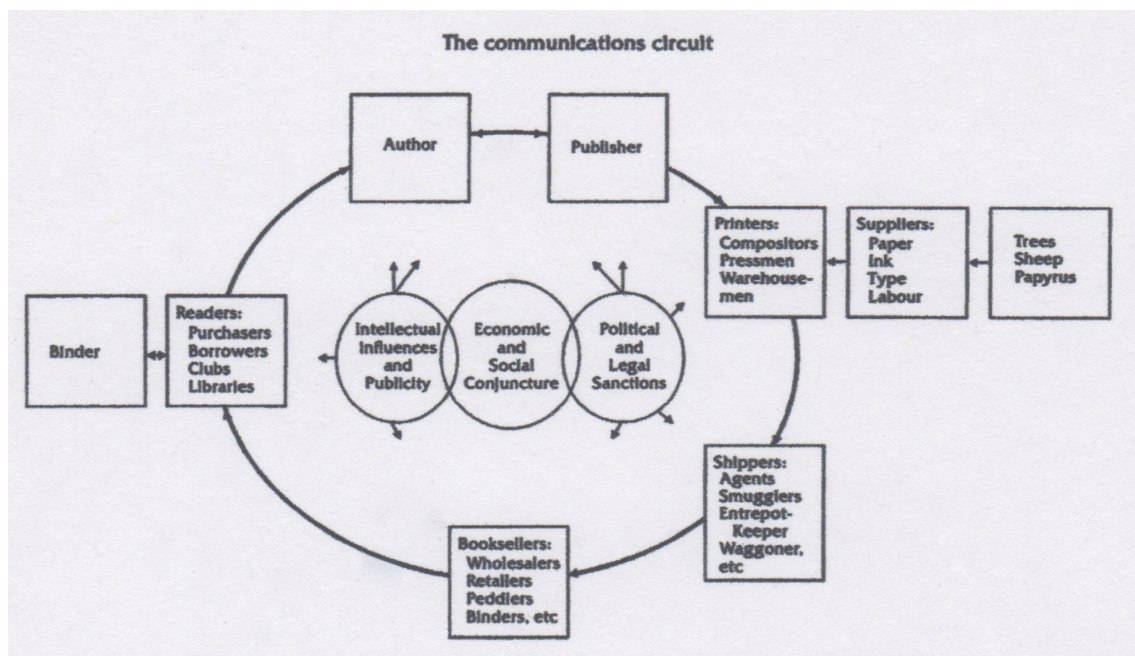
<sup>1</sup> Henry Petroski, *The Pencil: A History of Design and Circumstance* (New York, USA: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 15.

books also emerged and operated within the field of publishing, which was, and remains, an industry with its own complexities. Bourdieu's field theory helps to explain the field of publishing and how five different types of capital related to the popularisation of coffee-table books in the post-war era.

## Conceptual framework

### The life cycle of a book

Darnton encourages book historians to make their studies more integrated by connecting all parts of the book.<sup>2</sup> To illustrate this, Darnton's "communications circuit" visually represents the life cycle of books and the logical flow of all the processes involved in taking a book from inception to publication, or in other words, author to reader.<sup>3</sup> Although the processes, including terms, have been updated and refined over the years, Darnton's diagram demonstrates that all printed books share a common human and technical experience. This includes coffee-table books.



**Figure 1.1:** The Communications Circuit, 1982 by Robert Darnton. (Source: Page 503, "What is the History of Books?" Revisited. Scanned image.)

<sup>2</sup> Darnton, "History of Books? Revisited," 200–201.

<sup>3</sup> Darnton, "History of Books? Revisited," 503.

Robert Darnton's communications circuit is a visual representation of a six-stage process involved in the human experience of book publishing from inception, production and distribution through to the reception of books. The people carrying out those functions include: Readers, authors, publishers, printers, shippers, booksellers along with associated providers of services to each of the six stages. Darnton places the reader at the beginning and end of the circuit because readers influence authors at inception, and consume the end product. The model might be compared with one developed in 1993 by Thomas R. Adams and Nicholas Barker and based on five socio-economic events: publication, manufacture, distribution, reception and survival.<sup>4</sup> Noting the validity of Adams and Barker's model, Darnton argues that although publishing creates a physical object, it is the decisions made by people that determines the final product.<sup>5</sup> Two of the key arguments of this thesis are: the role entrepreneurs played in the popularisation of coffee-table books and the reception some of the books received due to post-war social change. Therefore, Darnton's relational view of book publishing is the preferred model for this study. Padmini Ray Murray and Claire Squires, who adapted Darnton's model to create a revised communications circuit in 2012, argue that Darnton's model has been a "largely accurate representation of the publishing industry until the late twentieth century."<sup>6</sup> Their models, along with others developed by Simone Murray and John Thompson, represent the changing nature of book publishing industry in the twenty-first century, particular in the age of digital publishing.<sup>7</sup>

Darnton's "communications circuit" offers a clear and logical model for interrogating how the creation, production and distribution of coffee-table books led to them being popularised in the post-war era, in conjunction with his suggested research questions:

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<sup>4</sup> Darnton, "'History of Books?' Revisited," 503–504.

<sup>5</sup> Darnton, "'History of Books?' Revisited," 504.

<sup>6</sup> Padmini Ray Murray and Claire Squires, "The Digital Publishing Communications Circuit," *Book 2.0* 3, 1 (2013): 3.

<sup>7</sup> See: Murray and Squires, "The Digital Publishing Communications Circuit." See also: Simone Murray, "Charting the Digital Literary Sphere," *Contemporary Literature* 56, 2 (2015). See also: John B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge, USA: Polity, 2010), 312–368. And, John B. Thompson, *Books in the Digital Age* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2005).

## How do books come into being?

### Cultural production

#### (i) The field of book publishing

According to Curtain, “the book” commands a unique cultural position in society but remains an enigma compared to other media industries because it lacks the personalities associated with film, television, newspapers and radio, which results in it often being neglected or left out of reviews and comparisons with the media industry.<sup>8</sup> To illustrate this point, Curtain draws on a Canadian publishing industry report, which identifies three important characteristics for a standard global industry model that can be applied to the American, British and Australian industries.<sup>9</sup> First, book publishing is a cultural industry that operates within the constraints of the commercial sector. In other words, commerce and culture are always in tension to some degree. Books disseminate messages of social and cultural importance, but the industry publishes and sells books to meet the market’s needs. For example, McLean notes that British books in Australia were “considered superior in cultural value to local books” well into the twentieth century. This meant that a market for Australian stories in Australia was virtually non-existent, so local independent publishers had to concentrate on popular and commercial publishing.<sup>10</sup> As this thesis will demonstrate, a new interest in Australian national identity in the post-war era created a market for Australian narratives, to which Australian independent publishers responded. Secondly, it is generally accepted that the publishing industry has few barriers to entry because it requires little infrastructure and can begin on a small scale. While the report suggests that this aspect of the industry may be responsible for

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<sup>8</sup> John Curtain, “Book Publishing,” in *The Media in Australia: Industries, Texts, Audiences*, eds. Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner (St Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, 1993), 102. See also: David Carter and Anne Galligan, eds., *Making Books: Contemporary Australian Publishing*. (St. Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2007), 3–4.

<sup>9</sup> Curtain, “Book Publishing,” 103.

<sup>10</sup> Kathleen Ann McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence: A Study of Australian Federal Government Intervention in Book Publishing” (PhD, Monash University, National Centre for Australian Studies School of Political and Social Inquiry 2002): 60. See also: Jason Ensor D, “A Commercial and Cultural Relationship,” in *Angus & Robertson and the British Trade in Australian Books, 1930–1970: The Getting of Bookselling Wisdom*, (London UK: Anthem Press, 2012), 101–110.

many of its problems, it also recognises that this ease of entry allows a voice to minority opinions, thereby contributing to free speech. And thirdly, the industry is structurally complex because of the various combinations of firms, products, ownership, finances, distribution channels and motivations.<sup>11</sup>

Reflecting on the ease of entry into the publishing industry, Glover notes that although other media sectors are young compared with the book publishing industry, it has remained free from licensing and regulations for at least 300 years.<sup>12</sup> Curtain provides an example when he compares the sizable investment needed to buy licences to the airwaves and/or distribution rights for the newspaper, radio, television and film industries.<sup>13</sup> In addition to licences and distribution rights, physical studios and technical infrastructure are required to run a television or radio station. Once operational, the constant reliance on a healthy flow of revenue from advertisers determines the success or otherwise of the creative content.<sup>14</sup> According to Curtain, the pressure to maintain advertising revenue is the most distinguishing feature separating book publishing from the other creative industries, because although they all have audiences, publishing a book is not constrained by the need to attract advertisers to create and maintain their businesses.<sup>15</sup> Was “ease of entry” a factor in the popularisation of coffee-table books in the post-war era? How might this have been affected by the fact the period was one of economic growth and opportunities?

Book publishing may be relatively “easy” to enter, but it is a complex field of activities. J.B. Thompson notes that this is because the industry is made up of specialist roles by people who oversee the production of various book genres, all of whom operate within a set of conventions and rules pertaining to their particular field of publishing.<sup>16</sup> It is therefore helpful to draw on

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<sup>11</sup> Curtain, “Book Publishing,” 103.

<sup>12</sup> Stuart Glover, “Publishing and the State,” in *Making Books: Contemporary Australian Publishing*, eds. David Carter and Anne Galligan (St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2007), 84.

<sup>13</sup> Curtain, “Book Publishing,” 106.

<sup>14</sup> Curtain, “Book Publishing,” 104.

<sup>15</sup> Curtain, “Book Publishing,” 104.

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 4. See also: David Carter, “The Literary Field and Contemporary Trade-Book Publishing in Australia: Literary and Genre Fiction,” *Media International Australia* 158, 1 (2016).

Thompson's use of Bourdieu's field theory to illuminate the complexities within the field of publishing.<sup>17</sup> First, Bourdieu's concept of "*plurality of fields*", where each field has its own characteristic, clearly applies to the field of publishing because it comprises various sectors such as trade publishing, scholarly publishing, journal publishing, educational publishing and illustrated art publishing. All of these sectors sit within the field of book publishing and each has its own particularities of operation and specialisation.<sup>18</sup> Specialisation is a consequence of the way the industry works, but as Thompson notes, this kind of specialisation adds yet another level of complexity, because when people are appointed to senior positions of management, their prior specialisation may hinder their ability to fully understand how other fields of publishing work.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, Thompson argues that the publishing field is a relational field and Bourdieu's field theory raises the idea of thinking in relational terms about book publishing rather than focusing on specific organisations. Thompson argues that this is important because the publishing field relies on the actions of each agent or function to work together to achieve optimal success.<sup>20</sup> Thirdly, Bourdieu states that power is not something an agent (individual or organisation) inherently possesses; rather it is something attained by an agent's ability to make things happen. The publishing field relates to quantities and resources or *capital*, which translates to power.<sup>21</sup> By adapting Bourdieu's concepts of capital, Thompson has identified five types of capital that are critical to creating and maintaining a successful publishing enterprise: "economic capital"—money, stock and the ability to draw on resources and finances; "human capital"—staff; social capital—relationships developed through networks and contacts; "intellectual capital"—intellectual property pertaining to copyright, and "symbolic capital"—the accumulation of status and prestige.<sup>22</sup> Thompson states that all five types of capital are key components of a successful publishing house. In practice, the competitive edge is

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<sup>17</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 3–14.

<sup>18</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 3–4.

<sup>21</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 5–10.

determined by the differential distribution of economic and symbolic capital.<sup>23</sup> Finally, Thompson's fourth reason for applying Bourdieu's field theory to book publishing, and perhaps the most critical, is what he refers to as "the logic of the field". This concept relates to the conditions which determine how, "individual agents and organizations can participate in the field – that is, the conditions under which they can play the game (and play it successfully)."<sup>24</sup> Thompson's overview of how Bourdieu's field and capital theories apply to the publishing industry is key to this study because it provides a useful set of parameters for assessing how the various agents and organisations gain and use their capital to "play the game" in relation to the popularisation of the coffee-table book in the post-war era.

## **(ii) Design**

Even within the constraints of publishing conventions and house styles, each photographically illustrated book has its own unique design qualities. A significant influence has been Bauhaus, which encapsulated a movement that was influential in reforming thinking around education and art. By drawing together multiple creative disciplines, its conceptual models challenged traditional approaches. The Bauhaus book designers were known for their clarity of design through consistent structure and use of space, particularly the integration of text and images.<sup>25</sup> These elements were expressed through the interaction of colours, and colours with space and form, as well as Bauhaus typographies such as the "elementary", which was dominated by red and black:

[O]ther compositional elements included san-serif type (joined later by future) and the use of photos and typographical material such as points, rules, bold rules and screens. Arrangements on the plane now respected not the rules of symmetry but the significance of the text, and might be angled or vertical.<sup>26</sup>

As graphic design is the principal art form involved in the composition of a coffee-table book's front cover and content, no doubt the pioneering layout of images with text were influenced by the

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<sup>23</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 11.

<sup>25</sup> Alan Bartram, *Bauhaus, Modernism and the Illustrated Book* (New Haven, USA: Yale University Press, 2004), 12.

<sup>26</sup> Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus 1919–1933* (Koln, Germany: Taschen, 2015), 145–151.



fourteen aesthetically designed books published by the Bauhaus school between 1925 and 1930.<sup>27</sup>

The book covers are notable for the use of graphic emblems, abstract shapes and avant-garde typography with an “extreme emphasis on [the structures] of word and image.”<sup>28</sup>

In a tribute to graphic designer Alan Bartram, Catherine Dixon describes him as a “quietly important figure in the development of British book design and typography”.<sup>29</sup> Bartram’s commentary on book design is significant to this study because the book designer’s role is to create an engaging visual narrative using aesthetic design principles, much the same way a novelist engages the reader with the arrangement of sentences and choice of words that carry the narrative. Bartram, who wrote *Bauhaus, Modernism and the Illustrated Book*, was particularly interested in lettering and published a series of illustrated books on the subject. Bartram’s books were heavily illustrated with his own black and white photos, which “allowed for images to be integrated alongside text.”<sup>30</sup> Drawing on Bartram’s own words to illustrate how offset printing revolutionised photographically illustrated books, Dixon refers to a tribute to Bartram posted by Lucy Myers on the Modern British Artists blog:

My lettering books [. . .] were integrated and could not have been done any other way. I first organised the sequence of photographs, grouped them into thematic pages, then wrote the captions. These referred directly to the illustrations I was showing on each spread, but they ran on from page to page to form a continuous text. Although picture-led, the text is equally important, the design in my mind as I was writing it: the advantage of being a designer-writer is that the text and page layout can be organised together to fit.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin/Museum for Gestaltung, Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau and Klassik Stiftung Weimar, eds., *Bauhaus: A Conceptual Model*. (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 234.

<sup>28</sup> Gestaltung, Dessau and Weimar, *Bauhaus: A Conceptual Model*, 234.

<sup>29</sup> Catherine Dixon, “Quiet Man of Letters,” *Eye* 22, 86 (2013): 33-35. See also: Bartram’s book series on lettering: *Lettering in Architecture* (1975), *Fascia Lettering*, *Street Name Lettering* and *Tombstone Lettering in the British Isles* (1978) and *The English Lettering Tradition* (1986).

<sup>30</sup> Dixon, “Quiet Man of Letters,” 35.

<sup>31</sup> Lucy Myers, April 12, 2013, comment on, Alan Bartram, “In Memory of Alan Bartram, 1932–2013: Writer, Book Designer and Artist.” *The Modern British Artists Blog* Accessed October 30, 2017, <https://modernbritishartists.wordpress.com/2013/04/12/in-memory-of-alan-bartram-1932-2013-writer-book-designer-and-artist/>.

Bartram claims that Bauhaus design principles used in modern illustrated books remain modernist, even though the primary intention is to be eye-catching.<sup>32</sup> Design intent is both a commercial and a cultural reflection of the times. He also states that those principles unified artists, architects, artisans and craftsmen through the common language of design for visual expression and had its most significant period in continental Europe in the late 1920s and 1930s.<sup>33</sup> According to Walz, Bauhaus resonated internationally on both a practical and theoretical level, synthesising a wide variety of arts with practicality through its hierarchical model of masters and students.<sup>34</sup>

The Bauhaus was a modernist movement, marking a “radical break in European culture to produce what art critic Harold Rosenberg has called ‘the tradition of the new’.”<sup>35</sup> For a movement that existed for fourteen years, Bartram states that “its thinking influenced the appearance of almost every kind of artefact throughout the twentieth century, and continues to do so in the twenty-first, despite occasional reactions against its modernist ethic.”<sup>36</sup> This includes coffee-table books, which can no doubt attribute the arrangement of images and text to Bauhaus influences. Bartram argues that one of the essential achievements of twentieth-century book design was the way the book form integrates text and illustrations.<sup>37</sup> This integration of text and images is achieved “by means of a consistent structure and use of space, which is aesthetically pleasing and supports the reading experience.”<sup>38</sup> And the juxtaposition of captions and images is a hallmark of the coffee-table book.

## Disruptive technologies and behaviour

### Technologies

Advances in an existing technology or the introduction of a new technology can dramatically reshape an industry or organisation. Clayton Christensen has famously categorised these advances

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<sup>32</sup> Bartram, *Bauhaus*, 14–15.

<sup>33</sup> Bartram, *Bauhaus*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> Robin Walz, *Modernism* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education, 2013), 63.

<sup>35</sup> Walz, *Modernism*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Bartram, *Bauhaus*, 12.

<sup>37</sup> Bartram, *Bauhaus*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> Bartram, *Bauhaus*, 12.

as ‘sustaining’ or ‘disruptive’ technologies. Christensen’s theories on sustaining and disruptive technologies are central to this study because advances in full-colour offset printing technology in the early 1960s improved the cost efficiencies, quality and ability to mass-produce large-format, full-colour photobooks. According to Christensen, “[m]ost new technologies foster improved product performance,” which he refers to as sustaining technologies. Some sustaining technologies have their own distinct characteristics, which can be “discontinuous or radical in character, while others are of an incremental in nature.”<sup>39</sup> Christensen argues that, initially, fringe or new customers value a disruptive technology because products are “typically cheaper, simpler, smaller, and, frequently, more convenient to use,” but occasionally genuine disruptive technologies emerge and are fully embraced<sup>40</sup> This was the case when full-colour offset printing was embraced by printing centres and publishers in the post-war era, which enabled the popularisation of coffee-table books. They could be produced and sold at low costs, they were a simple medium to use because the visual content could be enjoyed without having to read, they were produced in full-colour, and they were accessible.

I argue that full-colour offset printing was both a sustaining and a disruptive technology because it opened up the illustrated publishing industry and market. For book publishers, this new full-colour technology meant less time-consuming production practices and improved print quality and economies of scale. It allowed the sustainable emergence of full-colour coffee-table books, making it possible to produce large volumes of books at lower cost. To this extent, it appeared as a “sustaining” technology. At the same time, it had radical effects on the book-selling industry. Christensen’s theories help us to understand how full-colour offset printing, as both a “sustaining” and a “disruptive” technology, enhanced the production of books in an existing industry, and facilitated the large-format, photographically illustrated book sector in the publishing field to

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<sup>39</sup> Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovator’s Dilemma: The Revolutionary Book That Will Change the Way You Do Business* (New York, USA: Collins Business Essentials, 2005), xviii.

<sup>40</sup> Christensen, *The Innovator’s Dilemma*, xviii.

flourish. However, it was not until this “sustaining” yet “disruptive” technology was coupled with entrepreneurial or innovative behaviour, that disrupted the trajectory of the photobooks.

## **Behaviour**

Entrepreneurs and innovators can disrupt an industry or organisation because they challenge established systems and conventions. In some cases, this disruption is associated almost immediately with business success. This was very much the pattern in the case of publishers Paul Hamlyn and Lloyd O’Neil. They achieved business success and their innovations influenced British and Australian publishing. In another case, however, the picture is more complicated. As Executive Director of the Sierra Club, David Brower demonstrated many of the qualities we might associate with entrepreneurship. The immediate effect, however, was culturally successful, but financially disastrous.

According to Bourdieu, fields of cultural production are structured by the possibilities of positions, which then become largely characterised by struggles over positions.<sup>41</sup> This often means “battle[s] between established producers, institutions and styles, and heretical newcomers.”<sup>42</sup> Bourdieu encapsulates this phenomenon by drawing on the concept of “*the space of possibilities*” where actions and interventions are still constituted by a certain habitus by people who understand and operate within the laws of a particular group or organisation. How then do visionaries, innovators or entrepreneurs break from the conventions of their habitus?<sup>43</sup> This is an area where Bourdieu’s habitus theory offers few answers, and we need to turn theories such as those put forward by Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen.

These theorists of innovation argue that a willingness to move outside accepted ways of operating is “the ‘secret sauce’ of business success.”<sup>44</sup> While Dyer et al. attribute this factor to a

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<sup>41</sup> David Hesmondhalgh, “Bourdieu, the Media and Cultural Production,” *Media, Culture & Society* 28, 2 (2006): 215–216.

<sup>42</sup> Hesmondhalgh, “Media and Cultural Production,” 216.

<sup>43</sup> Hesmondhalgh, “Media and Cultural Production,” 216.

<sup>44</sup> Jeff Dyer, Hal Gregersen and Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovator’s DNA: Mastering the Five Skills of Disruptive Innovators* (Boston, USA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011), 17.

basic ‘DNA’, they are not suggesting that innovation is a result of genetic determinism. Rather, they use the term as a metaphor to highlight shared fundamental characteristics necessary for innovation. However, their research confirms that disruptive innovators are not entirely the result of shared instinctive characteristics. It is possible to develop creativity and innovation, which is the “lifeblood of our global economy and a strategic priority for virtually every CEO around the world.”<sup>45</sup> The five skills, which distinguish innovators from others, begin with “associational thinking”. This, for Dyer et al., is the central skill.<sup>46</sup> It “helps innovators discover new directions by making connections across seemingly unrelated questions, problems, or ideas”. The four remaining skills having a role in triggering “associational thinking.”<sup>47</sup> They are: questioning, observing, networking and experimenting.<sup>48</sup>

The figure most associated with theories of entrepreneurship is Joseph Schumpeter. As a political and economic scientist, he was particularly interested in how entrepreneurship functioned within different economic and political systems. According to Schumpeter, one of the key features of entrepreneurship involves an element of exploitation:

We have seen that the function of entrepreneurs is to reform or revolutionize the pattern of production by exploiting an invention or, more generally, an untried technological possibility for producing a new commodity or producing an old one in a new way, by opening a new source of supply of materials or a new outlet for products, by reorganizing an industry and so on.<sup>49</sup>

Because I argue that entrepreneurship helped to popularise coffee-table books in the post-war period, theories on disruptive behaviour are important to this study. The post-war publication of large-format illustrated books by publishers such as Brower, Hamlyn and O’Neil involved elements of risk-taking, uncertainty, exploitation and experimentation, due to the cost and availability of quality full-colour printing and the prevailing publishing politics and conventions in which they

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<sup>45</sup> Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen, *The Innovator's DNA*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen, *The Innovator's DNA*, 22.

<sup>47</sup> Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen, *The Innovator's DNA*, 23.

<sup>48</sup> Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen, *The Innovator's DNA*, 23–25.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London, UK: Routledge, 2010), 117.

operated. As previously mentioned, independent publishers in post-war Australia exploited the availability of hi-tech offshore printing centres in South-east Asia to achieve a superior product and better economies of scale, which resulted in a disruption to how the Australian publishing industry operated.<sup>50</sup>

A useful further addition to theories of entrepreneurship is provided by Appadurai's concept of "diversion". According to Appadurai, the entrepreneur frequently diverts commodities from their customary paths, enabling the new to flow.<sup>51</sup> For example, Hamlyn created new pathways for book sales in Britain by making them available in outlets such as department stores, which was outside the usual realm of the traditional book stores. Similarly, the founders of Phaidon Press were forced to find a new pathway for their publishing business when World War II disrupted their operations in Vienna, and they fled to London to continue their tradition of fine art publications. Schumpeter also notes that profit is not always the prime motivator driving entrepreneurs. He argues that motivation is driven by the pleasure of creating and fulfilling a dream when establishing an enterprise. As the three case studies in this thesis will demonstrate, the primary motivations of Brower, Hamlyn and O'Neil were different, but they all responded to the publishing and social circumstances in which they operated. These included—saving the wilderness, rediscovering national heritage, making art more accessible and challenging publishing and bookselling conventions through the publication of coffee-table books, and promoting national identity. However, these entrepreneurs had to work within the realities of book publishing as both a creative and a commercial business, and some were more successful at playing the game than others.

## How do books reach readers?

What motivates consumers to buy certain objects, and why do material objects matter? According to Appadurai, consumption becomes "noticeable only when contextually ostentatious." When

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<sup>50</sup> Jenny Lee, "Exploiting the Imprint," in *Making books: Contemporary Australian Publishing*, eds. David Carter and Anne Galligan (St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2007), 31.

<sup>51</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 25.

consumers wish to be liberated from the repetition or habituation of consuming products of necessity such as food.<sup>52</sup> As a result, consumers turn towards the “aesthetic of the ephemeral” if they wish freedom from habit. Appadurai draws on fashion as an example because it is constantly changing. Fashion consumers are encouraged constantly to consume new looks in order to keep up with the latest trend.<sup>53</sup> Coffee-table books do not fall into aesthetic ephemeral consumption as much as fashion because books tend to be more enduring artefacts that can outlast current trends. This is why coffee-table books are promoted as gifts for Christmas. Appadurai argues that a certain logic resides in consumer repetition, particularly associated with consumption markers such as Christmas. As he points out, it is a time of “obligatory or near-obligatory patterns of gift giving,” which occur generally within family and friendship circles.<sup>54</sup> It is therefore one of the most important commercial markets for producers and consumers, given the “obligation” to consume in the context of reciprocity. Given the commercialism of gift-giving periods, the spirit of gift exchange is starkly opposed to the “profit-oriented, self-centred, and calculated spirit that fires the circulation of commodities.”<sup>55</sup> Appadurai characterises gift-giving as obligatory, while also acknowledging that individuals enter into the spirit of wanting to give and exchange gifts. Humphery identifies that these conflicting characteristics of gift-giving as a conundrum for consumerism because many people in affluent nations seem to live a set of conflicting values, in that they strive to achieve material wealth, yet object to being labeled as rampant consumers.<sup>56</sup> Gift-giving is clearly of interest to this study. As the thesis will demonstrate, books have been part of Christmas gift-giving as early as the eighteenth century and the Christmas market is very significant for production timelines. Some of the coffee-table books discussed in this thesis strategically targeted the Christmas market.

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<sup>52</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 66.

<sup>53</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 68.

<sup>54</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 68.

<sup>55</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (London, UK: Verso Books, 2013), 17.

<sup>56</sup> Kim Humphery, *Excess: Anti-consumerism in the West* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2010), 110.

The following book review, published in 1967, illustrates the connection between Christmas and the consumption of coffee-table books:

An impression exists that if a new book is especially stately in format, amply illustrated, high-priced, devoted to some worthy cultural topic, and published in the fall, it is not doubt designed for the Christmas-gift and coffee-table trade — to be seen but not read. This isn't necessarily so. Numerous "big" books of this season's crop make for very good reading indeed (though their heft prevents reading in bed, and often even in the lap), as well as for spectacular looking.<sup>57</sup>

Producers of consumer goods could not sustain their businesses if consumers did not have the tendency to consume or exhibit some level of taste. According to Bourdieu, "the universe of cultural goods [is] a system of stylistic possibles".<sup>58</sup> Products are developed in response to how tastes are determined, one of them being class where individual taste can be expressed through lifestyle and product choices.<sup>59</sup> Even in the case of mass-produced products such as the coffee-table, which became a popular item in post-war homes, individual expressions of taste could still be made in the choice of design and materials used, and the way the coffee-table was "dressed". Taste, however, does not remain static. According to Bourdieu, any changes made to a product creates changes in taste, which causes the field of production and consumption to be in a constant state of adaption. The best producers succeed because they are able to meet the needs of the changing taste of consumers.<sup>60</sup> This makes consumer taste a powerful driver behind the design and production of goods and a way of distinguishing oneself from the "others". Bourdieu argues that consumers objectively attune to goods that occupy their own social class.<sup>61</sup> In other words, buying certain lifestyle products signifies an attachment to a group or class of people, which Lury lists as: certain homes, cars, holidays, furnishings, clothes, food and drink.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> William Harlan Hale, "Easy to Look At, Not Bad to Read," *The New York Times*, December 3, 1967, 399.

<sup>58</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 230.

<sup>59</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 230.

<sup>60</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 231.

<sup>61</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 232.

<sup>62</sup> Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, USA: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 80.



In addition to Bourdieu's theories on consumerism, Kopytoff proposes that consumerism and material culture form a part of the transactional nature of commodities. Kopytoff's theory is useful to this study because it requires a broader thinking about what material objects reveal beyond being a consumable product. As Kopytoff argues, another dimension to consumerism is the cultural biography commodities create because the transaction of commodities can reveal things that otherwise remain obscure. To illustrate this point, Kopytoff cites the example of how a car in Africa has a cultural history beyond its function as a vehicle for transporting people. It represents a symbol of consumer and material culture because it has involved interaction between the buyer and seller, where money was negotiated and exchanged.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, as suggested by Darnton's "communications circuit", a coffee table laden with coffee-table books represents a process of many interactions with people and machinery prior to appearing on the coffee table as illustrated by Darnton's "communications circuit". For example, coffee-table books interact with other commodities such as paper, ink and photographs during the production process, then with booksellers and consumers. In other words, the coffee-table book is a physical commodity in one part of its life cycle and beyond that, becomes an object of inspiration or aspiration. Once in the hands of the consumer it may it may be exchanged as a gift, added to a collection, provide a travel memory or symbolise an affluent life.

## Globalisation

The globalisation of book production was important to the emergence of coffee-table books in the post-war era. For example, engagement with South-east Asian printing centres in the post-war era, "marked the entry of Australian publishing into a rapidly globalising print trade."<sup>64</sup> British publisher, Hamlyn, sought cheaper colour printing options in Czechoslovakia, in order to produce high-quality, affordable illustrated books for an emerging market of book consumers. Appadurai

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<sup>63</sup> Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 67.

<sup>64</sup> Lee, "Australia in Colour," 51.

states that globalisation is not necessarily just about things in motion. Rather, the phenomenon is more about “relations of disjuncture” because the flow of objects, people, images, and discourses move at different speeds, axes, points of origin and terminate in different regions, nations or societies.<sup>65</sup> In practice, this means that the timing and emergence of products into markets, reflects the culture and economics of those markets at the time. Appadurai notes that two main forces have sustained cultural interaction. These are: war and religious conversion.<sup>66</sup> The Second World War is one of the key events that helped to popularise the coffee-table book for two reasons—the war contributed to the arrival of immigrant publishers who published coffee-table books and the subsequent post-war renewal created a new market of book-buyers. The war period saw the displacement of people who had escaped the Nazis in Europe, which saw them migrate to countries such as America, Britain and Australia. This resulted in the establishment of at least three key publishing houses who once published or still publish coffee-table books, namely: Phaidon Press, Thames & Hudson, and Paul Hamlyn. The founders of Phaidon Press and Thames & Hudson established major publishing houses in America and Britain. Dr Bela Horovitz and Ludwig Goldscheider (Phaidon Press) and Walter and Eva Neurath (Thames & Hudson), all Jewish *émigrés*, brought their culture as well as their publishing skills and experience to the production of coffee-table art books. According to James, this transference of talent enriched the universities and institutions of English-speaking countries, particularly to the appreciation of the visual arts. On a more practical level, Britain saw the establishment of Phaidon Press, which published “art books for the average intelligent reader.”<sup>67</sup>

After the end of the Second World War, book publishers focused on the landscape in many of their early coffee-table books, whether it was the American wilderness, the English countryside or the Australian landscapes. Why was the landscape a common theme in coffee-table books in three

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<sup>65</sup> Arjun Appadurai, ed. *Globalization*. (Durham, USA: Duke University Press, 2001), 5–6.

<sup>66</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 27.

<sup>67</sup> Clive James, “On the Library Coffee-Table,” *Visual Resources* 15, 3 (1999): 371.

different countries during the same period? Landscapes are vast. The large-format of the coffee-table book page was a natural medium to showcase large images. The other medium which featured the natural environment at the time was television. Mitman notes that nature programs on American television were popular forms of entertainment for the whole family.<sup>68</sup> Australians also tuned into television programs like *Ask the Leyland Brothers*, which took their audience on weekly adventures through the Australian outback.<sup>69</sup> As this thesis demonstrates, consumer interest in books featuring landscapes, occurred for different reasons in America, Britain and Australia. For example, the Sierra Club's environmental coffee-table books were published as a visual tool to help save the American wilderness.<sup>70</sup> Britain had a long tradition of publishing books on the English countryside in the inter-war years, one which reacquainted the population with the idea of Englishness and nationhood.<sup>71</sup> In addition, independent Australian publishers were producing Australiana landscape coffee-table books, which tapped into a new interest in national identity: "people wanted Australian books with Australian themes."<sup>72</sup> As Horne notes, "it was becoming more difficult to keep a straight face when thinking of Australia as 'British' and as a land of 'the bush'"<sup>73</sup>

## What do readers make of books?

### Culture

Taste is closely linked to cultural preferences. For example, one's taste – the thing that causes one to choose one coffee-table book over another or avoiding coffee-table books all together is, according to Bourdieu, based on a person's "upbringing and education". Consumers choose cultural

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<sup>68</sup> Gregg Mitman, *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* (Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 134.

<sup>69</sup> C. Healy and A. Huber, "Ask the Leyland Brothers: Instructional TV, travel and popular memory," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 24, 3 (2010): 389.

<sup>70</sup> Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Lincoln, USA: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 171.

<sup>71</sup> Catherine Brace, "Publishing and Publishers: Towards an Historical Geography of Countryside Writing," *Area* 33, 3 (2001): 287.

<sup>72</sup> Frank Thompson, "Sixties Larrikins," in *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005*, eds. Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright (St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2006), 32–33.

<sup>73</sup> Donald Horne, *Ideas for a Nation* (Sydney, Australia: Pan Books, 1989), 37.

goods such as coffee-table books based on taste, has a certain logic.<sup>74</sup> Bourdieu's theories on "taste" are particularly applicable to this study because the status conferred on large-format photographically illustrated books in relation to terminology—art book, photography book, coffee-table book—is linked to taste and class. In other words, the consumption of art books or photography books is regarded as "high-brow" and the consumption of coffee-table books as "middle-brow" or popular, depending on content.

But, what is culture and how is it defined and understood? From an etymological viewpoint, Williams regards the term "culture" as "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" and argues that its complexity is partly due to an intricate historical development, particularly in how it was used and understood in various European languages. The term "culture" was associated with different concepts in different languages, which eventually separated while still overlapping. For example, Williams notes that meanings for "culture" ranged from "inhabit and cultivate to protect and honour with worship", which viewed "culture" in terms of processes. The term then shifted to the abstract as the result of two crucial changes. First, a degree of habituation occurred, which "made the sense of human tending direct" and secondly, there was an extension of "particular processes to a general process, which the word could abstractly carry" as an independent noun. This particular use of the term did not become important until the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>75</sup> The noun "'culture' progressed from the 'intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic' to a more general word used to describe a 'particular way of life'" and is now widely used to describe the "practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity" such as, "music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film."<sup>76</sup> Williams makes the point that the complexity is not in the word "culture" itself but lies in the variations of its usage.<sup>77</sup> Given that the term culture

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<sup>74</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 1985), 87–88.

<sup>76</sup> Williams, *Keywords*, 90.

<sup>77</sup> Williams, *Keywords*, 91.

is now widely applied to creative pursuits, what role have coffee-table books played in disseminating culture through photographic content?

While Williams focuses on the etymology of the word “culture”, Bourdieu examines the connection between culture and class through an analysis of questionnaires conducted on cultural pursuits such as music and art. Bourdieu concludes that the influence of social origin on cultural practices and choices enables a hierarchy of the arts, which creates a hierarchy of consumers who have “predispose[d] tastes [that] function as markers of “class”.”<sup>78</sup> Bourdieu’s conclusions certainly apply to how distinctions were made between photobooks and coffee-table books and their target markets. Bourdieu states that cultural practices cannot be fully understood without understanding the ordinary use of “culture” and how it is contextualised in relation to class.<sup>79</sup> It is one thing to have acquired manners, he suggests, but it is the practice of manners that distinguishes one person from the other as an indicator of class.<sup>80</sup> On the basis of a survey of 1,217 people, assessing preferences for three styles of classical music, Bourdieu identified three “zones of taste”: “*Legitimate taste*”, “*Middle-brow*” taste and “*Popular*” taste, which were shown to be aligned with levels of education and social classes.<sup>81</sup>

The perspective applies particularly well to coffee-table books. In terms of the three zones of taste photobooks might be regarded as media of *Legitimate taste*, while coffee-table books would fall into the categories of “*Middle-brow*” taste and “*Popular*” taste, attracting a new book-buying market. With regard to the term “middlebrow”, Driscoll points out that it does not only relate to the product itself. Location also determines which category of “brow” a cultural product occupies. “The value of a text is always influenced by its dissemination and consumption,” in venues such as

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<sup>78</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 1–2.

<sup>79</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 2.

<sup>80</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 2.

<sup>81</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 16.

cinemas, in magazines or on television.<sup>82</sup> Driscoll's comment on the "middlebrow" also applies to the distribution of coffee-table books. As objects, they fall into Bourdieu's categories of "*Middlebrow*" taste and "*Popular*" taste, but this status is reinforced by patterns of distribution. A significant part of the history of the coffee table book is the move by publishers such as Hamlyn to sell books outside of established bookshops.

### Visual culture

According to Mirzoeff, "for many critics, the problem with visual culture lies not in its emphasis on the importance of visibility but in its use of a cultural framework to explain the history of the visual."<sup>83</sup> One of the key influences on how culture itself is framed is Matthew Arnold. Mirzoeff argues that his influential 1880s essays in *Culture and Anarchy* characterised culture and anarchy as binary opposites.<sup>84</sup> Arnold views high culture as the embodiment of great men with a passion for spreading the best of knowledge and ideas, which contrasts with the unpleasant and rough behaviour found in those with anarchic tendencies.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, art critic Clement Greenberg contextualises the judging of art as binary opposites.<sup>86</sup> In his article "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" published in *Partisan Review* in 1939, Greenberg claims that the avant-garde belongs to the ruling class because of their wealth: "No culture can develop with a social basis, without a source of stable income."<sup>87</sup> According to Greenberg, there was a simultaneous entrance of avant-garde and kitsch, arguing that the new cultural phenomenon of kitsch was a product of the industrial revolution. It appeared in the industrial West and took its name from what the Germans called Kitsch, meaning:

[P]opular, commercial art and literature with their chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies [and so forth].<sup>88</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Beth Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow: Tastemakers and Reading in the Twenty-first Century* (New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 9.

<sup>83</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London, UK: Routledge, 1999), 22.

<sup>84</sup> Mirzoeff, *Visual Culture*, 23.

<sup>85</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge : C.U.P., 1963), 137.

<sup>86</sup> Mirzoeff, *Visual Culture*, 23.

<sup>87</sup> Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* 5, (1939): 38.

<sup>88</sup> Greenberg, "Avant-Garde," 39.

This newly devised kitsch culture was destined to fill the demand of those who were “insensible to the values of genuine culture” but still wanting the distraction that any sort of culture can deliver.<sup>89</sup> The framing of culture and visual culture in terms of binary opposites, whether it be highbrow versus lowbrow or fine art versus commercial art, is highly relevant to this study. As visual media, coffee-table books exist within a field dominated by text-filled books, which creates binary opposites between text-filled books and photographically illustrated books.

Bourdieu defines the structure of the literary field in terms of “the space of literary or artistic position-takings,” in which the dominant class determines the positions within the structure.<sup>90</sup> Bourdieu calls this “[the] science of the literary field”. It is here that a system of distinctive properties set one genre apart from another. On the spectrum of books, coffee-table books could be categorised as binary opposites to text-filled books because the content is largely image-driven.<sup>91</sup> Bourdieu proposes that a system of dependence on the other classes by the dominant class exists to determine and maintain its position. In other words, the distinctive properties of literary novels (text-filled fiction) and coffee table books (image-driven non-fiction) depend on each other in order to maintain their position in the literary field. Literary fiction appeals to those with “legitimate taste” while consumers with “middlebrow” or “popular taste” are drawn to coffee-table books.

As coffee-table books are largely photographic media, reading visual narratives and exploring what image-filled books offer the reader is pertinent to this study. Berger draws our attention to the complex nature of the way we see and understand the visual by framing it as a continual set of mechanical and relational functions that occur while looking, gazing and interpreting images.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the visual world is understood via an optic response to stimuli through our eyes in conjunction with our relationship to the scenes or objects we encounter.<sup>93</sup> Viewing visual media

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<sup>89</sup> Greenberg, “Avant-Garde,” 39.

<sup>90</sup> Greenberg, “Avant-Garde,” 39.

<sup>91</sup> Bourdieu, “Field of Cultural Production,” 312.

<sup>92</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London, UK: Penguin, 2008), 1–5.

<sup>93</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 1.

such as photographs, paintings, films and advertisements involves an intricate set of mechanical and cultural interpretations and responses. One can expect to engage various mechanical functions and cultural experiences when “reading” visual media such as coffee-table books. To highlight the attributes that sight brings to our understanding of the world, Berger makes a distinction between touch and sight. He argues that touch is more about being situational, “like a static, limited form of sight” because one has to be within reach of an object in order to touch it. Whereas the act of looking at something is an active choice, one that is a continual function of scanning and holding images because sight gives us the ability to continually take in large amounts of images and objects at a time.<sup>94</sup> Thus, the act of looking and seeing is both an autonomic and a conscience action because our optic function operates automatically when responding to what we deliberately choose to view. With regard to “reading” images, Berger notes that there has to be some level of awareness the photographer has curated what we see in choice of subject and location.<sup>95</sup> Gombrich argues that “no image tells its own story” as it requires the viewer’s input, which he refers to as “the beholders share”. This indicates that the viewer also has influence over how an image is “seen”. In other words, the viewer plays their part in making sense of a visual experience by drawing on a stock of images, which have been stored in their memory over time. Even so, as Gombrich points out, one cannot always control what the viewer takes away from an image because the viewer may extract a different meaning from the creator’s intention.<sup>96</sup>

The discussion on “reading” images, thus far, has focused on what the photographer and viewer bring to the pictorial experience. Mitchell, in contrast, proposes a bold question when he asks: “what do pictures want?” In doing so, he shifts the question from what “pictures *do* to what they *want*”. This constrains the rhetoric power of the image because his question involves subjectivising images or the personification of inanimate objects, as well as discarding our sense of disbelief,

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<sup>94</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 1.

<sup>95</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 2–3.

<sup>96</sup> E. H. Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Oxford, UK: Phaidon, 1982), 145.



because such is the power of some images they demand something of the viewer other than appreciation or admiration.<sup>97</sup> To illustrate his point, Mitchell cites the famous “Uncle Sam” image as the perfect example. It demands more than a viewing; the image wants you.<sup>98</sup> Here, Mitchell is suggesting that some images have desires. As already discussed, the viewer’s eyes are continually moving and holding their gaze on objects or scenes of interest. Likewise, images are capable of gazing back at the viewer. Returning to the “Uncle Sam” image, Mitchell notes that “[t]he immediate aim of the picture appears to be a version of the Medusa effect: that is, it “hails” the viewer verbally and tries to transfix him with the directness of its gaze.”<sup>99</sup> The finger-pointing gesture, by the Uncle Sam character, singles out the viewer by way of “accusing, designating, and commanding him.”<sup>100</sup>

Technology also has an impact on the way images are viewed. First, the printing process necessarily changes an original photographic image to a facsimile on the page causing each process to impact on authenticity. This is particularly pertinent to the production of coffee-table art books where authenticity is paramount when reproducing works of art, so that colour and texture is replicated as close to the original as possible. This means that the authority and authenticity of an image-filled book comes from the reputation of the publisher to reproduce images of fine art to a high standard. I discuss the way this is demonstrated by publishers Thames & Hudson and Phaidon Press in Chapter Three. Secondly, just as an artist uses a brush as a natural extension of their hand to create art, the camera is an extension of the photographer’s hand, albeit a mechanical device, which aids the photographer in creating an image. According to Mirzoeff, one of the reasons photography eluded a traditional classification of art is its modernity. It was seen as having

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<sup>97</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 33.

<sup>98</sup> Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 28–36.

<sup>99</sup> Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 36.

<sup>100</sup> Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 36–37.

democratised the visual image, allowing ordinary people to document their lives.<sup>101</sup> Another reason photography was not seen as “real” art may be that sometimes new technology has potential to displace an old tradition. Mirzoeff notes that cries of “the death of ...” can often be heard in the face of a new technology. On seeing a new photographic process in 1839, Paul Delaroche, the French artist exclaimed, “[f]rom today painting is dead!”<sup>102</sup> As Mirzoeff explains, the unique quality of photography compared to fine art is its precision because it has ability to render an exact moment in time.<sup>103</sup> Sontag argues that the power of a photograph lies in the image itself and part of its authority is being repeatedly accessible in contrast to moving images, which move quickly out of frame. For this reason, she claims that photographs can make more of an impression and are more memorable than a moving image because they portray a particular moment in time. Bourdieu also noted that “[t]elevision is a stream of underselected images, each of which cancels its predecessor. By contrast, each still photograph is a privileged moment, turned into a slim object that one can keep and look at again.”<sup>104</sup> Sontag’s assessment of the attributes of a photograph adds weight to the argument that one of the appealing attributes of coffee-table books is that they are an accessible medium and have the ability to capture the viewer, even when browsing.

How then is the artistic value of photography determined and how does it affect comparisons between photobooks? Bourdieu’s commentary on photography and the artistic value of photography compared to fine art is useful in trying to address what is at the heart of the comparisons made between photobooks and coffee-table books by Parr and Badger and other photobook scholars. Bourdieu frames his theories on photography within a social definition of photography as a middlebrow art. Photography and fine art both require creative and mechanical skills, however effort and aesthetic appeal distinguishes photography from fine art.<sup>105</sup> Bourdieu raises the idea that

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<sup>101</sup> Mirzoeff, *Visual Culture*, 65.

<sup>102</sup> Mirzoeff, *Visual Culture*, 65–66.

<sup>103</sup> Mirzoeff, *Visual Culture*, 65–66.

<sup>104</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London, UK: Allen Lane, 1978), 13.

<sup>105</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography, a Middle-Brow Art* (Stanford, USA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 78.

the simplicity of the mechanical process involved in taking a photograph diminishes the idea of effort, “since all it takes is the simple pressing of a button”.<sup>106</sup> Bourdieu asks the question, “[c]an an art without an artist still be an art?”<sup>107</sup> Underpinning this question is the idea that the act of photography is mitigated through an apparatus, namely the camera, basing the artistic value of photography on an assessment of effort and skill. Regarding skill level, Bourdieu argues that there does not seem to be a photograph that is untakeable, “since all it takes is the simple pressing of a button to liberate the impersonal aptitude by which the camera is defined.”<sup>108</sup> Bourdieu’s assessment of photography as a middle-brow aesthetically fulfilling pursuit for the working classes is comparable to how the popularisation of coffee-table books in the post-war era was viewed and promoted a medium for the masses. Mitchell argues that the visual is ultimately just as important as language to social interactions and should not be reduced to language, signs or discourse because “pictures demand equal rights to language, not to be turned into language” as they have their own unique complexities.<sup>109</sup> Mitchell’s views support the idea that, as visual media, coffee-table books offered an alternative language and experience to their readers who could revisit the books at any time, at any speed, unlike the scheduling constraints of watching a film or television.

## **What do readers *do* with books?**

### **Place and space**

Coffee-table books are as much about inhabiting a space and occupying a place, as being a book. But what role did place and space play in the popularisation of the coffee-table book? Why did the coffee table as a space become the focus for displaying coffee-table books in post-war homes? The coffee table provided a new space for displaying large-format illustrated books and the new, more casual post-war living areas provided a central place for the coffee table to occupy. I argue that the general height and size of coffee tables afforded coffee-tables books with the perfect surface on

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<sup>106</sup> Bourdieu, *Photography*, 78.

<sup>107</sup> Bourdieu, *Photography*, 78.

<sup>108</sup> Bourdieu, *Photography*, 77.

<sup>109</sup> Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 47.

which to open a large-format book and view its large high-definition photographs. Bourdieu proposes that art offers the greatest scope for expressing an aesthetic disposition, even at the point of making a distinctive statement when decorating the domestic space with aesthetically pleasing objects.<sup>110</sup> In the light of this, coffee tables became another location in the domestic space where aesthetic taste could be expressed and seen by others because the domestic space is both a private and public space or liminal space.<sup>111</sup> Briganti and Mezei describe liminal spaces as the intersection between private and public because these “spaces that negotiate the relationship between inside and outside, private and public, such as doors, gardens, or windows.”<sup>112</sup> Could furniture pieces such as coffee tables be described as a liminal space? At times they act as a boundary between what taste is expressed in private and is also expressed in public when outsiders step over the threshold? Briganti and Mezei also note that there has been a long tradition of appropriating the names of domestic objects in literature, such as drawing-room comedy.<sup>113</sup> The practice of describing large-format illustrated books as coffee-table books is part of a long tradition of naming objects after domestic features. In this case, large-format illustrated books derived their name from the coffee table, a piece of furniture that was commonplace in the post-war era.

Yet the coffee table provided more than a space for displaying beautiful or decorative objects, they were a central focus in post-war homes. According to Gibson’s affordances theory, a surface expresses its affordance when it becomes a support for the unique features of an animal:

If a terrestrial surface is nearly horizontal (instead of slanted), nearly flat (instead of convex or concave), and sufficiently extended (relative to the size of the animal) and if its substance is rigid (relative to the weight of the animal), then the surface *affords support*.<sup>114</sup>

If Gibson’s affordance theory is applied to the appearance and proliferation of the coffee table in post-war homes, it provided the right habitat with the right structure at the right time for displaying

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<sup>110</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 5.

<sup>111</sup> Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei, “Liminal Spaces,” in *The Domestic Space Reader*, eds. Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 247.

<sup>112</sup> Briganti and Mezei, “Liminal Spaces,” 247.

<sup>113</sup> Briganti and Mezei, “Literary Spaces,” 320.

<sup>114</sup> James J. Gibson, “The Theory of Affordances,” in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, (Hillsdale, USA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986), 127.

and reading large-format illustrated books. Gaver makes the point that “[i]n general, when the apparent affordances of an artefact match its intended use, the artefact is easy to operate”, for example a door handle.<sup>115</sup> In other words, the physical attributes of one object implies that a compatible actor will apply an action to that object. In the case of the coffee table, the coffee-table book becomes the compatible actor by acting on the physical attributes of the coffee table by providing a large enough flat surface to support and store a large book, allowing easy access for browsing at any time. Gibson states that for a structure to support an animal, it must be “*measured relative to the animal*” because the structure is unique for that animal.<sup>116</sup> Again, if Gibson’s theory is applied to the coffee table, the coffee table provides the right measurement for large-format illustrated books and provides a unique space for them to reside where the low height of a coffee table affords the optimal viewing of large-format images in books. When looking at a coffee-table book while seated, the angle, afforded by the height of the coffee table, allows a bird’s eye view of an image rather than looking across an image if seated at a dining table. According to Monaco, optics plays an important role in how we see an image because the function of foveated vision (in the “fovea” of the retina), means reading images is both a physical, mental and psychological transaction.<sup>117</sup> This means that the ability to directly look down on an image rather than across potentially enhances the experience for viewing large-format photographs.

## Conclusion

The value of Danton’s communications circuit and book history questions as a model of enquiry has enabled the development of a rich, contextualised approach to the coffee-table book’s own unique history and cultural function in the post-war era. As this chapter has shown, the publishing history of coffee-table books in the post-war era involved three key factors. Firstly, advances in full-colour

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<sup>115</sup> William W. Gaver, “Technology Affordances” (paper presented at the Proceedings of CHI’91, New Orleans, USA, April 29–May 2, 1991). 80.

<sup>116</sup> Gibson, “Affordances,” 127.

<sup>117</sup> James Monaco, *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, and Beyond: Art, Technology, Language, History, Theory* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 174.

printing technology, secondly, post-war social change in America, Britain and Australia and thirdly, entrepreneurial publishers. These three factors placed the emergence of the coffee-table book within a rich social biography. The interplay between the technological disruption of full-colour offset printing and the disruptive behaviour of entrepreneurs enabled the mass-production and mass-consumption of coffee-table books. As a visual book genre in a field of text-filled books, coffee-table books are defined by their large-format images, aesthetics, material culture, taste, place and visual culture, which contributed to the mass-consumption of the genre and their cultural appeal in post-war homes. The phenomenon of displaying large-format photographically illustrated books on coffee tables saw the term “coffee-table book” become a common descriptor in the post-war era, which crossed the cultural boundaries of America, Britain and Australia. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach, this study draws on theories of book history, sociology and cultural studies to bring a more holistic approach to how the coffee-table book was popularised in the post-war era in America, Britain and Australia. In the next chapter, the coffee-table book is examined in the context of its links to the heritage of illustrated books. With the invention of photography, it became possible to reproduce images in books. However, the evolution of printing technology enabled the mass-production of full-colour photographically illustrated books, which entrepreneurial publishers exploited. The mass-consumption of these books ensued in the post-war era, which gave “birth” to the coffee-table book.

## Chapter Two

### How did coffee-table books come into being?

The photograph in a book is, obviously, the image of an image. But since it is, to begin with, a printed, smooth object, a photograph loses much less of its essential quality when reproduced in a book than a painting does.

Susan Sontag<sup>1</sup>

Coffee-table books are generally thought to have emerged in the 1960s. However, they did not suddenly come into being out of nowhere. They emerged from a number of earlier developments that had taken decades, if not longer, to unfold. The first, and most obvious, was technological. A necessary condition for the emergence of the coffee-table book was the availability of colour offset printing. But this was not in itself sufficient. Two further conditions were also important: new markets for books and entrepreneurial publishers who had identified the commercial possibilities of mass-circulation, large-format, illustrated volumes.

This chapter will map the lineage of coffee-table books from 1844 to the post-war social period, culminating in the development of three different book-buying markets. I will argue that four key developments together created the conditions for the coffee-table book to come into being. First, photographic methods which allowed the reproduction of images onto paper. This invention was utilised by William Henry Fox Talbot to produce the first instalment of *The Pencil of Nature*, published in 1844. In doing so he brought the photobook to actualisation and set a significant precedent for what was to become a new space for photography. Second, technological advances in full-colour printing led to four-colour offset printing in the 1960s. These enabled mass print runs of full-colour photobooks, which led to their commercialisation. The third step was the creation of a *cultural space* for the coffee-table book in the context of the post-war boom and changing social circumstances, which publishers successfully exploited. The fourth and final step was the development of a market for books among non-specialist readers. The term “coffee-table book” was

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<sup>1</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, 2–3.

applied to these more commercially driven photobooks. Thus the coffee-table book came into being and found a ready market.

## **Transferring photographs onto paper**

The most important precursor of the coffee-table book was the photobook—an artefact usually traced to Talbot’s invention of negative–positive paper photography, which not only set photographically illustrated books apart from text-only books but effectively set the trajectory for the coffee-table book in the post-war era. Talbot, who developed the negative–positive process, is largely credited with the reproduction of photographs on paper.<sup>2</sup> However, Talbot was but one of several working on perfecting their own photographic methods at the same time. His main competitor, Frenchman Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, developed the daguerreotype, which was at first regarded as “aesthetically and technically superior to Talbot’s photogenic drawing, or calotype because it produced a more refined result.”<sup>3</sup> Talbot’s procedure produced a coarsened reproduction that Parr and Badger described as being “like roughly drawn sketches compared to finished paintings.”<sup>4</sup> The significance of Talbot’s process, however, is that it allowed images to be replicated over and over again. Repetition was a key step towards the production of photobooks, paving the way for the later development of the coffee-table book.

The potential for multiple reproductions was significant because it opened the way to the commercialisation of illustrated books and had a further democratising effect on images. As Eisenstein argues, the ability to replicate allowed for the concurrent viewing of images and access to information. As she notes, the first democratising revolution for illustrated books occurred with the use of the wood block and engraving techniques, and these methods transformed technical literature because exact replications of diagrams or maps could be included in reference works and

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<sup>2</sup> Graham Smith, “H. Fox Talbot’s ‘Scotch Views’ for *Sun Pictures in Scotland* (1845),” in *The Photobook: From Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond*, eds. Patrizia Di Bello and Colette Wilson and Shamoon Zamir (New York, USA: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2012), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook*, vol. I, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook*, vol. I, 13.



viewed simultaneously by a wide range of readers.<sup>5</sup> Parr and Badger argue that Talbot's more time-consuming, two-step method was in fact, the "medium's salvation" because of its capacity to repeat identical images numerous times, which they argue "formed the basis of all modern photography".<sup>6</sup>

Talbot not only developed the negative-positive process; he also translated it from a technical triumph into an applied creative medium. This culminated in the publication of *The Pencil of Nature*, a photobook published in six instalments between 1844 to 1846, which was a collaboration between Talbot and botanist William Jackson Hooker.<sup>7</sup> Inevitably, any new medium has its supporters and detractors. It requires someone with a new perspective to realise its possibilities and to find an audience. Talbot was such a figure. *The Pencil of Nature* was intended as a working demonstration of his methodology and photographic techniques, and he gave pictorial evidence in the shape of a book to showcase his procedures. Talbot opens the book with a detailed account of the steps he took to reproduce photographs onto paper. The introduction is followed by twenty-four two-tone photographs, with accompanying text that describes the angle from which the images were taken as well as atmospheric anecdotes about the image and its surrounds.

Talbot's photographs feature a variety of subjects, from historic buildings, artefacts, art, prints, streetscapes and nature through to a country scene depicting haystack with a ladder and a piece of lace. While some of the images now seem rudimentary, the concept would have been revolutionary at the time.<sup>8</sup> The book was also in the nature of an experimental piece rather than a definitive statement of what the medium could achieve. As Parr and Badger note, *The Pencil of Nature* was recognised for its significance, but also criticised for its subject matter selection and inconsistencies

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, "Defining the Initial Shift: Some Features of Print Culture," in *Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 52–53.

<sup>6</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook*, vol. I, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Patrizia Di Bello, Colette Wilson and Shamooin Zamir, eds., *The Photobook: From Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond*. (New York, USA: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2012), 1.

<sup>8</sup> This description of *The Pencil of Nature* was gained by viewing an Ebook pdf version online made available by The Project Gutenberg. William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (Chapel Hill, USA: The Project Gutenberg, 2010).

in the quality of the photography.<sup>9</sup> Although Talbot's subject matter was largely regarded as dull, his subjects were consistent with some of the first themes featured in post-war coffee-table books in America, Britain and Australia. As I note later in this chapter, nature and landscapes, historic buildings and architecture, and art were popular categories, and remain so to this day.

*The Pencil of Nature* is generally considered to be the first photographically illustrated book, although there is some debate about this among photobook scholars.<sup>10</sup> Others argue that the honour should go to the three-volume *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* (1843–53) by Anna Atkins, given that Atkins' book predates the first instalment of *The Pencil of Nature*. Being first in time is not the important point here. The key issue is, what defines a photobook? Two essential features distinguished *The Pencil of Nature* from Atkins' book. First, Atkins' book was printed in small numbers and privately disseminated. Second, "the cyanotypes (blueprints) were made without a camera." According to Parr and Badger, the absence of a camera made Atkins' book a "photographic process of prints rather than photographs". To qualify as photography, it needed to offer a semblance of commercial enterprise, with image reproductions that included all of the elements that exemplify photography—most importantly, the camera. As Parr and Badger put it, *The Pencil of Nature* is considered a manifesto on photography and "the consensus is still inclined to award the palm to Talbot."<sup>11</sup> In his Introductory Remarks to *The Pencil of Nature*, Talbot correctly surmises that "Photographic Art" was likely to be widely used in the future.<sup>12</sup> Even so, the creative and commercial potential that the transference of photographs onto paper represented could only have been imagined by Talbot and Daguerre at the time.

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<sup>9</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook*, vol. I, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook*, vol. I, 14. Correspondence between William Henry Fox Talbot 'a typically Victorian mixture of amateur scientist, man of letters and world-be artist' and William Jackson Hooker, botanist, provided evidence of their wish to collaborate on a book about British plants by pasting photographs in a book, 13–14.

<sup>11</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook*, vol. I, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, 2.

## Photobooks

As a new cultural form, photobooks gave photographers another vehicle to exhibit their art to wider audiences. However, free artistic expression and meeting market needs are sometimes at odds in the field of publishing, and this can create tension between culture and commerce. The subject matter of the early photobooks reflected the interests of buyers in the market at the time, and the emphasis was on cultural or educative functions, not commercial opportunity. These photobooks also marked a shift in attitudes: photography in books was being seen as a legitimate way to obtain information through artistic expression. As Parr and Badger point out, the early photobooks functioned as a cultural artefact and were aimed at a specialist market. Topics such as travel, landscapes and engineering were for the “pedagogical cultural interests of the educated classes, with their tendency to be high-minded and ‘improving’.”<sup>13</sup>

Until the early 1870s, each photobook was produced by hand-pasting original photographic prints onto the page, which was time consuming and expensive. This changed with the development of photomechanical processes.<sup>14</sup> Photogravure was one of the first printing processes that enabled photographs to be reproduced in books. Using a light-sensitive gel, it enabled the transfer of a photo onto a metal plate, where it could then be etched.<sup>15</sup> The chromolithography technique, developed in France, allowed artists to print in colour, but each colour required a different plate to be prepared by the artist.<sup>16</sup> Although time consuming, in the hands of skilled artisans this technique produced high-quality images. This was imperative in the field of art publishing, where a good reputation and credibility was acquired through the authenticity of the art reproductions. Former director of Phaidon Press, Harvey Miller, recognised their translational nature: “[a]ny reproduction of a

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<sup>13</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook*, vol. I, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook*, vol. I, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Lyons, *Books*, 190.

<sup>16</sup> Lyons, *Books*, 190.

painting is a translation, like the translation of a poem.”<sup>17</sup> According to Clive James, a prime example of the quality these reproductions achieved can be found in the colour plates in Phaidon Press art books from the 1930s and 1940s. As James notes, there is no comparison to images found in art books today. “Goldsheider’s plates were the culmination of a great tradition going back to the time when technical limitations imposed a long pause for thought.” He was also noted for “[having] an infallible eye for the balance of colour.”<sup>18</sup> While James relishes this time-honoured tradition, it called for mastery of multi-layered, highly-technical printing processes, and in the business of publishing, time is money. This is one of the reason full-colour offset printing was such a revelation to the business of publishing. Illustrated books could be produced at greater speeds and volumes, which changed the economics of publishing. If technology could obviate long pauses in the printing process, it was no wonder publishers embraced the opportunity. Although photogravure and chromolithography were superior techniques to hand-pasting photographs onto a page, they remained expensive, time consuming and labour intensive.

Despite high printing costs, the photobook began to earn its place as an important medium for social observation, particularly through government commissions. This development gave selected photographers a financial boost and exposure to a book-buying audience interested in photographic essays as an art form. It also set a precedent for the role post-war coffee-table books played in reflecting national identity in America, Britain and Australia. By the 1930s, the photobook became a popular medium for documentary photographers and photojournalists beyond their home territory of magazines, newspapers and galleries. The medium allowed “serious” photographers to produce photographic essays in a format that would do justice to their photography and reach wider audiences through the book-buying market.

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<sup>17</sup> Harvey Miller, “Phaidon and the Business of Art Book Publishing: 1923–1967,” *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation* 15, 3 (1999): 344.

<sup>18</sup> James, “Library Coffee-Table,” 372.

One example of this type of photobook is Walker Evans's, *American Photographs*, published by the Museum of Modern Art in 1938 from the collection curated in the "American Photographs" exhibition.<sup>19</sup> Documentary photographers such as Evans were chosen to add a sense of authenticity to government programs. As Parr and Badger explain, "[t]he photobook became an essential tool of the documentary movements in the United States, western Europe and the Soviet Union."<sup>20</sup> In America, Roosevelt established the Farm Security Administration (FSA) during the Depression and the Resettlement Administration (RA) in 1935 as part of his New Deal program.<sup>21</sup> Other well-known photographers such as Ben Shahn, Dorothea Lange and Russell Lee were employed in the program to undertake a pictorial survey of rural areas in order to "show Americans America."<sup>22</sup> Parr and Badger argue that the program was the "most extensive Western documentary enterprise of the 1930s" while simultaneously having the dual purpose of informing and educating Americans, and keeping artists employed.<sup>23</sup>

From the outset, Evans makes a declaration on the artistic integrity of his photographic essay and his relative independence from governmental interests in the Frontmatter of *American Photographs*.<sup>24</sup> The photobook comprises thirty-seven black and white images (all recto, with verso pages blank save for the page numbers at bottom left). The images provide a snapshot of a cross-section of the American people—their living conditions, streetscapes, architecture, landscapes and industry. A note included in the fiftieth-anniversary edition describes the original edition of the book as an "elaborately prepared and—despite its austere style—luxurious production."<sup>25</sup> This background information supports the contention that aesthetics was also an important function of the early photobooks. It was a way of appropriately "framing" the photographer's work, and it gave

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<sup>19</sup> Walker Evans, *American Photographs* (New York, USA: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 200.

<sup>20</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook, vol. I*, 10.

<sup>21</sup> Lili Corbus Bezner, *Photography and Politics in America: From the New Deal into the Cold War* (Baltimore, USA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 3–4.

<sup>22</sup> Bezner, *Photography and Politics in America*, 3–4.

<sup>23</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook, vol. I*, 121.

<sup>24</sup> Evans, *American Photographs*, [not paginated].

<sup>25</sup> Evans, *American Photographs*, 201.

the work gravitas. Although the intention of New Deal was to show Americans America, and the production of *American Photographs* released the images from the confines of a gallery, the audience no doubt remained specialist rather than populist.

Although Parr and Badger describe *American Photographs* as a “photobook among photobooks” this did not guarantee its commercial success.<sup>26</sup> Books must resonate at the right time with the right audience. This was the case with two of Evans’s books. *American Photographs* (1938) and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) were remaindered as soon as they were published, yet when reissued in the 1960s, both achieved great success.<sup>27</sup> As Company puts it, “[their] time had come precisely insofar as their moment had gone.”<sup>28</sup> Evans’s books may have resonated more with a post-war American population reflecting on its nation’s history, fuelling a renewed appreciation of his photographic essays for their artistic commentary on sometimes less than idyllic scenes of American life. The success coincided with the popularisation of coffee-table books in the 1960s, which may have influenced the commercial viability of photobooks by celebrated photographers such as Walker Evans.

Nevertheless, it took some time for the photobook to develop as a popular form. At first the genre experienced a cross-over period where the treatment of topics by “serious” photojournalists was both critically regarded and began to achieve wide circulation. Perhaps their work was not initially intended to reach a more general audience, but a range of photographers would have seen the photobook as an opportunity to further their careers and broaden their exposure beyond exhibitions. Bezner argues that the documentary artistic stance became more popular in the post-war period, citing Steichen’s *The Family of Man* exhibit as a prime example of this phenomenon. It was “subsumed, and diluted, within the safer (or less extreme) realm of photojournalism”. She

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<sup>26</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook*, vol. I, 8.

<sup>27</sup> David Company, “Recalcitrant Intervention: Walker Evans’s Pages,” in *The Photobook: From Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond*, eds. Patrizia Di Bello and Colette Wilson and Shamoan Zamir (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 72.

<sup>28</sup> Company, “Recalcitrant Intervention,” 72.

considers that documentary photographers are primarily concerned with “sending messages of social realities beyond his or her own personal inner world (or “other-centeredness”).”<sup>29</sup>

In her political exploration of photography, Bezner seeks to distinguish artistic forms of photojournalism from those that are merely “populist”. Bezner’s perception was that “popular” grated against the high ideals that social commentary achieved through artistic narrative intent by the photographer. Yet critical reception was often at odds with popular success. Despite Bezner’s low regard for Steichen’s *The Family of Man*, it attracted an audience of 35,000 to the Museum of Modern Art in the first two weeks alone.<sup>30</sup> Herein lies the dilemma for any artist: seek approval from a specialist audience, or create works that have wider appeal? Bezner partly ascribes the tendency towards quasi-photographic journalism in America to the rise of repressive politics during the Cold War.<sup>31</sup> During times of national questioning, people may be reassured and respond to a “safer” curation of visual messages. This may explain why landscapes and historic buildings became popular as subjects for coffee-table books in the post-war period, when many were seeking a return to safety and security. Although *The Family of Man* is often dismissed for its sentimental humanism, Sandeen notes that it was Steichen’s *intention* to appeal to a large audience. He ventured beyond conventional museum norms by using the “modernist aesthetic” to curate the photographs.<sup>32</sup> In doing so, his *Family of Man* exhibition “pass[ed] from the wall to the coffee table, from the debate over the work’s future to the timeless realm of sentiment.”<sup>33</sup> Sandeen’s quote raises questions about the “authority” of photographs in an exhibition space compared to photographs in a book. Although he recognises the longevity of the book and the ability to return to it over and over again, by using the term “sentimental” he signals his acceptance of the view that the coffee table is no place for “serious” gazing.

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<sup>29</sup> Bezner, *Photography and Politics in America*, 2–3.

<sup>30</sup> Bezner, *Photography and Politics in America*, 257.

<sup>31</sup> Bezner, *Photography and Politics in America*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Eric J. Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950s America* (Albuquerque, USA: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 3–4.

<sup>33</sup> Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition*, 156.

American photographers were not unique in documenting their nation's character through photobooks. Britain also had photographers who tapped into a characterisation of British identity in this way. Even so, the outsiders were sometimes more successful at capturing Britishness than home-grown photographers were. One example was *The English at Home*, photographed by British photographer Bill Brandt and published by Batsford in 1936. Howells argues that Brandt successfully portrayed "British-ness (or 'English-ness' at least)" because he had the ability to capture his subjects sitting proudly within their class.<sup>34</sup> This was significant because Brandt was born in Germany and had lived in England for less than five years before the release of the photobook.<sup>35</sup> In his critique of Brandt's successful characterisation of Britishness and class, Howells suggests that a British photographer might have been more tempted to portray stereotypes of the British class system.

Outsiders interpreting Britain for the British was not a new phenomenon. One earlier example was Stefan Lorant, the first editor of *Picture Post* magazine, who "brought with him two outstanding cameramen . . . [who like Lorant] were both German refugees."<sup>36</sup> Hall argues that outsider journalists and photojournalists seemed to find it easier to break through the fixed view that the British public possessed a "crust of ignorance and prejudice".<sup>37</sup> Howell argues that Brandt's German background played a key role in the "reading" of *The English at Home* because he provided a "*portrait* not a *self-portrait* of the British experience."<sup>38</sup> Parr and Badger claim that Evans and Brandt were among the best proponents of utilising the ambiguities and certainties of the photobook, because "[they] demonstrated that the documentary photobook was a complex, subtle, yet passionate art, and not just a bald manifesto."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Richard Howells, "Self Portrait: The Sense of Self in British Documentary Photography," *National Identities* 4, 2 (2002): 104.

<sup>35</sup> Howells, "Self Portrait," 104.

<sup>36</sup> Stuart Hall, "The Social Eye of Picture Post," *Cultural Studies* 2 (1973): 72.

<sup>37</sup> Hall, "The Social Eye of Picture Post," 72–73.

<sup>38</sup> Howells, "Self Portrait," 105.

<sup>39</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook*, vol. I, 123.



As I have been arguing, photobooks became an additional space for photographic art, liberating photographers from the confines of the gallery by opening up opportunities for social commentary. However, photobooks were not always created with such high ideals. Sometimes publishing a photobook was a function of the hard, commercial realities of having to derive a living from photography. The Australiana celebratory photobooks that began to appear on the Australian market in the 1950s are a good example. Many featured the work of celebrated Australian photographer Frank Hurley; they displayed an unabashed celebration of *his* version of Australia and had a clear commercial intent. The content and commercial nature of these celebratory photobooks also readied the nation for the plethora of Australiana coffee-table books that would populate bookshops and decorate homes in the 1960s. One of Hurley's photobooks, *Australia in Natural Colour* (1956), is significant to this study as a direct precursor to an Australiana coffee-table book developed by Lloyd O'Neil, on which I focus in Chapter Seven. According to independent Australian publisher John Currey, who worked closely with O'Neil, *Australia in Natural Colour* provided the inspiration for the format of the extremely popular *Australia in Colour* published in 1963.<sup>40</sup>

Hurley's rather rudimentary photobooks are worth noting because they greatly contrast with his reputation as a serious documentary photography with an extensive body of work comprising several expeditions to the Antarctic, including the Mawson expedition 1911–14, and both World Wars.<sup>41</sup> However, Hurley was not averse to applying his photographic skills to help rebuild his finances after the war.<sup>42</sup> As can be seen in the following images, the heroic Antarctic scene featured in Figure 2.1 is vastly different in gravitas and sentiment from Hurley's portrayal of Australia in *Australia in Natural Colour* in Figure 2.2.

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<sup>40</sup> John Currey (Former publisher and colleague of Lloyd O'Neil), "Coffee-table books," in discussion with Christine Elliott, August 6, 2015, Malvern, Australia. Digital recording.

<sup>41</sup> Alasdair McGregor, *Frank Hurley: A Photographer's Life* (Camberwell, Australia: Viking, 2004), 1–6.

<sup>42</sup> McGregor, *Frank Hurley*, 399.



**Figure 2.1:** Page 117 illustrates Hurley's best-known photograph, of the wreck of Endurance, reproduced in Alasdair McGregor's *Frank Hurley: A Photographer's Life*. (Source: Monash University Library. Photographed image.)





**Figure 2.2:** Page 6 depicts two images of Australian life and a Koala along with text, *Australia in Natural Colour* by Frank Hurley illustrating images, text and layout of the book, [not paginated]. (Source: State Library of Victoria website digitised pdf. Captured image.)

As already noted, Hurley's portrayal of Australia in *Australia in Natural Colour* and in his other photobooks was personal: *his* perspective on Australian society and culture and the way it should be portrayed. Some of his titles included: *The Garden of Tasmania* (1947), *Queensland: A Camera Study* (1950), *Australia: A Camera Study* (1955) and *Australia in Natural Colour* (1956). His idealised portrayal was of a country with an abundance of prosperity, well-established institutions and cities, iconic landmarks, outdoor activities, natural beauty, and wealth from the land—wheat and sheep farming and mining. Although this image of Australia was largely true, not all Australians benefited from white settlement nation building, the most obvious counterexample being indigenous Australians. Compared with Evans's observational photographic style in *American Photographs*, *Australia in Natural Colour*, it does not ask anything of the viewer. While Evans documented the consequences of post-depression America, Hurley celebrated the

opportunities that post-war Australia presented. McGregor argues that Hurley's books "eulogised the scenic grandeur, the agricultural prosperity and the bounty of resources in his own conservative and affectionate way,"—that is, nothing too daring or innovative.<sup>43</sup> Hurley was inclined to concentrate on the "confident streets of prosperous cities and the scenic byways of rural Australia" and was content to follow his own style rather than emulate the international photographic trends set by renowned landscape photographers such as Ansel Adams and Eliot Porter.<sup>44</sup> He regarded his illustrated books as an opportunity for Australians to see Australia captured through his lens, and he believed this could also be of interest to an international audience.<sup>45</sup> Hurley exhibits this sentiment in the Foreword to *Queensland: A Camera Study* published in 1950, which had been preceded by *Sydney: A Camera Study*:

I entered this project with enthusiasm, feeling that a life's experience in this type of work could be applied usefully to awakening our citizens to the greatness of their heritage, and that it would stimulate a vital interest in Australia among peoples beyond the seas.<sup>46</sup>

Whatever one may think of Hurley's one-dimensional social commentary on Australia, his photobooks served a commercial purpose. He may also have sensed that photobooks celebrating Australia's natural beauty, progress and lifestyle would hit the right tone with a general audience. McGregor notes that the most successful book for Hurley and Angus & Robertson was *Australia: A Camera Study*, published in 1955, which had sold 56,000 copies after three reprints.<sup>47</sup> Lee also points out that Hurley's "illustrated books and calendars were regular features of Christmas trade during the 1950s."<sup>48</sup> His commercial use of the photobook format to advance his pictorial narrative of post-war Australia no doubt did much to legitimise the Australiana coffee-table books in the 1960s. The Christmas trade success of Hurley's books also set a precedent for Australiana coffee-

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<sup>43</sup> McGregor, *Frank Hurley*, 400.

<sup>44</sup> McGregor, *Frank Hurley*, 400.

<sup>45</sup> McGregor, *Frank Hurley*, 400.

<sup>46</sup> Frank Hurley, *Queensland: A Camera Study* (Sydney, Australia: Angus & Robertson, 1950), 9. See also, Alasdair McGregor, *Frank Hurley: A Photographer's Life*. (Camberwell, Australia: Viking 2004), 400.

<sup>47</sup> McGregor, *Frank Hurley*, 409.

<sup>48</sup> Lee, "Australia in Colour," 52.

table books as suitable for gift-giving at Christmas. Hurley's celebratory photobooks proved that a market existed for this genre, and with advances in full-colour offset printing, America, Britain and Australia were on the verge of a new genre populating their homes—the coffee-table book.

## **Advances in full-colour printing**

While the photobook incorporated many of the same features as the coffee-table book, it was not until the emergence of four-colour offset printing that the form really emerged. Full-colour offset printing increased the speed and size of print runs, which made the mass-production of photobooks more economical. One machine operation printed coloured images (offset lithography) and text (phototypesetting) together, amendments were easier to manage and new opportunities for creative design and layout were made possible.<sup>49</sup> However, it took some time for the publication opportunities to be realised. Before the coffee-table book could fully emerge, a new kind of market needed to be established. A mass-market for magazines, for both specialist and general audiences, was well established, but a mass-market for the general consumption of photobooks books was lacking. So the technological means had been available, but other factors had to fall into place before the mass-production and mass-consumption of photobooks for a general audience could fully embed the “coffee-table book” in Australian culture.

The coffee-table book emerges at the point when printing costs begin to fall substantially. The establishment of large, sophisticated, efficient printing centres in Japan and Hong Kong altered the economies of mass production of full-colour photobooks, allowing them to be offered at significantly reduced prices. These high-tech centres were particularly important to independent Australian publishers, who had struggled to compete with the quality and affordability of the British and American imports. Japanese printing companies, such as Toppan and Dai Nippon, set up modern, high-tech printing plants to meet home-grown printing needs, and eventually serviced

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<sup>49</sup> Banham, “Industrialization of the Book,” 288.

other South-east Asian markets and Australia.<sup>50</sup> In the early 1960s they also introduced their skills and technology into Hong Kong.<sup>51</sup> Altbach and Hoshino note that both companies remain in operation today as two of the biggest and best quality printers, as well as being instrumental in the expansion of the local printing industry, as former employees have become some of their major competitors.<sup>52</sup> The sheer size and proficiency of the Asian printing centres was a key part to the materialisation of the coffee-table book, particularly in Australia. British publisher Paul Hamlyn also saw the business advantages of using Asian printing centres. Freeman claims that Hamlyn was one of the first British publishers to start printing in Hong Kong. In North America offshore printing was perhaps less important at the time, because publishers there had access to cheaper domestic labour. When Hamlyn set up Octopus, he employed Derek Freeman as his Production Director. Freeman had experience working as a print manager overseeing the printing of 30,000,000 magazines a week.<sup>53</sup> One of his first tasks in that role with Octopus was to spend three weeks in Hong Kong observing the efficient Chinese craftsmen producing quality printing—on what were seemingly ancient second-hand machinery in factories without airconditioning.<sup>54</sup> Sue Thomson, who also worked for Hamlyn, notes that printing facilities in Hong Kong had been largely established to print cigarette cartons and government documents in one or two colours, so gearing up for four-colour printing was a large learning curve. After the Chinese printers bought Roland and Heidelberg printing machines from Germany, printers were sent out to teach the Chinese how to work the machines.<sup>55</sup> Freeman also notes that, “China to this day has the highest concentration of book printers in the world in a relatively small geographic area.”<sup>56</sup> The right technology was

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<sup>50</sup> Altbach and Hoshino, *International Book Publishing*, 426.

<sup>51</sup> Altbach and Hoshino, *International Book Publishing*, 426.

<sup>52</sup> Altbach and Hoshino, *International Book Publishing*, 426.

<sup>53</sup> Freeman, “Coffee-table books.”

<sup>54</sup> Freeman, “Coffee-table books.”

<sup>55</sup> Sue Thomson (former production manager, Thames & Hudson), “NLSC: Book Trade Lives,” in discussion with Sue Bradley, (2004): NLSC: Book Trade Lives, C827/64/06, Tape recording F15885, Tape 9 Side A of 18, The British Library, London UK. Accessed April 11, 2015.

<sup>56</sup> Freeman, “Coffee-table books.”

available, printing centres were established, and now the full realisation of coffee-table books required the vision, entrepreneurship and enterprise of publishers who would use the technology to create new book-buying markets.

## Coffee-table books

Was the emergence of coffee-table books part of a continuous history of photobooks, or a variation within the genre? In purely physical, material and content terms, they were similar artefacts. The photographic content was generally captioned, and some books included supporting text. They did not conform to any particular large-format size; they were generally square or portrait in orientation, and they varied in page extent. By comparison with today's coffee-table books, some of the early books appear small. But generally the expectation was for an overall visual experience, as the main attribute of large-format books is their ability to exhibit large-format photography. The main divergence from the photobook occurred at the point of rapid commercialisation and mass-consumption among a new targeted market. Coffee-table books generally shifted from *auteur*-created photobooks to books focusing on a commercial topic. One way to illustrate the difference is to use Bourdieu's analysis of music surveys that found correlations between class and divisions of taste based on preferences for certain classical piano pieces. For example, the photobook would be equivalent to the *Art of the Fugue* by J.S. Bach because the piece was associated with "legitimate" or "high-brow" taste. By contrast, the coffee-table book would straddle both "middle-brow" and "popular" taste. The music survey disclosed that "middle-brow" tastes were aligned with a preference for *Rhapsody in Blue* by George Gershwin and were classed as such because this piece was viewed as a "minor work of the major arts". "Popular" taste, was associated with a preference for the *Blue Danube* by Johann Strauss; a work of "so called 'light' music or classical music devalued by popularization."<sup>57</sup> Similarly, the photobook was seen to have been devalued when it ceased to be a space for "legitimate" photographic art and became a space for "popular"

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<sup>57</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 16.

photography. The popularisation of non-specialist photographic books coincided with a rise in the use of the term “coffee-table book”.

America, Britain and Australia experienced similar post-war economic growth and social changes. However, each market had its own characteristics which reflected the types of coffee-table books that were published. Compared with Australia, the American and British book industries were well-established, and they played a significant role in the cultural and commercial fabric of their societies. In America, publishing houses such as Random House, Simon and Schuster and Knopf were founded in the early twentieth century. Similarly, publishing houses such as Unwin, Collins, and Heinemann, founded in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, formed part of the backbone of the British publishing establishment. America and Britain dominated the book trade market, which was becoming increasingly globalised, and the population size of each country by itself gave a marketplace advantage. Favourable trade agreements, such as the Net Book Agreement in Britain, contributed to the economic viability of British publishers by regulating the bookselling industry. World War II also brought unintended consequences to the American and British publishing industries. They benefited from an influx of publishing expertise and enterprise, particularly in art publishing, in the form of a large number of émigrés who had escaped the rise of Nazism in Europe. Some brought with them a desire to publish not only scholarly art books, but to publish art books for a non-specialist market, and this played a significant role in the democratisation of art. By contrast, the Australian book industry was relatively young, underdeveloped, and lacked book production expertise; in addition, Australian literature was not seen as “legitimate” compared with British and American literature. This was largely due to being treated as a colonial outpost of the British publishing industry. Trade restrictions affected the economic viability of independent Australian publishers and stirred their passion for change. This colonial overlay essentially constrained the growth of the Australian publishing industry, and the country’s much smaller population consumed mostly British or American literature.



The emergence of the coffee-table books can only be fully understood in the broader context of increasing commercial interests in popular culture in the post-war period. Cars and mobilisation of people also influenced book markets and the popularisation of coffee-table books. Thompson notes that one of the challenges to the industry in America was book distribution. Social change had gained its own momentum, and publishing had to adapt to an emerging book-buying market spreading beyond the city-centric market. With increased ownership of cars and people moving to the suburbs, distribution systems needed to include urban regions where shopping malls had sprung up alongside the burgeoning suburbs.<sup>58</sup>

The flood of Americans to automobile-oriented suburbs, the spread of a culture of informality, Americans' self-conscious conflation of consumption with leisure, and the prominence given to marketing as a strategy for both personal and organizational success affected retailers in a wide variety of fields, [including bookselling].<sup>59</sup>

In America, car ownership was not only useful for commuting: the vehicle opened up opportunities for leisure pursuits such as exploring the American wilderness. According to Runte, Americans began using their spare time to explore the country, which created an unprecedented travel revolution. Americans arrived by cars and trains to visit national parks such as Yosemite, Yellowstone and Rocky Mountain.<sup>60</sup> This interest in exploring the outdoors provided a new market for nature coffee-table books, featuring photographers such as Ansel Adams, as people began to appreciate the importance of experiencing America's natural beauty. In Britain, the growth of travel to places of national interest similarly coincided with increased car ownership and mobilisation. English countryside and historic architecture coffee-table books not only tapped into this nostalgia but also played a significant role in growing heritage tourism in Britain. Although car ownership also increased in Australia, travelling to see the outback locations featured in many of the

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<sup>58</sup> John B. Thompson, "The Growth of the Retail Chains," in *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-first Century*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), 27.

<sup>59</sup> Laura Millar, "Selling the Product," in *A History of the Book in America: The Enduring Book: Print Culture in Postwar America Volume 5*, eds. David Paul Nord and Joan Shelley Rubin and Michael Schudson (Chapel Hill, USA: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 91.

<sup>60</sup> Runte, *National Parks*, 171.

Australiana coffee-table books was less feasible, because many of these places were remote or inaccessible. As mostly urban dwellers, the idea of undertaking an outback experience was not easy to contemplate in the average 1960s family car. For most Australians, the outback was something they experienced in the comfort of their own homes through magazines, books, films and television.

The American book market was also influenced by government literacy programs in the context of the Cold War. According to Scott, concern with “world science dominance” at the time of the launch of Sputnik in 1957 raised anxiety among the population. Americans viewed education, in particular literacy for the next generation, as an important long-term response to the challenge to American supremacy.<sup>61</sup> Given this focus on literacy, where did coffee-table books fit in? Coffee-table books often include text or captions, but they are largely a visual experience. As their greatest attribute is the ability to showcase large-format photography, coffee-table books could fill a new and different role. Their visual appeal broadened the spectrum of book ownership. As Weedon put it, in what had once been the realm of the privileged, the new middle-class consumed books, and Americans spent an “increasing amount of their discretionary income on luxury items, including expensive art books.”<sup>62</sup>

Weedon’s analysis supports my argument that coffee-table books created a new book-buying market. Luxury art books now fell into the category of indulgence rather than edification, which no doubt challenged the “arbiters of culture” who saw book ownership and the attainment of knowledge as a high-brow pursuit, not an easily acquired status symbol. Art publishers such as Abrams, Phaidon and Thames & Hudson recognised a gap in the market for highly produced art books, of both scholarly and general appeal, as the middle and lower classes joined the market.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Linda M. Scott, “Markets and Audiences,” in *A History of the Book in America: Volume 5: The Enduring Book: Print Culture in Postwar America*, eds. David Paul Nord and Joan Shelley Rubin and Michael Schudson (Chapel Hill, USA: University of North Carolina 2009), 75.

<sup>62</sup> Alexis Weedon, ed. *The History of the Book in the West: 1914–2000 Volume V*. (Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2010), 47.

<sup>63</sup> Weedon, *The History of the Book in the West*, vol. V, 85.

According to Lyons, most art books available in America up until the post-war period were imports from Europe—a situation that only began to change when publishing houses such as Abrams books, founded in 1949, began “specializ[ing] in the creation of richly illustrated art books.”<sup>64</sup> Lyons claims that Abrams was the first American company to produce such books; however, Thames & Hudson were founded in America and London at the same time and, along with Abrams, became major publishers of coffee-table art books. What these publishers had recognised was that the new socioeconomic conditions emerging in America were conducive to the “development of a new genre in book publishing, the art book.”<sup>65</sup> Abrams had particular success with European co-editions, notably *The Picture History of Painting* (1957), which was translated into twelve languages.<sup>66</sup> He also published books on artists at different price points and formatted the content to match the targeted market. For example, the works of Van Gogh were published in different editions ranging from \$95 to \$15. The more expensive editions combined elegant colour reproductions with a scholarly text, whereas the cheaper editions emphasized the colour reproductions.<sup>67</sup> This is a good illustration of the way legitimate and popular tastes were accommodated by adjusting content style and price point. I contend that coffee-table art books featuring reproductions alone did much to seed prejudices against coffee-table art books and coffee-table books in general. Cultural commentators saw art appreciation reduced to superficial mass appropriation.

While coffee-table art books were also a big part of the British book trade, its market was in addition characterised by interest in architectural history, particularly of rural heritage buildings. This interest could be seen as a response to the destruction of buildings during World War II. Coffee-table books featuring historic buildings and idealised rural landscapes tapped into British nostalgia. The preservation of buildings would also have been important to the rebuilding of British national identity and pride after the devastating effects of World War II on the population and on

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<sup>64</sup> Lyons, *Books*, 195.

<sup>65</sup> Weedon, *The History of the Book in the West*, vol. V, 47.

<sup>66</sup> Lyons, *Books*, 195.

<sup>67</sup> Weedon, *The History of the Book in the West*, vol. V, 85.

the country's infrastructure. With a renewed interest in exploring the English countryside, publishers such as Batsford, Weidenfeld, and Nicholson and Robert became specialists in this field.<sup>68</sup> Bunce argues that the emergence of countryside coffee-table books was part of the commercialisation of the countryside which saw bookstores devote entire sections to "lavishly illustrated volumes, aimed mainly at the tourist and Christmas gift market."<sup>69</sup> The commercialisation of the English countryside had its detractors, and Bunce is among the many commentators who questioned the "intellectual value" of these types of books, which were regarded as lifestyle reading:

Nostalgic interest in the countryside, however, has fuelled a vigorous trade in less intellectual treatments of rural heritage. For many consumers of coffee-table publications, mainly pictorial volumes depicting traditional rural architecture and customs seem to suffice.<sup>70</sup>

However, lifestyles were changing, and people were consuming information in different ways.

Interests and leisure pursuits expanded, and publishers diversified into a whole range of other topics including cooking, furnishing, gardening and tourism.<sup>71</sup>

Work by writers Mark Girouard and John Betjeman were part of a movement in nostalgia tourism in the UK alongside magazines such as *Country Life*. Their illustrated books "contributed to the growing eulogisation of the lifestyle of the English country gentleman."<sup>72</sup> One example is Girouard's *Historic Houses of Britain*, in which historic information was presented in an entertaining manner. One reviewer noted its good design and use of high-quality colour photos and well-written text "[showcasing] the ancestral homes of such figures as the Duke of Wellington, the Rothschilds and the Churchills."<sup>73</sup> Betjeman was already familiar to the British population as Editor of the pre-war *Shell Guides*, and many of his illustrated books followed a similar content format.

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<sup>68</sup> M. F. Bunce, *The Countryside Ideal: Anglo-American Images of Landscape* (London, UK: Routledge, 1994), 69.

<sup>69</sup> Bunce, *The Countryside Ideal*, 69.

<sup>70</sup> Bunce, *The Countryside Ideal*, 70.

<sup>71</sup> Bunce, *The Countryside Ideal*, 70–71.

<sup>72</sup> Bunce, *The Countryside Ideal*, 82.

<sup>73</sup> Julia Van Haaften, "Historic Houses of Britain," *Library Journal* 104, 14 (1979): 1553–1554.

The *Shell Guides* were small reference books used to accompany a day's outing into the countryside. A fascination for churches and Victorian railway carriages was developed by Betjeman in his illustrated books, further influencing the wave of post-war interest in heritage tourism.<sup>74</sup>

Paul Elek, one of the cohort of Jewish émigrés, also did much to stimulate the cultural life of “staid, provincial Britain” in the 1950s.<sup>75</sup> According to Mosse et al., Paul Elek Ltd, established after the war, published books such as the *Camden Classics Series* and the successful *Cities of Art* series as well as “[trying] his hand at book-packaging; outsize picture books.”<sup>76</sup> Attentive to the look of his books, *Coaching* (with Time Life) and *The Age of the Grand Tour* were splendid publications enhanced by the skills he had gained earlier, with his father, a printer in Budapest. Although Elek produced well-crafted books, Stamp argues that the *Visions of England* books published by Elek between 1946 and 1950 have been “unaccountably ignored.”<sup>77</sup> Although Stamp does not offer any explanation, one might conceivably have been Elek's foray into book-packaging. This type of compilation publishing is most often associated with the belief that coffee-table books take little effort to produce and are solely commercial publications, and that could have affected Elek's overall standing as a publisher.

In Australia, the popularisation of coffee-table books is understood in the context of questions about post-war national identity. Who was it as a nation, in relation to its British heritage? As the Australian book market slowly began to embrace local narratives, the publication of Australiana coffee-table books visually reflected the lifestyle and landscape Australians inhabited. Australians had a growing desire to read about and see their own culture reflected back to them, and the Australiana books symbolised a landscape and lifestyle that differentiated Australia from Britain. The commercial success of Australiana coffee-table books and Australian novels was an important

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<sup>74</sup> Frank Delaney, *Betjeman Country* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), 7–13.

<sup>75</sup> Gavin Stamp, “Architecture: A Vision of England,” *Apollo* 167, 553 (2008): 63.

<sup>76</sup> Werner Eugen Mosse, Julius Carlebach, Gerhard Hirschfeld and Aubrey Newman, eds., *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-speaking Jews in the United Kingdom*. (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Seibek, 1991), 205.

<sup>77</sup> Stamp, “Architecture,” 62.

step towards the legitimisation of Australian cultural narratives while at the same time being popular—which is a good example of Bourdieu’s notion of two zones of taste converging. Britain’s colonial domination over Australia’s book trade had caused much tension over issues of commerce and culture, and had for many years impeded the development of the Australian publishing industry.<sup>78</sup> However, things were changing and Australian textual and pictorial narratives were gaining traction. Former University of Queensland Press and Rigby publisher, Frank Thompson, nominated 1957 as the year of a symbolic shift for independent publishers in Australia. That year, John O’Grady’s novel *They’re a Weird Mob* was published. The book was a huge success and heralded a new modern era for the industry.<sup>79</sup> The era was exciting for Australian independent publishers: “[o]ld barriers and rigid traditions were collapsing and there was a keen sense of adventure and even camaraderie among publishers.”<sup>80</sup> Although the sentiments may have been “rollicking and naïve (like the Australia portrayed in *They’re a Weird Mob*), it gave the 1960s publishing landscape a pioneering devil-may-care spirit.”<sup>81</sup> Thompson argues that although *They’re a Weird Mob* marked a watershed in Australian awareness of identity, it was non-fiction Australiana—large-format books filled with photographs of the Australian landscape and its people—that really grabbed people’s interest.<sup>82</sup> The success of this Australian novel was an important message to independent Australian publishers that a strong market existed for Australian narratives. Independent Australian publishers soon tapped into these nationalistic sentiments and started publishing Australiana coffee-table books featuring images of the Australian landscape and its people. Examples include *This is Australia* (1956) Oswald Ziegler; *Australia in Colour* (1963) Lansdowne Press; *Australia: from the Dawn of Time to the Present Day* (1964) Oswald Ziegler; *Australia* (1965) Angus & Robertson; *The Australians* (1966) Rigby and *My Australia* (1969)

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<sup>78</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 41.

<sup>79</sup> Thompson, “Sixties Larrikins,” 32.

<sup>80</sup> Thompson, “Sixties Larrikins,” 33.

<sup>81</sup> Thompson, “Sixties Larrikins,” 33–34.

<sup>82</sup> Thompson, “Sixties Larrikins,” 33.

Collins. Other publishers such as Ure Smith of Ure Smith Pty Ltd; Paul Hamlyn and Kevin Weldon of Paul Hamlyn Australia Pty Ltd; Brian Stonier, Geoffrey Dutton and Max Harris of Sun Books, Cheshire and Jacaranda also contributed to the success of this era of Australiana publishing.<sup>83</sup> It is not difficult to recognise the nationalistic pattern that emerged in the Australiana coffee-table books titles. Anything with “Australia” in the title attracted book-buyers interested in seeing their own nation reflected in photographs. Although Lee<sup>84</sup> describes these Australiana coffee-table books as “overtly nationalistic”, they can also be seen in more sympathetic terms. The obsession with the Australian landscape and a sun-filled lifestyle may have been jingoistic, but these iconic images of an idealised Australia did much to draw attention to its contrast with British culture and lifestyle. The fashioning of this characterisation of Australia and the popularity of Australiana fiction and coffee-table books could be viewed as deliberate overreach in response to a large section of the population questioning divided loyalties of cultural identity. As Lee puts it:

The boom in [illustrated Australiana] was also a sign of the emergence of an increasingly autonomous Australian book-buying public, no longer prepared to tolerate a diet consisting exclusively of British books.<sup>85</sup>

There was evidence of a strengthening in Australian national identity, but McGregor points out that through the 1960s and 1970s “the nation’s view of itself was at times clouded by doubt and unease.”<sup>86</sup> Social commentators such as Donald Horne and David Malouf questioned 1950s Australia so eulogised by the likes of Hurley, and this image of Australia was satirised by Australian expatriates such as Barry Humphries.<sup>87</sup> Humphries’ satire even extended to the coffee-table book with the publication of *Dame Edna’s Coffee Table Book* in 1977.<sup>88</sup> Although the title suggests that it belongs in that genre, it does not exhibit the attributes of a coffee-table book.

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<sup>83</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 41.

<sup>84</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 51–58.

<sup>85</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 58.

<sup>86</sup> McGregor, *Frank Hurley*, 412.

<sup>87</sup> McGregor, *Frank Hurley*, 412.

<sup>88</sup> Edna Everage, *Dame Edna’s Coffee Table Book* (Sydney, Australia: Australian Publishing Company in association with George G. Harrop & Co. Ltd, 1977).

However, it is no accident that Humphries used the concept and popularisation of coffee-table books to dramatise insecurities inherent in the social and cultural identities of post-war suburbia. That was his shtick. One of the key attributes of coffee-table books is their ability to exhibit large-format photographs, but Humphries' book consists mainly of snap shot collages, a great deal of text with some full-page images. *Dame Edna's Coffee Table Book* also includes recipes, which was consistent with a growing trend: the coffee-table format was being appropriated for cookery books by publishers such as Paul Hamlyn and Lloyd O'Neil in the 1960s and 70s. Inevitably, the concept of Dame Edna's coffee-table book being transformed into a coffee table was also lampooned by Humphries. "This latest atrocity is called 'Dame Edna Everage's Coffee Table Book,' which she had planned to come in a laminated plywood cover, with holes in the corners for screw-in legs."<sup>89</sup> No doubt Dame Edna's coffee-table book would have provided a great source of amusement in Australia and Britain, given her prominent profile in both countries.

### **The coffee-table book as a discursive object**

Thus far, this chapter has focused on the way coffee-table books came into being in terms of the technological and social changes. At a certain point, all the historical changes come to be condensed in the term "coffee-table book". My contention is that without this genre having been anointed with the term "coffee-table book", then essentially "coffee-table books" would not have come into existence. A search of the term "coffee-table book" in the digital archives of *The New York Times*, *The Times* and *Trove* revealed that the first use of the term "coffee-table book" appeared several years apart. This is not to say that the term did not appear in other newspapers or magazines at earlier or similar times, but this evidence gives some indication of when the term was adopted. For example, the term first appeared in *The New York Times* on December 24, 1960 in a review of the history coffee-table book *The Past We Share: An Illustrated History of the British and American*

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<sup>89</sup> Anne Matheson, "People Dame Edna Does a 'Patriotic Duty'." *The Australian Women's Weekly*, August 11, 1976, 8.



*Peoples* edited by Peter Quennell and Alan Hodge.<sup>90</sup> In *The Times* newspaper, the term first appeared in a review on July 2, 1964 outlining the impact of television and paperback books on the book club trade. “Book club”, in this instance, refers to schemes under which a seller regularly sent books to members of the “club” on a “buy or return” (inertia selling) basis. These were generally a selected “book of the month”, with discount offers for other books. The World Record Club operated on a similar model. The article notes that sales of coffee-table books had been doing well in bookshops and were a new addition to the book club field.<sup>91</sup> And finally, a search for term “coffee-table book” on *Trove* disclosed that the term was first used in *The Canberra Times* on October 23, 1965. Donald Brook reviewed a coffee-table art book published by Paul Hamlyn, *The Drawings of Leonardo and Michelangelo* by Jaromir Pecirha.<sup>92</sup> The book, published by Hamlyn, was listed at 84/- (Australian currency) —a very affordable price, which supports the argument that coffee-table art books had a democratising effect on access to art. (See figure 2.3)

<sup>90</sup> Charles Poore, "Books of The Times." *The New York Times* December 24, 1960, 13. Accessed, February 19, 2018. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/115088245/5CFE5FC9EFBE4F17PQ/1?accountid=12528>.

<sup>91</sup> “Renewed Lures Check Fall In Book Club Membership.” *The Times*, July 2, 1964, 16. Accessed, February 23, 2018.  
<http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=monash&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS270100194&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>.

<sup>92</sup> Donald Brook, "Old Masters and New Reputations." *The Canberra Times*, October 23, 1965, 11–11. Accessed, June 17, 2018. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/105868772?searchTerm=%22coffee-table%20book%22%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20&searchLimits=sortby=dateAsc|||1-australian=y>.



**Figure 2.3:** Dust jacket, *Drawings of Leonardo and Michelangelo* by Jaromir Pecirha. (Source: State Library of Victoria. Scanned image.)

An entry in *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable* indicates that there was a predecessor to the term “coffee-table book”:

Coffee-table book. A large, expensive and lavishly illustrated book, supposedly placed on a low table in a sitting-room to be glanced at rather than read or to impress a visitor. The term dates from the early 1960s and may have originally been intended to denote a book that was simply too large to be shelved normally. Such books were earlier sometimes known as ‘grand-piano books’.<sup>93</sup>

It is interesting to note that both the “grand-piano book” and the “coffee-table book” acquired their names from an object. Presumably “grand-piano books” were so named in recognition of their large size. Another term for large-format illustrated books is “folio book”. In this case, the term is not taken from an object; rather it is a printing term describing the number of folds in a piece of paper to create a large-format page. As Hellinga explains, the hand-press printer worked in folios because the number of folds had to be set before the printing commenced, and it was the folds that determined the size of the book.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, Polk points out that the number of paper folds in the full sheets or “signatures” were 18 x 24 inches. Hence, “a [full] sheet folded once made four pages about 12 x 18 inches in size, and was called a folio”, which created the large-format.<sup>95</sup> This term is still used in libraries for categorising large-format, illustrated books, and is not regarded as pejorative.

While some sectors of the American, British and Australian markets focused on art, nature, cultural heritage and Australiana, Table 2.0 below provides examples of a range of titles that were designated as coffee-table books. The table comprises a combined curated selection of coffee-table books published in America, Britain and Australia, obtained from a search of the term “coffee-table

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<sup>93</sup> Susie Dent, ed. *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*. (London, UK: Chambers Harrap Publishers Ltd, 2012), 288. Also, various terminologies for this style of book have been acquired via numerous conversations with publishing professionals past and present, academics, books and publishers' websites. They include: John Currey, Paul Latham, Professor Kate Burridge, Rose Wilson, Brian Sadgrove, Robert Sessions, Kevin Weldon, publishers at the London Book Fair 14–16, 2015 and the Art Book Fair NGV Melbourne 3/5/2015.

<sup>94</sup> Lotte Hellinga, “The Gutenberg Revolutions,” in *The Companion to The History of the Book*, eds. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 210.

<sup>95</sup> Ralph W Polk and Edwin W Polk, *The Practice of Printing: Letterpress and Offset* (Peoria, USA: C. A. Bennett Co, 1971), 262–263.

book” in the online digital archives of *The New York Times*, *The Times* and *Trove*. It provides a snapshot of coffee-table books, published from 1960 to 1979 and includes some of the publishers and books discussed in this thesis. Although coffee-table art books were well represented across two decades in America, Britain and Australia, other categories included history, nature, architecture and design, performing arts, royalty and sport. Prices indicate that coffee-table books aimed at those with discretionary funds to spend on expensive books were expensive; buyers could expect to pay as much as \$75 US dollars for an architectural book in 1963. Other coffee-table books, such as those published by Hamlyn and Chatto & Windus, were sold at a very cheap price point for a different market— see nos. 4, 7, and 8 in Table 2.0. Of particular note is the cookbook listed as no. 17. Arguably, the emergence of large-format, full-colour cookbooks were influenced by full-colour coffee-table books. They were made possible by the same improvements in printing technology, and O’Neil and Hamlyn took advantage of this. Although large-format cookbooks differ from coffee-table books because of their instructional function, many contemporary cookbooks are now so highly produced it is not unusual to see them displayed on coffee tables. However, in the post-war era, large-format cookbooks would generally have stayed in the kitchen, and were less likely to be displayed on coffee tables.



Curated list of coffee-table books published in newspapers and magazines 1960–1980					
America – <i>The New York Times</i> (Digitised)					
Britain – <i>The Times</i> (Digitised)					
Australia – Various newspapers and magazines (Digitised)					
No	Document	Date	Title and Author	Category	Publisher and Cost
1	Review: “Books of The Times” by Charles Poore, page 13	Dec 24, 1960	<i>The Past We Share: An Illustrated History of the British and American Peoples</i> edited by Peter Quennell and Alan Hodge	History	Putnams \$9.95
2	Display Ad 55: “Reward for shopping now! Special Pre-Christmas Prices”, page 19. A short description of 28 coffee-table books	Nov 26, 1962	<i>In Wildness is the Preservation of the World</i> photos by Eliot Porter, text by David Thoreau	Nature	Sierra Club \$20
3	Article: “Books of The Times: End Papers” by Ada Louise Huxtable, page 15	Dec 24, 1963	<i>Buildings, Plans and Designs</i> by Frank Lloyd Wright	Architecture	Horizon Press \$75
4	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Old Masters and New Reputations” by Donald Brook, page 11	Oct 23, 1965	<i>The Drawings of Leonardo and Michelangelo</i> by Jaromir Pecirha	Art	Paul Hamlyn 84/-
5	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Memories of Degas” by Donald Brook, page 11	Sep 10, 1966	<i>Viking Art</i> by David M. Wilson and Ole Klindtjenson	Art	Allen and Unwin \$9.80
6	Display Ad 1238: “A Royal Selection of Beautifully Illustrated Volumes”, page 364	Nov 19, 1967	<i>The Windsor Years</i> by Lord Kinross	Royalty	Studio \$16.00
7	“Elegant for Whom?” by Nathaniel Tarn, page 25	Oct 12, 1968	<i>Dawn of the Gods</i> by Jacquetta Hawkes	Archaeology	Chatto & Windus 75s
8	Review: “Art Choice” by David Piper, page IV. A review of 13 coffee-table art books.	Nov 29, 1969	<i>Negro Art</i> by D. Olderoggo and Werner Forman	Art	Hamlyn 50s
9	Article in <i>The Australian Women’s Weekly</i> : “At Home . . . with Margaret Sydney” by Margaret Sydney, page 56	May 27, 1970	<i>A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World</i> by James Cook	History	South Australian Libraries Board \$22.50
10	Article in the <i>Tribune</i> : “Books”, A review of 8 books including 1 coffee-table book, page 8	Aug 11, 1971	<i>The Aborigine Today</i> Roderick Hulsbergen et al	Australiana	Hamlyn \$6.95
11	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Bird Pictures” by Hugh Elliot, page 12	Jul 15, 1972	<i>Birds of Australia</i> by Michael Morcombe	Birds	Lansdowne Press \$4.95
12	Article: “As They Saw Him” by Thomas Lask, page 31	Sep 8, 1972	<i>From the Sketchbooks of the Great Artists</i> by Claude Marks	Art	Crowell \$19.95
13	Review: “More Than a Coffee-Table Book” by Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, page 45	Dec 14, 1973	<i>Graphic Design</i> by Milton Glaser	Graphic Design	Overlook Press/Viking \$30
14	News: “Some Time-Stopping, Vivid Visions” by David Piper, page VII	Nov 29, 1973	<i>Albrecht Durer: The Landscape Water-Colours</i> by Walter Koschatsky	Art	Academy £15.75

Curated list of coffee-table books published in newspapers and magazines 1960–1980					
America – <i>The New York Times</i> (Digitised)					
Britain – <i>The Times</i> (Digitised)					
Australia – Various newspapers and magazines (Digitised)					
No	Document	Date	Title and Author	Category	Publisher and Cost
15	Article in <i>The Australian Women's Weekly</i> : “Book Present to Pope”, page 12	Jan 29, 1975	<i>A Big Country: Stories from the ABC Series about the People of Australia</i> by Ron Iddon and John Mabey	Australiana	Australian Broadcasting Commission in 1974 Cost not listed
16	Review: “Feverish Industry and Activity” by Derek Parker, Page 8	Oct 30, 1975	<i>Trollope</i> by C.P. Snow	Biography	Macmillan £6.50
17	Article: “Cooking: Cooking” by Mimi Sheraton, page 271	Dec 5, 1976	<i>The Complete Book of Preserving</i> by Marye Cameron-Smith	Cooking	Bobbs-Merrill \$18.95
18	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Edna Dives Between Covers” by Roger Pulvers, page 12	Feb 26, 1977	<i>Dame Edna's Coffee Table Book</i> by Barry Humphries (Edna Everage)	Australiana	Sydney Australasian Publishing Company in association with George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd, London \$8.95
19	Review: “High Road to Modern Art” by John Russell Taylor, page XII	Nov 24, 1978	<i>Cézanne: The Late Work</i> edited by William Rubin	Art	Thames & Hudson £20
20	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Coffee table tomes and serious social history” a review of 8 coffee-table books by Maurice Dunlevy, page 15	May 27, 1979	<i>The Birth of Australia</i> by Robin Smith	History	Rigby/John Curry, O'Neil \$19.95
21	Article: “A Special Kind of Theater: Broadway Musicals Musical” By Harold C. Schonberg	Sept 30, 1979	<i>Broadway Musicals</i> by Martin Gottfried	Performing Arts	Harry N. Abrams \$40
22	Review: “Comprehensive guide is a decade's labour of love” by John Blunsden, page 12	Jan 18, 1980	<i>Autocourse 1979-80</i> edited by Maurice Hamilton	Sport	Hazelton Securities Ltd £10.95

**Table 2.0:** A curated list of coffee-table books published in newspapers and magazines 1960–1980. (Source: *The New York Times* historical newspapers archive (1851–2008), *The Times* Digital Archive 1785–1985 and *Trove*, Digitised newspapers and more, National Library of Australia.)

For a more comprehensive curated list of coffee-table books published in America, Britain and Australia during the 1960s and 1970s, see Appendices 1, 2, and 3.

Does terminology alone determine whether or not an object “exists” in a cultural sense? Beyond a cultural-linguistic framing of that question, terminology clearly determined the coffee-table book’s status in some social sectors. Despite the popularity of coffee-table books, “arbiters of taste”

need a way of demarcating “high-brow” taste from “popular taste”. The commercialisation and popularisation of photobooks, which gave birth to the term “coffee-table book”, enabled such distinctions to be drawn. This illustrates Bourdieu’s point that a level of “popular” legitimacy is attained because “consecration [has been] bestowed by the choice of ordinary consumers, the ‘mass audience’.”<sup>96</sup> Another significant example of this is the way the Bauhaus school was categorised. Although Bauhaus practitioners did not want their work to be defined as a style, inevitably anything developed by Bauhaus members, from architecture through to lamps, chairs, wallpaper and typeface, soon became identified as “Bauhaus Style”, to their chagrin:

But this concept, which describes something that actually did not exist, became stubbornly burned into the general vocabulary and simply never went away—up to the present day.<sup>97</sup>

The terms “Bauhaus Style” and “coffee-table book” are examples of linguistic persistence: once a term becomes popular and part of regular vernacular, it can be hard to shift. Thus, the term “coffee-table book” was the coffee-table book’s reification and the final step in the coming into being of coffee-table books as such.

## Conclusion

While coffee-table books can claim a lineage reaching back to the first photobook, *The Pencil of Nature*, the post-war boom and social change made it a variance within a genre rather than a linear extension. Photobooks and coffee-table books share the same technological developments, as well as physical and content similarities. However, it was not until advances in colour print technology in the post-war era that the coffee-table book begins to be seen as a definite form aimed at a new mass market of book-buyers. While coffee-table books grated against the “arbiters of taste”, the form played a significant role in post-war culture. It was important to the democratisation of art, it offered a medium for the development of new kinds of identity and it contributed to expanded ideas of the book and mass literacy. It is also important to the history of publishing, particularly as an

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<sup>96</sup> Bourdieu, “Field of Cultural Production,” 331–332.

<sup>97</sup> Boris Friedewald, *Bauhaus* (Berlin, Germany: Prestel 2009), 25.

arena for a cohort of émigrés who brought their skills and enterprise to the art publishing market. Perhaps disdain for coffee-table books escalated in the post-war era because the specialised or educated gaze for “literary” photobooks quickly shifted towards “popular” browsing, which deviated from the way the literary elite regarded books. The term “coffee-table book” arose largely in response to this development and has contributed to the way the coffee-table books is defined. A review of the term “coffee-table book” showed that it emerged in certain publications at different times in America, Britain and Australia. It is impossible to disentangle the coffee table book from class-based responses to these developments; thus the coffee table book has always been haunted by derogatory connotations, and this was fairly uniform across America, Britain and Australia. The following chapter provides insights into this phenomenon and addresses these default positions by presenting examples of coffee-table books making important cultural contributions to the post-war landscape, as well as highlighting their role as material objects through the processes involved in their production.



## Chapter Three

### The reception of coffee-table books

Debray's impressive attempt in *Vie et mort de l'image. Une histoire du en Occident* (1992) to understand the visual human society notwithstanding, his own critical essayism on the photograph loses the photo-essayistic wager: how to overturn, rewrite, reorder, re-polemicize iconic photography; or, put another way, how to avoid becoming a 'coffee-table book'?

Andy Stafford<sup>1</sup>

"Coffee-table book" has often been used pejoratively, and it is one of the most contentious terms ever applied to large-format, photographically illustrated books. While some sectors of society have looked down on coffee table books, others have enthusiastically embraced them. The transition from photobooks to coffee-table books was a response to commercialism and popularity. As mentioned in the Introduction, the "arbiters of taste" often appropriated the term "coffee-table book" to differentiate "legitimate" taste from "popular" taste. Thus, although coffee-table books have proliferated since the post-war era, their cultural function is often understated or dismissed. In this chapter, I will argue that critical judgements, rather than the actual cultural contribution of coffee-table books, have shaped their status, and that it is important to examine the reception of coffee-table books in the context of post-war social change to see how this shaping occurred. The role of this chapter is not only to explain and address these disparaging judgements, but also to place the coffee-table book at the centre of a more holistic discourse about its role as a cultural and material artefact. My examination of the way people responded to coffee-table books necessarily takes into account book reviewers, publishers and the book-buying market. Drawing on a selection of reviewers' comments from American, British and Australian publications, I will first examine the way derogatory default perspectives on coffee-table books were established. Against this background, I then consider examples of coffee-table books that resonated culturally with post-war readers. I examine three in particular—*Hi-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the*

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<sup>1</sup> Stafford, *Photo-texts*, 82.

*Home*, *The Art Book* and *The Australians*— to shed light on their appeal. And finally, I address a common belief that coffee-table books took little skill or time to produce. By drawing on publishers’ first-hand accounts to explain the technical and material challenges of producing coffee-table books, particularly those involving authentic reproductions of art, this chapter highlights the skills that underpin the authenticity and materiality of these aesthetically pleasing *objets d’art*.

## Inferences and ambiguities

Publishers, understandably, did not want to be associated with negative inferences sometimes made by book reviewers and tended to avoid the term. This odd situation called into doubt the existence of coffee-table books as “real” objects. Yet, if publishers did not publish coffee-table books, how did they exist? The following extract from *The New York Times* noticed this ambiguity in 1968:

[The coffee-table book] is also non-existent. Nonexistent, that is, according to publishers, who never issue anything but works of art and have never heard of a coffee-table book without extenuating circumstances. Despite its nonexistence, though, the coffee-table book proliferates — larger, more expensive and more numerous every year. Where will it all end?<sup>2</sup>

Evidence that at least one publisher was willing to admit to publishing coffee-table books can be found in an employment advertisement for a “Secretary/Assistant to the Financial Director of a ‘Coffee-table books’ Publisher” in *The Times* in 1975. Although the advertisement does not give the name of the publisher, it does reveal that the company’s offices were located in a Georgian house in Mayfair.<sup>3</sup> As I will demonstrate, coffee-table books did exist and were regularly reviewed in newspapers and magazines. Table 3.0 below provides a list of comments about coffee-table books that were published in newspapers and magazines in America, Australia and Britain between 1960–80. As the table makes clear, references to coffee-table books ranged from reviewers claiming that the “glitter and unhandiness” often conceal the value of their content, or expressing reluctance in having to categorise an illustrated book as a coffee-table book, to genuine surprise that a coffee-

<sup>2</sup> John Leonard, “Three Long, Two Wide, One Deep,” *The New York Times*, December 1, 1968, 8.

<sup>3</sup> “Secretarial and General Appointments,” *The Times*, January 7, 1975, 22. Accessed, March 26, 2018.

<http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=monash&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS369327143&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>.

table book could deliver more than was expected of the genre, through to suggesting that courage was needed to own and display a coffee-table book. These responses demonstrate that coffee-table books could not always be judged by their cover, even if their cultural contribution was questioned.

Not all commentaries were pejorative, but a judgemental tone occurred frequently enough to diminish any claim to a positive cultural function. Notably, too, the size of coffee-table books was often commented on: many reviews included a book's measurements and weight. Some reviewers even suggested that the books were so large they could themselves become coffee tables (see Table 3.0, nos. 2, 5, 7, 8, 16 and 20). Thus Seinfeld's Kramer or Humphries' Dame Edna were not the only ones to offer this critique of the coffee-table book. One of the more affirming comments about coffee-table books acknowledged their positive influence on access to art: a reviewer noted that one outcome of the cultural revolution was the popular consumption of art (see Table 3.0, no. 12). This recognition of the role of coffee-table art book supports my claim that the emergence of coffee-table art books played a central role in democratising art. Another review, published in *The Times* in 1980, focuses on the attributes of the coffee-table book's large format in evoking the atmosphere of grand prix racing (see Table 3.0, no. 21). One of the most illuminating comments listed in the table, found in a review in *The Times* in 1978, supports my contention that coffee-table books are discursive. Reviewer John Russell questioned the implicit ambiguities of judgments made about which large-format illustrated books were coffee-table books and which were not: how, and by whom, were they made? His tone leaves us feeling that he was frustrated with the shifting parameters of classification, which he concluded were arbitrary.

Curated list of quotes about coffee-table books published in newspapers and magazines 1960–1980				
America – <i>The New York Times</i> (digitised)				
Britain – <i>The Times</i> (digitised)				
Australia – Various newspapers and magazines (digitised)				
No	Document/ Date	Quote	Format	Title
1	Review: “Books of The Times” by Charles Poore, page 13. Dec 24, 1960	“It is a coffee-table book. The young man who is waiting in your living room to take the daughter of the house to a party they are already late for can improve his mind by turning its pages.”	308 pages	<i>The Past We Share: An Illustrated History of the British and American Peoples</i> edited by Peter Quennell and Alan Hodge
2	Article: “Books of The Times: End Papers” by Ada Louise Huxtable, page 15. Dec 24, 1963	“It is big enough, 16x26 inches, to be not just a coffee-table book but a coffee table.”	32 pages, 100 plates, 16” x 26”	<i>Buildings, Plans and Designs</i> by Frank Lloyd Wright
3	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Old Masters and New Reputations” by Donald Brook, page 11. Oct 23, 1965	“It is not a work of scholarship (or if it is it is slight, and unnecessary) nor is it quite a coffee-table art book (only the dustjacket is glossy). It is a moderately useful introductory textbook suitable for art students and amateurs, moderately priced as art books go.”	29 reproductions of Leonardo drawings and 37 Michelangelo plates	<i>The Drawings of Leonardo and Michelangelo</i> by Jaromir Pecirha
4	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Memories of Degas” by Donald Brook, page 11. Sep 10, 1966	“Not a coffee-table art book, unless you take your coffee in fairly scholarly company.”	Photographic illustrations are remarkably clear and businesslike	<i>Viking Art</i> by David M. Wilson and Ole Klindtjenson
5	Article: “Books of The Times: Over the Counter and Under the Tree” by Eliot Fremont-Smith, page 45. Dec 9, 1966	“The subcategory Coffee Table Book has been mentioned. But The Coffee Table proper is a different and rarer breed. It is a gift book so large that if you put legs on it, you have a coffee table.”	24 “outsize” colour plates	<i>Coaching Days of England</i>
6	Review: “Elegant for Whom?” by Nathaniel Tarn, page 25. Oct 12, 1968	“The reluctant conclusion is that this is a coffee-table book after all, for there is no new material to hand and the discussion of such air-raising problems as that of Linear B decipherment is scanty and only tangential.”	Text and illustrations	<i>Dawn of the Gods</i> by Jacquetta Hawkes
7	Review: “Art Choice” by David Piper, page IV. A review of 13 coffee-table art books. Nov 29, 1969	“Homage to the book beautiful: better perhaps that the malign epithet, ‘coffee-table book’, had never been hit upon. Devastatingly apposite as it so often is, it can also be only too easily and often applied as sufficient and complete dismissal of almost all books that are large and lush with colour plates. Indeed it must now take some courage for a man of sensibility to leave such a book lying about in his rooms on any kind of table. But in fact there are produced each year, a number of large-scale, expensive, even glossy books that need justification for their existence in a secular age no more than did the illuminated missal in a religious age.”	A series of excellent photographs both plain and coloured	A review of 13 coffee-table art book titles

Curated list of quotes about coffee-table books published in newspapers and magazines 1960–1980				
America – <i>The New York Times</i> (digitised)				
Britain – <i>The Times</i> (digitised)				
Australia – Various newspapers and magazines (digitised)				
No	Document/ Date	Quote	Format	Title
8	Article in <i>The Australian Women's Weekly</i> : “At Home . . . with Margaret Sydney” by Margaret Sydney, page 56. May 27, 1970	“It is absorbing to read, and usually attractive to look at because of its superb steel engravings. This is a combination that all good coffee-table books should have, and if you want to treat it as just that, for once the Joneses will find it hard to keep up with you. WARNING: You may need a new coffee table. It's in two great volumes, and my bathroom scales allege that the two together weigh 9lb . . .”	Two-volume Bi-Centenary souvenir facsimile edition with text and more than 100 pictures	<i>A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World</i> by James Cook
9	Article in the <i>Tribune</i> : “Books”, a review of 8 books including 1 coffee-table book, page 8. Aug 11, 1971	“This beautiful collection of colour photographs, is no ordinary coffee-table book. The text accompanying the pictures has been written by specialists who have studied Aborigines as human beings and not just for the purposes of academic exercise. They include Frank Stevens, Colin Tatz, Denis O'Brien, Kath Walker and Frank Hardy. The genocidal ferocity of Australia's early white settlers wiped out Aborigines by the thousands, setting a pattern for generations of cruelty, neglect, discrimination and total disregard. Perhaps the appearance of this book show the stirrings of social conscience.”	Colour photographs and accompanying text	<i>The Aborigine Today</i> Roderick Hulsbergen et al
10	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Bird Pictures” by Hugh Elliot, page 12. Jul 15, 1972	“The coffee-table book of our flora and fauna is usually a document who value as a record or reference is often concealed by its glitter, the unhandiness of its large size and its scanty textual information. Michael Morcombe's ‘Birds of Australia’ is such a book.”	80 pages	<i>Birds of Australia</i> by Michael Morcombe
11	Article: “As They Saw Him” by Thomas Lask, page 31. Oct 2, 1970	“There's more to this, Beethoven books than meets the eye. On the surface it bears all the stigmata of a coffee table book: elaborate make-up, tinted paper, pages of glossy prints in black and white and attractive colour.”	400 pages	<i>Beethoven: A Documentary Study</i>
12	Review: “Of Art and Its Makers” by Thomas Lask, page 30. Sep 8, 1972	“One of the dividends of the cultural revolution, along with the increase in museum attendance, museum tours of Europe and the like, has been the proliferation of art books for popular consumption.”	Illustrated 480 pages	<i>From the Sketchbooks of the Great Artists</i> by Claude Marks
13	Review: “More Than a Coffee-Table Book” by Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, page 45. Dec 14, 1973	“Call it elegant, lavish, a colorful feast for the eyes. Say its reproductions of book jackets, record cases, magazine covers, illustrations, posters and advertisements are faithful to their originals. Celebrate how good it looks on the coffee table and how pleasant it is to leaf through when the after-dinner conversation fails to absorb.”	Illustrated	<i>Graphic Design</i> by Milton Glaser
14	News: “Some Time-Stopping, Vivid Visions” by David Piper, page VII. Nov 29, 1973	“[The book] may look suspiciously like the dreaded coffee-table book, but justifies its format by reproducing all the known examples around the size of the originals . . .”	Not listed	<i>Albrecht Durer: The Landscape Water-Colours</i> by Walter Koschatsky
15	Review: “Feverish Industry and Activity” by Derek Parker, Page 8. Oct 30, 1975	“This is one of those elegant books designed and produced by George Rainbird Ltd, who have helped to make the fully illustrated “coffee-table book” an acceptable form for the serious biographer or social historian.”	Illustrated	<i>Trollope</i> by C.P. Snow

Curated list of quotes about coffee-table books published in newspapers and magazines 1960–1980				
America – <i>The New York Times</i> (digitised)				
Britain – <i>The Times</i> (digitised)				
Australia – Various newspapers and magazines (digitised)				
No	Document/ Date	Quote	Format	Title
16	Article: “Machu Picchu at Delphi” by Sherwin Smith, page 359. Dec 7, 1975	“Categorizing gift books is a difficult matter—it isn’t just one of your holiday games, though it flourishes during the holiday season. First of all, there’s the coffee-table book that the family see daily even if they seldom look inside once the thank-you notes have been sent.”	16” x 12 ¾” weighing 5lbs. 15oz.	<i>Classic Lines: A Gallery of the Great Thoroughbreds</i>
17	Article: “Cooking: Cooking” by Mimi Sheraton, page 271. Dec 5, 1976	“As with [The Complete Book of Fruits and Vegetables], The Complete Book of Preserving could be considered a coffee-table book with a thoroughly practical side. Originally published in England, this beautifully illustrated work covers all methods of preserving . . .”	Illustrated with text	<i>The Complete Book of Preserving</i> by Marye Cameron-Smith
18	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Edna Dives Between Covers” by Roger Pulvers, page 12. Feb 26, 1977	“But it is sheer modesty on the part of the publishers, the Australasian Publishing Company of Sydney, Australia to call this a coffee table book for it is a volume literally to be relished, savoured, and digested.”	Black and white, and some colour snaps and recipes	<i>Dame Edna's Coffee Table Book</i> by Barry Humphries (Edna Everage)
19	Review: “High Road to Modern Art” by John Russell Taylor, page XII. Nov 24, 1978	“Who, if anyone, reads the text of a coffee-table book? It is easy enough to sidestep the question: coffee-table books, like pornography, can be defined by superior persons to exclude anything they actually have to approve of. This is not a coffee-table book because it is scholarly, even if its size and lavishness of illustration would seem to include it. That is not a coffee-table book because its subject is sufficiently obscure to preclude the casual picture-browser from ever picking it up in the first place. And so on, until finally what is let is merely the bottom of the barrel. Perhaps intelligent people are not supposed to have coffee tables; or read large books only on lecterns; or have no use for pictures at all. Well, if so, none of these new art books is for them. But for the rest of us, who still like to get pretty and not totally brainless presents, they still have their uses.”	Large number of black and white reproductions and a number of “superbly accurate”, colour reproductions	<i>Cézanne: The Late Work</i> edited by William Rubin
20	Article: “A Special Kind of Theatre: Broadway Musicals Musical” by Harold C. Schonberg, BR4 Sep 30, 1979	“Some coffee-table book: about six pounds, 13 ½ inches by 10 ½, 353 pages, 395 illustrations (about a third of them in colour). It is intended as a reading or browsing book rather than as a reference . . .”	Illustrated, weighs 6lbs, measures 13 ½” x 10 ½”, 353 pages, 395 illustrations	<i>Broadway Musicals</i> by Martin Gottfried
21	Review: “Comprehensive guide is a decade’s labour of love” by John Blunsden, page 12. Jan 18, 1980	“Facts and figures can be compressed into a small-format publication but the wide spaces of the so-called coffee table book are, I believe, essential to recapture effectively the glamour, colour, excitement and atmosphere of grand prix racing.”	Colour and black and white photographs	<i>Autocourse 1979-80</i> edited by Maurice Hamilton

**Table 3.0:** A curated list of quotes about coffee-table books published in newspapers and magazines 1960–1980. (Source: *The New York Times* historical newspapers archive (1851–2008), *The Times* Digital Archive 1785–1985 and *Trove*, Digitised newspapers and more, National Library of Australia.)

For a more comprehensive list of curated extracts of comments made by reviewers in America, Britain and Australia, see Appendices 4, 5 and 6.

Once a pejorative default view of coffee-table books took hold in the 1960s and 1970s, it prevailed. For example, a 2007 review by Brian Fawcett titled “Two Coffee Table Books-and a Real Book” questions whether there is even a legitimate role for coffee-table books:

Graham Osborne and Courtney Milne are known and moderately renowned Canadian landscape photographers [...] Presumably there are enough human beings around who buy these kinds of books and set them on coffee tables to make this sort of thing a viable enterprise. But really, I’m only presuming this because I don’t actually understand either the commercial genre or the cultural allure. Is this waiting room fodder for dentists and doctors wanting to calm their frantic patients? Are they meant to give dinner guests something to talk about before dinner parties sensible people wouldn’t want to be invited to? [...] And anyway, I tend to gather dinner party guests in the kitchen, where I serve them complicated seasonal hors d’oeuvres and the like while I question them about current events.<sup>4</sup>

The contrast between “*real* books” and coffee-table books, is a good illustration of the way in which “legitimate” culture is defined in relation to “lesser” forms. Literary books are the benchmark here against which all other books are measured. And, in the spectrum of photobooks, literary photobooks set the benchmark for the cultural status of coffee-table books. Derogatory remarks about coffee-table books also support Bourdieu’s dominant culture theory that a certain level of acceptance of such a position is needed in order for it to be promulgated.<sup>5</sup> Although negative asides about coffee-table books may be made with a certain degree of humour, it nonetheless has undermined the legitimacy of the genre. In the context of post-war social change, this period involved a shedding of a traditions. The dominant culture in which ownership of books was embedded was challenged by the mass-production and consumption of new genres such as coffee-table books. An expanded book-buying market embraced book genres for other reasons than a mainstream view that books were primarily for the attainment of knowledge. After all, what is inherently wrong with the incidental viewing or reading of photographic books in a waiting room?

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<sup>4</sup> Brian Fawcett, “Two Coffee Table Books-and a Real Book,” *Books in Canada* 36, 7 (2007): 18–19.

<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 386.

## “Battle of the brows”

Notable studies on books and cultural values by Radway, Rubin, Levine, and more recently Driscoll, also focus on the way taste is categorised as highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow.<sup>6</sup> Driscoll states that the early usages of brow categories were couched in playful terms but were delivered with an edge. “All three of the brow terms have historically been insults, used to include and exclude people from legitimate culture,” which was particularly evident between the “1920s and 1960s that became known as the Battle of the Brows.”<sup>7</sup> She also notes that the middlebrow emerged to “open up the binary [opposites of highbrow and lowbrow],” where highbrow was associated with the pursuit of art appreciation, while “lesser” activities generating its opposite—the lowbrow:<sup>8</sup>

[Then], in 1925, a columnist in *Punch* quipped that ‘the BBC claim to have discovered a new type, the ‘middlebrow’. It consists of people who are hoping that someday they will get used to the stuff they ought to like.’<sup>9</sup>

The new market of book-buyers created by the publishers of coffee-table books in the post-war era could be described as “new middlebrow” types because they had the means to start embracing material culture, and became culturally aspirational. Driscoll points out that not all scholars and writers accept the middlebrow and have devised other terms to describe the space between elite and popular, for example, “Nobrow” used by John Seabrook. Nonetheless, Driscoll argues that the term “middlebrow” does persist in “contemporary cultural discourse” and it needs to be taken into account.<sup>10</sup> As a contentious term, middlebrow shares some parallels with “coffee-table book”, in that their usage has a tendency to offend because of their connotations. For example, Macdonald

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<sup>6</sup> See, Janice A. Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-class Desire* (Chapel Hill, USA: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill, USA: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992). Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press, 1988). Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*.

<sup>7</sup> Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 7–8.

<sup>8</sup> Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 8–9.



argues that “midcult [or middlebrow] has it both ways: it pretends to respect the standards of High Culture while in fact it waters them down and vulgarizes them.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, middlebrow does not claim its own position between highbrow and lowbrow; instead it causes the position of high culture or highbrow to become corrupted. Similarly, the term “coffee-table”, as noted and addressed in previous chapters, is dismissed or avoided as a descriptive term for large-format, photographically illustrated books because its links to superficiality may diminish the cultural status of large-format, photographically illustrated books deemed to display a “literary” narrative. In 2011, an article by Macy Halford in *The New Yorker* raised the ire of some readers with her use of the word middlebrow in relation to author Zadie Smith as a reviewer, and the accusation required further explanation in a subsequent article. Halford suggested that Smith had re-invented the middlebrow book review because of her ability to write at a “very high level of critical intelligence with accessible language, an abbreviated form, and a strong personality.” Admitting that the term was fraught with issues, nonetheless Halford defended her use of it, saying that she saw it as aligned to the idea of accessibility and the circulation of ideas to a broad audience.<sup>12</sup> This idea of democratising the dissemination of information is similar to the aims expressed by publishers of coffee-table books such as Thames and Hudson, Phaidon Press, David Brower, Paul Hamlyn and Lloyd O’Neil in the post-war era—which may be a further indication that the coffee-table book is situated in the middlebrow category.

According to Levine, the “brow” categories serve as a vertical hierarchy within the central social theme of cultural values.<sup>13</sup> Given that a hierarchy exists, Bourdieu argues that in order for position-taking to persist, the hierarchy necessarily relies on interdependency, so the existence of

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<sup>11</sup> Dwight Macdonald, “Masscult and Midcult: II,” *Partisan Review* 27, Spring (1960): 592. See also: Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Macy Halford, February 10, 2011, comment on, “On “Middlebrow”.” *Page Turner* Accessed June 24, 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/on-middlebrow>. See also: Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 224.

middlebrow and lowbrow positions maintains the dominant position of highbrow.<sup>14</sup> On this point, it could be argued that Parr and Badger's stance on making a distinction between a photobook and a coffee-table book maintains the view that high-art photographic content with a "literary" narrative takes the dominant position for a reason: lest all large-format photographically illustrated books be deemed equals, given that they all have photographic content. Of course, their position is not dissimilar to the distinctions made within the field of written-text literature, which are hierarchically judged against highbrow literary novels capable of winning awards such as the Man Booker Prize.

While Parr and Badger made an argument for excluding coffee-table books from their study of the history of photobooks, there are always exceptions within the spectrum of position taking. For example, *A Wonderful Time: An Intimate Portrait of the Good Life* by Slim Aarons is included in Parr and Badger's history of the photobook.<sup>15</sup> Although Parr and Badger categorise Aarons' book as a coffee-table book because its subject matter is more akin to content found in *Hello* magazine, a window into the lifestyles of the rich and famous, they included his book because it "displays much more than the genre calls for."<sup>16</sup> Kamping-Carder describes Aarons as "best known for his high-society portraits of the 1960s and '70s—colour-saturated images of the upper classes, casually exulted in their wealth."<sup>17</sup> However, Parr and Badger determined that Aarons' ability to capture nuances of the scenes he was photographing made his book worthy of inclusion. Aarons directed his lens away from the usual sycophantic observations of this group of people and elevated his photographic content to a level not usually associated with this "type of book".<sup>18</sup> This example serves to explain why I describe the coffee-table book as a discursive object. Parr and Badger

<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu, "Field of Cultural Production," 312.

<sup>15</sup> Slim Aarons, *A Wonderful Time: An Intimate Portrait of the Good Life* (New York, USA: Harper and Row, 1974).

<sup>16</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook*, vol. II, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Leigh Kamping-Carder, "Photographer Slim Aarons's Images of Lavish Homes; Luxury real estate served as an evocative backdrop for the high-society pictures," *The Wall Street Journal* (April 21, 2015): [https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/docview/1674472295?accountid=12528&rft\\_id=info%3Axi%2Fsid%3Apmo](https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/docview/1674472295?accountid=12528&rft_id=info%3Axi%2Fsid%3Apmo):

<sup>18</sup> Parr and Badger, *The Photobook*, vol. II, 20.

deemed the subject matter to align the book with others of coffee-table status, but Aarons' perceptive lens managed to steer his work towards a higher category of photographic awareness not normally assigned to such books.

Despite the widespread critical disapproval of coffee-table books, they were commercially successful. Negative comments clearly resonated only within particular cultural circles. The commercial success of coffee-table books suggests that most consumers ignored such comments. Readers of broadsheet newspapers may not have been inclined to consume coffee-table books, sniggering appreciatively at reviewers' comments, but this position was not specific to a certain class. It is interesting to note also that broadsheet newspapers regularly reviewed coffee-table books, suggesting that their proliferation could not be ignored. And in fact, the consumption of coffee-table books may have extended beyond the popular book-buying market. As Comparato explains, Curtis Benjamin, a leading publisher, noted that sales of "nonbooks" (or coffee-table books) had increased by as much as 380 percent in the 1960s.<sup>19</sup> Given that publishing is in the business of commerce and culture, some publishers capitalised on the opportunity offered by the phenomenon and began publishing illustrated books. Benjamin also remarked that "the reprehensible" creators of such books were in fact "laughing all the way to the bank over [the] disdainful characterization [of nonbooks or coffee-table books.]"<sup>20</sup>

Although coffee-table books were a profitable addition to trade publishing, as I have already noted, publishers of illustrated books found it necessary to distinguish their illustrated book from those with the prevailing "coffee-table" status. One example of this was the *Studio Books Series*. The aim of the publisher, Studio Publications, was to create a cohesive narrative for its illustrated books.<sup>21</sup> Tebbel notes that the series featured books with text and images on travel, flowers, gardens, flower arranging, art, architecture, furniture, how-to craft books and pictorial biographies.

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<sup>19</sup> Frank E. Comparato, *Books for the Millions: A History of the Men Whose Methods and Machines Packaged the Printed Word* (Harrisburg, USA: Stackpole Co., 1971), 297.

<sup>20</sup> Comparato, *Books for the Millions*, 297.

<sup>21</sup> Tebbel, *History of Book Publishing in the U.S.*, vol. IV, 199.

Believing that his books should exhibit a “strong story theme”, Bryan Holme, president and editor of Studio Publications, employed a “higher order” of content to set his illustrated books apart from coffee-table books.<sup>22</sup>

As I have previously argued, if a book looks like a coffee-table book it is likely to be regarded as such. According to Tebbel, the *Studio Book Series* looked like coffee-table books because they were beautifully produced.<sup>23</sup> Efforts by Holme to produce a “superior” series of illustrated books, and Tebbel’s assessment of the series, also support my argument that coffee-table books are discursively defined. In the end, Holme’s efforts were thwarted because large-format illustrated books carry the diminished status of “coffee-table books”. Thus far, this chapter has focused on what reviewers made of coffee-table books and how their commentaries questioned the status of coffee-table books as a cultural artefact. In further elaboration, I now discuss the above-mentioned coffee-table books to give an insight into why they “spoke” to their audiences in the right way, at the right time.

## Cultural Resonance

One of the benchmarks used to measure a book’s cultural resonance is a good set of sales figures. Each of the three coffee-table books discussed in this section achieved that benchmark. The first, *Hi-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home* (Clarkson N. Potter, 1978) achieved popularity because it tapped into the *Zeitgeist* of American architecture and interior design trends at the time. This book offers a good example of how architectural and design coffee-table books can play a role in reflecting or influencing style. The second, *The Art Book* (Phaidon Press, 1994), provides a significant example of coffee-table art books playing a role in the democratisation of art by exhibiting art to a general audience in an accessible format. The third, *The Australians* (Rigby Limited, 1966) an Australiana coffee-table book, offered a portrait of Australia at the time, set

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<sup>22</sup> Tebbel, *History of Book Publishing in the U.S.*, vol. IV, 199.

<sup>23</sup> Tebbel, *History of Book Publishing in the U.S.*, vol. IV, 199.

against a background of renewed interest in what Australia was as a nation. National identity was a significant topic of interest in post-war Australia and *The Australians* is one example of the many Australiana coffee-table books that dominated the Australian publishing landscape in the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Zeitgeist**

Book publishers seek to produce books that capture the prevailing *Zeitgeist*—or, ideally, sense a shift before it emerges in earnest. The post-war era was a time of rebuilding and rethinking new ways of living, and this was expressed through various design movements and emerging trends. One example is the Hi-Tech movement, which was the focus of the architecture and design coffee-table book, *Hi-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home*, published in America in 1978. The book signified the arrival of the Hi-Tech movement and offered a “formulation of a coherent, more commercial High-Tech domestic style.”<sup>24</sup> It was emblematic of a desire to experiment with or take inspiration from non-traditional buildings and interiors and captured an emerging market with both inspirational and aspirational tendencies. The book’s popularity and resonance with public sentiment was evident—by 1979 it reached sales of almost 60,000 copies.<sup>25</sup>

According to John Winter, the Hi-tech industrial design movement thrived in the 1970s and 1980s in response to nostalgic interior design. It was a time in which there was “growing disillusionment on the part of architects and designers with the achievements of the Modern Movement.”<sup>26</sup> In architecture, the industrial style trend began with the “Reliance Controls factory in Swindon” in 1967. The structure was unembellished and minimalist. Hi-Tech architects borrowed imagery from transport:

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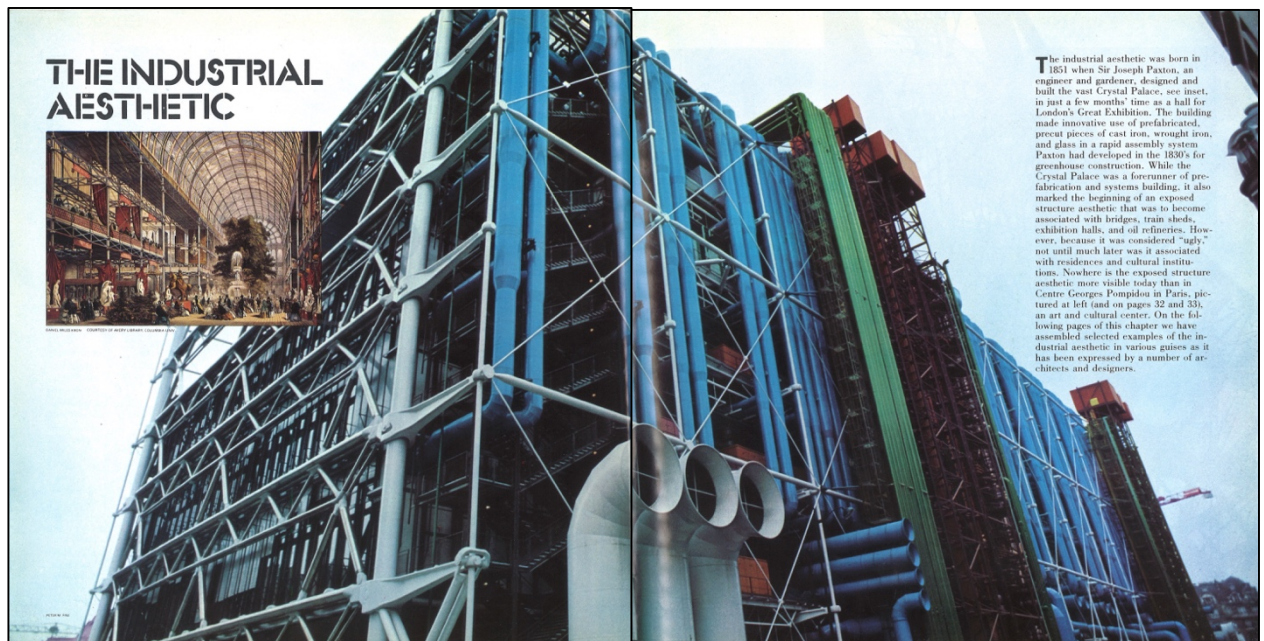
<sup>24</sup> Joanna Banham and Leanda Shrimpton, eds., *Encyclopedia of Interior Design*. (London, UK: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), 563.

<sup>25</sup> Harriet Shapiro, “Ready for High-Tech? Authors Joan Kron & Suzanne Slesin Insist Living in a Factory Can Be Fun,” *People* 13 (April 2, 1979): <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20073310,00.html>:

<sup>26</sup> John Winter, “Hi-Tech,” in *Encyclopedia of Interior Design*, eds. Joanna Banham and Leanda Shrimpton (London, UK: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), 562.

[R]ounded corners from the car industry, stressed-skin construction from the aerospace industry, and spars and tension cables from yacht-builders and shipyards.<sup>27</sup>

One of the most celebrated examples of Hi-Tech architecture is the Georges Pompidou Centre in Paris, which Winter claims “propelled the style into the big time.”<sup>28</sup> Inevitably, features of this architectural style were picked up by interior designers who designed fittings and fixtures for offices, restaurants and shops. Winter notes that by the late 1970s, the domestic sphere began to incorporate Hi-Tech features.<sup>29</sup> Figures 3.1–3.3 illustrate the Hi-Tech style.



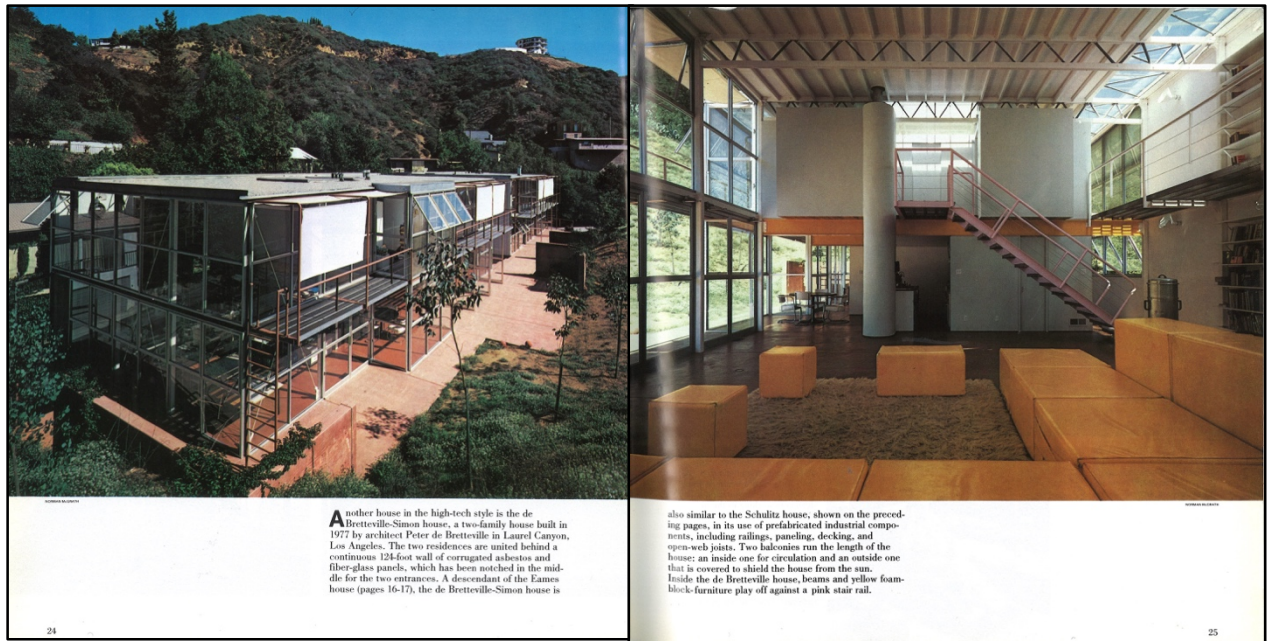
**Figure 3.1:** Pages 8–9 illustrate the High-Tech movement style in *High-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home* by Joan Kron and Suzanne Slesin. (Source: Monash University Library. Scanned image.)

<sup>27</sup> Winter, “Hi-Tech,” 562.

<sup>28</sup> Winter, “Hi-Tech,” 562–563.

<sup>29</sup> Winter, “Hi-Tech.”





**Figure 3.2:** Pages 24–25 illustrate the High-Tech movement style in *High-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home* by Joan Kron and Suzanne Slesin. (Source: Monash University Library. Scanned image.)



**Figure 3.3:** Pages 62–63 illustrate the High-Tech movement style in *High-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home* by Joan Kron and Suzanne Slesin. (Source: Monash University Library. Scanned image.)

Ellen Fischer argues that anyone with an artistic impulse is inspired by visual imagery, and that before the advent of internet sites with large visual repositories such as Houzz and Pinterest, designers and clients looked to image-filled mediums such as coffee-table books and magazines for inspiration.<sup>30</sup> “The tradition in interior design and in architecture is to go looking and go looking in books.”<sup>31</sup> Coffee-table books allow designers to view other designers’ work, whether historical or current, to find inspiration. These images play a key role in their creative work life.<sup>32</sup> In conceiving *Hi-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home*, authors, Joan Kron and Suzanne Slesin had three aims. First, they wanted to report and record the new trends in industrial design. Secondly, they wanted to illustrate a wide range of industrial products that could transfer to the home environment. Finally, “[they] didn’t want [the] book to just sit there on the coffee table looking pretty.”<sup>33</sup> Fisher points out that Kron and Slesin’s exploration and promotion of the possibilities of industrial design introduced a completely different vocabulary into interior design. Priced at \$27.50, *Hi-Tech* was regarded as the bible for the industrial design movement. The book comprises 286 pages of both black and white and colour images of products and design ideas, is square in format and measures 10.2 x 10.1 inches. The paper quality is thin and glossy and feels more like a magazine, which falls outside the usual heavy gsm paper stock used for coffee-table books. The book’s materiality suggests a crossover between a book, a catalogue, and a magazine. This may have been the publisher’s intention, as several of the featured products provide product prices and the names and addresses of stockists and suppliers.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Dr Ellen Fisher (Dean, New York School of Interior Design), “Coffee-table books and interior design,” in discussion with Christine Elliott, June 6, 2014, New York, USA. Digital recording.

<sup>31</sup> Fisher, “Coffee-table books and interior design.”

<sup>32</sup> Fisher, “Coffee-table books and interior design.”

<sup>33</sup> Joan Kron and Suzanne Slesin, *Hi-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home* (New York, USA: Clarkson N. Potter, 1978), 3.

<sup>34</sup> Banham and Shrimpton, *Interior Design*, 563.



In Slesin's opinion, "*Hi-Tech* was important in the coming of age of American design."<sup>35</sup> She notes that the return to traditional decorating away from the modern philosophy of repurposing what industrial design promoted "offers some insights into the changing values of our society."<sup>36</sup> Fisher claims that people may have thought *Hi-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home* was just another coffee-table book, "yet it really changed the way a whole era of designers thought about what design could be."<sup>37</sup> Fisher regards the publication of the coffee-table book *Hi-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home* in 1978 as a significant moment in interior design: "It was a signal that something new was happening."<sup>38</sup> Fisher emphasises that living environments are not haphazard. Design has a role to play in what the next iteration is going to be, and, in this case, Hi-Tech was the next stage on from the home furnishings of the 1960s.<sup>39</sup> In a 1987 *New York Times* article, Slesin notes that the movement really only lasted 15 years after introducing the industrial look to thousands of American homes.<sup>40</sup> Fisher's assessment of *Hi-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home* highlights the fact that the Hi-Tech movement and the book acted as an agent of change in the field of architecture and design, and created a shift in the production of consumer goods to fit changing consumer tastes. Interior designers look to visual cues for creative inspiration and potential trends, and *Hi-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home* was one of those books that created a buzz in the late 70s. Using architectural and design coffee-table books as inspirational and aspirational visual media has not abated to this day; they remain a prolific and popular category.

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<sup>35</sup> Suzanne Slesin, *The New York Times*. "The 1970's Industrial Look: What Became of High Tech?" February 1, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/19/garden/the-1970-s-industrial-look-what-became-of-high-tech.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>36</sup> Slesin, "1970's Industrial Look."

<sup>37</sup> Fisher, "Coffee-table books and interior design."

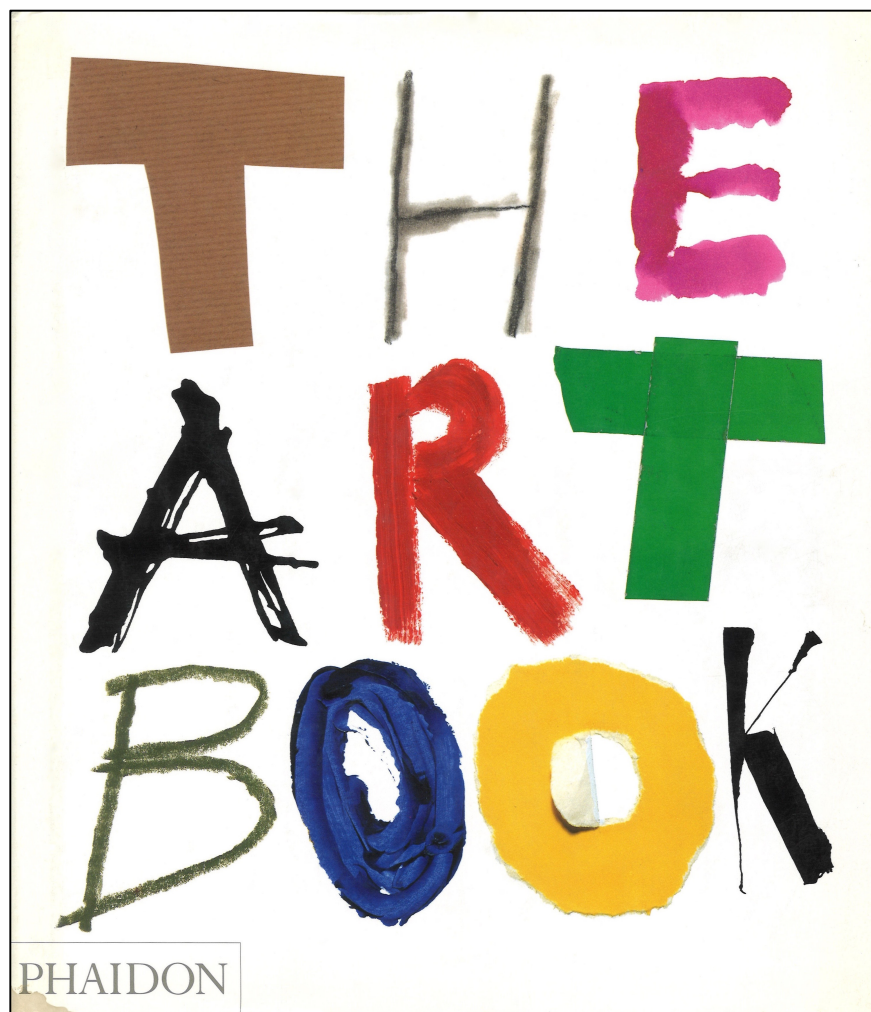
<sup>38</sup> Fisher, "Coffee-table books and interior design."

<sup>39</sup> Fisher, "Coffee-table books and interior design."

<sup>40</sup> Slesin, "1970's Industrial Look."

## Art for the masses

As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, post-war coffee-table art books played a significant role in the democratisation of art. One example of a coffee-table art book that exemplifies this phenomenon is *The Art Book*, first published by Phaidon in 1994. It has played a significant role in introducing a wide range of major art works to a large general audience. It comprises 500 images with one page dedicated to each image, accompanied by a short description of the work at the top of the page. Nyburg explains that Phaidon had a vast library of archived art transparencies but decided that “the project required an entirely new selection and sourcing of images.”<sup>41</sup>



**Figure 3.4:** Dust jacket, *The Art Book* by Phaidon Press. (Source: My book. Scanned image.)

<sup>41</sup> Anna Nyburg, *Émigrés: The Transformation of Art Publishing in Britain* (London, UK: Phaidon Press, 2014), 188.

In 2012, Phaidon reissued *The Art Book* featuring 100 new works including photography by Ansel Adams and others, in recognition that photography had become a respected art form.<sup>42</sup> According to Phaidon Press, the book has sold over 2 million copies and has been published in 20 languages.<sup>43</sup> Why has this coffee-table art book found such a large audience? Part of the explanation lies in its simple but distinctive format. First, the book's cover is bold, informal, naïve and attention grabbing. Secondly, the alphabetisation and juxtaposition of artists breaks with traditional art classifications. For example, in figure 3.5, a Richard Hamilton collage is located on the same opening page as an oil painting by Wilhelm Hammershoi. These two works of art are from different eras, use completely different styles and media and their juxtaposition exemplifies why breaking the rules was a bold, but popular move.



**Figure 3.5:** Pages 206–207 illustrate the alphabetical juxtaposition of Hamilton with Hammershoi, reproduced in *The Art Book* by Phaidon Press. (Source: My book. Scanned image.)

<sup>42</sup> “Phaidon's New Look Art Book,” *The Bookseller* 5538 (2012): 27.

<sup>43</sup> Phaidon Press, *YouTube*. “The Art Book: New Edition, by Phaidon.” April 23, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZfj8L0h81M>





**Figure 3.6:** Pages 252-253 illustrate the alphabetical juxtaposition of Klimt with Kline, reproduced in *The Art Book* by Phaidon Press. (Source: My book. Scanned image.)



**Figure 3.7:** Pages 274–275 illustrate the alphabetical juxtaposition of Lichtenstein with Limbourg, reproduced in *The Art Book* by Phaidon Press. (Source: My book. Scanned image.)

Another explanation for *The Art Book*'s success is that it is underpinned by Phaidon's history of publishing scholarly art books that have achieved wide appeal. For example, the success of *The Story of Art* by Ernst Gombrich in 1950 proved that scholarly art books could be presented in a more accessible manner and sold at an affordable price. Nyburg points out *The Story of Art* and *The Art Book* share parallel features and successes. They both feature illustrations and accompanying text on one page, have achieved very high sales figures and have gone through many reprints.<sup>44</sup> According to Miller, one of Phaidon's strategies was to make *The Story of Art* affordable in order to establish a market. They achieved this by printing the colour plates on "4 page sections which were wrapped round the 32 page sections, thereby reducing the printing cost."<sup>45</sup> Gombrich commented that trying to publish the book with economies in mind meant that he had to reduce or extend his text to fit the format.<sup>46</sup> "It forced [him] to be doubly rigorous in [his] selection of what to mention and what to exclude" and he restricted the number of technical terms and jargon in order to engage with the readership he had in mind.<sup>47</sup> This had a positive outcome on the book's wide appeal, which was initially aimed at the younger generation but became a hit with every age group.<sup>48</sup> The book was printed on art paper and sold for the very low cost of 21 shillings. The first 20,000 copies "just covered the printing and binding cost, with no contribution to overheads or profit."<sup>49</sup> However, the successive reprints of *The Story of Art* present a story of financial and cultural success. According to Bumpus, its greatest achievement was that it married "[art] scholarship with accessibility."<sup>50</sup> Phaidon published a paperback version of *The Story of Art* with Oxford University in the 1960s and as Miller points out, it has been on the reading list of many American Universities. "[T]he book has

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<sup>44</sup> Nyburg, *Émigrés*, 188.

<sup>45</sup> Miller, "Business of Art Book Publishing," 350.

<sup>46</sup> Miller, "Business of Art Book Publishing," 350.

<sup>47</sup> E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (London, UK: Phaidon, 1956), 1.

<sup>48</sup> Judith Bumpus, "Horovitz and Phaidon," *Art Book* 5, 4 (1998): 53.

<sup>49</sup> Miller, "Business of Art Book Publishing," 350.

<sup>50</sup> Bumpus, "Horovitz," 53.

gone through many reprints and revisions, with more of the illustrations in colour, and sales have totalled over six million copies.”<sup>51</sup>

The motivation behind the production of the first print run of *The Story of Art* demonstrates the entrepreneurial approach Phaidon took when they decided to sacrifice profit for mass sales, which created a mass audience for the book. A small press can achieve a reputation that outweighs the limits of its size and budget—a point that is made by Thompson:

[A] firm with small stocks of economic capital can succeed in building up substantial stocks of symbolic capital in the domains where it is active, gaining a reputation for itself that far exceeds its strength in sheer economic terms—in other words, it can punch above its weight.<sup>52</sup>

Fortunately, Phaidon’s market testing experiment for the book paid off. Part of the success of *The Art Book* and Phaidon’s status as an art book publisher was the symbolic capital gained from the earlier publication of *The Story of Art*, strongly underwritten by Gombrich’s status as an authoritative art historian. When Phaidon published *The Art Book* in a coffee-table format, it borrowed some of the authority of *The Story of Art*. Ultimately, *The Art Book* fulfilled “Horowitz’s original theory of successful art publishing: good quality reproduction, good design and a very competitive cover price.” Nyburg also notes that both books achieved record sales, have engaged with a broad audience and gone through several reprints.<sup>53</sup> Although *The Story of Art* was not a coffee-table book—unlike *The Art Book*—it paved the way for Phaidon to eventually publish *The Art Book*. That book not only presented art in a simple format, but Phaidon’s considerable symbolic capital in the field of art publishing allowed to it to break from traditional art conventions and bring art to the masses.

## National identity

Australiana coffee-table books were prolific in the 1960s. and 1970s. They resonated with Australian readers because they provided an accessible window on the country they inhabited, and

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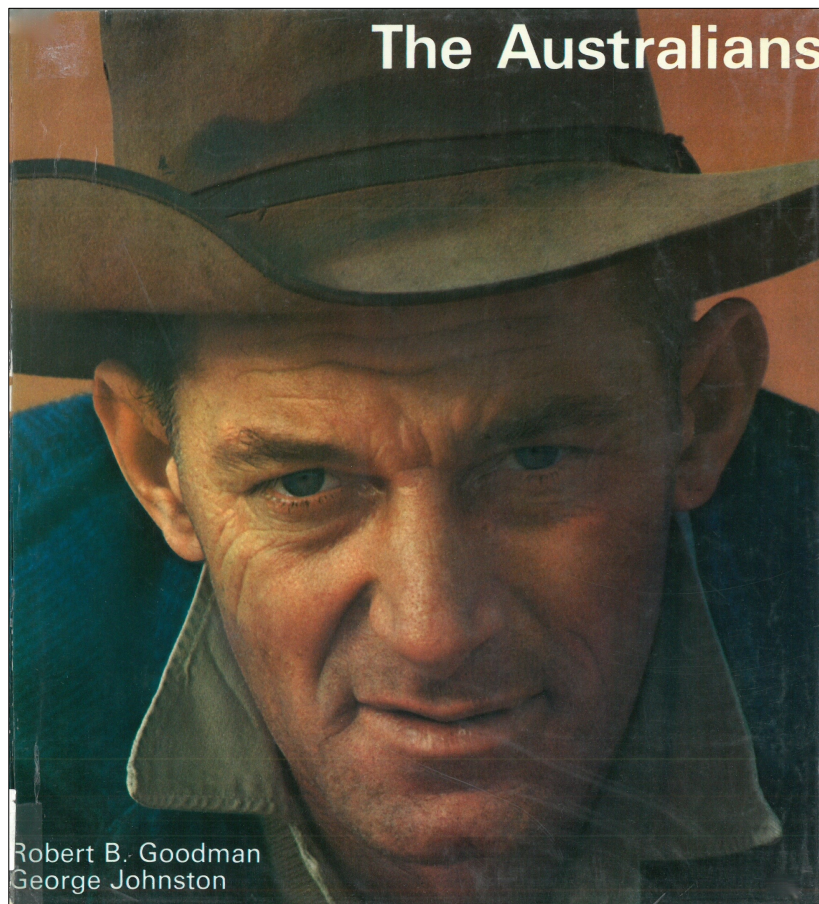
<sup>51</sup> Miller, “Business of Art Book Publishing,” 350.

<sup>52</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 9.

<sup>53</sup> Nyburg, *Émigrés*, 188.



Australian independent publishers capitalised on this. *The Australians*, is one example of a coffee-table book that gained considerable success in contributing to a discourse on questions around national identity in Australia in 1966. The *Australian Financial Review* reported that 1967 had been a bumper sales year for publishers of Australian books.<sup>54</sup> At the heart of that success was *The Australians*, the most successful book of any kind in Australia that year.<sup>55</sup> At the time of her article going to press, Preston reported that 80,000 copies had already been sold, and a fourth reprint of 20,000 was due to hit the market.<sup>56</sup> Why did *this* Australiana coffee-table book make such an impact in Australia at the time? An examination of the book's conception and production shines some light on its success.



**Figure 3.8:** Dust jacket, *The Australians* by Robert Goodman and George Johnston. (Source: State Library of Victoria. Scanned image.)

<sup>54</sup>Manuscript 20, Folio 1. "A Good Year for Publishers: Love and Cooking, and Love and the Outback," 1967, 16, 'in' 12 *State Library of South Australia. Adelaide, Australia, Rigby Limited, Publishers BRG 12 Series List*, 'in' Newspaper cuttings books, 16.

<sup>55</sup>"A Good Year " 1967, "A Good Year " State Library of South Australia, 'in' Newspaper cuttings books, 16.

<sup>56</sup>"A Good Year " 1967, "A Good Year " State Library of South Australia, 'in' Newspaper cuttings books, 16.





**Figure 3.9:** Pages 90–91 illustrate images of Australia, along with text and captions, *The Australians* by Robert Goodman and George Johnston. (Source: Monash University Library. Scanned image.)



**Figure 3.10:** Pages 118–119 illustrate of the images of Australia, along with text and captions, *The Australians* by Robert Goodman and George Johnston. (Source: Monash University Library. Scanned image.)



Curran and Ward note that literary works, critical essays and studies focusing on Australian literature, legends and ballads, emanated from a new wave of nationalism in the 1960s. The proliferation of such works spoke volumes about the mood of the times, but did not necessarily point to any sort of resolution to the problem of how to define the new Australia.”<sup>57</sup> *The Australians* did not offer a definitive resolution to the troublesome characterisation of Australia, but its visual and textual representation of Australia was a popular contributor to the discourse. The book had two distinguishing features—a visual characterisation of Australia was through the lens of American photographer Robert Goodman and text written by the celebrated Australian author George Johnston, writing about his country after a fourteen-year absence abroad. Johnston’s role was largely due to Rigby’s publishing editor, Ian Mudie, who was well connected in Adelaide’s literary circles.<sup>58</sup> Johnston was an important addition to the project because he had achieved great success and acclaim for his novel *My Brother Jack*: it had earned him the Miles Franklin award. Although coffee-table books are a largely visual experience, Johnston’s name, reputation and text added considerable symbolic capital to the project.<sup>59</sup> This merging of Goodman’s outsider view with Johnston’s literary text gave *The Australians* a point of difference from other Australiana coffee-table books. Johnston also commenced his narrative with an acknowledgement of the Australian continent before white settlement. As he stated, “a numerically small cluster of white people has been set down by the chances of history” as incomparable to the ancient presence of the land.<sup>60</sup> Thus, Johnston distinguishes the original inhabitants from European settlers by referring to each as “earlier lodgers” and “more recent arrivals”.<sup>61</sup> This recognition of Australia’s Indigenous heritage was especially notable because many Australiana coffee-table books completely sidelined the issue.

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<sup>57</sup> James Curran and Stuart Ward, *The Unknown Nation: Australia after Empire* (Carlton, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 2010), 62.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Page, “Case-study: Rigby Limited,” in *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005*, ed. Frank Thompson (St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2006), 42.

<sup>59</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 10.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Goodman and George Johnston, *The Australians* (Adelaide, Australia: Rigby Limited, 1966), 11.

<sup>61</sup> Goodman and Johnston, *The Australians*, 12.

At the same time, however, as Lee notes, Johnston's commentary was "full of unresolved contradictions". On the one hand, he recognised the original inhabitants of Australia, and on the other, he stated that European settlers had arrived at *terra nullius*.<sup>62</sup>

The idea for *The Australians* was conceived by Goodman when he travelled to Australia on assignment for the National Geographic in 1961. In March 1964, Goodman approached Rigby with a proposal to publish 40,000 copies of the book. His address to the Directors' meeting included examples of the types of photos that would be in the book.<sup>63</sup> After postponing a decision on the proposal for five days, the Directors reconvened and resolved to go ahead with publication under a joint venture with *The Advertiser* newspaper, sharing the costs equally.<sup>64</sup> According to Mr Slade, Rigby's Chairman of Directors, Goodman wanted to produce a book of images that would "truly represent the land, the art, the sport, the cities, but above all, the people of Australia."<sup>65</sup>

*The Australians* comprises ten chapters of text with black and white and colour images; it is printed on thick, high-gsm paper. It also includes a map of Australia with details of its size, population and location. Succeeding chapters focus on Australia's landscapes, its people, city and country life, multi-cultural Australia, nation building, natural resources, rural industries, science, the Arts, sport, and the Anzac history and tradition. The book's front cover is arresting. It features a close-up colour image of one man's weathered face beneath a hat that clearly places him as a working man from the land. This image projected a dominant aspect of the Australian character. Before the reader sees Goodman's images, each chapter begins with six or more pages of Johnston's expressive and factual text, setting the background for the images to come. The

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<sup>62</sup> Lee, "Australia in Colour," 55.

<sup>63</sup> Manuscript 3, Folio 9. "Proposal for 'The Australians'," 1964, 1, 'in' BRG 12 State Library of South Australia. Adelaide, Australia, *Minutes of Directors and Annual General Meeting Reports 1960s*, 'in' Mixed material, 1.

<sup>64</sup> Manuscript 3, Folio 9. "'The Australians'," 1964, 1, 'in' BRG 12 State Library of South Australia. Adelaide, Australia, *Minutes of Directors and Annual General Meeting Reports 1960s*, 'in' Mixed material, 1.

<sup>65</sup> Manuscript 3, Folio 9. "Address of the Chairman of Directors (Mr A. L. Slade) to Annual General Meeting, of Rigby, Wednesday September 28," 1, 'in' BRG 12 State Library of South Australia. Adelaide, Australia, *Rigby Limited: SUMMARY RECORD*, 'in' Mixed material, 1.

juxtaposition of literary text and photographs provides a fulfilling experience for those interested in more than viewing images.

At the end of each of each chapter, Goodman includes, for each photograph, metadata including technical and atmospheric data along with information about the identity of the subjects and situations featured in the shot. For example, the description of Figure 3.9 includes:

(LEFT) The Greek passenger ship had just docked. A 600mm Tele-Nikkor, Nidon F, and heavy tripod brought the passengers waiting to disembark up close. Tri-X-film. (RIGHT) Hand-held 300mm Auto-Nikkor telephoto of Sydney street scene during a Royal visit. Nikkomat FT camera, CPS film, reproduction was from an Ektacolor master print.<sup>66</sup>

This detailed background information adds a valuable dimension to the experience of viewing and reading *The Australians* and provides insight into Goodman's photographic narrative intentions.

Having closely examined *The Australians* first edition, I can understand why it resonated with the Australian population at the time. It is a substantial book in dimension and weight, comprising 288 pages. The book depicts many aspects of Australian life that would have appealed to all age groups. It presents a snapshot of Australian life in an aesthetically appealing medium that would have taken pride of place in many homes as a symbol of Australian life.<sup>67</sup> Even so, as Lee points out, *The Australians* retailed for \$7.95, which was not cheap at the time.<sup>68</sup> As an indication of the Australiana coffee-table genre popularity at the time, Lee points out that:

The National Library's accessions of pictorial works about Australia, which stood at twelve titles annually in 1963 and 1964, rose rapidly in the following decade, averaging 23 new editions annually in 1965–1969 and 36 in 1970–1974.<sup>69</sup>

By all accounts, Rigby was quite surprised by the book's popularity after a full year in the bookstores and a gift-buying Christmas period.<sup>70</sup> Michael Page, Rigby's Publishing Manager in 1967–1982, identifies timing as one of the key factors in *The Australians* becoming Rigby's first

<sup>66</sup> Goodman and Johnston, *The Australians*, 287.

<sup>67</sup> Goodman and Johnston, *The Australians*. See also, Lee's description of *The Australians* in Lee, "Australia in Colour," 54–56.

<sup>68</sup> Lee, "Australia in Colour," 54.

<sup>69</sup> Lee, "Australia in Colour," 56.

<sup>70</sup> "A Good Year " 1967, "A Good Year " State Library of South Australia, 'in' Newspaper cuttings books, 16.

post-war bestseller.<sup>71</sup> This was largely due to a renewed interest in national identity in Australia; the parallel boom in Australiana coffee-table books signalled the “emergence of an increasingly autonomous Australian book-buying public, no longer prepared to tolerate a diet consisting exclusively of British books.”<sup>72</sup> Another key factor in the book’s success was its marketing. Rigby promoted the book as an ideal gift or souvenir.<sup>73</sup> With Australia’s growing migrant population at the time, Australiana books made a perfect gift to send to relatives living overseas or visual memento of a trip to Australia. “[S]ome Australian publishers firmly believe (although there are no figures to prove this) that the biggest proportion of Australian book sales goes overseas.”<sup>74</sup> As coffee-table books are large and heavy, the cost of sending *The Australians* by post, or carrying it back home in luggage, may have been prohibitive. Albeit that much travel was still by sea, and aircraft baggage allowances were more generous. However, if Australian books are available overseas through distribution channels, publishers do not need to rely on local sales. That is what Rigby was able to achieve. It had significant overseas sales for *The Australians* through its breadth of its distribution in the UK and the US markets and negotiated intellectual capital. This was confirmed by Rigby’s Chairman of Directors on September 28, 1966:

[Along with an additional] 30,000 copies [published in Adelaide], 5,000 copies were sold to Paul Hamlyn for publication in the United Kingdom and 20,000 to Time-Life of the US, for inclusion in their International Book Library.<sup>75</sup>

*The Australians* was also cross-promoted with a film of the same name. Max Brown states that the short film and the book were released at the same time, although a columnist reported that “[the] coffee-table book production [was] designed for the US market and had nothing to do with the

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<sup>71</sup> Page, “Rigby Limited,” 42.

<sup>72</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 58.

<sup>73</sup> “A Good Year ” 1967, “A Good Year ” State Library of South Australia, 'in' Newspaper cuttings books.

<sup>74</sup> “A Good Year ” 1967, “A Good Year ” State Library of South Australia, 'in' Newspaper cuttings books.

<sup>75</sup> “Address by Mr A. L. Slade” 1966, “Address by Mr A. L. Slade” State Library of South Australia, 'in' Mixed material, 1.

movie.”<sup>76</sup> Johnston had received only a fee for the project and, according to Brown “was furious when he found the book [had achieved] massive sales through corporate hook-ups on both sides of the Pacific.”<sup>77</sup> Ultimately, Rigby was proud of the commercial success of *The Australians* because it proved that a local Australian publishing company was capable of publishing quality books that would stand against any on the world stage.<sup>78</sup> This was not only due to the status of the photographer and author. Advances in full-colour printing in the post-war era meant that Australian publishers could produce books to a standard that could compete in the global market.

Given the cultural resonance of Goodman’s photography and Johnston’s text, it is difficult to maintain a claim that coffee-table books are superficial or without artistic intent. The intention of a coffee-table book is that the images take centre stage, but in the case of *The Australians*, Garry Kinnane argues that “Johnston’s 50,000-word text [outshone] Goodman’s photographs” due to its level of research and its lively, literary style.<sup>79</sup> Kinnane refers to *The Australians* as a “high prestige documentary book” in one instance and undeniably a coffee-table book in another.<sup>80</sup> This view underlines my earlier point that when a large-format illustrated book resists the first, superficial categorisation, definitions become conflicted. It may *look* like a coffee-table book but its content surpasses the usual expectations of the genre. This reinforces my argument that the coffee-table book is a discursive object.

## Producing authentic *objects d’art*

My own publishing experience has taught me that a coffee-table book as a final object is the culmination of a long process of detailed discussions about format, page extent, choice of cover image, the narrative sequencing of images in juxtaposition with the accompanying text and

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<sup>76</sup> Max Brown, *Charmian and George: The Marriage of George Johnston and Charmian Clift* (Sydney, Australia: Rosenberg Publishing Pty Ltd, 2004), 163.

<sup>77</sup> Brown, *Charmian and George*, 163.

<sup>78</sup> Manuscript 24, Folio “Rigby Review Souvenir Edition: 20 Years of Publication,” 1973, 20, ‘in’ *BRG 12 State Library of South Australia. Adelaide, Australia, Printed Matter*, ‘in’ Mixed material, 20.

<sup>79</sup> Garry Kinnane, *George Johnston: A Biography* (Melbourne, Australia: Nelson Publishing, 1986), 247–248.

<sup>80</sup> Kinnane, *George Johnston*, 247.

captions, and choice of paper stock. These elements were all underpinned by the need to balance design and materiality with commercial considerations. Yet there is a widespread perception that coffee-table books require little skill or effort to produce, which I know to be an untruth. According to Comparato, this perception was derived from the practice of pasting collected items into albums:

When publishers profess to deprecate “nonbooks,” which began to flourish after World War II for much the same trade as coffee-table albums a century before, they refer to scissors and paste collections of ephemera, cartoon and picture anthologies, and other productions requiring little or no author skill.<sup>81</sup>

However, the perception that coffee-table books require little production effort fails to recognise that coffee-table books have their own complexities. Many elements converge to produce a coffee-table book—aesthetics, materiality and technical factors and play a role in catching the eye of the book-buyer.<sup>82</sup> Their materiality, design attributes and sheer physicality are fundamental to understanding books as cultural and material artefacts. One key element driving layout design decisions is format, that is the orientation of the book (portrait or landscape), the final trim size, and the page extent (number of pages in the book), all of which influence the size and layout of images and text. Then there is choice of paper stock, which varies in gsm weight and come in various textures and coatings. All of these physical and material elements combine to make the coffee-table book an object of commerce and desire.<sup>83</sup> Finally, the design and finish—the book’s saddle stitched soft cover, or section-sewn and casebound hard cover, generally “dressed” in a dust jacket, also warrant mention.

While the external and internal aesthetics of a coffee-table book are key considerations, publishing conventions also dictate the way a book’s content is curated. For example, the front matter of a book usually includes a half-title page, followed by a blank page on the following verso

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<sup>81</sup> Comparato, *Books for the Millions*, 297.

<sup>82</sup> Nick Walker, “New Technology and the Publishing Firm: Business Development, Culture and Models,” in *Making Books: Contemporary Australian Publishing*, eds. David Carter and Anne Galligan (St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2007), 161.

<sup>83</sup> Guy Mirabella, “Case-study: Illustrated Books,” in *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005*, eds. Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright (St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2006), 198.

page (left-hand page). Then, the title page is printed recto (a right-hand page) opposite that blank verso. The following pages contain imprint details, the contents page/s and a foreword, which always appears verso. Additionally, the front matter may include an acknowledgements page and a preface. Of equal importance is the endmatter, which may include glossaries or bibliographies that begin on the first recto page after the last page of the final chapter.<sup>84</sup> Ultimately, the economics of publishing intersect with publishing conventions and design elements. As Walker point out, although commercial considerations may constrain the final design of a book, successful publishers have to manage a fine balance between commercial interests and the expectations of the book-buyer.<sup>85</sup> For example, Miller states that Phaidon was able to achieve low priced, high-quality illustrated books because Horvitz and Goldscheider exploited book production techniques.<sup>86</sup> When deciding on a book's format Phaidon's first consideration was the capacity of the printing machine. As printing machines came in different sizes, their first task was to determine the largest sheet of paper the machine could print.<sup>87</sup> When Phaidon started to publish large-format art books, beginning with Van Gogh in 1935, the same size sheet was used, but it was folded only twice, so that the page size was doubled. "Thus was established the distinctive large elegant book, which gave Goldscheider the opportunity to present the striking details which became the hallmark of Phaidon."<sup>88</sup> Miller notes that the most common format for large-format illustrated books is the square fold, where "each fold is at right-angles to its predecessor and there are 3 or 4 folds producing 16 or 32 page sections."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Technical descriptions of coffee-table books and book publishing conventions have been acquired via discussions with publishing professionals, past and present: Jocelyn Hargrave 2/3/15, Paul Latham 10/2/15, Brian Sadgrove 17/9/14, Robert Sessions 9/7/14. Fieldwork trip to McPherson's Printing Group in Maryborough, Victoria 1/10/14.

<sup>85</sup> Walker, "New Technology and the Publishing Firm," 161.

<sup>86</sup> Miller, "Business of Art Book Publishing," 345.

<sup>87</sup> Miller, "Business of Art Book Publishing," 345.

<sup>88</sup> Miller, "Business of Art Book Publishing," 344.

<sup>89</sup> Miller, "Business of Art Book Publishing," 345.

## Visual narratives

Narrative sequencing allows a visual story to be told, but the placement and size of images on the page is also determined by the book's format. A visual narrative may be carefully curated, but this does not guarantee the reader will sequentially follow that narrative. One of the attributes of coffee-table books is that they are easy to dip in and out of and it is possible to gain a visual experience on any given page. Part of the pleasure is freedom from linear viewing. This may particularly have resonated with readers in the post-war era, when people were experimenting with more casual lifestyles. Even Di Bello et al. recognise that the narrative sequence of images in a photobook necessarily co-exists with the random nature in which people read image-filled books:

The reader/viewer is richly rewarded when opening the book at random, flicking the pages backwards from the end, or stopping to look at individual pages in no particular sequence.<sup>90</sup>

Viewing images out of sequence does not greatly impact on comprehension and the viewer browses at their own speed and leisure. As Sontag explains “nothing holds readers to the recommended order or indicates the amount of time to be spent on each photograph [in a book].”<sup>91</sup>

## Authenticity

Authentic reproductions of artworks lay at the heart of producing well regarded coffee-table art books. The following account by Thames & Hudson's production manager, Werner Guttman, gives some insight into the complexities of reproducing an authentic reproduction of the Bayeux Tapestry in 1985. Measuring 10.2 x 13.2 inches, this book comprises seventy-three, full-colour, double-page, sequential, reproductions of the Bayeux Tapestry at approximately fifty-four percent scale over 234 pages, and includes a foreword by M. Jean L Carpentier, the Mayor of Bayeux.<sup>92</sup> Guttman travelled to Bayeux with Eva Neurath on a snow-swept January day to seek permission from the

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<sup>90</sup> Di Bello, Wilson and Zamir, *The Photobook*, 12.

<sup>91</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, 2.

<sup>92</sup> David M. Wilson, *The Bayeux Tapestry* (London, UK: Thames & Hudson, 1985), [not paginated].



Mayor of Bayeux for the project, as the tapestry was the Mayor's responsibility.<sup>93</sup> Once permission was given and the project got under way, the Mayor attended each photographic session and inspected the transparencies.<sup>94</sup> Each of the transparencies had to be compared with the original, which was difficult because at the time the tapestry was shown in a darkened room behind tungsten glass.<sup>95</sup> Searching for ways to more accurately match the colours of the tapestry, they opened the shutters to the room so that Guttman could view it by daylight rather than under artificial lighting.<sup>96</sup> An indication of the attention to detail Thames & Hudson paid to *The Bayeux Tapestry* project a note in the front matter confirms that the tapestry was moved from behind the glass to be photographed and explains why colour values of the images, taken in natural light, vary slightly from those observed when viewing the tapestry through glass.<sup>97</sup> Guttman had the book printed in Japan, which achieved clear reproductions. He noted that working with the Japanese printers was an enjoyable feature of the project because they spared no effort to get the best result and to satisfy everybody's requirements.<sup>98</sup>

A 1986 review of the book by Heslop offers testimony to the extraordinary clarity achieved by the Japanese printers:

It is remarkable, given the fame and importance of the Bayeux Tapestry, that we have had to wait so long for a complete colour reproduction. But now we have it we may be very grateful, for the quality of the plates is excellent both for truth to colour and clarity of image, which is such that not only is every stitch of the embroidery visible but one could, if one wished, count every warp and weft thread of the eleventh-century fine linen support.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Werner Guttman (former production manager, Thames & Hudson), "NLSC: Book Trade Lives," interviewed by Jenny Simmons, (2001): NLSC: Book Trade Lives, C872/64/06, Tape Recording F9090, Tape 6, Side B of 7, The British Library, London UK. Accessed April 9, 2015.

<sup>94</sup> Guttman, "NLSC: Book Trade Lives."

<sup>95</sup> Guttman, "NLSC: Book Trade Lives."

<sup>96</sup> Guttman, "NLSC: Book Trade Lives."

<sup>97</sup> Wilson, *Bayeux Tapestry*, [not paginated].

<sup>98</sup> Guttman, "NLSC: Book Trade Lives."

<sup>99</sup> T. A. Heslop, "The Bayeux Tapestry," *The Burlington Magazine* 128, 995 (1986): 147.



**Figure 3.11:** Page 46 illustrates a section of the Bayeux Tapestry, reproduced in *The Bayeux Tapestry* by David M. Wilson. (Source: Monash University Library. Scanned image.)

Heslop concludes that while the book is not a “comprehensive monograph”, the quality of the text and plates makes “it an essential work for the study of the Tapestry.”<sup>100</sup> *The Bayeux Tapestry* is a fine example of the time and effort required to produce authentic coffee-table art book in order to bring genuine representation of major art works to a wider audience. Having had to photograph the tapestry outside its case to achieve a more authentic representation, Guttman notes that the Bayeux Tapestry is now housed in a new building, where it is carefully lit with cool lighting.<sup>101</sup>

## Materiality

The paper quality used in the production of coffee-table books adds to their overall aesthetic appeal. All paper is not equal. There are a number of factors to consider when choosing paper for a coffee-

<sup>100</sup> Heslop, “The Bayeux Tapestry,” 147.

<sup>101</sup> Guttman, “NLSC: Book Trade Lives.”

table book because paper quality affects the reproduction quality of photographs. In many ways, the technical process of printing ink onto paper lies at the heart of the romance of publishing, because this is where creative ideas are finally realised. The following quote from David Brower, perhaps more aptly described as a love letter to printing on paper, illustrates this aspect of book production:

If I were paper, I would love letterpress and the sensuous impressive kiss of real type—and having that impression caressed by a loving hand. I would not object to gravure. I would feel quite cool about offset, in which the ink-to-paper *affair* is over so soon that a one-night stand would, by comparison, have an element of perpetuity in it.<sup>102</sup>

Brower's words tap into the idea that publishing is about more than just a material object. It is a creative and technical process. As the renowned British publisher Sir Stanley Unwin put it, book publishing has a level of fascination because it is about more than just another commodity; it is “the product of man's imagination” or “the lively offspring of an author's mind.”<sup>103</sup>

Paper is the main material product in a coffee-table book, therefore choosing the right paper for the right job is important because it is the canvas for exhibiting photographic and other images. During his time at the Tate Gallery, Iain Bain, acquired expertise on various printing techniques and the way different inks reacted with different paper quality. Bain emphasises that the feel of the paper for Tate publications was important. The paper also had to be capable of achieving a sharp image with good, rich, accurate colour “that didn't stink of coating”. It was preferably of archival quality so that the paper did not turn yellow over time.<sup>104</sup> Also, different paper qualities required different printing processes—stochastic (a computerized system) and conventional screen.<sup>105</sup> Stochastic process used more dots where there was more colour, while the conventional screen used larger dots. When printers used the stochastic separation process to print watercolour reproductions on paper without much body it produced a lovely translucent colour. If they were reproducing Old

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<sup>102</sup> David R. Brower, *Work in Progress* (Layton, USA: Gibbs Smith, 1991), 12.

<sup>103</sup> Stanley Unwin, *The Truth About a Publisher* (London, UK: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1960), 309–316.

<sup>104</sup> Bain, “NLSC: Book Trade Lives.”

<sup>105</sup> Bain, “NLSC: Book Trade Lives.”

Masters, the outcome could be a “bit muddy in the shadow” because the dots were the same size.<sup>106</sup>

The other consideration is the way the ink sits on the paper. Some papers will cause “dot gain where the dot expands, like when you drop ink on blotting paper it spreads widely. This is a problem with uncoated paper because you get more dot gain.”<sup>107</sup>

Then there are the intricacies of the paper-making process itself, which create variations in the way paper interacts with the printing process and can affect the functionality of a book. The speed at which a paper mills runs its machines influences paper quality. If you hold a sheet of paper of lesser quality to the light, mottling is evident and the paper thickness varies. This could be problematic when printing on a lithographic press, as the damping solution used on the paper could expand along its grain, which often results in having to bind across the grain.<sup>108</sup> Consequently, “you’re looking at the end of the grain on the book and so that does not allow the leaf to fall easily” and this impacts on functionality.<sup>109</sup> If a publisher wishes to produce an illustrated book with high-quality image reproductions, they need to pay close attention to every detail and element of the production process, right down to the grain of the paper.<sup>110</sup> Mirabella eloquently summarises the essential ingredients that go into producing a well-designed coffee-table book:

Beautiful, stylish and intelligent books make you pause and skip a heartbeat. The feel of the paper, the images, the typeface, the design and the message all connect and unite to surprise us. Clever designers grab the various elements of a book and mix and stir and add a part of themselves each time they produce a new design. The book designer is a great dreamer who help access the words that carry us to another world.<sup>111</sup>

## Conclusion

Judgements about the value of coffee-table books has been profoundly affected by a series of contrasts in which they are set off against more “legitimate” genres. This has meant that reviewers and publishers have often taken circuitous measures to rule books “in” or “out” of quality

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<sup>106</sup> Bain, “NLSC: Book Trade Lives.”

<sup>107</sup> Bain, “NLSC: Book Trade Lives.”

<sup>108</sup> Bain, “NLSC: Book Trade Lives.”

<sup>109</sup> Bain, “NLSC: Book Trade Lives.”

<sup>110</sup> Bain, “NLSC: Book Trade Lives.”

<sup>111</sup> Mirabella, “Illustrated Books,” 200–201.

categories. Yet efforts to avoid a particular designation, or to create a hierarchy among cultural artefacts, have often been thwarted by the simple currency and popularity of a term. The term “coffee-table book” has offered itself as a user-friendly, descriptive collective noun that easily conjured an image of the object in people’s minds. For this reason, reviewers regularly applied the term to large-format, photographically illustrated books.

My argument in this chapter has been that it is time we put aside prejudices against coffee table books and “own the term”. As my examples have demonstrated, the genre, even in its most popular forms, does not deserve its historical opprobrium. The response to titles such as *Hi-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home*, *The Art Book* and *The Australians* proved that the genre played an important role in the cultural changes that took place in post-war America, Britain and Australia. The coffee-table book’s still-image narratives were capable of tapping into a broad range of issues: the *Zeitgeist* of architecture and interior design trends, the democratisation of art, and questions of national identity. The coffee table book was far more than merely “pleasing, pleasant and placatory”.

Coffee-table art book publishers such as Thames & Hudson have in many ways realised the original intent of their founders: “an approach to illustrated books that emphasises that text and pictures are equal partners; a determination to bring art and scholarship to a wide public; high editorial and design standards; and a loyalty to its authors that sees titles maintained in the firm’s backlist for decades.”<sup>112</sup> Ultimately, the type of coffee-table books chosen by consumers aligned with their cultural tendencies, interests and tastes. Whether they viewed themselves as being part of a specialised niche market or a general book-buying market, it all comes down to a matter of taste. This chapter has examined the way “legitimate” or “popular” taste has influenced the status of coffee-table books as cultural artefacts. This leaves a question of how taste functioned in the

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<sup>112</sup> Michael Hall, “Dolphins in the Swim,” *Apollo* 169, 566 (2009): 90.

domestic sphere. The next chapter examines what people *did* with coffee-table books. It considers the function of coffee-table books as aesthetic objects for the home, and as gifts.

## Chapter Four

### The domestic sphere, coffee tables, and gifts

Ownership of books, which had traditionally bestowed a certain elite cultural credential, meant less and less per se as unprecedented number of Americans began to buy books for a host of reasons, including explicitly for their iconographic powers. Many, that is, grew skilled at what one writer drolly termed “domestic bookaflage,” the selection and presentation of books in one’s home to project the cultural persona that others would perceive.

Megan Benton<sup>1</sup>

In the Introduction to this thesis, I highlighted three key questions raised by Robert Darnton and posed an additional or fourth question: what do readers *do* with coffee-table in response to the central role they play in the home as aesthetic objects, and as popular offerings during gift-giving periods? Drawing on Kopytoff’s concept of the ‘social life of things’, I suggest that the role of coffee-table books in the domestic sphere and as gifts was shaped by their cultural biography as they moved from commodities to domestic possessions.<sup>2</sup> The emergence of mass-produced, full-colour coffee-table books saw them become part of domestic “middlebrow” and “popular” culture, which was related to the increasing importance of the home as a site of display, including the advent of coffee tables. Along with pictorial news magazines and television, coffee-table books gained increasing prominence in many homes across America, Britain and Australia. They also became popular as gifts, which was heavily promoted during major gift-giving periods.

The term “coffee-table book” suggests a symbiotic connection to the coffee table, but how did this relationship work in reality? It is often assumed that the emergence of coffee-table books coincided with people placing books on coffee tables as overt displays of cultural taste. However, the post-war era was not the first time that books were reappropriated to purposes other than reading. Yet distaste for this reassignment of function seemed to increase in the case of coffee-table books.

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<sup>1</sup> Megan Benton, ““Too Many Books”: Book Ownership and Cultural Identity in the 1920s,” *American Quarterly* 49, 2 (1997): 270. See also: Christine Pawley, “Blood and Thunder on the Bookmobile: *American Public Libraries and the Construction of “the Reader,” 1950–1995*,” in *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States*, eds. Thomas Augst and Kenneth E. Carpenter (Amherst and Boston, USA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 275.

<sup>2</sup> Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things,” 64.

As post-war lifestyles became more casualised, many domestic activities centred on the coffee-table, which was often located in the family living room. These activities included: reading magazines, watching television, eating dinner, playing board games, drinking tea or coffee, entertaining guests, as well as displaying and browsing coffee-table books.

In this chapter, I will first examine the way books function as status symbols. Second, since the term “coffee-table book” derives from a piece of furniture, I will trace the relationship between books and furniture that resulted in the introduction of the coffee table, and explain its role in visual culture in the domestic sphere. Finally, I will discuss the relationship between books and gift-giving: the way it developed, and the way coffee-table books came to occupy a significant place in this commercialised personal space.

## **Books, status and the domestic sphere**

The post-war domestic sphere played an important role in the popularisation of coffee-table books because of their visible aesthetic qualities, which played a role in the objectification of coffee-table books on coffee tables. Viewing books as mere objects usurped a reverence to the book as a medium of knowledge, which many traditional societies regarded as almost sacrilege:

[B]ooks possessed miraculous and symbolic powers that only members of the religious elite knew how to manipulate. If anyone usurped this clerical monopoly over the written word, they risked accusations of heresy.<sup>3</sup>

Although the objectification of coffee-table books was not seen as heresy, there was an apparent distaste for this presumed function of coffee-table books in the post-war era. As discussed in Chapter Three, coffee-table books attracted a new book-buying market, and the democratisation of book-ownership affronted those in the cultured sectors of society, who revered the literary virtues of books and their role in the dissemination of knowledge. Prior to the emergence of coffee-table books, there is a long history of books being appropriated for exhibition of one’s personal taste and used in a non-textual way as symbolic objects. In the previous chapter, I discussed the “arbiters of

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<sup>3</sup> Lyons, *Books*, 7.



taste” and the way they used judgements about taste to determine whether a photographically illustrated book was a coffee-table book. How did taste and coffee-table books function in the domestic sphere?

Derision based on the use of coffee-table book as decorative objects was especially noticeable in the post-war era because of the proliferation of these books. However, a preoccupation with what people did with their books can be traced back to the fourteenth-century poet Eustache Deschamps, who was known to have mocked the practice of using books as accessories. According to Watson, Deschamps:

[F]amously teased wealthy housewives of Paris for needing to appear in church with expensively decorated Book of Hours, and there are similar derogatory remarks about using prayer-books as a fashion accessory at later dates.<sup>4</sup>

In more recent history, the use of books as intellectual and fashion accessories in the home was also belittled. Benton’s reference to “domestic bookaflage” in this chapter’s opening quote borrows a term coined by Thomas Masson in his 1923 essay of the same title, which describes the art of arranging books around the domestic sphere to give the impression of cultivating one’s intellect by reading “high-brow” books. The art of “domestic bookaflage”, or strategically arranging books to catch the eye of guests, relied on possession of books that would reflect well on the owner’s intellect and taste.<sup>5</sup> However, as Bourdieu notes, the concept of “taste” refers to having “good” taste or making “superior” choices, rather than a general, non-normative reflection of taste in books, art, furnishings, clothes, music or vehicles.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, good taste was dependent on owning the “right” books or objects. While Arnold’s influential essay *Culture and Anarchy* promoted a binary view of culture in which “high” culture was the benchmark, the concept of “taste” is about variations of taste rather than binary opposites.<sup>7</sup> Despite evidence of a correlation between taste and levels of

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<sup>4</sup> Rowan Watson, “Some Non-textual Uses of Books,” in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, eds. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 486.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas L. Masson, “Domestic Bookaflage,” *The Independent* 110, 3840 (1923): 256.

<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 11.

<sup>7</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 137.

education and social class, “good” taste could be attained through the conspicuous exhibition of the “right” symbols of taste, essentially bypassing the “qualifications” underpinning taste. For example, Masson suggests that displaying such classics as Plato’s *Republic*, or Milton’s *Paradise Lost* without having read them was safe because people tended to discuss newly released books, and there was little danger of exposure when engaging in this subterfuge.<sup>8</sup> In other words, a person could acquire a certain level of intellectual and cultural kudos simply by practicing “bookaflage”:

Anyone entering and seeing these flowers of literature carelessly disposed on a near-mahogany table just inside of the living-room bounds, would say to himself at once: “Here we have culture! Here we have literary delicacy!”<sup>9</sup>

In fact, Benton argues that Masson’s suggestion of arranging a few “high-brow” books at strategic locations in the home to impress guests was his way of lampooning the practice of creating a “better home” and superior intellect simply by displaying the “right” books.<sup>10</sup> Masson’s mocking tone reflected a view that this type of “self-styling was deplored by those of the older cultural view” because they saw the practice as devaluing the true nature of books. Instead of casting an intellectual light on the owner, it was more likely to reflect a level of shallowness among the new market of book consumers at the time.<sup>11</sup> This conspicuously shallow appropriation of books may well have devalued their true function, around the home or in a personal library. Although Masson ridiculed this practice, he ignores “the book” as an aesthetically pleasing material object in its own right. Using books as *objets d’art* was an acknowledgement of their wider aesthetic role, and it demonstrated an appreciation for their materiality. One of the reasons coffee-table books were popular was that they were books with a dual purpose. Benton also argues that a reverence for written text as the “true” nature of books remains a sticking point when it comes to books as *objets*

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<sup>8</sup> Masson, “Domestic Bookaflage,” 256. See also: Benton, “‘Too Many Books’,” 279–280.

<sup>9</sup> Masson, “Domestic Bookaflage,” 256.

<sup>10</sup> Benton, “‘Too Many Books’,” 279.

<sup>11</sup> Benton, “‘Too Many Books’,” 270.

*d'art*: “Book purists rarely consider anything a book without [text], while art purists tend to scorn anything that attends to it.”<sup>12</sup>

The non-textual function of books was not only about aesthetics; it also had a symbolic function. As Watson points out, books have been used in ceremonies, by institutions and for personal usage throughout the ages as symbolic objects of conspicuous consumption and status.<sup>13</sup> Some books have been elevated to relic status, if once owned by someone of note, or are believed to have talismanic powers. Many holy rituals are performed with sacred religious texts, and the Bible is used as a symbol of truth to swear an oath in courts of law, as well as on ceremonial occasions such as Coronations.<sup>14</sup> While coffee-table books certainly do not possess the same symbolic power of the Bible, as discussed in Chapter Three, some of the post-war coffee-table books were emblematic of the social changes that were taking place, and represented more than decorative objects. However, the changing social conditions of the post-war era did result in a new appreciation for aesthetics and decoration, partly as a response to the grim war years. The emerging middle class took pleasure in material culture, which challenged the idea of aesthetic taste only being aligned to “legitimate” culture.

## **Furniture and books**

Furniture and books have long been associated because, at some stage, books needed to be stored. In domestic settings, ownership of books and bookcases, often housed in personal libraries, was a marker of wealth. By the post-war period, the coffee table was influential in shifting the relationship between books and furniture, often resulting in a more open, informal and democratising setting.

According to Watson, the storage of books had become a consideration by the sixteenth century, because “if books were not of the pocket or bedside variety they were stored in cupboards or on

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<sup>12</sup> Megan Benton, “The Book as Art,” in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, eds. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 493.

<sup>13</sup> Watson, “Some Non-textual Uses ” 480.

<sup>14</sup> Watson, “Some Non-textual Uses ” 480–489.

shelves.”<sup>15</sup> This shift away from keeping the book in close personal proximity resulted in books becoming a part of the interior decoration of a home, particularly once freestanding bookcases were developed. Notably, English writer and cleric the Reverend Sydney Smith, who used his growing wealth to indulge in a library “twenty-eight feet long and eight feet high”, commented that there was “[n]o furniture so charming as books, even if you never open them, or read a single word.”<sup>16</sup> Watson notes an emergence of fabricated book spines when books moved to bookcases, and that they were appropriated to reflect the owner’s intellect or wit: “[t]he conceit of false spines was to have a glorious future.”<sup>17</sup> The role of false book spines was to “dress” a bookcase, as is illustrated in the following query about “Binding Furniture” in the 1925 *Notes and Queries* Journal (figure 4.1):<sup>18</sup>

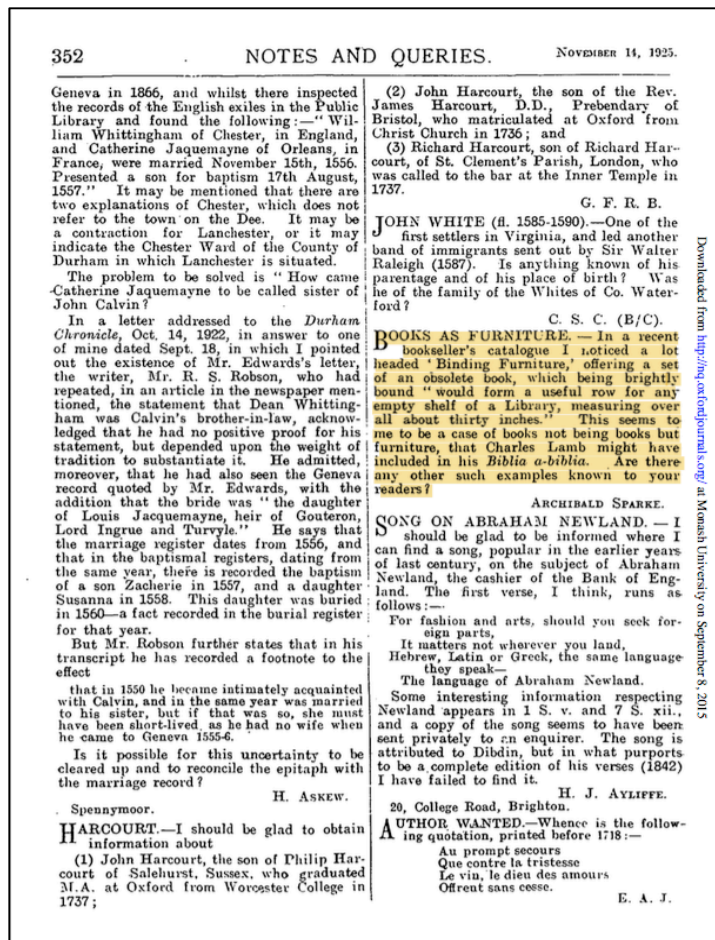


Figure 4.1: Page 352 of *Notes and Queries* Journal dated November 14, 1925 is an example of a query about books becoming furniture. (Source: Oxford University Press Journals Digital Archive. Digitised pdf. Captured image.)

<sup>15</sup> Watson, "Some Non-textual Uses" 488–489.

<sup>16</sup> Sydney Smith, *A Memoir of the Reverend Sydney Smith* (New York, USA: Harper & Brothers, 1856), 214. See also: Nicholson Baker, "Annals of Self-Esteem: Books as Furniture." *The New Yorker*, June 12, 1995, 89.

<sup>17</sup> Watson, "Some Non-textual Uses" 489.

<sup>18</sup> Archibald Sparke, "Readers' Queries," *Notes and Queries* CXLIX, November 14 (1925): 352.

The supplementary function of books as decorative furnishings resulted in a loss of “cultural credentials”, according to Benton, as the practice of using books in this fashion made it more difficult to distinguish “authentic— “civilized”—book ownership and superficial, store-bought appearances.”<sup>19</sup> As a result, book ownership could no longer be relied on to accurately assess whether book owners aspired to the attainment of higher cultural knowledge, and by the 1920s “cultural credentials”, once gained from book ownership, started to mean less.<sup>20</sup> In other words, a proliferation in the commercialisation and objectification of books marked a symbolic shift away from the cultural distinction once enjoyed by the dominant class of book owners.<sup>21</sup> It could be argued that when a semblance of cultural authenticity can be achieved through imitation, in this case with books, it allowed a more middlebrow or common approach to book ownership to proliferate. Moreover, Benton argues that “book ownership helped to characterize the cultural gulf that many perceived between two kinds of Americans in the 1920s,” which was typically encapsulated within a binary argument: books as valued cultural objects on one side and books as admired objects on the other:

[O]n one hand were those who discerned and valued good books for their own sake, for the enduring, intrinsic merit of their texts. On the other hand were those who treated books as “things” that might provide an hour’s diversion, impress the neighbors, deliver professional and social advantages, and so on, much like a new radio or automobile.<sup>22</sup>

Benton’s assertion that the appropriation of books for purposes other than attaining higher ideals was symbolic of a division in the cultural ideals of 1920s Americans, underscores the appearance of coffee-table books, amidst a more leisurely post-war lifestyle, as another example of the central role books can play in shaping cultural ideals.

A 1985 study by Belk and Pollay indicates that books began to be used as a backdrop in lifestyle advertisements in the 1920s, along with other reading materials, as symbols of comfort and luxury.

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<sup>19</sup> Benton, “‘Too Many Books’,” 270.

<sup>20</sup> Benton, “‘Too Many Books’,” 270.

<sup>21</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 282–283.

<sup>22</sup> Benton, “‘Too Many Books’,” 269.

Notably, their study found an increase in books featured in advertisements during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>23</sup> This observed increase in books featuring in advertisements in the post-war period coincides with the growth in the mass-production and mass-consumption of books and the fact that books were no longer locked away in libraries lined with formal bookcases. Rather, books were integrated into family life via built-in book shelves or on coffee-tables, as illustrated in (figure 4.2.) It is not surprising, therefore, that books featured in home advertisements in the 1960s and 1970s.



**Figure 4.2:** Page 25 of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated April 1960 shows that books were being used to decorate homes. (Source: Swinburne University Special Collections. Photographed image.)

<sup>23</sup> Russell W. Belk and Richard W. Pollay, "Images of Ourselves: The Good Life in Twentieth Century Advertising," *Journal of Consumer Research* 11, 4 (1985): 893.

In their examination of the domestic space, Briganti and Mezei note that the concept of home and representations of houses have shaped the world of literature since the Bible. Writers and literary critics have used architectural terms to describe the writing process, or a piece of literature, using terms such as, “structure, aspect, outlook, character, interior, content, liminal threshold, entry point, style, perspective”, which have become established descriptions.<sup>24</sup> The trend for appropriating architectural terms and household objects was also transported to descriptions of literary genres, with terms such as “closet dramas, gothic novel, drawing room comedy, kitchen sink dramas, the locked room detective story, country house poem and novel, the domestic novel, Aga sagas, and postmodern (a term that literature appropriated from architecture).”<sup>25</sup> Given that the term “coffee-table book” is derived from the coffee table, this is another example of how the name of an artefact was appropriated from a household object.

## Coffee tables

The history of the coffee table and its proliferation is central to the popularisation of the coffee-table book. Payne and Zemaitis claim that the inspiration and origins of the coffee table lay in Europe. One common design element that all coffee tables and their predecessors, tea kettle stands, have had since the 1920s is their height— “approximately 16-24 inches”.<sup>26</sup> As I argue in Chapter One, this coffee-table feature was well suited to viewing large-format images in coffee-table books because its low height afforded a bird’s-eye view. Notably, Payne and Zemaitis,<sup>27</sup> and Attfield,<sup>28</sup> claim that low occasional tables only became *coffee* tables when placed in a room where everyday social and leisure activities took place.

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<sup>24</sup> Briganti and Mezei, “Literary Spaces,” 321.

<sup>25</sup> Briganti and Mezei, “Literary Spaces,” 321.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Payne and James Zemaitis, *The Coffee Table Coffee Table Book* (London, UK: Black Dog Publishing, 2003), 15.

<sup>27</sup> Payne and Zemaitis, *The Coffee Table* 15.

<sup>28</sup> Judy Attfield, “Design as a Practice of Modernity: A Case for the Study of the Coffee Table in the Mid-century Domestic Interior,” *Journal of Material Culture* 2, 3 (1997): 271.

[U]ntil it was freed from its association with the fancy luxury goods category which set it apart for occasional use rather than as an everyday object.<sup>29</sup>

However, it was not just the location of an occasional table that defined its function. Attfield argues that it was the intended singularity of the table located in the centre of the room that was transformative and distinctive.<sup>30</sup> The positioning of the coffee table in front of a couch, compared to occasional tables located behind or beside chairs, became a marker of modern design, and as it was not assigned for special occasions, this was symbolic of a transition from formality to informality. As Attfield puts it, “[the coffee table] owed its post-war popularity to its role in defining a new type of space with the domestic interior.” She also claims that new open-plan living areas were a major reason the coffee table flourished in America. This was different in Britain, where the coffee table was a popular piece of furniture by default.<sup>31</sup> In this regard, Australia was aligned more truly with America than with Britain, because of the availability of detached dwellings with modern, open layouts, which were typical of the houses that populated the burgeoning suburbs of America and Australia at the time.<sup>32</sup>

Watson’s question, “at what point did contact with books become inescapable?”, could easily have applied to the post-war era. Book ownership was democratised, and books were more integrated into the domestic aesthetics, in accessible book shelves or on coffee tables. Libraries had once been a discrete and necessary feature in the nineteenth-century stately homes, exclusively set aside for men.<sup>33</sup> However, formal libraries were not part of post-war suburbia. Book shelves were often built-in features of living rooms, and the coffee table could be used to display books. In

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<sup>29</sup> Judy Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home: Writings on Popular Design and Material Culture* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007), 193–194.

<sup>30</sup> Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*, 193.

<sup>31</sup> Attfield, “Design as a Practice of Modernity,” 271.

<sup>32</sup> Stella Lees and June Senyard, *The 1950s: How Australia Became a Modern Society, and Everyone Got a House and a Car* (South Yarra, Australia: Hyland House, 1987), 19. See also: Amanda McLeod, *Abundance: Buying and Selling in Post War Australia* (North Melbourne, Australia: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2007), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Watson, “Some Non-textual Uses ” 490.



answer to Watson's question, this more informal integration into the living space made closer contact with books inescapable.<sup>34</sup>

Another feature that distinguished coffee tables from formal bookcases was that they were mass-produced rather than handcrafted—though there would have been exceptions, and this aided their proliferation. Coffee tables were one of the many mass-produced artefacts that appeared in this era of heightened production and consumption of furniture, appliances and objects for the newly acquired homes that needed furnishing and decorating.<sup>35</sup> The shift to mass-produced household furniture was indicative of the high demand for commodities to service the expanding population and burgeoning suburbs on post-war America, Britain and Australia. Attfield argues that apart from responding to market forces, the mass-production of furniture pieces such as coffee tables was “[t]he conscious break from traditional handicraft techniques and materials, [which] entailed a strict division between ordinary mass-produced artefacts answering ‘needs’ and the decorative ‘art object’ catering for discerning elite tastes.”<sup>36</sup> Where once mass-produced products were regarded as commodities of imposed taste, this new era of mass-production tended to be more design-driven, adventurous and about embracing modernity.<sup>37</sup> While the coffee table's height remained consistent, there was plenty of room to play with different designs, which provided some distinction within these mass-produced pieces.<sup>38</sup> Hine noted that although tastes in coffee table design were sometimes a trifle bizarre—such as boomerang-shaped coffee tables—these audacious choices felt right for the times.<sup>39</sup> “[A]s in most periods, mass tastes during the postwar years were often at odds with what was considered to be good taste, or educated taste.”<sup>40</sup> However, the suburbs provided a new

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<sup>34</sup> Watson, “Some Non-textual Uses ” 490.

<sup>35</sup> Attfield, “Design as a Practice of Modernity,” 268.

<sup>36</sup> Attfield, “Design as a Practice of Modernity,” 268.

<sup>37</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 372.

<sup>38</sup> Payne and Zemaitis, *The Coffee Table* 4.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Hine, *Populuxe* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, 1990), 9.

<sup>40</sup> Hine, *Populuxe*, 4.

opportunity to experiment with taste, as there were so many new decorating ideas and consumer goods to embrace.

Cities became identified with old-fashioned values, a hierarchical class structure, lack of space and freedom. The suburbs were new and free, there was no declaration of hierarchy, they were informal and seemed not to exclude anyone.<sup>41</sup>

Banham and Shrimpton state that coffee tables were also “emblematic of the rise of popular modern styling in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century domestic interior.”<sup>42</sup> These less-formal living environments constituted a shift away from “traditional home values” to a focus on fashionable objects and design by new, younger consumers.<sup>43</sup> Just as the development of the bookcase in the nineteenth century was a significant step in the association between books and furniture in the home, the introduction of the coffee table increased the potential for informal contact with books.

The mass production and appearance of coffee tables in post-war homes is only part of the story. Banham and Shrimpton note that coffee tables “defined the centre ‘hot’ spot of the room – the focus of social conviviality, leisure and relaxation.”<sup>44</sup> The shift to families gathering towards the centre of the living room also signalled a rise in the installation of central heating in the 1960s, which made it no longer necessary for furniture and families to be arranged around the fireplace:<sup>45</sup>

[I]t was the coffee table that almost replaced the hearth as the altar to domesticity. It defined the room as “Contemporary” and provided a space for the display of the accoutrements of ideal modern home living, style awareness and leisure through the display of items such as coasters, “coffee table books”, exotic house plants, statuettes and ornaments.<sup>46</sup>

Generally, these new “altars” were positioned in front of the television, which Hartley describes as having taken on an altar-like status with their array of family photos and memorabilia, which were

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<sup>41</sup> Hine, *Populuxe*, 147.

<sup>42</sup> Banham and Shrimpton, *Interior Design*, 294.

<sup>43</sup> Attfield, “Design as a Practice of Modernity,” 271.

<sup>44</sup> Banham and Shrimpton, *Interior Design*, 295.

<sup>45</sup> Banham and Shrimpton, *Interior Design*, 295. See also: Attfield, “Design as a Practice of Modernity,” 271.

<sup>46</sup> Banham and Shrimpton, *Interior Design*, 295.

juxtaposed to the moving images on the television screen broadcasting onscreen family entertainment directly into the home.<sup>47</sup>



**Figure 4.3:** The front cover of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated September, 1961 illustrates a 1960s living room layout with coffee table as a central focus of the room. (Source: Swinburne University Special Collections. Photographed image.)

<sup>47</sup> John Hartley, *The Politics of Pictures: The Creation of the Public in the Age of Popular Media* (London, UK: Routledge, 1992), 108.

The coffee-table was also a symbol of suburban modernity, which Attfield argues placed an emphasis on lifestyle over status. When the coffee table transitioned from being an occasional table to a central object, it “objectified the social changes that developed out of a new type of leisure associated with informality rather than with status.”<sup>48</sup> Leisure had always been associated with being wealthy because it signified the ability to take time away from the need to work.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, increased leisure was recast in the post-war era as part of an overall social reform. It became a source of informality, socialising, enjoyment and conviviality, and the coffee table was often at the centre of these activities. As an everyday piece of furniture, the coffee table also signalled a shift away from the implied formal use of occasional furniture.<sup>50</sup>

Although Attfield views the coffee table as a symbol of an emerging middleclass more interested in lifestyle than status, coffee tables did nevertheless become a new space for expressing taste by how it was “dressed”. Payne and Zemaitis claim that the coffee table’s supplementary function is for displaying a selection of books in order to gain cultural status; a form of showing-off symbolic of a reverence for status symbols in countries where conspicuous consumer culture is encouraged.<sup>51</sup> While their claim may be valid, it fails to recognise that coffee-table books became a phenomenon and were not the only objects capable of pretentious expressions of status. Given the highly energised consumer market in the post-war era, there was certainly a plethora of competing goods with which to express one’s taste in the domestic sphere. The coffee table with coffee-table books provided yet another “symbolic sub-space” within the domestic sphere. This point was often made, as the following quote from a 1962 review of coffee-table books demonstrates:

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<sup>48</sup> Attfield, “Design as a Practice of Modernity,” 276.

<sup>49</sup> Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*, 195.

<sup>50</sup> Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*, 195–197.

<sup>51</sup> Payne and Zemaitis, *The Coffee Table* 2.



Book browsers seeking portable status symbols, but not yet ready to go all the way on a \$1,475 gold golf putter at Tiffany's, will be able to choose such titles as "The Jerusalem Windows of Marc Chagall, \$35.<sup>52</sup>

The review focuses on consumers motivated by conspicuous consumption. but what is the evidence that this actually happened in post-war homes? The following eight images, seven from *The Australian Home Beautiful* issued 1965 to 1967 and one photo staged by me, illustrate some of the different functions coffee tables were used for in Australian homes at the time. The images from *The Australian Home Beautiful* may not give a complete picture of what people did with their coffee tables because they were styled for photoshoots. Nonetheless, the images are an indication of how coffee tables may have been "dressed" in the post-war era.

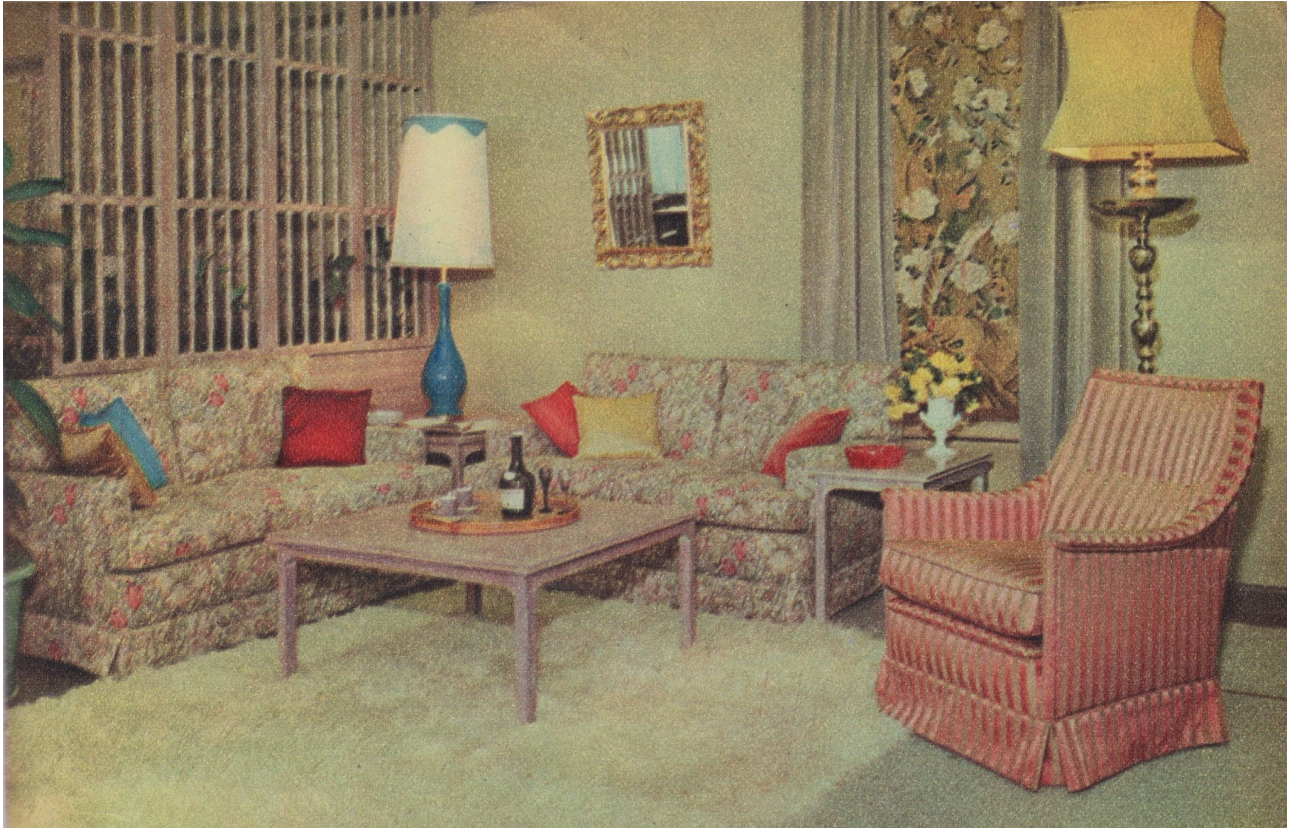


**Figure 4.4:** Page 5 of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated August, 1965 illustrates a coffee table located in a living room decorated with coffee table books and a large ceramic dish. (Source: My collection. Scanned image.)

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<sup>52</sup> "Fall's Art Books: Large and Costly: Dozens are Priced at \$50-One Weighs 10 Pounds," *The New York Times*, August 7, 1962.





**Figure 4.5:** Page 29 of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated August, 1965 illustrates a coffee table located in a living room decorated with a bottle of alcohol, two glasses and two coffee cups. (Source: My collection. Scanned image.)



**Figure 4.6:** Page 20 of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated December, 1966 illustrates a coffee table located in a living room decorated with a soda syphon and two glasses. (Source: My collection. Scanned image.)





**Figure 4.7:** Page 28 of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated December, 1966 is an illustration of guests being entertained around a coffee table located in the living room. (Source: My collection. Scanned image.)



**Figure 4.8:** Page 11 of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated March, 1967 illustrates two girls reading picture books in front of a coffee table located in the living room. Decorated with one large open coffee-table book and a closed coffee-table books. (Source: My collection. Scanned image.)



**Figure 4.9:** Page 93 of *The Australian Home Beautiful* dated March, 1967 illustrates two adults sitting in a living room watching television with a coffee table placed between them and the television. (Source: My collection. Scanned image.)

As previously discussed, the practice of “domestic bookaflage” was only relevant if people outside the home were witness to its practice. The possibility of deriving cultural status from coffee-table books on coffee tables could only be realised when the domestic space moved from private to public.<sup>53</sup> In some households, a permanent display of strategically placed coffee-table books may not have been practical or realistic when coffee tables were the centre of other activities. If one did want to achieve cultural status through coffee-table books, a more likely scenario may have been that a selection of coffee-table books was placed on the coffee tables before guests came

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<sup>53</sup> Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei, eds., *The Domestic Space Reader*. (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 11.



to visit. Alternatively, because coffee-table books were too large to negotiate on a lap, the coffee table may have been used as a support while browsing through a coffee-table book, which would then be put back on a book shelf. Even though the coffee table defined the coffee-table book, coffee-table books did not necessarily reside there permanently.

## Visual culture in the domestic sphere

The conspicuous display of class and status was not confined to coffee-table books. Buying and displaying the “right” magazines also had cultural currency. Long before full-colour coffee-table books began to appear on coffee tables in earnest, a culture of consuming illustrated publications featuring social, cultural and political life was well-established in America, Australia and Britain via popular news and lifestyle magazines such as the *Life* in America, *Picture Post* in Britain, and *The Australian Women’s Weekly* in Australia, which provided a parochial view as well as a pictorial view of world affairs. As Twitchell points out, part of having an elevated life in the 1960s was the ability to recognise high-cultured reading, and good-looking books alluded to the promise of a library, although they were no longer fashionable: “Even the magazines on your coffee table were coded for class.”<sup>54</sup> *National Geographic*, an internationally distributed magazine, provided a window to world cultures through high-quality images and long-form articles, and was one of the more prestigious magazine one could have on a coffee table. Like the coffee-table book, large-format magazines such as *Life*, *Picture Post* and *The Australian Women’s Weekly* were defined by their ability to showcase large photographs. As this suggests, a sizable market interested in full-colour image-based representations of society and culture already existed prior to the popularisation of coffee-table books. According to Kitch, newsmagazines such as *Life* played a role in constructing a sense of the American national identity because they were able to disseminate political and cultural ideas to a national audience by means of dramatic, large-scale illustrations and later,

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<sup>54</sup> James B. Twitchell, *Living It Up: America’s Love Affair with Luxury* (New York, USA: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 171.

photography, which had more visual impact than newspapers.<sup>55</sup> This was also the case with *Picture Post* in Britain and *The Australian Women's Weekly* in Australia, both of which could make an impact by featuring one photograph on a whole page.

The *Picture Post* historical archive states that the magazine's photo-journalism documented the ordinary life of British people between 1938 and 1957, which at its peak commanded an 80% readership.<sup>56</sup> This type of cultural feedback may have been familiar territory for its readers, in that the reader's gaze would have brought with it a sense of cultural familiarity. For example, *Picture Post* would have played a key role in providing images of how the war was impacting on London and its citizens during World War II. The front black and white image from the May 3, 1941 edition depicts a soldier behind a desk on the street, giving directions to a woman and two men, with a crowd in the background the morning after the Blitz. This image is followed by six more, of buildings reduced to rubble and fire hoses being used to put out building fires.<sup>57</sup> The use of full-colour appears to have been set aside for the Royal Family. For example, the front cover of the July 28, 1951 issue features Prince Charles as a young child, and includes some advertisements printed in colour. Subsequent covers continued in black and white until further stories about the Royal Family in February 23, 1952 and April 19, 1952 with stories on the King's death and Prince Phillip meeting miners. Eight more coloured cover pages, including the Royal Family, appear during the remainder of 1952 until full-colour covers become a regular feature from 1953. Although the front covers were printed in full colour, the majority of the magazine's content was still in black and white, with some full-colour pages for advertisements. When the magazine ceased production in 1957 (the final front cover appeared on June 1) it took readers through a nostalgic review of its pivotal moments, including a replication of the first front cover from October 1, 1938.

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<sup>55</sup> Carolyn Kitch, *Pages from the Past: History and Memory in American Magazines* (North Carolina, USA: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 17.

<sup>56</sup> GALE Cengage Learning, GALE. "Picture Post Historical Archive." April 10, 2017.  
<http://www.gale.com/c/picture-post-historical-archive>

<sup>57</sup> Louis Macneice, *Picture Post Historical Archive*. "The Morning After the Blitz." April 10, 2017.  
<http://www.gale.com/c/picture-post-historical-archive>

Similar to *Life* and *Picture Post*, *The Australian Women's Weekly's* articles and images represented everyday Australian life. Although the magazine was primarily aimed at women to offer them a sense of social connectedness, it was distinct from other women's magazines because it also included "news and stories that were not exclusively feminine." These included regular stories about the British Royal Family and events such as visits to Australia by the Pope and President Lyndon Johnson.<sup>58</sup> However, according to Sheridan, Baird et al., the magazine's real significance lay in it having its peak circulation period during the 1950s and 1960s, when radical social changes were occurring, particularly in the role of women. Its popularity meant that it was "read in one in four Australian homes and had the biggest circulation per head of population of any women's magazine in the world."<sup>59</sup>

By contrast, *National Geographic*, introduced many unfamiliar cultures into the domestic sphere, albeit through a Western gaze, and required a more sophisticated reading of both images and text because of its "high middlebrow" status.<sup>60</sup> Lutz and Collins note that during the post-war era, *National Geographic* images from around the world often featured a Westerner, which served to validate the first-hand field work conducted by the magazine's photographers and writers and to "[dramatize] intercultural relations."<sup>61</sup> Lutz and Collins argue that not only did the magazine attain cultural legitimacy through its "connections to the state, national identity, and science but its materiality was also a significant component of its success. Its size, format, paper quality and binding makes it almost book-like, raising it from the category of magazine and its lowbrow overtones."<sup>62</sup> If Lutz and Collins' claim that magazines fall into the category of lowbrow, and that it is accepted that literary books occupy the status of highbrow, then coffee-table books can

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<sup>58</sup> Susan Sheridan, Barbara Baird, Kate Borrett and Lyndall Ryan, *Who Was That Woman?: The Australian Women's Weekly in the Postwar Years* (Sydney, Australia: University of New South Wales Press Ltd, 2002), 1–3.

<sup>59</sup> Sheridan, Baird, Borrett and Ryan, *Who Was That Woman?*, 1.

<sup>60</sup> Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 7.

<sup>61</sup> Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, 203–204.

<sup>62</sup> Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, 7.

comfortably inhabit the middlebrow or popular taste categories. Their materiality sets them apart from magazines, and their content is not generally regarded as highbrow. However, compared with magazines, why was the materiality of coffee-table books so appealing in the post-war era?

The physical attributes of coffee-table books made an impressive statement with their weighty large-format form and striking covers. According to Vanderschantz and Timpany, the durable casebound hardcover, which allows the spine of the book to lie flat for ease of viewing and reading, is generally enclosed in a protective dust jacket, forming part of its overall visual decorative appeal. These features, along with 157-gsm glossy coated paper stock lend weight and a sense of aesthetic authority to the coffee-table book format.<sup>63</sup> With these aesthetic material attributes, they necessarily formed part of the textural environment and added to the decorative taste of post-war homes. This use of coffee-table books in the domestic sphere also illustrates Bourdieu's theory that there is nothing more distinctive than conferring aesthetic status to common objects or everyday life activities such as decoration. It has the effect of "perform[ing] a systematic reduction of the things of art to the things of life."<sup>64</sup> The overall materiality was a key component to their success, but the "real" allure of coffee-table books were their covers. Front covers were designed to be graphically interesting to catch the eye of consumers and once on the coffee table, they visibly communicated something about the owner's taste. Matthews and Moody claim that "[t]he importance of covers to the marketing of twentieth-century books is signalled by the proliferation of coffee-table books."<sup>65</sup> Although, as Mirabella points out, designing a captivating cover is a skilful process, not just the result of choosing the most striking photo for the cover, which is why the overall design aesthetic plays a central role in the production of coffee-table books as discussed in Chapter Three.<sup>66</sup> Good book cover design has the capacity to catch the eye as well as impart powerful messages. *The*

<sup>63</sup> Nicholas Vanderschantz and Claire Timpany, "Who Says You Can't Judge a Book by its Cover?," *The International Journal of the Book* 10, 4 (2013): 8–9.

<sup>64</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 5.

<sup>65</sup> Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody, eds., *Judging a Book by Its Cover: Fans, Publishers, Designers, and the Marketing of Fiction*. (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), xvii.

<sup>66</sup> Mirabella, "Illustrated Books," 198.

*Australians* front cover offers a good example of how a single close-up image of a man's face was not only a striking image but also a statement on Australian national identity for a post-war coffee table. Furthermore, Brace argues that part of the success the Batsford had with their English countryside books was attributed to their beautifully illustrated dust jackets by Brian Cook, which "[legitimised] a version of England as a rural homeland."<sup>67</sup> The power of the book covers lay in their ability to create a relationship between consumers and a love of rural life

As I have already suggested, coffee-table books may have been moved to the coffee table for browsing and then returned to a book shelf. But what made coffee-table books an appealing leisure pursuit in the post-war era? Generally, viewing a coffee-table book is a visual experience, even though photographs have captions and/or some supporting text. As a visual medium they were well-suited to browsing or flipping through in an incidental manner in an era of increased leisure time. This is not to suggest that viewing photographs in this manner does not have its own complexity, as there are multiple gazes—but browsing through a coffee-table book could be as absorbing or detached as the experience required. According to Lutz and Collins, an image is intersected by the photographer's gaze, the subject of the photo's gaze, the design layout gaze and the viewer's gaze converge into viewing a moment in time, thereby creating an infinite number of interpretations based on the various cultural experiences each gaze brings to an image.<sup>68</sup> Apart from the visual experience, captions were also short and easily absorbed, which complemented the images and browsing experience. However, complementary captions did not just describe the image, they added to its meaning. For example, Nancy Newhall, writer of several Sierra Club *Exhibit Format* books, states that the relationship between photographs and the additive caption, as the principal type of caption, because "combines its own connotations with those in the photograph to produce a new image in the mind of the spectator".<sup>69</sup> Dunaway describes the collaboration between photographer

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<sup>67</sup> Brace, "Publishing and Publishers," 294.

<sup>68</sup> Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, 192–215.

<sup>69</sup> Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, 131.

Ansel Adams and Nancy Newhall on *This Is the American Earth*, as a “creative fusion of words and pictures.”<sup>70</sup> By contrast, the role of captions in the *National Geographic* is to signpost and capture the interest of the casual reader to partake in further reading of the accompanying article. However, Lutz and Collins reported that “53 percent of subscribers read only picture captions, not the text, and editors see captions as a crucial opportunity to give these casual readers a fix on the article.”<sup>71</sup> Even though the designers of coffee-table books lay out a visual narrative, a satisfying visual experience can be gained even if the book is opened at a random page. As Sontag points out, individual images have the ability to hold their own moment in time, and compared with a stream of images on television, individual images may be more memorable and can be viewed again.<sup>72</sup> This was certainly true for coffee-table books, as like all books, they have longevity and are not subject to scheduling.

The major visual culture activity in American, British and Australian post-war homes was watching television. As Groves points out, the television in Australia created a whole culture of supplementary activities and products such as TV dinners, special TV furniture, and TV parties.<sup>73</sup> With family and social life now centered on the allure of television, where favourite shows were scheduled on particular days at particular times, where did coffee-table books fit into this visual culture? Lee argues that television was one reason the popularity of Australian coffee-table books decreased about 1970. However, television personalities such as the “Leyland Brothers, Harry Butler, Bill Peach, Robert Raymond and Peter Luck” created a renewed interest in Australian illustrated book titles, which complemented their own television programs.<sup>74</sup> Healy also points out that Australian viewers could experience the Australian outback through the Leyland brothers’

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<sup>70</sup> Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, 131.

<sup>71</sup> Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, 76.

<sup>72</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, 13.

<sup>73</sup> Derham Groves, *TV Houses: Television's Influence on the Australian Home* (Burwood, Australia: Black Jack Press, 2004), 63–114.

<sup>74</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 57.

adventures, which was a form of citizen education and travel as self-discovery.<sup>75</sup> While television may have contributed to the demise of Australian coffee-table books, Paul Hamlyn personally embraced both television and radio to advertise his books in Britain and Australia. Presumably his advertisements were scheduled to coincide with gift-giving periods. As Table 4.0 illustrates coffee-table books were published and promoted as gifts in time for Christmas in the post-war era. This is not only because they make impressive gifts; the practice follows a long history of lavishly produced books being exchanged as presents, particularly at Christmas. and coffee-table books became a continuation of this exchange.

## Books as gifts

Books as gifts became part of the commercialisation of Christmas as early as the eighteenth century. Nissenbaum states that from an early period, books were at the cutting edge of the commercialisation of Christmas.<sup>76</sup> The first evidence Nissenbaum found of a commercial Christmas present being given to a child was recorded in Martha Ballard's diary on December 29, 1796, where she noted that an almanac was given to her son for Christmas.<sup>77</sup>

We cannot know what promoted Livermore to make such a gift, or just which almanac he chose (there were many), but of one thing we can be sure: The almanac would have noted that December 25 was Christmas.<sup>78</sup>

The giving of an almanac to an individual at Christmas is significant, because it marks the beginning of books as gifts rather than the exchange of food as part of the normal dynamics of community life, where any celebration of Christmas was a civic rather than a domestic affair.

“Christmas in late-eighteenth-century New England—or anywhere else—was not centered around the family or on children or giving presents.”<sup>79</sup> Nissenbaum states that “publishers began to

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<sup>75</sup> Healy and Huber, “*Ask the Leyland Brothers*,” 389.

<sup>76</sup> Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York, USA: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 140.

<sup>77</sup> Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 30.

<sup>78</sup> Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 30–31.

<sup>79</sup> Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 38.

cultivate the Christmas trade in a systematic fashion” in the 1820s.<sup>80</sup> Notably, gift books became the popular choice for Americans where almanacs had left off. Although the two genres share several parallels, such as “they appeared each year as part of a series, with the same title, format, and organization; in both cases the only thing on the title page that changed from one year to the next was the year itself,” the function of each was different. Almanacs contained public information such as calendars and court listings, while gift books provided culture such as “literature, art, moral values—bourgeois values.”<sup>81</sup> In 1842 a Philadelphia publisher published *Kriss Kringle’s Book*, which was a gift book, aimed at children, explaining the benefits of behaving well during the year in order to reap the rewards of presents from Santa Claus, including books.<sup>82</sup> To put it another way, the Kriss Kringle book became a marketing tool for the idea of receiving Christmas presents and the promotion of good behaviour.

As the materiality of gift books became more pronounced, they were precursors to the coffee-table book because of the emphasis on their ornate physical attributes, which included, “gilt edges, lavish bindings, expensive engravings, and coloured ‘presentation plates.’”<sup>83</sup> It is debatable whether coffee-table books would be classed as delivering “culture” in the same highbrow manner as the gift book described above. Although coffee-table books frequently present highbrow subjects such as art, their cultural status is questioned. One significant difference between the gift books Nissenbaum refers to and coffee-table books is that gift books were specifically marketed as “*presents*, purchased only to be given away”, whereas coffee-table books were marketed as both gifts and for personal consumption. According to Lee, this was certainly the case with the Australian coffee-table books; newly affluent customers were prepared to spend their discretionary income on books as gifts or for the home.<sup>84</sup> As she points out, coffee-table books “attracted the

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<sup>80</sup> Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 141.

<sup>81</sup> Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 143.

<sup>82</sup> Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 126–127.

<sup>83</sup> Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 143.

<sup>84</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 41.



custom of [these] consumers, many of them women who were not bookshop habitués but were prepared to spend significant sums purchasing books as gifts or items of domestic display.”<sup>85</sup>

Whether coffee-table books became popular in the post-war era as gifts or for conspicuous consumption, an article in the *New York Times* in 1962 reported that the market for books as gifts, particularly coffee-table books, was booming, even though these type of books were becoming quite substantial and expensive:

Those fancy art books that people have traditionally put on coffee tables will be getting even larger and more expensive this fall—so large, in fact, that an editor this week said of one such book: “This is not for the coffee table; this is the coffee table.”<sup>86</sup>

The article also noted that the market for expensive gift books had increased so much that even paperback publishers were publishing gift books, which reflected the commercial success of coffee-table books.<sup>87</sup> Their commercial success and choices in subject matter has often left the genre open to ridicule, which cast them as commercial commodities rather than as cultural mediums. However, one person’s “lowbrow” is another person’s “middlebrow”. Cultural taste is all in the eye of the beholder and if a market exists, publishers will tap into it. This position is well illustrated by the following quote:

No Yuletide scene is complete without a gracious recipient hefting some massy, gift-wrapped rectangle, shaking it mischievously, and coyly musing to the anxious donor, ‘I wonder what this is’—and then with thespian genius expressing pure delight at four pounds and as many hundred pages on tadpoles. Who would not weep at being given *The Compleat Chimney Sweep* or *All About Ogees*?<sup>88</sup>

While Burke draws on some ludicrous coffee-table book titles to ridicule the efficacy of publishing these types of coffee-table books as Christmas approaches, he does draw our attention to the fact that consumers are often more focused on buying gifts to impress, rather than for their inherent usefulness. To further illustrate his point, he notes that approximately 4,089 coffee-table books

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<sup>85</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 1.

<sup>86</sup> “Fall’s Art Books.”

<sup>87</sup> “Fall’s Art Books.”

<sup>88</sup> Jeffrey Burke, “An Ostentation of Books: Tomes on Gnomes, and the Like.” *Harper’s Magazine*, November 1, 1979, 98.

about gnomes were purchased as gifts for Christmas in late 1970.<sup>89</sup> With regard to the size of coffee-table books, Burke explains that the attraction to the size and weight of books is a real phenomenon that has been studied by psychologists. They found that it relates back to our memories of reading oversized picture books as children.<sup>90</sup> Burke also focuses on the abundance of coffee-table books available for the Christmas market, as if this is particular to that genre. Production schedules for all book genres are geared towards gift-giving periods, like many other commodities. Coffee-table books are perhaps more noticeably targeted in this way, and in some cases pre-Christmas pricing is actively promoted, as illustrated in Table 4.0. *The New York Times* specifically published discounted prices for coffee-table books if purchased before Christmas. The other coffee-table books listed in British and Australian publications did not indicate pre- and post-Christmas prices, although the list gives an indication of coffee-table books titles published in the post-war era, leading into Christmas. Notably, within the range of subjects listed, the Arts is dominant.

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<sup>89</sup> Burke does not disclose the origin of his figures or bibliographic details for the coffee-table book *Gnomes*. But, as Burke's article is written in 1979, a search on Amazon does feature a book title *Gnomes* published in 1977 by Author, Wil Huygen and Illustrator, Rien Poortvliet, [https://www.amazon.com/Gnomes-Wil-Huygen/dp/B000O2RSBS/ref=pd\\_sbs\\_14\\_img\\_1?\\_encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=N58T8JD8THD19QP46X3W](https://www.amazon.com/Gnomes-Wil-Huygen/dp/B000O2RSBS/ref=pd_sbs_14_img_1?_encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=N58T8JD8THD19QP46X3W)

<sup>90</sup> Burke, "Ostentation of Books", 98.

Curated list of coffee-table books aimed at the Christmas market 1960–1979						
America – <i>The New York Times</i> (Digitised)						
Britain – <i>The Times</i> (Digitised)						
Australia – Various newspapers and magazines (Digitised)						
No	Document	Date	Title and Author	Category	Publisher	Cost
1	Review: “Books of The Times” by Charles Poore, page 13	Dec 24, 1960	<i>The Past We Share: An Illustrated History of the British and American Peoples</i> edited by Peter Quennell and Alan Hodge	History	Putnam's	\$9.95 until Jan 1, thereafter \$12.50
2	Display Ad 55: “Reward for shopping now! Special Pre-Christmas Prices”, page 19. A short description of 28 coffee-table books	Nov 26, 1962	<i>The Coffee Table Book of Astrology</i> edited by John Lynch	Spirituality	Studio Book-Viking	\$12.50
3	Display Ad 55: “Reward for shopping now! Special Pre-Christmas Prices”, page 19. A short description of 28 coffee-table books	Nov 26, 1962	<i>In Wildness is the Preservation of the World</i> photos by Eliot Porter, text by David Thoreau	Nature	Sierra Club	Before Christmas \$20, thereafter \$25
4	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Hal Porter’s Japanese Ordeal” by John Gaiger, page 13	Nov 2, 1968	<i>The Actors: An Image of the New Japan</i> by Hal Porter	Travel	Angus and Robertson	\$5.25
5	Review: “Art Choice” by David Piper, page IV. A review of 13 coffee-table art books.	Nov 29, 1969	<i>Negro Art</i> by D. Olderoggo and Werner Forman	Art	Hamlyn	50s
6	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Books for Christmas Reading” by a Special Correspondent, A review of 21 book suggestions for Christmas, including 2 coffee-table books page 9	Dec 24, 1969	<i>History of the Royal Navy</i> edited by Peter Kemp  <i>The Princes’</i> by H. D. Molesworth	War	Arthur Barker  Weidenfeld and Nicolson	\$8.40  \$9.35
7	Article: “The Collector and the Collected” by Aline B. Saarinen, page 242	Dec 15, 1963	<i>Great Private Collections</i> by Douglas Cooper	Art	Macmillan	\$19.95 until Dec 31, thereafter \$25
8	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Old Masters and New Reputations” by Donald Brook, page 11	Oct 23, 1965	<i>The Drawings of Leonardo and Michelangelo</i> by Jaromir Pecirha	Art	Paul Hamlyn	84/-
9	Article: “Books of The Times: Over the Counter and Under the Tree” by Eliot Fremont-Smith, page 45	Dec 9, 1966	<i>Coaching Days of England</i> edited by Paul and Elizabeth Elek	History	Imported by Timelife	\$32.95
10	Display Ad 1238: “A Royal Selection of Beautifully Illustrated Volumes”, page 364	Nov 19, 1967	<i>The Windsor Years</i> by Lord Kinross	Royalty	Studio	\$16.00
11	Review: “The American Heritage History of ...” by Edgar Kaufmann Jr., page BR74	Dec 7, 1969	<i>The American Heritage History of Antiques: From the Civil War to World War I</i> by Marshall B. Davidson	Antiques	American Heritage Publishing Co.	\$14.95 until Dec 31, thereafter \$17.50
12	Article: <i>As They Saw Him</i> by Thomas Lask, page 31	Oct 2, 1970	<i>Beethoven: A Documentary Study</i> edited by H.C. Robbins	Music	Macmillan	\$22.50 until Dec 31, thereafter \$25

Curated list of coffee-table books aimed at the Christmas market 1960–1979						
America – <i>The New York Times</i> (Digitised)						
Britain – <i>The Times</i> (Digitised)						
Australia – Various newspapers and magazines (Digitised)						
No	Document	Date	Title and Author	Category	Publisher	Cost
13	Article: “As They Saw Him” by Thomas Lask, page 31	Sep 8, 1972	<i>From the Sketchbooks of the Great Artists</i> by Claude Marks	Art	Crowell	\$19.95 until Dec 25, thereafter \$25
14	Review: “Escape from Reality” by Stanley Sadie, page 13	Nov 22, 1973	<i>Tchaikovsky</i> by John Warrack	Music	Hamish Hamilton	£5
15	Article: “Machu Picchu at Delphi” by Sherwin Smith, page 359	Dec 7, 1975	<i>Classic Lines: A Gallery of the Great Thoroughbreds</i> by Richard Stone Reeves and Patrick Robinson	Animals	Oxmoor House	\$50 until Jan 31, thereafter \$75
16	Review: “Visual Aides to Composers” by William Mann, page XXIII	Nov 26, 1976	<i>Mozart: the Man, the Musician</i> by Arthur Hutching	Music	Thames & Hudson	£16
17	Article: “‘The Kitchen Book’: From Cave to Microwave” by Mimi Sheraton, page 78	Sep 15, 1977	<i>The Kitchen Book</i> by Terence Conran	Design	Crown	\$27.50 until Oct 26, thereafter \$30
18	Review: “High Road to Modern Art” by John Russell Taylor, page XII. In connexion, originally with a big exhibition last year at MoMA.	Nov 24, 1978	<i>Cézanne: The Late Work</i> edited by William Rubin	Art	Thames & Hudson	£20
19	Article: “Architecture: Buildings” by Paul Goldberger, page BR6	Dec 3, 1978	<i>Summer Places</i> by Brendon Gill and Dudley Witney	Architecture	Methuen	\$29.95 until Jan 1, thereafter \$35
20	Article: “A Special Kind of Theater: Broadway Musicals Musical” By Harold C. Schonberg	Sept 30, 1979	<i>Broadway Musicals</i> by Martin Gottfried	Performing Arts	Harry N. Abrams	\$40 until Dec 31, thereafter \$45

**Table 4.0:** A curated list of coffee-table books aimed at the Christmas market, including prices, published in newspapers and magazines, 1960–1980. (Source: *The New York Times* historical newspapers archive (1851–2008), *The Times* Digital Archive 1785–1985 and *Trove*, Digitised newspapers and more, National Library of Australia.)

Christmas period discounts varied; some were quite substantial, and no doubt would have encouraged extra sales. For example, no. 20, *Broadway Musicals* (Abrams, 1979) came with a \$5 pre-Christmas/New Year discount. While no. 15, *Classic Lines: A Gallery of the Great Thoroughbreds* (Thames & Hudson, 1978) was generously discounted by \$25 until January 31, which translates to a big discount for that time. Why such a large discount? The popularity of the subject matter may have been overestimated, and therefore a lot of stock needed to be shifted. What

better time to offer a generous discount, to act as an incentive, than when people are frantically buying gifts during the Christmas rush?

## **Conclusion**

As I argue in this thesis, a series of social changes that occurred in the post-war period contributed to the popularisation of the coffee table book. One of the hallmarks of this era was increased disposable income and mass-consumerism, which saw the acquisition of pieces of furniture such as coffee tables alongside an increasing interest in home decoration. The popularisation of the coffee table and the lavish aesthetics of coffee-table books combined to create a new, central and informal space for displaying and interacting with this style of book. A dislike for the superficial function of coffee-table books increased in the post-war era, even though there had been a long history of appropriating books as status symbols and for purposes other than reading.

To view the coffee-table book genre as only performing a superficial function fails to recognise the well-established global market that was created through the convergence of social change, advances in colour printing technology and the publishers who championed the genre or others who embraced its commercial success in post-war years. In the following chapters, I follow three case-studies, publishers David Brower, Paul Hamlyn, and Lloyd O'Neil, each of whom had different motivations for publishing. However, all three successfully tapped in their specific markets, contributing to significant changes in attitudes towards the environment in America, and new innovations for the book trade in Britain and Australia.

## Chapter Five

### At what cost, the Earth? *The Exhibit Format Series*

LET US RE-EMPOWER THE BOOK! Free the world from the treadmill of television and radio, which requires the captive audience to race along at the producer's pace, their own sense of position lost.

David Brower<sup>1</sup>

David Brower is an iconic figure within the environmental movement. He was a visionary and passionate defender of planet Earth. After serving seventeen years as the first Executive Director of the Sierra Club he established Friends of the Earth, co-founded League of Conservation Voters and Earth Island Institute.<sup>2</sup> Brower also developed a passion for the art of fine publishing under the guidance of Francis Farquhar, editor of the Sierra Club *Bulletin* (hereafter referred to as the *Bulletin*). In the late 1950s, Brower witnessed how people were inspired by the photographic exhibition “This Is the American Earth” and recognised the potential for reproducing the exhibition in a large-format photographically illustrated book. He believed Americans would become passionate about the need for environmental protection if they were reminded of its beauty in their own homes.<sup>3</sup> Thus began *The Exhibit Format Series* (hereafter referred to as the *Series*), comprising twenty environmental coffee-table books published by the Sierra Club during the 1960s.<sup>4</sup>

The *Series* is recognised for its quality photographic reproductions, literary texts by distinguished authors Thoreau and Muir, and for its design and quality material attributes. Notably,

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<sup>1</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 34.

<sup>2</sup> David Brower Center, *David Brower Center*. “Who was David Brower.” August 27, 2017. <https://browercenter.org/about/who-was-david-brower/>

<sup>3</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 19.

<sup>4</sup> *This Is the American Earth* (1960), *Words of the Earth* (1960), *These we Inherit: The Parklands of America* (1962), *In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World* (1962), *The Place No One Knew: Glen Canyon on the Colorado* (1963), *The Last Redwoods: Photographs and Story of a Vanishing Scenic Resource* (1963), *Ansel Adams: A Biography. Volume 1: The Eloquent Light* (1964), *Time and the River Flowing: Grand Canyon* (1964), *Gentle Wilderness: The Sierra Nevada* (1964), *Not Man Apart* (1965), *The Wild Cascades, Forgotten Parkland* (1965), *Everest: the West Ridge* (1965), *Summer Island: Penobscot Country* (1966), *Navajo Wildlands: As Long as the Rivers Shall Run* (1967), *Kauai and the Park Country of Hawaii* (1967), *Glacier Bay: The Land and the Silence* (1967), *Baja California and the Geography of Hope* (1967), *Central Park Country: A Tune Within Us* (1968), *Galapagos: The Flow of Wildness. Vol. 1: Discovery* (1968), *Galapagos: The Flow of Wildness. Vol. 2: Prospect* (1968).

the *Series* received many awards including a Carey-Thomas award in 1964 “for the best achievement in creative publishing in the United States.”<sup>5</sup> Dunaway argues that the books and their awards “help[ed] bring Brower into the national spotlight.”<sup>6</sup> Much is known about David Brower and the Sierra Club (hereafter referred to as the Club): their environmental history, vision, campaigns, publications, advocacy and fostering grassroots lead chapters across America. This American case-study examines how Brower and the *Series* made a significant contribution to the history of large-format illustrated publishing in America and helped to popularise coffee-table books in the post-war era. Brower was instrumental in creating the concept of the Club’s photographic exhibit format books and some claim that he invented the coffee-table book genre. As already noted in the Introduction, with the success of *In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World*, Brower had proven that “color photograph coffee table books” were highly commercial.<sup>7</sup>

Drawing on various archival accounts and resources, this chapter examines the creation of the *Series* as a book history phenomenon. Recollections and commentaries by Brower and his Club colleagues, garnered from published interviews and books, minutes and correspondence of the Sierra Club Publications Committee archives and Sierra Club Bulletins, shed light on the key role Brower played in the creation, production, marketing and distribution of the *Series*, driven by his entrepreneurial activism. Brower’s single-minded defence of the planet motivated the publishing of the *Series* but challenged the patience of his colleagues and the Club’s resources. Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen argue that innovators are naturally imbued with a certain DNA but these skills can also be developed. They argue that innovators think differently, have a keen sense of enquiry, take time to observe, they network and experiment with ideas.<sup>8</sup> As this chapter will demonstrate, Brower’s impatience for the Earth’s welfare ultimately threatened the Club’s financial viability.

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<sup>5</sup> Sierra Club, *Sierra Club*. “William E. Colby Memorial Library Reading List: Sierra Club Exhibit Format Series.” October 21, 2014. [http://vault.sierraclub.org/library/lists/lists\\_exhibit.asp](http://vault.sierraclub.org/library/lists/lists_exhibit.asp)

<sup>6</sup> Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, 117–118.

<sup>7</sup> Frugé, “A Publisher’s Career,” 80.

<sup>8</sup> Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen, *The Innovator's DNA*, 12–13.

Many books in the *Series* had high sales, were well received and contributed to the ratification of an environmental Bill. But embarking on an ambitious and expensive publishing schedule within a grassroots, not-for-profit organisation came at a financial cost to the Club and a personal cost to Brower. The Chapter particularly focuses on the publication of two books: *This Is the American Earth*, the first book, which created the concept for the *Series*, and *In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World* as the first full-colour book in the *Series*.

## Background

Several factors contributed to the creation of *The Series*. Firstly, Brower's single-minded commitment to the environment, coupled with a passion for publishing, put the Club on a new publishing trajectory.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, Brower urgently wanted to change people's attitudes to the environment, particularly the attitudes of politicians. And the photographic exhibition, "This is the American Earth," was the genesis for recreating the photographs from the exhibition in a large-format book.<sup>10</sup> These factors alone could not have produced the *Series*. Timing is a key factor in publishing and post-war social change was a fertile environment in which to introduce powerful environmental messages in the form of beautifully crafted, coffee-table books. Mitman notes that this was a period when Americans were being exposed to wildlife and nature on screen as well as in books and magazines.<sup>11</sup> The publishing history of the *Series* necessarily includes successes and failures, as is the business of book publishing. The books raised environmental awareness beyond Club members and conservationists and contributed to membership growth.<sup>12</sup> Yet, behind the scenes, the Club's Board and publishing committee were challenged by Brower's chaotic management style. He generally ignored established management practices and lacked financial responsibility. In the first few years of his tenure the publishing program began to dominate the Club's budget, which

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<sup>9</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> Mitman, *Reel Nature*, 116–119. See also: Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, 120.

<sup>12</sup> Sierra Club, *Sierra Club*. "A Centennial Celebration 1892–1992." August 4, 2014. <http://vault.sierraclub.org/sierra/1992/Centennial.pdf>



created great dissatisfaction and conflict within the Club.<sup>13</sup> Brower's altruistic yet disruptive behaviour resulted in near bankruptcy for the Club in 1969. How could the publishing of twenty environmental coffee-table books lead to this situation? The following four sub-sections give an overview of how Brower's passion for the environment and fine publishing, his appointment as Executive Director and his attitude towards use of Club monies converged to produce a series of coffee-table book that nearly brought down the very organisation that was fighting the environmental cause.

### **(i) Nature and nurture**

Are visionaries born or made? Brower was only two years old when renowned naturalist and first President of the Club John Muir died. Yet Muir's thoughts and writings on Yosemite and the High Sierra greatly influenced Brower in his drive to protect the wilderness.<sup>14</sup> There is also no doubt his family's love of nature nurtured Brower's passion for the environment from a very early age. He and his siblings were taken on regular family outings to the surrounding woods and mountains. These trips exposed him to the deforestation and degradation of his "beautiful, friendly mountains" all in the cause of turning trees into products such as paper.<sup>15</sup> This first-hand experience of environmental destruction struck a powerful chord in Brower that resonated for the rest of his life:

I got annoyed I guess. Disappointed that we'd been doing that and thought I'd get going and do something about it and I never got over the habit of trying to do something about it.<sup>16</sup>

At age eight, Brower's connection to the wilderness became more profound when his mother suddenly lost her eyesight. For the remaining nineteen years of her life, Brower became her eyes to nature, which taught him to observe it in detail, interpret scenes and objects and to write about what

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<sup>13</sup> Club, "Centennial Celebration."

<sup>14</sup> David Brower, "Enviro Close-Up #617 "David Brower"," interview by Karl Grossman, *Enviro Close-Up*. (New York, USA: EnviroVideo, 1996). Online audiovisual, Accessed September 2, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSv61PxT4qM>.

<sup>15</sup> Brower, "Enviro Close-Up."

<sup>16</sup> Brower, "Enviro Close-Up."

he saw.<sup>17</sup> This experience no doubt sharpened his eye in the choice of photographs included in *The Exhibit Format Series* books.

As a young adult, Brower continued his steadfast commitment to outdoor pursuits and openly admits that his mountain expeditions often clashed with employment responsibilities. His passion for nature came first.<sup>18</sup> This is an early indication that Brower would have difficulties prioritising his responsibilities. For example, when working as the lowest-level clerk for a candy company he finally lost his job after taking off on an extended expedition to Mount Waddington in Canada. A turning point in his future career came when he was employed by the Yosemite Park and Curry Company to operate a calculating machine and moved on to become their publicity manager. This is where he got to know and learn from Ansel Adams, one of the company's consultant photographers.<sup>19</sup> They subsequently forged a long-term professional and personal relationship and collaborated on four books in the *Series*.<sup>20</sup> Brower's family activities and natural surroundings suggest that his love of nature was nurtured, but his tendency for preferencing the environment over imperative responsibilities was perhaps a born character trait. And, it was this particular trait that drove the publication of the Club's environmental coffee-table books.

## **(ii) Fine publishing tradition**

The publication of *The Exhibit Format Series* was the Club's most significant publishing venture, but the Club had had a publishing program from the outset. When it was founded, one of its stated aims was to "publish authentic information concerning the mountain regions of the Pacific Coast."

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<sup>17</sup> David Brower, "An Interview with David Brower," interview by Douglas Gillies, (Santa Barbara, USA: East Beach Productions, Online published transcript, Accessed September 10, 2014. [http://www.douglasgillies.com/interviews/david\\_brower.html](http://www.douglasgillies.com/interviews/david_brower.html).

<sup>18</sup> David R. Brower, "Environmental Activist, Publicist, and Prophet," interview by Susan Schrepfer, *Sierra Club History Series*. (Berkeley, USA: Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 1974–1978). Online published transcript, 8-9. Accessed September 3, 2014. <https://ia600308.us.archive.org/7/items/environmentalact00browrich/environmentalact00browrich.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Brower, "Environmental Activist," 8–9.

<sup>20</sup> Ansel Adams' books in the *Series*: *This Is the American Earth* (1960), *These We Inherit: The Parklands of America* (1962), *Ansel Adams: A Biography Volume 1: The Eloquent Light* (1964) and *Not Man Apart* (1965). Adams also served as a member of the Sierra Club's Publications Committee for a period while David Brower was Executive Director.

The first *Bulletin* was published in 1893.<sup>21</sup> This periodic journal, along with producing maps of Yosemite and the Kings River region was the Club's commitment to documenting, communicating and sharing evidence of its work and activities with its members.<sup>22</sup> Brower's publishing career trajectory began with the *Bulletin* through his participation in Club mountaineering expeditions and writing notes for the *Bulletin*. In 1935 the *Bulletin*'s editor, Francis Farquhar, invited Brower to join the editorial Board, which was significant in igniting Brower's passion for publishing. "[F]rom then my interest in books began and never left. It went on and on."<sup>23</sup> August Frugé, a renowned scholarly publisher and Director of the University of California Berkeley Press, notes that Farquhar was a connoisseur of fine printing and he gave Brower a grounding in the finer points of publishing.<sup>24</sup> Brower eventually became associate editor of the *Bulletin* in 1942 and finally editor until his appointment as Executive Director.<sup>25</sup> Frugé remembers the Club's publishing program before the 1960s consisted of the *Bulletin*, a few books of interest to members and a small monthly leaflet.<sup>26</sup> However, the publishing program was about to change under Brower. After learning skills from a range of people, he approached the production of the *Series* with his own particular style. Brower argues that his publishing mentors made him understand the power of combining images with text and what it could do for the conservation movement.<sup>27</sup> Brower gave the *Series* all the hallmarks for which coffee-table books are often associated: eye-catching front covers, high-quality paper and spectacular visual and textual narratives.

### **(iii) First Executive Director**

When charismatic visionaries, like Brower, enter the organisational sphere, management systems and processes can be driven off course in the wake of their brilliance and disruption. Upon his

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<sup>21</sup> Club, "Centennial Celebration."

<sup>22</sup> Club, "Centennial Celebration."

<sup>23</sup> Brower, "Environmental Activist," 9. Farquhar was appointed editor of the *Sierra Club Bulletin* (a voluntary position) about the mid-1920s. He held the position for twenty years.

<sup>24</sup> Frugé, "A Publisher's Career," 61.

<sup>25</sup> Frugé, "A Publisher's Career," 69.

<sup>26</sup> Frugé, "A Publisher's Career," 71.

<sup>27</sup> Brower, "Environmental Activist," 40.

appointment, one of Brower's first moves was to request a change of title from Executive Secretary to Executive Director.<sup>28</sup> Was this title upgrade an early indication of Brower's desire to legitimise his power over future Club activities and direction? Frugé notes that the Club had appointed Brower to coordinate and assist the Club's chapters, committees and activities; to hold things together:<sup>29</sup>

I think they wanted to hire a coordinator, but that isn't what they got. Maybe he was that for a few years, but he turned into something else and thereby there was trouble. I can't say that anybody was at fault there. I'm sure that most directors of the Club, and chapter chairmen and so on, thought they were hiring somebody who would coordinate, and also head conservation campaigns, which I think Dave [Brower] had already done; that he would coordinate the work of the Conservation Committee and so on, rather than taking the ball and running with it.<sup>30</sup>

However, Brower adopted a "no time to waste" approach. As Executive Director of a key environmental organisation with a long history of publishing, he had a platform from which to galvanise people into action through campaigns and publishing books.

Former Board member, Martin Litton, argues that Brower regarded organisational processes as a hindrance to saving the environment. "He just saw ways in which he felt the Club had to go, and the only way to make it go that way fast was to make a decision and not wait six months for a Board meeting."<sup>31</sup> Dominant characters like Brower need enablers. He may have taken the ball and run with it but as Farquhar points out, he was also permitted to run away with things.<sup>32</sup> Alexander Hildebrand, the Club's President during some of the Brower years, also agrees that the Board itself was not sufficiently unified and some members were completely in awe of Brower. "[The Board] had some members who practically idolised Dave so they couldn't come to grips with forcing Dave

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<sup>28</sup> Frugé, "A Publisher's Career," 70.

<sup>29</sup> Frugé, "A Publisher's Career," 70.

<sup>30</sup> Frugé, "A Publisher's Career," 70.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Litton, "Sierra Club Director and Uncompromising Preservationist, 1950s–1970s," interview by Ann Lage, *Sierra Club History Series*. (Berkeley, USA: Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 1980–1981). Online published transcript, 78. Accessed August 7, 2014. <https://archive.org/details/sierraclubleaders01lagerich>.

<sup>32</sup> Francis P. Farquhar, "Sierra Club Reminiscences," interview by Ann and Ray Lage, *Sierra Club Oral History Project*. (Berkeley, USA: Sierra Club, 1974). Online published transcript, 75. Accessed August 5, 2014. [http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/sc\\_reminiscences1.pdf](http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/sc_reminiscences1.pdf).

to make a change.”<sup>33</sup> Basically, the *Series* would not exist without Brower’s dominating character. Although the Club was committed to saving the environment and not averse to publishing books, without Brower the Board and the publishing committee would have taken a more balanced approach to what they could do to save the environment while conserving the Club’s financial position.

#### **(iv) The economics of book publishing**

Brower also brought a unique philosophical approach to the Club’s finances, admitting that their money could and should be utilised to promote environmental issues. He also believed that a shift from the Club investing in stocks to investing in books would bring about a positive two-fold outcome; promoting the Club’s environmental message as well as recouping the money through sales.<sup>34</sup> However, the idea that book publishing would become a sustainable enterprise was not supported by evidence. As Adams recalls, Frugé had assessed the Club’s editorial activities sometime in the 1960s and concluded no economic justification for a book-publishing program. Adams viewed the Club’s role as one of initiating ideas, texts and pictures, rather than operating as a publishing house because publishing houses have “several hundred items and the whole business of production, publicity and sales at their command.”<sup>35</sup> Also, losses on one book can be offset if other books sell well. Publishing houses work in a cycle of production and sales whereas the Sierra Club’s primary reason for being was environmental advocacy.

Yet, despite this reality, Brower pushed ahead with an ambitious publishing schedule by arguing that the most important cost to account for was the cost to the earth:

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<sup>33</sup> Alexander Hildebrand, “Sierra Club Leader and Critic: Perspective on Club Growth, Scope and Tactics, 1950s–1970s,” interview by Ann Lage, *Sierra Club History Series*. (Berkeley, USA: Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 1981). Online published transcript, 20. Accessed August 7, 2014. <https://archive.org/details/sierraclubleaders01lagerich>.

<sup>34</sup> Brower, “Environmental Activist,” 210.

<sup>35</sup> Ansel Adams, “Conversations with Ansel Adams,” interview by Ruth Teiser and Catherine Harroun, *Sierra Club History Series*. (Berkeley, USA: Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 1972, 1974, and 1975). Online transcript, Accessed August 18, 2014. <https://archive.org/stream/convanseladams00adamrich#page/n0/mode/2up>.

[M]y basic philosophy in budgeting and running an organization and thinking of what you want to do is what does it cost if you do it; but more important, what does it cost the earth if you don't? And there are very few people who want to think that way. But I want to think that way<sup>36</sup>

It is not surprising that money became a major battleground between Brower and the Club. His philosophy towards money was altruistically reckless. One of Brower's sayings was, "[i]f a conservation organization is not in financial trouble, it's not doing its job."<sup>37</sup> Despite battles over money, Farquhar acknowledges that Brower's motivations were never working for his own interests.<sup>38</sup> Brower had vision, enthusiasm and ability, but could not accept to authority.<sup>39</sup> As author Wallace Stegner puts it, "[Brower] was absolutely unscarable, and most of his stuff paid off, because he was so energetic that if it started to look stuck he would unstick it."<sup>40</sup> Brower's altruistic beliefs blinded him to the fact that Board members were ultimately accountable for how donated monies and membership dues were spent.

## ***The Exhibit Format Series***

### ***This Is the American Earth***

The first book published in the *Series* was *This Is the American Earth*, which was released in late 1959. The book is a representation of a photographic exhibition of the same title that had circulated throughout the United States and beyond.<sup>41</sup> The exhibition comprised photographs primarily by Ansel Adams with text by Nancy Newhall, and it was this dynamic between Newhall's words and Adam's photographs that inspired Brower. In her own words, Newhall explains how additive captions answered a new need:

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<sup>36</sup> David Ross Brower, "Reflections on The Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, And Earth Island Institute," interview by Ann Lage, *Sierra Club Oral History Project*. (Berkeley, USA: Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 1999). Online published transcript, 17. Accessed September 5, 2014. [http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/brower\\_david.pdf](http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/brower_david.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Frugé, "A Publisher's Career," 101–102.

<sup>38</sup> Farquhar, "Reminiscences," 72–73.

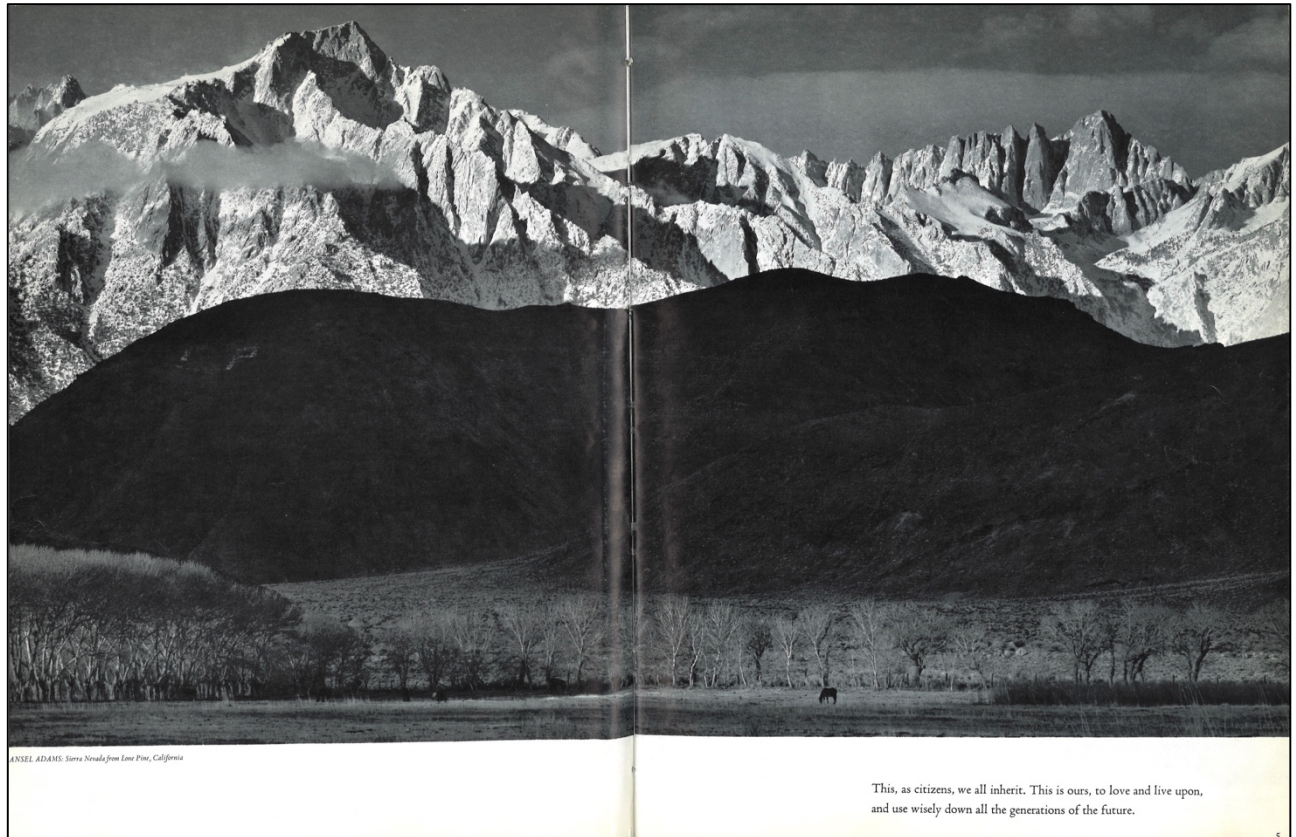
<sup>39</sup> Farquhar, "Reminiscences," 72.

<sup>40</sup> Wallace Stegner, "The Artist as Environmental Advocate," interview by Ann Lage, *Sierra Club History Series*. (Berkeley, USA: Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 1982). Online published transcript, 25. Accessed August 7, 2014. [http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/stegner\\_wallace.pdf](http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/stegner_wallace.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Club, "Centennial Celebration."

It combines its own connotations with those in the photograph to produce a new image in the mind of the spectator...which exists in neither words nor photographs but only in their juxtaposition.”<sup>42</sup>

Additionally, as Dunaway points out, Newhall’s narrative drew the reader into the environmental message of *This Is the American Earth*, by using the pronoun “we”.<sup>43</sup>



**Figure 5.1:** Pages 4 and 5 of *This Is the American Earth* show the juxtaposition of Nancy Newhall’s text with Ansel Adams’ black and white double-page photograph. (Source: Monash University Library. Scanned image.)

Despite the powerful messages on show, Brower was concerned that some people might view the images out of sequence and therefore not understand their context given the wandering nature of an exhibition.<sup>44</sup> Brower wanted the photographic exhibition to be rescued from its exhibit mode, but as Cohen explains it was a letter from Adams that provided the impetus for the *Series*. Adams believed

<sup>42</sup> Nancy Newhall, “The Caption: The Mutual Relation of Words / Photographs,” *Aperture* 1, 1 (1952): 19, 28. See also: Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, 131.

<sup>43</sup> Sierra Club, “Advertisement for This Is the American Earth.” *Sierra Club Bulletin*, October, 1959, [not paginated]. See also: Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, 135.

<sup>44</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 12.

that a more professional program of publications could be effective in attracting a more diverse readership and new younger members. As Adams puts it, the “problem was not simply to impress confirmed conservationists [...] it needed a more durable, more aggressive, more moving, and in a sense, more general kind of literature.”<sup>45</sup> Adams could not have envisaged, at the time, that the idea for this first book would become a series of books the Club could not sustain. Brower quickly acted on Adams’ correspondence by revising his job description to include “coordinating book publishing and public relations programs based on development of photographic and literary material.”<sup>46</sup> While Brower’s intention was that a publication of the exhibition would extend its impact, a carefully curated coffee-table book does not guarantee sequential viewing, as noted in Chapter Three, given the nature of browsing coffee-table books.

### **The concept**

Once a book of the exhibition had been decided upon, dimensions were important if the exhibition was to be simulated to enable the necessary visual dynamics. Brower, Adams and Newhall wanted the page large enough that the eye had to move over the images rather than view them in one glance.<sup>47</sup> They settled on a trim size of 10 ¼” x 13 ½”, which Brower named the Exhibit Format size, hence the name of the *Series*. The concept process reveals that Brower, Adams and Newhall had a keen awareness of the social changes and new lifestyles taking place in America at the time because the final trim size took into account the way the book would function within domestic and public settings. As Brower puts it, if the books were too big, “coffee tables would have to be reinforced.”<sup>48</sup> Brower, Adams and Newhall “settled for a portable size that would later feel at home on a coffee table.”<sup>49</sup> Here is evidence of an expectation that the books were destined for coffee

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<sup>45</sup> Michael P. Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club, 1892–1970* (San Francisco, USA: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 254–255.

<sup>46</sup> Ansel Adams memo to David Brower and others, Sierra Club Archives, Brower papers, carton 225, file: Sierra Club Committees, Pub. Com. in Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club, 1892-1970*, 254.

<sup>47</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 12–13.

<sup>48</sup> David Ross Brower, *For Earth’s Sake: The Life and Times of David Brower* (Salt Lake City, USA: Peregrine Smith Books, 1990), 192.

<sup>49</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 13.



tables. One of their objectives stated, “[o]ur book will be out on display in homes, where friends will look at it and talk about what [it] says.”<sup>50</sup> Waiting rooms were also a potential space of influence:

It will be prominent in all waiting rooms we can reach with this message: “Why not let people who are waiting to see you look at something beautiful, stimulating, and important instead of outdated magazines. If you are a doctor, this book can start the cure!”<sup>51</sup>

Part of the concept for the book also included a prelude. Brower wanted a “long statement to precede the Foreword” to create a sense of excitement.<sup>52</sup> As discussed in Chapter Three, book design incorporates publishing conventions, and an extended prelude was going to cause a technical issue with the book’s layout. Cognisant that copyright information must appear on the verso (left-hand page) of the title page, Brower contacted the United States Register of Copyright. There were no objections as long as the copyright notice appeared on the verso side of the title page. Forthwith, extended preludes became a feature of several books in the *Series*.<sup>53</sup> As a result of the prelude, *This Is the American Earth* takes seven pages to get underway – four photographs and fewer than two hundred words of text.<sup>54</sup>

## **Production**

The intention for *This Is the American Earth* was that “[it] would be a perfect work of art, the glory and profits going entirely to the Club.”<sup>55</sup> Cohen states that much of Brower’s time was spent revising the prelude repeatedly while Adams maintained a watchful eye over the photographic reproductions.<sup>56</sup> However, not everything went to plan. As discussed in Chapter Three, printing procedures and costs prior to offset printing were time consuming and expensive, especially when mistakes needed to be rectified. Fortuitously, Adams called into Photogravure and Color Corporation while in New York to see how production was proceeding. Upon inspecting the proofs,

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<sup>50</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 19.

<sup>51</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 19.

<sup>52</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 13.

<sup>53</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 13.

<sup>54</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 14.

<sup>55</sup> Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club*, 256.

<sup>56</sup> Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club*, 256.

he identified a number of glaring mistakes—misspellings and wrong names and titles, which had implications. Poor attention to proofreading led to a last-minute holding of the presses to correct a number of mistakes. “[W]hen you print with gravure, you print on copper sheets and you can’t change anything. It’s etched – the type, everything...every time you changed a detail you had to re-make a whole plate.”<sup>57</sup> These errors added US\$780 to the cost of the first print run.<sup>58</sup> These issues affected production schedule timelines, which are crucial to book publishing particularly in gift-giving periods, and provide a good illustration of why offset printing disrupted the flexibility, efficiencies and cost of illustrated publishing.

### **Marketing to members**

The *Bulletin* was an important marketing tool for *This Is the American Earth* as well as subsequent books in the *Series* and Brower used it to his advantage. The *Bulletin* always included a list of available books for sale and he kept the members informed of *This Is the American Earth* sales, continually promoted its attributes and included feedback from people who praised the book. One advantage the Sierra Club did have over traditional publishing houses was a captive audience for its books, which guaranteed a certain volume of sales from members alone. Nevertheless, with “fewer than fifteen thousand members” at the time, Tuner notes that this was the most ambitious publishing project the Club had undertaken.<sup>59</sup> Brower’s marketing strategy also emphasised *This Is the American Earth* as a beautiful decorative object, which is evidence that he was aware that aesthetics were important if he wanted the book to be displayed on coffee tables:

The illustrations are reproduced in varnished gravure with an excellence that has never been surpassed and perhaps has never been equalled. We don’t make this claim recklessly. The book can be the most beautiful object in your home.\*

\*Next to your wife<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Adams, “Ansel Adams,” 475.

<sup>58</sup> Adams, “Ansel Adams,” 475.

<sup>59</sup> Tom Turner, *David Brower: The Making of the Environmental Movement* (Oakland, USA: University of California Press, 2015), 95.

<sup>60</sup> David Brower, “A Widely Acclaimed Exhibit Becomes a Stirring Book.” *Sierra Club Bulletin*, November, 1959, [not paginated].

In another article titled “American Earth Doing Well”, Brower acknowledges the sense of excitement and feelings of anxiety everyone felt leading up to publication of *This Is the*

*American Earth*:

[W]hen four years of effort have gone into a book project; the participants await public reaction with an anxiety that cannot be described by any phrase from our handy dictionary of similes. When it also involves an investment about equalling that of four years of publishing Club books, the purseholders share the anxiety.<sup>61</sup>

Brower’s words demonstrate an awareness of production costs and in doing so, counterbalances it by focusing on its potential as an agent of change for the environmental movement.

The book’s heralding is still a most important task. It *is* our most important publication by far. It stands a chance of achieving more for conservation than anything else we’ve done. Is there anyone who thinks it is not the most beautiful book every produced in the United States or Europe? – D.B.<sup>62</sup>

To vindicate the risk, he and the Club took publishing *This Is the American Earth*, Brower draws on some early positive responses to the book, like the following from a Professor of Physics who had believed the Club had taken a risk. “O.K. You win. It’s just as good as you said it was.”<sup>63</sup> Also, Justice William O. Douglas of the United States Supreme Court described *This Is the American Earth* as “[o]ne of the great statements in the history of conservation” and put in an order for three more books.<sup>64</sup>

One reason Brower chose “the book” as his preferred visual media is its longevity and non-reliance on the schedules of picture theatres or television programmers.<sup>65</sup> In doing so, Brower compares *This Is the American Earth* to a fine recording of an orchestral piece: “Like any fine recording, this book can be played again and again, and each time reveals something more, and

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<sup>61</sup> David Brower, “American Earth Doing Well.” *The Sierra Club Bulletin*, January, 1960, 19.

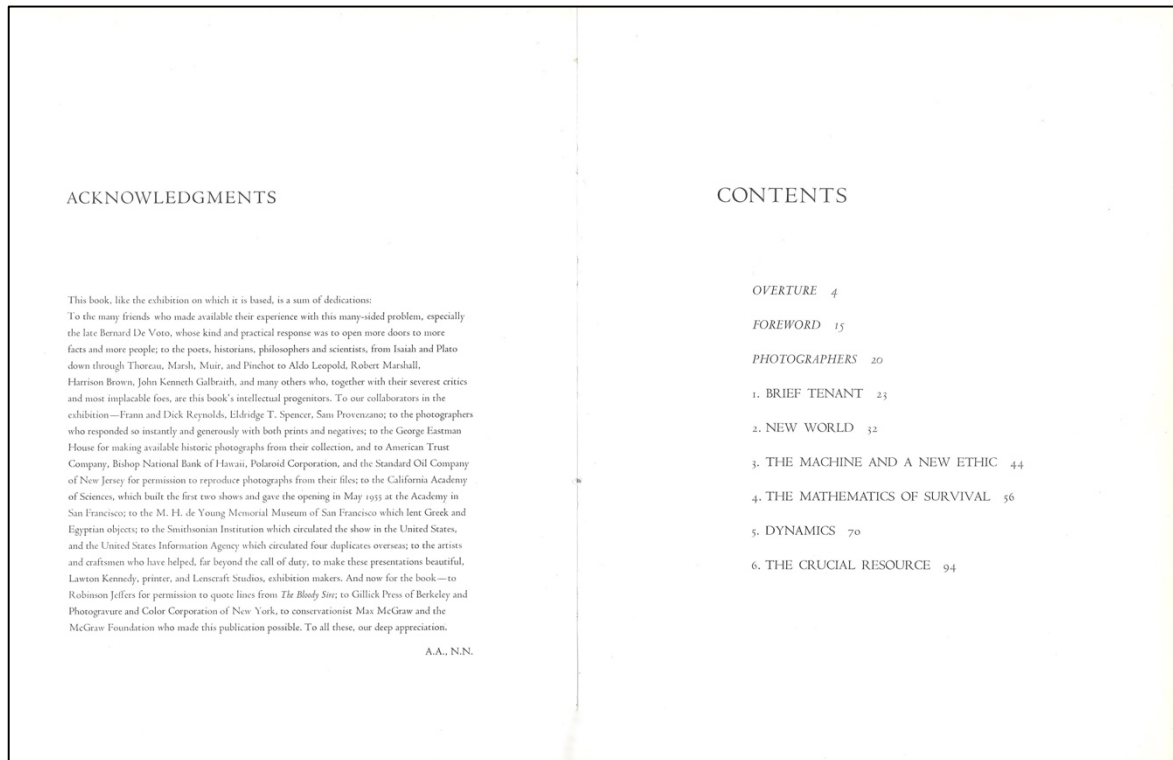
<sup>62</sup> Brower, “Doing Well”, 19.

<sup>63</sup> Brower, “Doing Well”, 19.

<sup>64</sup> Brower, “Doing Well”, 19.

<sup>65</sup> Brower David, *Work in Progress* (Layton, USA: Gibbs Smith, 1991), 34. See also: Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, 119.

something very personal.”<sup>66</sup> When Brower and Cohen referred to the inclusion of a prelude, it is, in fact, listed as an overture in the book’s chapter outline, which reinforces Brower’s music analogy.



**Figure 5.2:** Frontmatter chapter titles, *This Is the American Earth* by the Sierra Club, [not paginated]. (Source: Monash University Library. Scanned image.)

## Reviews

*This Is the American Earth* was reviewed in journals, newspapers and by conservation organisations, not to mention several letters of thanks from politicians who acknowledged receipt of their complimentary copy.<sup>67</sup> A review in *Science* by Deevey acknowledged Adams’ ability to communicate deep emotion.<sup>68</sup> Deevey identified the book’s appeal as a gift book, which was something Brower had hoped would eventuate:<sup>69</sup>

If this were a commercial publisher’s bid for a share of the Christmas trade, one need say no more about it. The book would be a handsome gift for anyone. Far from being intended as an

<sup>66</sup> Brower, “A Widely Acclaimed Exhibit”, [not paginated].

<sup>67</sup> Cartons 306, 308, 309, Series 11, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA., *Sierra Club Publications Records, 1956–1984*.

<sup>68</sup> Edward S. Deevey, “This Is the American Earth,” *Science* 132, 3441 (1960): 1759. See also: Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, 144.

<sup>69</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 19.

eye-catching gift package, however, it has a Message, promulgated by the Sierra Club, a leading conservationist organisation.<sup>70</sup>

However, Deevey's review was not entirely positive as he was not a fan of Newhall's non-conservationist writing. He labelled it as, "not Conservation, but Conservationism" because she used some the more pretentious clichés of the cultist fringe.<sup>71</sup> In his view, the book's one redeeming feature was the quality of the images: "[F]ortunately, any purchaser who can get past the book's repellent title will probably not even notice the text, and the pictures are magnificent."<sup>72</sup> Brower took Deevey's review personally and vehemently rejected to it by writing a letter to the editor of *Science*. Brower felt Deevey had completely missed the point of Newhall's thesis, which was about "scenic resources not broad conservation."<sup>73</sup>

In contrast, Hugh Edwards from the Art Institute of Chicago urged people to read the text or risk halving their experience of the book. Edwards provides another music analogy by describing the combination of image and text as complementary, "just as a composer would provide a musical score for a film"<sup>74</sup> For Edwards, the production qualities were a highlight, particularly the paper stock, which provided the right canvas for technician and artist to create the highest quality work.<sup>75</sup> Edwards' review also focuses on the book as a fine example of a mass-produced photographically illustrated book. Edwards' review reflects the quality Brower and Adams had intended:

It is worth buying this book just to see what can be done with mass production picture processes. Here the photogravure plates are worthy of the individually printed photographic originals: the paper has been chosen with an artist's understanding regard for its reflectance qualities and the excellence of reproduction brings the photogravure close to the classic printmaking media [ . . . ] In the illustrations for this book we are shown how near the reproduction can approach its object and how important is the understanding between the engraver and the artist whose work he is interpreting.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Deevey, "American Earth," 1759. See also: Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, 144–145.

<sup>71</sup> Deevey, "American Earth," 1759.

<sup>72</sup> Deevey, "American Earth," 1759.

<sup>73</sup> Edward S. Deevey, "Letters," *Science* 133, 3456 (1961): 922–923. See also: Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, 144.

<sup>74</sup> Hugh Edwards, "This is the American Earth," *Image* 9, 1 (1960): 48.

<sup>75</sup> Edwards, "American Earth," 48.

<sup>76</sup> Edwards, "American Earth," 48.

As with all books, there will be admirers and detractors, but importantly, *This Is the American Earth* was recognised for its photography and its aesthetics, which, as we have seen, played a significant role in the popularisation of coffee-table books.

### **Agent of influence**

Brower saw *This Is the American Earth* as a potential agent of influence and sent numerous copies of the book to politicians. While sales of *The Is the American Earth* were good, the cost of providing complimentary copies to Senators and Congressmen had to be absorbed into the overall cost of the project. However, successful publishing is not in the accolades a book receives, it also needs to be cost effective. Many letters of thanks *were* received complimenting Brower and the Club on the book and some provided feedback on its status as an agent of change. Notably, Brower received a letter of thanks from Senator John F. Kennedy. The Senator endorsed the book's blending of photography and words, and for its effectiveness as a visual medium. He noted that "[i]t is certainly a stimulus to renewed efforts to increase our national opportunities for outdoor recreation, conservation and wilderness preservation."<sup>77</sup>

Also, Congressman John C. Watts reassured Brower that the book would bring conservation to the fore when he considered proposals:

The subject matter treated is a most important one, and you may be assured of my deep interest and concern in any legislative proposals looking toward the establishment of an effective, comprehensive and responsible program will have my most friendly and deliberate consideration.<sup>78</sup>

Importantly, Congressman Victor L. Anfuso connected *This Is the American Earth* to any future discussion about environmental legislation:

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<sup>77</sup> Carton 309, Folders 9–10. John F. Kennedy, 'to' David Brower, February 20, 1960, 'in' Series 11, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA., *Sierra Club Publications Records, 1956–1984*. Letter.

<sup>78</sup> Carton 309, Folders 9–10. John C. Watts, 'to' David Brower, February 12, 1960, 'in' Series 11, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA., *Sierra Club Publications Records, 1956–1984*. Letter.

When the Wilderness Bill comes up on the House Floor, you may be assured that it will receive my earnest study and consideration<sup>79</sup>

The book was also endorsed as an environmental educational tool. Olaus Murie from the Wilderness Society remarked that “it should somehow get into our education – so that we might become more intelligent and learn to think.”<sup>80</sup> Finally, Clarence Cottam, Director of Welder Wildlife Foundation underlined the importance of publishing books of this kind: “It is a story that somehow our people must learn. If the Sierra Club had accomplished nothing other than this book, that alone would have been ample justification for its existence.”<sup>81</sup> All of this feedback from politicians no doubt emboldened Brower’s inclination to publish more environmental coffee-table books because the medium, as he thought, was striking the right chord.

### **Browsing the environment**

Some of the letters to Brower highlighted the way large-format illustrated books functioned as an object of leisure reading in the domestic sphere. Bill Harrison of Associated Press wrote, “[i]t’s like having a beautiful wealth of unspoiled wilderness right in my living room.”<sup>82</sup> A letter from travel promotion consultant, Garth Cate, reported that he had taken *This Is the American Earth* to the Fontana Conservation Roundup. Having left it in the lounge room for people to read, the book was in almost constant use.<sup>83</sup> Lastly, Congressman Philip J. Philbin sums up the book’s potential as a medium of inspiration and enjoyment: “*This Is the American Earth*, [...] has such an inspirational message in picture and prose. I am looking forward to leafing through it at leisure.”<sup>84</sup> These

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<sup>79</sup> Carton 309, Folders 9–10. L. Anfuso, ‘to’ David Brower, February 15, 1960, ‘in’ Series 11, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA., *Sierra Club Publications Records, 1956–1984*. Letter.

<sup>80</sup> Carton 309, Folders 9–10. Olaus J. Murie, ‘to’ David Brower, June 4, 1960, ‘in’ Series 11, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA., *Sierra Club Publications Records, 1956–1984*. Letter.

<sup>81</sup> Clarence Cottam, “Likes Earth.” *Sierra Club Bulletin*, March, 1960, 19.

<sup>82</sup> Carton 309, Folders 9–10. Bill Harrison, ‘to’ David Brower, February 25, 1960, ‘in’ Series 11, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA., *Sierra Club Publications Records, 1956–1984*. Letter.

<sup>83</sup> Carton 309, Folder 9–10. Garth Cate, ‘to’ Tom McCaskey, June 1, 1960, ‘in’ Series 11, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA., *Sierra Club Publications Records, 1956–1984*. Letter.

<sup>84</sup> Carton 309, Folders 9–10. Philip J. Philbin, ‘to’ David Brower, February 17, 1960, ‘in’ Series 11, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA., *Sierra Club Publications Records, 1956–1984*. Letter.

statements add weight to the argument that coffee-table books are capable of functioning as aesthetic objects and delivering serious messages.

Brower used the feedback and reviews of *This Is the American Earth* as a way of measuring the success of the publishing program and promoted this fact in the *Bulletin*:

The intangibles? We can't measure these easily, even though the club exists for the purpose of serving and protecting intangible values. The most *tangible* intangible is what American Earth has done. When for example, did any publisher, anywhere, not to mention a mere club with headquarters in San Francisco, have an entire editorial page in Wichita, Kansas, devoted to one of his books?<sup>85</sup>

Did the positive feedback give Brower extra incentive to push ahead with more titles in his effort to change attitudes towards the environment? According to Cohen, *This Is the American Earth* had finally given the Club a vehicle for a message which epitomized what the Sierra Club had been seeking on behalf of the "nation's scenic resources".<sup>86</sup> Most importantly, the book was representative of "the Sierra Club[']s vision as a philosophical standard for the nation to live up to and attempt to present the conservationist message in *positive* terms, as a celebration."<sup>87</sup> Brower claimed *This Is the American Earth* as the most important work the Club had ever published for its ability to stir an emotional response. In his words, the book drew attention to "a suspicion that what man is capable of doing to the earth is not always what he ought to do" and offered renewed hope that spacious freedom could remain for man and wild animal alike.<sup>88</sup>

## Machinations and manoeuvrings

Brower knew early on that his vision for the *Series* was going to be a challenge for the Club, but his sleight-of-hand methods were tolerated because some of the publications committee members felt he had the authority to act in this way. *This Is the American Earth* had been supported by a grant of

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<sup>85</sup> David Brower, "What Is Happening in Our New Publishing Program?" *Sierra Club Bulletin*, September, 1960, 7.

<sup>86</sup> Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club*, 259.

<sup>87</sup> Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club*, 256.

<sup>88</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 17.



\$10,000 and a \$15,000 interest-free loan.<sup>89</sup> However, Adams could see that the reality of publishing subsequent books was going to be challenging without more financial backing. Adams tried to convince Brower that his projections for future books were financially unsound. The complimentary copies sent to congressional representatives and the legislature had to be accounted for in future budgets even though thousands of dollars' worth of books had been sold.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, Brower somehow convinced the Board to proceed with two more *Exhibit Format* books. *Words of the Earth*, published in 1960, featured photographs by well-known black and white photographer, Cedric Wright.<sup>91</sup> This was followed by *These We Inherit: The Parklands of America* in 1962, which was a reworking of an earlier Ansel Adams book.<sup>92</sup>

Many of the books in the *Series* were published because Brower often went ahead on book ideas without first seeking the appropriate authority. He would present sketchy outlines to the publications committee or begin work on a book to a point where it was too hard to retreat.<sup>93</sup> According to Litton, who served as Club Director, Brower would act on the slightest affirmation made at committee meetings to justify proceeding with a project:

[He] would have the Publications Committee in a position in which he could say, "But you okayed it," because they had said it was nice or would be a good idea to look into. "But you okayed it. That's what I understood." "Oh, no, we didn't mean that." "Oh, but you did. I did this, and I spent this."<sup>94</sup>

This is further evidence that Brower's actions were enabled by others. Litton admits that he admired Brower for getting away with operating as he did.<sup>95</sup> However, it caused great animosity with longstanding friends. Francis Farquhar acknowledges that his fondness for Brower as a fine mountaineer and a man of vision dissipated in the face of Brower practically bankrupting the Club

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<sup>89</sup> Brower, "Environmental Activist," 210.

<sup>90</sup> Adams, "Ansel Adams," 667.

<sup>91</sup> Frugé, "A Publisher's Career," 74.

<sup>92</sup> Brower, "Environmental Activist," 210.

<sup>93</sup> Litton, "Sierra Club Director," 81.

<sup>94</sup> Litton, "Sierra Club Director," 81.

<sup>95</sup> Litton, "Sierra Club Director," 81.

through his reckless, unauthorised spending.<sup>96</sup> Adams also believed Brower's crusading manner managed to alienate most government agencies with which the Club needed a working relationship.

[Brower] and his young knights indulged in tactics that irritated friend and foe alike. Adams admired Brower, but could not turn a blind eye to the escalating and dangerous aspects of his management.<sup>97</sup>

Brower was on a mission and nothing seemed to deter him. Litton argues that the first three books were popular with the Board because they were profitable and sold well owing to Adams' black and white photography.<sup>98</sup> However, the next book, *In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World*, featured the photography of Eliot Porter, which took the spotlight off Adams who had been the Club's celebrated photographer for several years.<sup>99</sup>

### **The wilderness in colour**

The publication of *In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World*, (hereafter referred to as *In Wildness*), marked an exciting foray into full-colour publishing but printing in colour was more expensive. There was some initial resistance to Brower publishing a full-colour book, which Litton notes may have been Adams' professional jealousy. Adams criticised colour photography during committee meetings when Brower suggested publishing in colour by claiming that it could not be controlled, did not have the same artistic impact as black and white images, and was therefore a risky move for the Club.<sup>100</sup>

Again, Brower adopted his usual tactics and proceeded with *In Wildness* without the Committee's final authority. As Litton puts it:

With Eliot Porter's pictures, Dave had already gone ahead and had the color separations made, which is the most expensive thing in publishing, and here were the proofs [presented to the meeting].<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Farquhar, "Reminiscences," 72.

<sup>97</sup> Ansel Adams, *Ansel Adams: An Autobiography* (Boston, USA: Little Brown, 1985), 153.

<sup>98</sup> Litton, "Sierra Club Director," 80.

<sup>99</sup> Litton, "Sierra Club Director," 80.

<sup>100</sup> Litton, "Sierra Club Director," 80–81.

<sup>101</sup> Litton, "Sierra Club Director," 81.

The challenge for Brower, however, was not the committee. It was the expense of maintaining the same high-production standards of the previous three books. To overcome this issue, Brower secured a \$20,000 grant from Belvedere Scientific Fund and a \$30,000 interest-free loan.<sup>102</sup>

Brower's attempts to alleviate costs for *In Wildness* proves that at times he *was* aware of the cost to the Club, even though his dogged vision clouded his financial responsibilities. Fortunately, *In Wildness* was a visual and commercial triumph. The colour reproductions of the natural scenes were better than anybody had seen in a colour-plate book at the time, and Frugé attributes this quality to Brower standing over the printers to ensure the best possible outcome.<sup>103</sup>

### Production

Porter curated the images by season in *In Wildness* beginning with spring. These were complemented by selections from Henry Thoreau's nature writings.<sup>104</sup> Brower hailed the Porter/Thoreau interplay as a new art form:

Even to leaf through what has been created here is rewarding; but something quite wonderful happens to those who let themselves drift through. This is symbiotic art: Eliot Porter corroborates Thoreau and Thoreau verifies Porter, one never diminishing the other...these men travelled together a century apart.<sup>105</sup>

Once the printing process got underway, Brower and Porter watched as paper spewed out of the press, 4800 sheets per hour at 15 cents per sheet. The speed was impressive and the critical element was achieving absolute register. As Brower explains, "[i]t means putting on the four big sixteen-plate forms, adjusting the ink – more yellow, less red, more blue, more and less black – row after row, combination after combination."<sup>106</sup> The October 1962 edition of the *Bulletin* celebrated the publication of the first full-colour book in a two-page article, *In Wildness*: "The Story Behind It: 'The most beautiful book of its kind ever produced.'" In order to evoke a sense of excitement and

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<sup>102</sup> David Brower, "The Story Behind It: 'The Most Beautiful Book of its Kind Ever Produced'." *Sierra Club Bulletin*, October, 1962, 6. See also: Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, 158–159.

<sup>103</sup> Frugé, "A Publisher's Career," 75.

<sup>104</sup> Frugé, "A Publisher's Career," 75.

<sup>105</sup> David Brower, "Foreword," in *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World*, eds. Eliot Porter and Henry David Thoreau (San Francisco, USA: Sierra Club, 1962), [not paginated].

<sup>106</sup> Brower, "The Story Behind It", 7.

connection to the book. Brower places the reader at press number 3 inside the printing plant of Barnes Press, Inc., Greenwich Village, New York. Brower's behind-the-scenes expose was a clever marketing tool because it shared the excitement of *In Wildness* with Club members and shed light on printing as an art form. Brower's narrative captured the hours of work required to produce this high quality full-colour illustrated book by detailing each step in the process. He also told the tale of a mishap at the beginning of the production process to assure members that their membership dues were being spent responsibly.<sup>107</sup> Brower explained how the first sheets of paper coming off the press "looked good, but not superb" and how the printer, Hugh Barnes, recommended they go 50–50 in the cost of the paper if they threw out the first 2,500 sheets. As Brower points out, the cost was going to be \$200 each, equivalent to 25 membership dues, so he resolved that the printer withstand the loss, because it was their job to turn out first-class work.<sup>108</sup> Still the sheets he was willing to toss were beautiful – the best I had seen and all we could reasonably expect. They just weren't superbly beautiful.<sup>109</sup>

The benefit of publishing a behind-the-scenes story creates a deeper understanding and connection to an artefact. This technique is often employed in contemporary marketing for promoting Hollywood films, television series, music video clips and book production. For example, the website of renowned publishing house, Taschen, features a video titled, "The Making of the Most Expensive Book". The video demonstrates the various processes involved in producing *SUMO*, which is an iconic coffee-table book featuring Helmut Newton's fashion photography and its gigantic in size.<sup>110</sup> Giving an artefact a detailed social history also strengthens its provenance. Presumably, by giving Club members an insider's view on the production of *In Wildness*, Brower hoped it would translate to high sales and validate monies spent.

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<sup>107</sup> Brower, "The Story Behind It", 7.

<sup>108</sup> Brower, "The Story Behind It", 7.

<sup>109</sup> Brower, "The Story Behind It", 7.

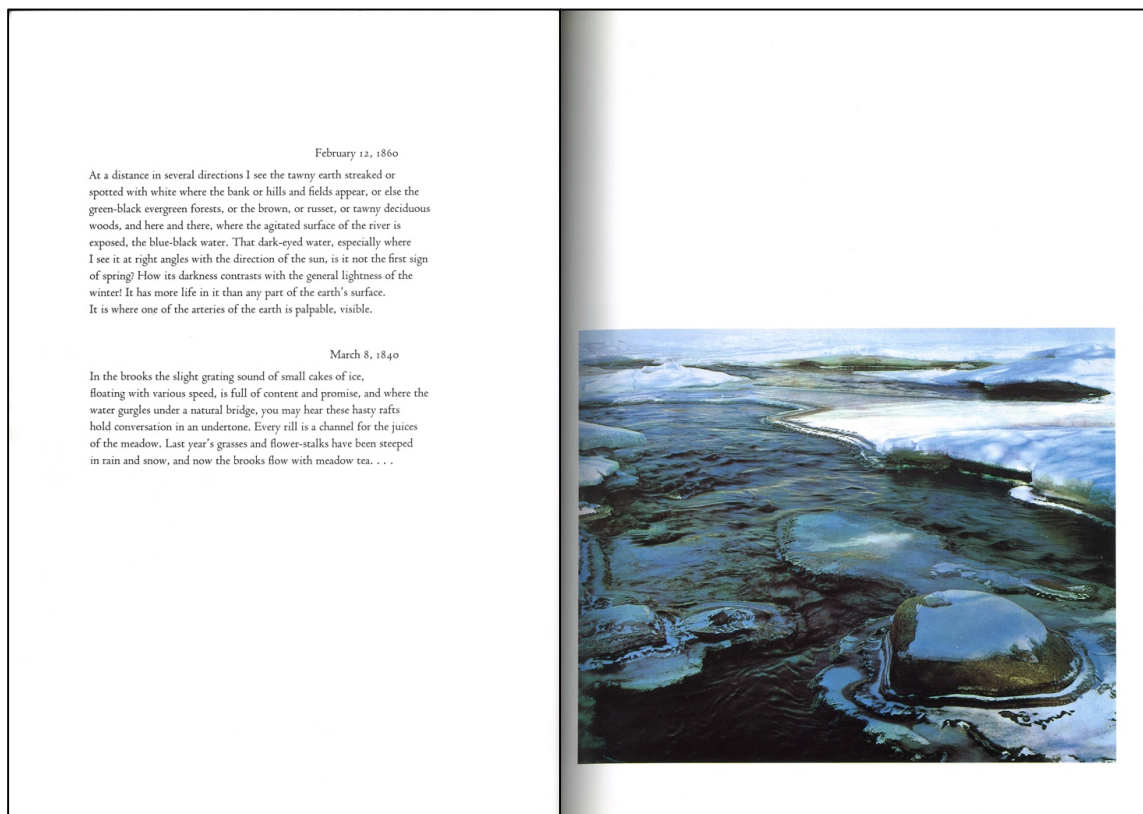
<sup>110</sup> Taschen, *Taschen*. "The Biggest and Most Expensive Book Production in the 20th century." June 18, 2013. [http://www.taschen.com/pages/en/catalogue/photography/all/02601/facts.helmut\\_newtons\\_sumo.htm](http://www.taschen.com/pages/en/catalogue/photography/all/02601/facts.helmut_newtons_sumo.htm)

## Response

*In Wildness* sold particularly well at Christmas and Brower acknowledges even he was surprised with its initial runaway success:

[T]he first printing of thirteen thousand copies would be sold before the book was off the press. Especially a book jacketed with an abstract image of leaves floating on autumn-coloured water and bearing the unlikely title, "*In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World*."<sup>111</sup>

As already noted, the *In Wildness* narrative features nature's four seasons. Thoreau's words appear on the verso page and Porter's photographs are reproduced on the recto page of the book, which draws the eye straight to the images at the turn of each page. Porter's spectacular colour images showcase how beauty in the natural environment are reflected in changes to water, trees, leaves, plants, flowers, rocks and evidence of animal life in each season. The following images illustrate a double-opening page from each season:

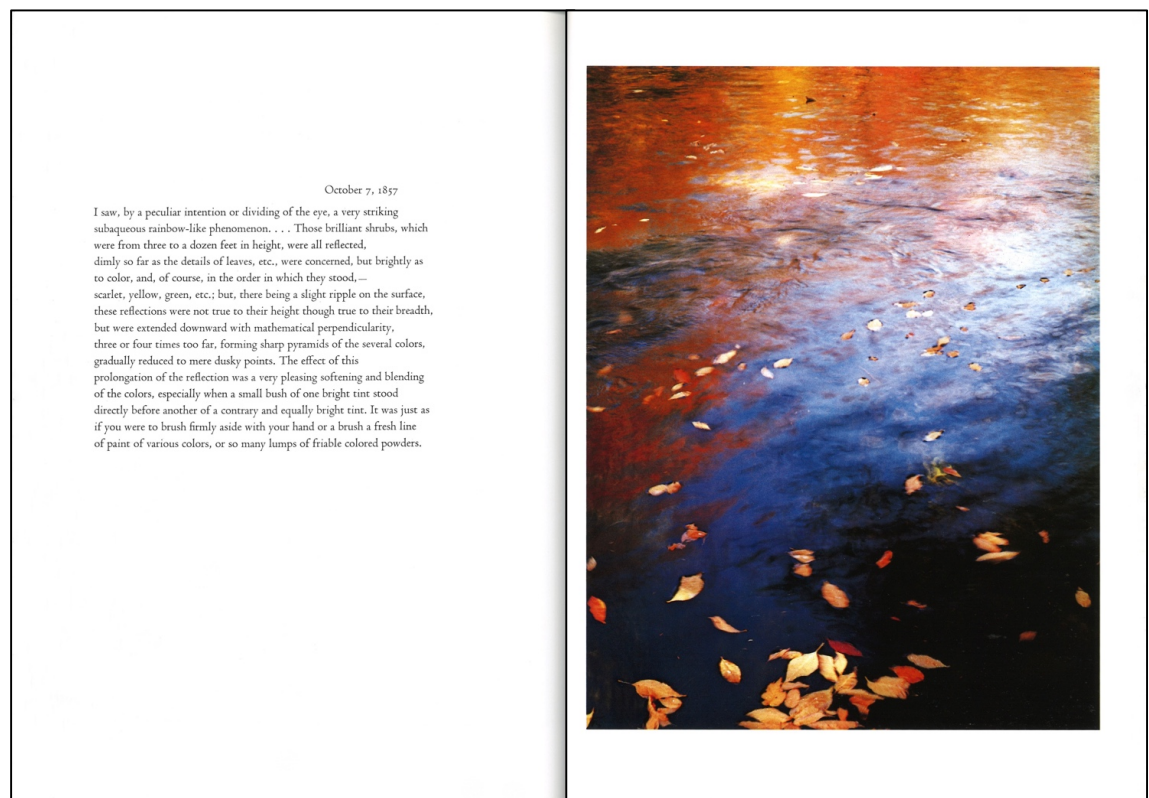


**Figure 5.3:** Text and an image of Spring, *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World* by the Sierra Club, [not paginated]. (Source: Monash University Library. Scanned image.)

<sup>111</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 23.

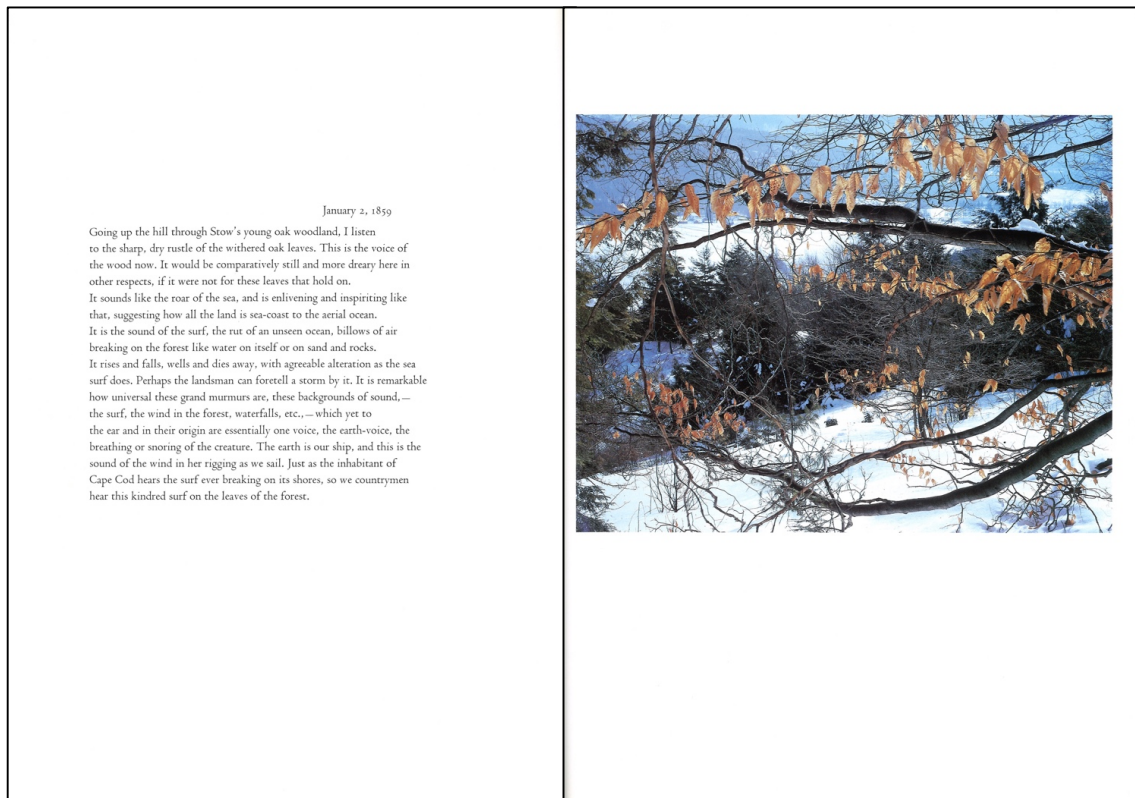


**Figure 5.4:** Text and an image of Summer, *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World* by the Sierra Club, [not paginated]. (Source: Monash University Library. Scanned image.)



**Figure 5.5:** Text and an image of Autumn, *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World* by the Sierra Club, [not paginated]. (Source: Monash University Library. Scanned image.)





**Figure 5.6:** Text and an image of Winter, *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World* by the Sierra Club, [not paginated]. (Source: Monash University Library. Scanned image.)

Frugé argues that Porter's photographs alongside the words of Thoreau really accelerated the book's success even though the books were costly. As he points out, "[t]hese were expensive books at the time, I think \$25, which in terms of present-day dollars [1997] would be a lot more than that."<sup>112</sup> Converting the cost of \$25 in 1962 is equivalent to spending \$132.17 in 1997. In 2017, \$25 is equivalent to spending \$201.19.<sup>113</sup> As these figures demonstrate, even by today's calculations, *In Wildness* was an expensive book. Nevertheless, according to Brower, total sales as of 1985 totalled about seventy-five thousand copies.<sup>114</sup> Clearly the price did not deter a critical mass of consumers who purchased the book.

Again, complimentary copies were sent to influential decision makers and, in this instance, Litton acknowledges that this was an important trade-off despite the cost.

<sup>112</sup> Frugé, "A Publisher's Career," 80.

<sup>113</sup> Saving.org, "Saving.org." June 9, 2015. <http://www.saving.org/inflation/inflation.php?amount=25> All of the figures quoted are in US dollars.

<sup>114</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 24.

[If] you give away 530 books to congressmen and senators, on a subject that you are working on and that you care about, you don't make money that way. But you may accomplish something in terms of what these books are supposed to help.<sup>115</sup>

Notably, Brower received an admiring response to *In Wildness* from the First Lady, Mrs Jacqueline Kennedy, which he reproduced in the *Bulletin*. Mrs Kennedy particularly emphasised the quality and poetry of Porter's colour photographs:

I don't think I have ever seen color plates of this quality and photographs of nature more poetically done. Thoreau's poetry accompanying each photograph is, of course, a collection of masterpieces in itself.<sup>116</sup>

Mrs Kennedy's words and her position provided much symbolic capital to the book, the publishing program and the Club. It also helped to justify the financial outlay and the many hours Brower and Porter had spent overseeing the production of *In Wildness*. Following the success of *In Wildness*, Brower and Porter believed they were ready to introduce a new format for the next book, *The Place No One Knew: Glen Canyon on the Colorado*. They envisaged a larger and more dynamic size, which they called, "gallery format (12½ x 17 inches)."<sup>117</sup> However, the proposed format did not eventuate on the advice of the printer, Barnes Press. "[T]he simple fact that the cost of a larger format would be prohibitive unless there were far fewer photographs. We had a good format going, they said; stick with it. We did."<sup>118</sup> Ultimately, publishers have to balance creative ideas against commercial realities. For the *Series*, the tried-and-true exhibit format prevailed.

## **Selling the Series**

In an effort to maximise book sales, Brower engaged in a variety of marketing techniques to encourage members to purchase books from the *Series*. The *Bulletin* frequently featured stirring full-page book reviews written by Brower as well as Christmas gift advertisements and special pre-publication offers. When Brower corresponded with members, he connected their contribution to the production, distribution or sale of a book. For example, in a letter of thanks to Mr Peake for

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<sup>115</sup> Litton, "Sierra Club Director," 79.

<sup>116</sup> Sierra Club, "High Praise for "In Wildness..." *Sierra Club Bulletin*, November, 1962, 18.

<sup>117</sup> Brower, *For Earth's Sake*, 346.

<sup>118</sup> Brower, *For Earth's Sake*, 346.



donating \$250, Brower informed him that the money would go towards the cost of distributing *This Is the American Earth*.<sup>119</sup> Other donations were earmarked for the publication of a particular book such as Mr Rosin's \$500. Brower wrote, "I think you will be pleased to know your contribution will help us publish Summer Island, Eliot Porter's book of text and photographs about his island in Penobscot Bay."<sup>120</sup> The Club also operated a gift-giving program to members, where they distributed books to people nominated by a member. Brower called on his entrepreneurial instinct to do whatever it took to make the books in the *Series* successful but the commercial realities of running such a publishing program within a Club primarily focused on the environment could not be ignored.

## Commercial realities of publishing and distribution

Coffee-table books were popular Christmas items in the post-war era *The Exhibit Format Series* was no exception. However, when Christmas book sales proved to be popular among Club members, accommodating the Christmas market did not sit well with several members. According to Frugé, the Club questioned whether it should be in the "Christmas book business," as their primary focus was the environment.<sup>121</sup> The following *Bulletin* notice highlights the Club's reluctance in having to acquiesce to the commercially focused Christmas market:

This year's member's Christmas sale catalogue comes to you in an earlier issue of the Bulletin than last year. We have no desire to further the cause of Christmas commercialization, but our experiences with the summer sale and other recent mailings have convinced us mightily that the best start is the earliest start.<sup>122</sup>

Although high book sales were the desired outcome, the Club was ill equipped to deal with the influx of mail requests for the *Exhibit Format* books. Gradually, the Club learned to plan for the

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<sup>119</sup> Carton 306, Folder 3. Robert V. Golden, 'to' Frederick Peake, January 18, 1960, 'in' Series 11, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA., *Sierra Club Publications Records, 1956–1984*. Letter.

<sup>120</sup> Carton 308, Folder 43. David Brower, 'to' Mr Alex Rosin, March 31, 1965, 'in' Series 11, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA., *Sierra Club Publications Records, 1956–1984*. Letter.

<sup>121</sup> Frugé, "A Publisher's Career," 80.

<sup>122</sup> Sierra Club, "Sierra Club Publications for Christmas Gift Giving." *Sierra Club Bulletin*, September-October, 1966, 11.

Christmas season and kept members abreast of the Club's response to any issues through the *Bulletin* including having to seek help from outside the Club, which added to the overall publishing costs. Nevertheless, good Christmas figures are a high priority in the publishing industry and a letter from Joseph Fox Books confirmed the commercial viability of *In Wildness* as a Christmas gift book:

Gentlemen:

Please send ten more "In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World" by Porter, and advise if you expect this book to be in good supply for the Christmas season. It is one of the most beautiful books I have ever handled.

Joseph Fox Books  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania<sup>123</sup>

The success that some books in the *Series* achieved gave Brower every reason to keep publishing environmental coffee-table books but he was never far from overstepping organisational processes and a couple of events in 1969 finally ended Brower's tenure. As Brower puts it, first, the President refused to allow him to run an advertisement in the *Bulletin* to promote the Club's two *Exhibit Format* Galapagos books. Desperate to promote them after spending a quarter of a million dollars on their publication, Brower published a new issue of the Explorer newsletter without permission for the sole purpose of advertising the books.<sup>124</sup> The two Galapagos books were a financial disaster for the Club. As Frugé puts it:

You could do twenty-five thousand for a certain book and it will be a dull thud like the Galapagos book. They put it out in two volumes, against everybody's advice. That's been the sourest dull thud lemon that anybody could imagine a \$55 book for the two volumes. I haven't seen the recent [1972] list, but they didn't even get their cost back on it. And they never will it's just too expensive. It'll be remaindered for maybe \$5, and somebody will sell it for \$2, and then it'll be all out of print and unobtainable, and then it will become valuable, but not at any benefit to [Eliot] Porter or to the Sierra Club!<sup>125</sup>

Secondly, as the history of the Sierra Club notes, "David sign[ed] off on a page-and-a-half New York Times ad calling for the planet to be a 'conservation district' within the universe called 'Earth

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<sup>123</sup> Joseph Fox Books, "'Most Beautiful...'" *Sierra Club Bulletin*, October 13, 1962, 12.

<sup>124</sup> Brower, "Reflections on The Sierra Club," 34.

<sup>125</sup> Adams, "Ansel Adams," 429.

National Park.”<sup>126</sup> The advertisement cost \$10,000, which he expected to be recouped through book sales and donations.<sup>127</sup> Brower concedes these actions exemplified the power struggle between the Club’s President and himself as Executive Director for which the President suspended his employment.<sup>128</sup> *The Exhibit Format Series* had created high deficits and the Club was running out of money.<sup>129</sup> Brower’s bold actions finally gave the President and the Board the impetus to take action against his undisciplined actions over seventeen years.

## Brower’s legacy

It is impossible to separate the creation of *The Exhibit Format Series* from the machinations and manoeuvrings of David Brower. The *Series* is the embodiment of Brower’s vision, drive and ambition and his conflicts with the usual processes of responsible, organisational decision-making. Cohen notes that Brower’s publishing efforts drew the Club into a broader sphere with books such as *Baja California and the Geography of Hope* (1967), *Navajo Wildlands: As Long as the Rivers Shall Run* (1967) and *Central Park Country: A Tune Within Us* (1968).<sup>130</sup> Wayburn acknowledges that the *Series* contributed to making the Club a nationwide organisation by attracting members from all over the country.<sup>131</sup> As Mrs Winfred Rhoades wrote:

Your book “This Is the American Earth”, is one of the most beautiful I have ever seen. It is of special interest as I have been camping in so many of those places. What are the dues? I would like to join.<sup>132</sup>

Despite the *Series* having influenced growth in membership, not all committee members saw this as a good outcome. Farquhar did not favour the growth because he felt that the Club was already large

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<sup>126</sup> *Sierra Club*. “David Brower (1912–2000).” May 13, 2015. <http://content.sierraclub.org/brower/timeline>

<sup>127</sup> Brower, *Work in Progress*, 105.

<sup>128</sup> Brower, “Reflections on The Sierra Club,” 34.

<sup>129</sup> Frugé, “A Publisher’s Career,” 97.

<sup>130</sup> Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club*, 399.

<sup>131</sup> Edgar Wayburn, “Sierra Club Statesman Leader of the Parks and Wilderness Movement: Gaining Protection for Alaska, the Redwoods, and Golden Gate Parklands,” interview by Ann Lage and Susan Schrepfer, *Sierra Club History Series*. (Berkeley, USA: Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 1976-1981). Online published transcript, 195. Accessed September 9, 2014. [http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/wayburn\\_edgar.pdf](http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/wayburn_edgar.pdf).

<sup>132</sup> Mrs Winfred Rhoades, letter to David Brower, January 15, 1960.

enough and viewed the increase as the commercialisation of the environment.<sup>133</sup> Through the *Series*, environmental awareness had been popularised, which would not have offended Brower, and his efforts in bringing the *Series* to fruition were rewarded with several design awards. The March 1961 edition of the *Bulletin* reported that the American Library Association selected *This Is the American Earth* as, “one of the 46 “notable books of 1960.”<sup>134</sup> It won the Carey-Thomas Award in 1964 for the best achievement in creative publishing in the United States and in 1967 Brower received notification that *Not Man Apart* and *Everest: the West Ridge* won the Turck & Reinfield Inc. Tenth Book Jacket Design Competition in the non-fiction classification.<sup>135</sup>

David Brower communicated his fear for the destruction of the environment through *The Exhibit Format Series* even though it nearly destroyed the Sierra Club. However, Robert Cox argues that history will remember David Brower as a “pioneer in communicating to public audiences about human threats to wild places.”<sup>136</sup> Rather than seeing Brower as an irresponsible risk taker, Cox regards the placement of full-page advertisements in newspapers as being the hallmark of an innovative leader.<sup>137</sup> “David [Brower’s] genius was to realize that somebody must speak for nature and rally others to add their own voices on behalf of threatened forests, wild rivers, and the wildlife they sustain.”<sup>138</sup> Ansel Adams best sums up the legacy of David Brower, the man, in one brief sentence. “Difficult as he may be, he is of the kind that moves the world.”<sup>139</sup> Brower died in the year 2000.

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<sup>133</sup> Farquhar, “Reminiscences,” 74-75.

<sup>134</sup> Sierra Club, “Library Group Picks *American Earth*.” *Sierra Club Bulletin*, March, 1961, 10.

<sup>135</sup> Turck & Reinfield Inc. was a design, production and colour printing company.

<sup>136</sup> J. Robert Cox, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere* (Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage Publications, 2010), 1. Robert Cox is Professor of Communications Studies and the Curriculum Ecology at the University of North Carolina and was a Sierra Club Board member and President during the years 1994 to 2007

<sup>137</sup> Cox, *Environmental Communication*, 1.

<sup>138</sup> Cox, *Environmental Communication*, 2.

<sup>139</sup> Adams, *Ansel Adams*, 154.

## Conclusion

Brower's contribution to the popularisation of coffee-table books within a grassroots, not-for-profit environmental organisation was innovative, ambitious, challenging and costly. Brower and the publications committee had the necessary skills to produce the *Series*, but the Club was not a full-time publishing house. As Frugé explains:

[Y]ou can't just publish a book now and then when you want to. You have to have a list every year, or at least every fall, for the Christmas season. That's when the big sale was.<sup>140</sup>

The Club needed to recognise the importance of the publishing cycle, which required a consistent level of publishing output and revenue from sales.<sup>141</sup> Adams argues that there was a disconnection between the Club's Board and Brower regarding the ongoing value of publishing environmental coffee-table books. Following the initial success of *This Is the American Earth*, Adams claims "he [Brower] brought the Sierra Club to the brink of disaster by producing a series of expensive coffee-table books – books with little relevance to the Board's understanding of the American conservation movement."<sup>142</sup>

Did Brower invent the coffee-table book? There is not sufficient evidence to support this claim, but Brower did intend for the *Series* to occupy coffee tables in homes and waiting rooms, so perhaps he emphasised a particular function. As previously noted, Brower, Adams and Newhall intentionally formatted *This Is the American Earth* with the coffee table in mind. McPhee sums up the function of the Exhibit Format books in the following way:

Big, four-pound, creamily beautiful, living-room furniture books that argue the cause of conservation in terms, photographically, of exquisite details from the natural world and, textually, of essences of writers like Thoreau and Muir.<sup>143</sup>

In her interview with Frugé, Reiss did ask if the *Series* was really the beginning of coffee-table books and his response was, "[o]h, there were coffee table books before". Frugé's response confirms that

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<sup>140</sup> Frugé, "A Publisher's Career," 82–83.

<sup>141</sup> Frugé, "A Publisher's Career," 77.

<sup>142</sup> Adams, *Ansel Adams*, 153.

<sup>143</sup> John McPhee, *Encounters with the Archdruid* (New York, USA: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), 15.

Brower did not invent the coffee-table book.<sup>144</sup> Reiss does not pursue the coffee-table book question further, therefore it is not clear whether other publishers influenced Brower or whether *The Exhibit Format Series* inspired other publishers. Turner argues that “big, lavish art books” did exist before Brower, but that he was instrumental in combining “fine photography and stirring words with a conservation message”.<sup>145</sup> As I have argued in this thesis, the coffee-table book is a discursive object, leaving it open to multiple definitions. But if a coffee-table book is defined literally by display on a coffee table, then Brower may have a special claim to inspiring this function of the *Series* and he was perhaps instrumental in producing and popularising a certain type of coffee-table book.

Brower did have insight into the challenges he presented to organisational management by stating that “I keep saying I didn’t leave the Sierra Club, I didn’t leave Friends of the Earth, I don’t leave Earth Island: I don’t leave organizations, I just get bypassed.”<sup>146</sup> However, he lacked insight into how his actions impacted on the Club and his long-term relationships. He admits to being stunned when Adams was the first to call for his removal over issues of authorisation, as he had not realised their friendship had deteriorated to that point.<sup>147</sup> Perhaps the nature of great visionaries is their ability to see and act on big issues while overlooking the issues closest to them. It could be argued that such single-minded visionaries are not suited to functioning within the constraints of organisational procedures. The Club, however, persevered for seventeen years; such was Brower’s influence.

Did Brower possess the attributes of an innovator as outlined by Dyer et al. in Chapter One? The first book in the *Series* required Brower’s vision. Reproducing a photographic exhibition in a large-

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<sup>144</sup> Frugé, “A Publisher’s Career,” 75.

<sup>145</sup> Turner, *David Brower: The Making of the Environmental Movement*, 94–95.

<sup>146</sup> Brower, “Reflections on The Sierra Club,” 13.

<sup>147</sup> Brower, “Environmental Activist,” 217.

format book was not a surprising move given the example of *The Family of Man*, but it was innovative because the medium he chose *did* have an impact on the environmental movement:<sup>148</sup>

[Innovator's] ignore safe questions and opt for crazy ones, challenging the status quo and often threatening the powers the be with uncommon intensity and frequency.<sup>149</sup>

Brower approached most activities with intense passion and vision. A famous example of this characteristic was his placement of a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times* on January 14, 1969, when he asked people to take action on his proposal that the Earth be declared a National Park.<sup>150</sup> Another quality of the innovator is the ability to observe. As noted, when Brower observed how people were inspired by the photographic exhibition of *This Is the American Earth* it provided the impetus for the *Series*. Networking is also a key asset and Brower worked hard behind the scenes to directly connect the books in the *Series* to donors, members and politicians. However, as noted previously by Adams, Brower's crusading manner often sullied his relationships with government agencies and organisations. Finally, experimenting is important in proving what might be possible.<sup>151</sup> Although Brower took a risk with the first book in the *Series* he proved that there was a market for environmental coffee-table books. His experiment particularly came to fruition with the success of *In Wildness*, the fourth book in the *Series*, which proved that a large market existed for full-colour coffee-table books. This coincided with the growing popularisation of coffee-table books in America, Britain and Australia.

Entrepreneurs are often viewed as competent business people. However, Brower's achievements coupled with his managerial flaws sheds light on the fact that possessing entrepreneurial flair does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with business acumen. However, Brower *did* make it clear from the outset that if the Club's money was not spent on saving the environment, the ultimate cost would be the Earth. Brower had a vision driven by passion and desperation because his focus was on the

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<sup>148</sup> Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen, *The Innovator's DNA*, 41.

<sup>149</sup> Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen, *The Innovator's DNA*, 65–66.

<sup>150</sup> Brower David, *New York Times (1923–Current File)*. "'National Park'." September 5, 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/docview/118488281?accountid=12528>.

<sup>151</sup> Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen, *The Innovator's DNA*, 133–134.

Earth, an object so immense it affected everyone. The recollections and reflections by Brower and his colleagues on the Brower years imbue the *Series* with a social history full of challenges, successes, failures, and emotions. Was the *Series* an inspired vision or an expensive folly? As Cohen notes, David Brower's determination in pursuing the publication of *The Exhibit Format Series* became an integral part of the Club: "[T]he Club would come to be known in some circles not as an organisation but as the producer of Sierra Club books."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club*, 259.



## Chapter Six

### Breaking the mould: Conspicuous commodification

Despite, or perhaps because of, his success, Hamlyn was ignored, deplored or patronized by the publishing establishment.

Iain Stevenson<sup>1</sup>

Paul Hamlyn was, without question, one of the most influential British publishers of the post-war period. However, as Stevenson points out, his achievements have often been minimised or ignored. Hamlyn was not averse to conspicuous consumption, which affronted his British book publishing “colleagues”. One of his personal indulgences, regarded as a symbol of bad taste, was his famous pink Rolls Royce.<sup>2</sup> Hamlyn’s tendency for making ostentatious gestures extended to chartering a 707 jumbo jet to fly colleagues and staff to Australia for the launch in 1965 of Hamlyn Australia.<sup>3</sup> With his “taste for natty dressing and fast cars”, Hamlyn brought a breath of fresh air to the staid image of the British publishing establishment.<sup>4</sup> His conspicuous displays of wealth were symbolic of the innovations he brought to the British book trade.

Hamlyn established a remainder book business, published well-crafted, affordable books for a new book-buying market and sold books in markets and department stores. He challenged all the traditions of British publishing and succeeded. According to former work colleagues, Philip Jarvis and Sue Thomson, Hamlyn also set out to “bring something new and worthwhile into the lives of people who were limited by lack of privilege or capacity—financial, social or cultural.”<sup>5</sup> The ease with which people walk into bookstores today can be attributed to Hamlyn’s vision for democratising the whole book-buying experience. Initially viewed as an “outsider” in British

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<sup>1</sup> Iain Stevenson, *Book Makers: British Publishing in the Twentieth Century* (London, UK: The British Library, 2010), 138.

<sup>2</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 139.

<sup>3</sup> Derek Freeman (British publisher and former colleague of Paul Hamlyn), “Paul Hamlyn and coffee-table books,” in discussion with Christine Elliott, April 15, 2015, London, UK. Digital recording. See also: Philip Jarvis and Sue Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn: “There Must Be Another Way ...”,” in *Immigrant Publishers: The Impact of Expatriate Publishers in Britain and America in the 20th Century*, eds. Richard Abel and William Gordon Graham (New Brunswick, USA: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 59.

<sup>4</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 52.

<sup>5</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 53.

publishing, Hamlyn received the highest of establishment awards in the end and his contribution to publishing could not be ignored. He was awarded a CBE and he was made a British Life Peer.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, Hamlyn used his publishing fortune to set up the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, which continues to run a range of programs to help people overcome disadvantage and lack of opportunity.

Much has been written about Hamlyn's career in books and articles as a significant figure in British publishing history by both his former colleagues and book historians. This British case-study draws on these works as well as British oral history archives, an audio documentary with commentary by Hamlyn, former colleagues, family, friends and authors, as well as more recent interviews conducted by me with Derek Freeman and Kevin Weldon. This material is brought together in this study to examine the way advances in colour print technology, together with social change and innovation, helped to popularise coffee-table books in post-war Britain and democratise the consumption of books and culture. Hamlyn's innovations and business flair succeeded because his new ideas operated outside of the established "rules" of publishing and he managed to break the mould. Prior to Hamlyn entering the industry after the war, the image of British publishing was somewhat stuffy and regulated by the Net Book Agreement, and Hamlyn's modern approach did much to attract the attention of new consumers following the austere war years. Stevenson argues that British publishing had had its "fair share of rapacious, ruthless and restless entrepreneurs, as handy with a balance sheet as a manuscript" however, the public perception of publishing to the end of the 1960s was one of a "cultivated image of literary gentility", inhabited by "tweed-jacketed *literateurs*, privately educated and supported by private incomes".<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John Calder, *Guardian News and Media*. "Lord Hamlyn: Pioneering Populist Publisher whose Philanthropy helped Labour, Education and the Arts." January 13, 2017.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2001/sep/03/guardianobituaries.politics>

<sup>7</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 203.

As this chapter will demonstrate, Hamlyn's role in the book trade is noteworthy for his influence in creating new publishing and book selling models. Though, Hamlyn was not the first British publisher to publish and sell popular books and influence the British book trade. During the 1930s Allan Lane dominated the industry. Along with other publishers such as "Dent, Oxford, Nelson, Collins and Macmillan" cheap reprint novels were published. Lane's Penguin books were particularly notable for their combined quality, accessibility and affordability, which he aimed at a non-book buying market.<sup>8</sup> Like Lane, Hamlyn also dominated the British book trade during his own publishing era. The important point here is that Hamlyn found new ways to commercialise and popularise books outside the existing market.<sup>9</sup> Despite the British publishing establishment's initial disdain for Hamlyn's approach to publishing, as book historian Iain Stevenson points out, Hamlyn was a "figure of genuine cultural importance" even though he "invent[ed] the new, rather disturbing category of consumer publishing."<sup>10</sup>

Although his name will forever be associated with the (truly useful and high-quality) books on cookery, gardening, needlework and interior decoration that bear his imprint, he also successfully brought words and, most importantly, pictures of art, architecture, music and theatre to readers who had never be able to own – or even see – such lavishly produced books before.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 6.1 and 6.2 feature front covers and dust jackets from six Hamlyn coffee-table books, in categories that appealed to a wide range of tastes: *World Architecture: An Illustrated History* (1963); *Buses, Trolleys & Trams* (1967); *Art Treasures in the British Isles: Monuments, Masterpieces, Commissions and Collections* (1969); *Dictionary of Needlework: An Encyclopaedia of Artistic, Plain and Fancy Needlework* (1972); *Illustrated History of Rock Music* (1978) and *Cigarette Pack Art* (1979).

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<sup>8</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 102.

<sup>9</sup> Eric de Bellaigue lists the occurrences and attributes Lane and Hamlyn had in common, even though their achievements differed widely. See, Eric de Bellaigue, *British Book Publishing as a Business since the 1960s* (London, UK: The British Library, 2004), 31.

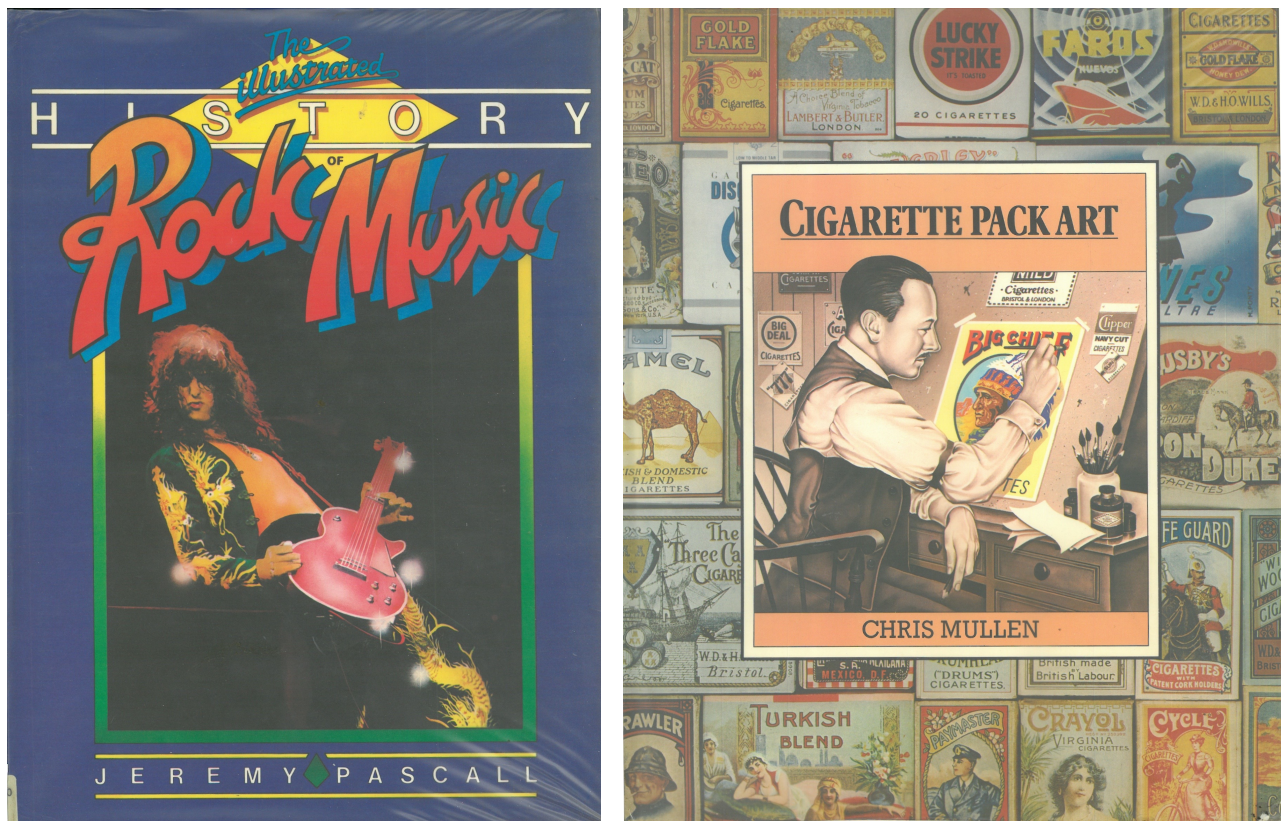
<sup>10</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 139-140.

<sup>11</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 139.



**Figure 6.1:** Front covers and dust jackets, *World Architecture: An Illustrated History* by Lloyd Seton; *Buses, Trolleys & Trams* by Charles Dunbar; *Art Treasures in the British Isles: Monuments, Masterpieces, Commissions and Collections* by general editors; *Dictionary of Needlework: An Encyclopaedia of Artistic and Plain and Fancy Needlework* by Sophia Caulfeild and Blanche C. Saward. (Source: State Library of Victoria. Scanned images.)





**Figure 6.2:** Dust jackets, *Illustrated History of Rock Music* by Jeremy Pascall and *Cigarette Pack Art* by Chris Mullen. (Source: State Library of Victoria. Scanned images.)

Notably, Stevenson underscores Hamlyn's role in the democratisation of the book market even though his focus was consumer publishing. Hamlyn recognised an emerging market that would appreciate consuming information in a pleasurable format. Consumers could purchase books while shopping in department stores and supermarkets. Attractively packaged full-colour coffee-table books about the arts and practical pursuits, introduced a non-specialist audience to topics in an accessible form.<sup>12</sup> In doing so, Hamlyn reformed revolutionised the British book trade by breaking *all* the “rules”. He is a perfect illustration of Schumpeter's claim that entrepreneurs and innovators “reform or revolutionize” in order to create new pathways for business and commodities.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 139.

<sup>13</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, 117.

## **“Business-like” not a business**

As an astute businessman, Hamlyn approached book publishing with a business mindset. He had no ideals about his product, he simply wanted to publish books that were accessible, attractive, available and appealing to consumers at a cost-effective price point. British publishers’ common disdain for the business side of publishing was often to their detriment, largely because they often over-estimated the interest in their books and published too many copies that remained unsold. Unimpeded by the tradition, Hamlyn forged ahead with his own business model and challenged a long-held view that publishing was somehow a business but not quite business-like.<sup>14</sup>

According to Warburg, British publishers regarded publishing as a gentlemen’s vocation, where financial dealings were rather distasteful.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, Hamlyn was comfortable with making business deals and used this skill to advantage. One of his first forays into the book trade was selling remaindered books at markets from a barrow. The acquisition of other publisher’s unsold stocks created a lucrative remainder business for Hamlyn and a new avenue of business for dealing with unsold stock languishing in warehouses. Jarvis and Thomson state that the usual method of pulping books was costly, it offended authors, and did not reflect well on a publisher’s business.<sup>16</sup> Although establishment publishers resented a non-conformist upstart like Hamlyn, they at least recognised that they could now make some money from selling their remaindered stocks.<sup>17</sup> One reason for so much remaindered stock business was that traditional publishers focused on the cultural output of publishing rather than its business. As Hyman notes, senior positions in the publishing industry were dominated by men and an Oxbridge-educated owner was more concerned

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<sup>14</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 203.

<sup>15</sup> Fredric Warburg, *An Occupation for Gentlemen* (London, UK: Hutchinson, 1959), 277.

<sup>16</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 54-55.

<sup>17</sup> Sue Thomson, “The Circles Make Themselves,” in *The British Book Trade: An Oral History*, ed. Sue Bradley (London, UK: The British Library, 2008), 268. See also: biographical notes on Sue Thomson’s book trade career, 312.

with a fine literary tradition rather than a profit.<sup>18</sup> The industry was dominated by distinguished publishers such as Sir Stanley Unwin and Sir Basil Blackwell, as well as Collins and Heinemann who, according to Graham, felt a sense of entitlement and destiny to publish books that the market should read.<sup>19</sup> In his 1959 autobiography, *An Occupation for Gentlemen*, Warburg acknowledges that in the end he had to face the real truth behind the large losses at Secker & Warburg, even though the company published well-known authors such as Wells and Orwell: “[t]he fact was that I was a fool in handling money and incompetent in dealing with sales.”<sup>20</sup>

Hamlyn, on the other hand, did not have had the lofty literary aspirations. He was financially literate and unafraid to try new strategies to engage customers. He was not in the book business to placate the publishing establishment who, according to Jarvis and Thomson, largely ostracised him, nor did he wish to join the “club”.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, his ability to make unexpected business moves was a great asset because it “aided his multi-faceted attack on the established way of doing things in the book trade.”<sup>22</sup> He separated his operation from the enclave of publishing houses in Covent Garden, Bloomsbury and Mayfair by setting up a warehouse in Kentish Town.<sup>23</sup> Hamlyn’s ground-breaking changes coincided with a new era of modernity, where “[t]he shift from traditional home values to a less formal, more fashion-and design-conscious awareness was symptomatic of social changes experienced by a new, younger generation of consumers from the 1950s.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, the changing nature of people’s relationships with books was also influenced by social change.

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<sup>18</sup> Robin Hyman, “The Circles Make Themselves,” in *The British Book Trade: An Oral History*, ed. Sue Bradley (London, UK: The British Library, 2008), 275. See also: biographical notes on Robin Hyman’s book trade career, 308.

<sup>19</sup> Gordon Graham, “Changing Hands,” in *The British Book Trade: An Oral History*, ed. Sue Bradley (London, UK: The British Library, 2008), 286. See also: biographical notes on Gordon Graham’s book trade career, 307.

<sup>20</sup> Warburg, *An Occupation*, 277. See also: Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 203.

<sup>21</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 52.

<sup>22</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 52.

<sup>23</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 138.

<sup>24</sup> Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham, *A View from the Interior: Women and Design* (London, UK: The Women's Press, 1995), 227. See also: Attfield, “Design as a Practice of Modernity,” 271.

Stevenson notes that Hamlyn's beautifully designed coffee-table lifestyle books became integrated into the aesthetics of the domestic sphere.<sup>25</sup> His books were so popular that Freeman describes "Hamlyn [as] the Allen Lane of illustrated publishing, [. . .] Allen Lane invented the paperback and Paul Hamlyn really invented the large-format illustrated industry as it became known."<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note here that both Lane and Hamlyn's "inventions" emerged in different eras of social change and prosperity. As Stevenson notes, Lane completely dominated British book publishing in the 1930s as Britain emerged from a global recession and Hamlyn thrived in the post-war era.<sup>27</sup> Given Hamlyn's central role in modernising British publishing and shifting the industry from being "business-like" to a business, how did he develop his particular style of doing business and what drew him to the business of book publishing and selling?

## The formative years

Paul Hamlyn, born Paul Hamburger emigrated with his family from Berlin to London in 1933 via Edinburgh when he was six-years-old after escaping the threat of Nazi persecution.<sup>28</sup> Hamlyn's father was a well-regarded pediatrician who was "cultured and bookish." Once the family had settled, Hamlyn was sent to a Quaker boarding school. There he displayed a "sense of fun and irreverence towards orthodoxy and conformity" but students regularly mocked his surname, hence his name change later in life.<sup>29</sup> While his academic achievements were unremarkable, his innovative approach to life was evident from a young age. As his daughter Jane Hamlyn recalls:

The school was vegetarian [and] Paul being an entrepreneur decided that the way he could make a bit of money was, he persuaded the school that he was very interested in photography

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<sup>25</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 138.

<sup>26</sup> Freeman, "Paul Hamlyn and coffee-table books."

<sup>27</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 73.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Abel and William Gordon Graham, eds., *Immigrant Publishers: The Impact of Expatriate Publishers in Britain and America in the 20th Century*. (New Brunswick, USA: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 4.

<sup>29</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, "Paul Hamlyn," 51.



and that he needed his own dark room and the school agreed. But in fact he wasn't making photographs, he was sort of frying up sausages and bacon and selling it to his colleagues.<sup>30</sup>

By the age of sixteen, he left school, embarked on a working life and managed to experience a variety of jobs along the way.<sup>31</sup> He was employed as an office boy with *Country Life* magazine during the war years and at times he was called upon to write correspondence for the letters page. In his own words, Hamlyn approached the job with a sense of fun by writing himself letters and then answering them.<sup>32</sup> Former British Labour politician, Neil Kinnock, states that in 1944, Hamlyn spent three years working in the coal mines of South Wales as one of the "Bevin Boys". They were adolescent boys conscripted to work in the coal mines while the adult miners were away at war. "Mainly middle-class kids with posh accents" but they were warmly welcomed by the community, which contrasted to the mostly terrifying experience of being 1500 feet underground in a wet pit where Hamlyn felt not of much use. It was tough but helped the war effort.<sup>33</sup> Unwin adds that during Hamlyn's time as a Bevin Boy, he moonlighted as a journalist on a part-time basis "for the South Wales Argus, as an excursion coach driver and as a weekend rep for a paperback publisher."<sup>34</sup> Britain, like Australia, needed to employ teenage boys in positions normally held by adult males, in view of the depleted workforce while adult men were away fighting the war. This situation afforded young people experiences or opportunities that otherwise may not have been available to them.

Upon completing his National Service, Hamlyn secured a clerical job working for Samuel French who published theatre scripts. He then worked as a sales assistant at Zwemmer's bookstore, which was to later influence his foray into art publishing.<sup>35</sup> Hamlyn gained his first insights into the book trade as a trader to the bookstores on Charing Cross Road and even had a stint as an author of

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<sup>30</sup> "Paul Hamlyn: An Oral History," Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2012. Sound recording. Accessed, June 25, 2013. <http://www.phf.org.uk/about-phf/paul-hamlyn/>.

<sup>31</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, "Paul Hamlyn," 51.

<sup>32</sup> "Paul Hamlyn: An Oral History."

<sup>33</sup> "Paul Hamlyn: An Oral History."

<sup>34</sup> Peter Unwin, ed. *Newcomers' Lives: The Story of Immigrants as Told in Obituaries from The Times*. (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2012), 157.

<sup>35</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 137.

“innocent paperback romances.”<sup>36</sup> Although he had changed his surname from Hamburger to Hamlyn after searching the H section of the telephone book he did not entirely escape further name calling during his working life. For example, when he began selling remaindered books from a barrow at Camden Market he was referred to demeaningly as a “barrow boy” by the publishing establishment.<sup>37</sup> As Thomson notes, Hamlyn’s innovations were already beginning to generate resentment:

Paul was a great success the minute he laid hands on his first barrow, as the saying goes. But he wasn’t a barrow boy. He bought up publishers’ remainders and sold them successfully in all sorts of unlikely outlets as well as through the conventional book trade, and it was somewhat resented.<sup>38</sup>

Successfully selling other publishers’ remaindered books at a market put the publishing establishment offside on two accounts. First, Hamlyn challenged the convention of selling books only in bookstores and, secondly, he was able to turn over stock that would have otherwise languished in warehouses at great loss to their publishers.

Hamlyn’s exposure to the book trade at Zwemmer’s art bookstore on Charing Cross Road was significant in developing his publishing predilections. Halliday notes that Zwemmer’s played a key role in the “microcosm of the British contemporary art scene, simultaneously a substitute library for its key figures, a publisher of contemporary art books at a time when they were under-represented in Britain and a gallery for contemporary art from 1929.”<sup>39</sup> Zwemmer’s specialised in fine art and scholarly books, which comprised “new, remaindered and second-hand and antiquarian books.”<sup>40</sup> The influence of Zwemmer’s bookshop was vast; it became a focus for networking in Britain and across Europe, it supplied libraries and was a source of education, particularly art education for children.<sup>41</sup> Anton Zwemmer also published co-editions, which later became a key factor in

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<sup>36</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 51.

<sup>37</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 137. See also: Nyburg, *Émigrés*, 201.

<sup>38</sup> Thomson, “The Circles Make Themselves,” 268.

<sup>39</sup> Nigel Vaux Halliday, *More than a Bookshop: Zwemmer's and Art in the 20th Century* (London, UK: Philip Wilson 1991), 79. See also: Nyburg, *Émigrés*, 82.

<sup>40</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 137.

<sup>41</sup> Nyburg, *Émigrés*, 82.

Hamlyn's publishing business.<sup>42</sup> While international foreign co-editions are commonplace today, Freeman notes that Hamlyn was a significant innovator in publishing books in French, German, Italian and Spanish.<sup>43</sup>

Later, Zwemmer's became more than a just a bookstore, just as, later, Paul Hamlyn became much more than a publisher of books. Hamlyn innovated in the areas of book publishing, marketing and distribution, all of which was motivated by his desire to "make changes wherever he found an inconvenient or prejudiced restriction."<sup>44</sup> As the "black sheep" of his family, a trait recognised in him by his nanny and his father, he happily lived up to the role. Jarvis and Thomson argue that this orientation drove all of his business life.<sup>45</sup> While his various working experiences may have seemed like a grab bag of jobs, Hamlyn demonstrated that he was someone willing to give anything a go and took opportunities as they presented themselves and paid close attention to book trade innovators such as Anton Zwemmer. He was also part of a cohort of Jewish émigrés who contributed to the arts and cultural industries.

## **An eye for the book business**

Hamlyn's key objective was to "create highly saleable products in the shape of books with eye appeal that said 'pick me up and buy me and you won't be disappointed.'"<sup>46</sup> Graham argues that Hamlyn was viewed as "someone who had no sense of tradition and regarded books as a commodity." There was a belief among the establishment that British books were somehow "special" but according to Hamlyn "they were just books" and Hamlyn proved that books could be produced, marketed and distributed like any other commodity.<sup>47</sup> He targeted a cohort of people not in the habit of purchasing books. Graham notes that this contrasted with the publishing establishment who published books they thought the market should read and regarded the business

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<sup>42</sup> Freeman, "Coffee-table books." See also: Nyburg, *Émigrés*, 82.

<sup>43</sup> Freeman, "Coffee-table books."

<sup>44</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, "Paul Hamlyn," 51.

<sup>45</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, "Paul Hamlyn," 52.

<sup>46</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, "Paul Hamlyn," 64.

<sup>47</sup> Graham, "Changing Hands," 286.

side of publishing as a necessary evil.<sup>48</sup> While their approach to publishing involved lofty ideals of a “higher calling”, it was ultimately an unsustainable model for meeting the needs of an era of social change with an expanding market of new consumers. A consequence of not “reading” the changing needs of the market was that when some books failed to reach their expected sales, publishers were left with excess stock or remainders.

Not one to let a business opportunity pass, Hamlyn was regarded as an opportunist by the trade. In reality, he was taking advantage of the fact, as Thomson puts it, that most traditional publishers had “no idea how to discipline their stock control.” As paper became available again in the post-war era, this new phenomenon of unsold stock increased.<sup>49</sup> To put it another way, several publishers failed to adjust to the new post-war conditions. Jarvis and Thomson argue that during the war and for a time afterwards, “[p]ublishers rationed deliveries of bestsellers, and retailers got into the habit of over-ordering in order to pre-empt the cuts.” When material supplies returned to normal, orders were delivered in full, which left warehouses and bookstore shelves groaning with an oversupply of books.<sup>50</sup> This situation highlights the British book trade’s entrenched systems and attitudes, which responded slowly to the changing circumstances. Hamlyn, by contrast, was able to recognise the signs of social change and saw an opportunity to turn unprofitable excess stock into a profitable remainders business.

In 1948 Hamlyn decided that he did not want to continue working for someone else and used the £350, left by his Grandfather for his education, to start his own business. This began slowly until luck and his business instincts intervened. As he explains himself:

I had a mad idea that really what this country needed was a whole host of different sorts of bookshops and I bought the lease for £200 of a shop in Parkway, in Camden Town hoping that lots of people in Camden Town would buy books. This of course proved to be a dismal disaster.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Graham, “Changing Hands,” 286.

<sup>49</sup> Thomson, “The Circles Make Themselves,” 268.

<sup>50</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 54.

<sup>51</sup> “Paul Hamlyn: An Oral History.”

With trial and error, Hamlyn made mistakes and learnt from them. Being in the right place at the right time provided a lifeline to Hamlyn's business. "A near perfect sense of timing", according to Jarvis and Thomson, was "one of Paul's universally recognized assets...something he cultivated by being secret about his future plans," a skill he used as a proficient poker player.<sup>52</sup> From an almost dismal disaster, Hamlyn's fortunes changed when a surge of visitors started coming to Camden Town in late 1949 owing to the birth of a polar bear cub called Brumas at the London Zoo. As the zoo was around the corner from his bookstore, the crowds of about 50,000 people a day would arrive by tube and walk past his shop to see Brumas. Sensing an opportunity, Hamlyn filled his shop with Brumas picture books and proceeded to stand outside the shop selling the books like newspapers. This initiative resulted in the sale of thousands of books, which kept the business solvent.<sup>53</sup> Hamlyn's proactive approach to this publishing and bookselling opportunity is an early example of the way he would continue to innovate in the book trade. He had the ability to sense a gap in the market and quickly responded to meet the demands of a market that had not previously existed. Thus, he bypassed the usual need for book consumers to step over the threshold of a bookstore to purchase books. He also captured impulse purchases from people on their way to or from the Zoo with a memento of the "reigning star" at the zoo.<sup>54</sup> Hamlyn's response to the Brumas phenomenon was a significant turning point in British publishing history. He created a new concept in publishing, marketing and distributing books that would change the way British publishers did business. Unwin makes the point that Hamlyn's remainder business and the success of the Brumas book provided "a side-door entry" into publishing by "[financing] his entry into real publishing with the establishment of Spring Books and Hamlyn Books."<sup>55</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, this "ease of entry" into the book publishing industry supports Curtain's claim that the ability to enter

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<sup>52</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, "Paul Hamlyn," 53.

<sup>53</sup> "Paul Hamlyn: An Oral History." Hamlyn does not clarify as to whether he produced the Brumas books himself or whether he sold Brumas books published by other publishers.

<sup>54</sup> Unwin, *Newcomers' Lives*, 158.

<sup>55</sup> Unwin, *Newcomers' Lives*, 158.

the book publishing business is relatively easy compared to other media such as newspapers and broadcasting, both of which may require considerably more capital and investment in infrastructure.<sup>56</sup>

## **A whole new concept**

As mentioned previously, working at Zwemmer's bookstore gave Hamlyn exposure to the book trade as well as the idea that a market existed for selling beautiful books at reasonable prices.<sup>57</sup> He was convinced that there had to be another way of approaching the economies of publishing and wanted to extend his business beyond being a remainders merchant. As Jarvis and Thomson note, Hamlyn held the view that "[i]f books could be designed to appeal to a wide range of shoppers and carry prices that tempted them, then there was no reason why he should depend on publishers' mistakes."<sup>58</sup>

Following his success with the Brumas book, Hamlyn had raised enough capital to launch his new concept, Books for Pleasure (BfP) in 1949. In Stevenson's view, BfP was Hamlyn's greatest innovation because it really put his stamp on the British book trade as it was an "entirely new concept in publishing, book marketing and distribution, created by a natural entrepreneur with a flair for design and an instinctive sense of what the public wanted."<sup>59</sup> The BfP books were all non-fiction and beautifully produced, on topics such as art, cookery, travel and lifestyle, and all in full-colour. With more affluence and leisure time, people were drawn to books that indulged areas of interest in a new visual form. BfP books were unlike anything seen on the British market before and, as Stevenson puts it, soon the "newly acquired coffee-tables of 1950s Britain groaned" with Hamlyn books.<sup>60</sup> Stevenson underlines the assumption that the natural habitat for coffee-table books was the coffee table. As discussed in Chapter Four coffee tables were multipurpose, therefore

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<sup>56</sup> Curtain, "Book Publishing," 103-106.

<sup>57</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 137.

<sup>58</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, "Paul Hamlyn," 55-56.

<sup>59</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 137.

<sup>60</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 138.

coffee-table books may not have always resided on coffee tables. Hamlyn's philosophy for BfP was always clear:

It's often been said that my books have sex appeal. I believe they have. They have to look interesting. People should want to touch them, open them, look at them and you should be able to buy a book, you should be able to get pleasure and enjoyment from it and the important thing is, that you should want to buy another book and when I started my company I called it Books for Pleasure...the message simply being—books give you pleasure. They give you pleasure for a tiny amount of money and the market was ten times bigger than anybody thought.<sup>61</sup>

Hamlyn's Books for Pleasure concept extended into music, with the development of Music for Pleasure. Jarvis and Thomson describe the music industry as similarly restrictive in its practices as the publishing industry. Companies such as EMI and Decca controlled which music retailers could sell their records and at what price.<sup>62</sup> Yet Hamlyn was able to break through the book trade's restrictive trade barriers by negotiating a deal.

[Hamlyn made] a joint venture with EMI which gave Music for Pleasure the exclusive right to market a budget range of long-playing records through an unlimited range of retail outlets and within three years, Music for Pleasure became the "biggest selling label in the business."<sup>63</sup>

One could argue that Hamlyn's book and music concepts became part of the visual and audio atmospherics of post-war British living rooms. living rooms.

Stevenson identifies several factors that contributed to the success of Hamlyn's new publishing business concept. These were: seeking cheaper colour printing, creating window displays, and using the media for marketing and selling his books in alternative outlets. Importantly, Hamlyn sought cheaper colour printing in Czechoslovakia to keep prices down and his attractive window displays drew people into his shop. He placed advertisements in catalogues and even advertised on television to market Hamlyn books and sold them in department stores and food retailers.<sup>64</sup> Notably, he was the first publisher to pioneer point-of-sale merchandising. "[He provided] his retailers with custom-designed stands and 'spinners', which his sales representatives would fill with new and established

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<sup>61</sup> "Paul Hamlyn: An Oral History."

<sup>62</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, "Paul Hamlyn," 65.

<sup>63</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, "Paul Hamlyn," 65.

<sup>64</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 137-138.

titles without waiting for the seller to order.”<sup>65</sup> Jarvis argues that Hamlyn’s approach in completely reversing the normal procedure for developing books also contributed significantly to his success. The usual practice for publishers was to wait for a manuscript to come to them but Hamlyn was never a receiver; he was proactive in making a book happen.<sup>66</sup> As Hamlyn himself explains, he would first envisage a book, “above all its selling price”. A production dummy of the book would then be made because he wanted the essential design to pass his test for a book. “I can read you, I can see you, I want to pick you up and I want to buy you.” It was only after the concept had been tested that a writer would be approached.<sup>67</sup>

Hamlyn took an active role in demonstrating the way his new publishing and consumption model successfully disrupted the British publishing landscape. Nyburg makes the point that Hamlyn’s art books came at a time when goods were becoming cheaper in Britain. In particular, younger people had more disposable income and “bought on impulse for their appealing, colourful appearance and low cover price.”<sup>68</sup> She notes that his books were not meant for serious students of art”, as distinct from the art books published by established serious art publishers Thames & Hudson and Phaidon Press.<sup>69</sup> By taking a commercial approach to producing, distributing and marketing books, he treated them like any other commodity in need of wide distribution and marketing to consumers. He invited Philip Jarvis to be his Managing Director because his book and retail experience was extensive. Having been the central book buyer for Boots, which had 140 book departments located in their chemist shops, Jarvis was comfortable seeing books in consumer outlets.<sup>70</sup> Jarvis once famously “told the Society of Young Publishers that ‘books can be sold like soap’.”<sup>71</sup> Hamlyn explains that his overall aim was to make buying books a more pleasurable, less intimidating

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<sup>65</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 137.

<sup>66</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 64.

<sup>67</sup> “Paul Hamlyn: An Oral History.”

<sup>68</sup> Nyburg, *Émigrés*, 202.

<sup>69</sup> Nyburg, *Émigrés*, 202.

<sup>70</sup> Philip Jarvis and Sue Thomson, “The Immigrants: Paul Hamlyn “There must be another way...”,” *LOGOS* 14, 3 (2003): 120.

<sup>71</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “The Immigrants,” 129.



experience for the average person. He regarded bookstores at the time as “dull and dusty”, inhabited by assistants who were “snobs”, which did not work for the general consumer. He wanted to break through this rather outdated image of buying books.<sup>72</sup> Bookstores had been elitist and unapproachable. By making books more available and accessible, Hamlyn democratised book-buying and book ownership by engaging with a market largely ignored by the establishment:

The independent bookshops in those days were fairly intimidating places unless you were a regular book buyer but the sort of spontaneous buying of books that the kind of very popular points of sale that we have now and the very welcoming bookshops that we have now, it didn't really exist in the 50s and 60s.<sup>73</sup>

Another key aspect of Hamlyn's success, was that he surrounded himself with experienced book trade people who embraced his model of producing and selling books. He employed Michael Gibson and Joan Clibbon for their editorial expertise and Philip Jarvis who had long been a strong advocate for creating new book-buying markets.<sup>74</sup> He also “recruited extrovert sales managers such as Lionel Cordell and Bill Dancer, who had no inhibitions about the alleged sanctity of books.”<sup>75</sup>

Hamlyn's first wife Eileen Watson, known as Bobbie, was also a great asset to his business.

Richard Baldwin, a Hamlyn employee, recalls the key role Bobbie played in the business, particularly when the company held large book promotions in department stores all around the country. Bobbie would arrive in a fur coat, put on her apron and work tirelessly all day. She was a hard worker and a great salesperson with the ability to relate to a wide range of people.<sup>76</sup>

## **Acquiring forms of capital**

Yet, apart from being an innovator, why was Hamlyn such a successful publisher? As discussed in Chapter One, Bourdieu's field theory is useful for understanding the way different types of capital can determine the success or otherwise of a publishing house. With this theory in mind, it is

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<sup>72</sup> “Paul Hamlyn: An Oral History.”

<sup>73</sup> Sue Thomson (former production manager, Thames & Hudson), “NLSC: Book Trade Lives,” in discussion with Sue Bradley, (2004): NLSC: Book Trade Lives, C827/64/06, Tape Recording F15885, Tape 9 Side A of 18, The British Library, London UK. Accessed April 11, 2015.

<sup>74</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 56.

<sup>75</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 55.

<sup>76</sup> “Paul Hamlyn: An Oral History.”

important to note that Hamlyn successfully acquired all forms of capital.<sup>77</sup> He may not have articulated the field of publishing in terms of capital, but he instinctively acquired it. First, he was adept at taking risks and acquired economic capital through the creation of a remainders business and then had success with his own publications. Secondly, he acquired intellectual capital by negotiating ongoing legal entitlements to any prints or reprints, which was a skill learned from Anton Zwemmer. Jarvis and Thomson note the sale of translation rights as a key example:

In 1959, Paul pulled off what was later agreed to be the best copyright purchase of a non-fiction title of all time, when he bought outright English-language and Scandinavian rights to *Larousse Gastronomique* and *Mythology* and two other encyclopaedias for less than £1,000—a sum which was later to turn into millions.<sup>78</sup>

Figure 6.2 features two front covers from Hamlyn's Larousse series: *Larousse Encyclopedia of Prehistoric and Ancient Art* (1962) and *Larousse Encyclopedia of Byzantine and Medieval Art* (1963).



**Figure 6.3:** Dust jackets, *Larousse Encyclopedia of Prehistoric and Ancient Art* edited by Rene Huyghe and *Larousse Encyclopedia of Byzantine and Medieval Art* edited by Rene Huyghe. (Source: State Library of Victoria. Scanned images.)

<sup>77</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 3–14.

<sup>78</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 57.

Hamlyn also acquired human, social, and symbolic capital, through the appointment of staff with specific expertise in different areas of publishing. This was a strategic move because experienced staff not only brought with them accumulated knowledge and contacts but demonstrated that Hamlyn was not threatened by the expertise of others. Rather, he harnessed the knowledge of others in the areas in which he lacked experience. His appointment of Philip Jarvis was particularly significant, not only for his expertise, but because he brought respect to the business. This was important to Hamlyn because he was well aware that he was not respected by the British publishing establishment. Jarvis was a “council member of the Booksellers Association, and this appointment helped to bring respectability and authority to Paul’s *enfant terrible* image.”<sup>79</sup> This appointment also helped raise the cultural status and profile of Hamlyn’s publishing business. As Thompson argues, the accumulation of symbolic capital plays a key role in the way a publisher is perceived: “most publishers want to be seen by others as organizations that publish works of ‘quality’, however that might be defined (and there are many ways it can be).”<sup>80</sup> Although Hamlyn did not care to join the establishment, he wanted their respect for his achievements and Jarvis’s appointment raised Hamlyn’s symbolic capital.

Hamlyn’s affordable coffee-table art books also contributed to the democratisation of art. The ‘quality’ of Hamlyn’s art and lifestyle books was expressed in their materiality as well as the subject matter. Hamlyn books were not only cheap to purchase but they were eye-catching, in full-colour and exhibited fine artists to a non-specialist audience.

Someone once worked out that Hamlyn sold in one year more copies of an illustrated book on Rembrandt (the text written over a weekend by a young art historian called Trewin Copplestone) at ten shillings a copy, than all other British publishers had sold of Rembrandt books in five years.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 56.

<sup>80</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 8.

<sup>81</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 57.

Hamlyn's contribution to the distribution of fine art, supports the claims made by Finkelstein and McCleery<sup>82</sup>, and Kilgour<sup>83</sup> that "the book's" mobility and portability have played a central role in the democratisation of knowledge. As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, coffee-table books played a role in liberating works of art from the confines of galleries and museums and engaged a broader general audience. Art publishing is a field that deals with high-brow artefacts. For example, Hamlyn took commercial advantage of publishing a coffee-table art book that coincided with a gallery exhibition. In the same year that TATE Britain held a Picasso exhibition from July 6 to September 18, in 1960, Hamlyn published a book on Picasso and had it printed in full-colour in Czechoslovakia, where colour printing costs were cheaper. The publication of *Picasso: The Early Years* is another example of Hamlyn's ability to quickly produce a book that took advantage of a high-profile public event, as he did with the Brumas book.<sup>84</sup>

Yet, with Bourdieu's "three zones of taste" in mind, was the *legitimate* art of Picasso devalued because it was popularised by a publisher such as Hamlyn? Or did Hamlyn's coffee-table art book on Picasso bring the artist's work to greater prominence by distributing it widely beyond gallery walls? Given that fine art is now reproduced on tea towels, mugs, and place mats, to name a few, Hamlyn's coffee-table art books could be deemed quite high-brow in hindsight. The important point here, however, is that Hamlyn was instrumental in enabling his market to feel more comfortable about consuming and enjoying books on art and other subjects.

## Non-conformity

Although Hamlyn's coffee-table art books were aimed at a general mass-market, gaining acceptance and respect from the publishing industry for books on high art would have been significant to Hamlyn even though he rejected some of its traditions. Jarvis and Thomson explain:

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<sup>82</sup> Finkelstein and McCleery, *Book History Reader*, 3.

<sup>83</sup> Kilgour, *The Evolution of the Book*, 3.

<sup>84</sup> Jiri Padrta, *Picasso: The Early Years* (London, UK: Paul Hamlyn, 1960).

[Hamlyn's] emotional make-up was an unusual blend of sentimentality and toughness, an almost blatant desire to be loved counterbalanced by an ability to cut out of his life anyone whom he suspected of disloyalty or negativism.<sup>85</sup>

However, part of Hamlyn's success was his non-conformity. This extended to not signing up to the Net Book Agreement, which was the centrepiece of the British book industry that had controlled the pricing and selling of books in Britain since its creation in January 1899:

The principles of the Agreement were that all booksellers who signed up for the scheme were obliged to sell net books at the prices specified by the publishers, no matter what discount terms had been agreed.<sup>86</sup>

As Thompson notes, Hamlyn never signed up to the Net Book Agreement because he felt it was a restriction of trade, but honoured it nonetheless.<sup>87</sup> Thomson does not give any further insights into why Hamlyn honoured the Agreement, but perhaps he did not want to cause any trouble and was already making a lot of money from publishing. Hamlyn's non-conformity also extended to refusing to join the Publishers' Association, formed in late 1895 by a group of forty-nine publishers to draft regulations.<sup>88</sup> The formation of a Publishers' Association was a response to suggested reforms to the trade by the Associated Booksellers, which had been formed in January of the same year. The Publishers' Association allowed publishers to regain control of the book trade with a united front and a stronger voice.<sup>89</sup> The initial membership of the Association comprised the long-established powerful firms, which were mostly London-based. For the smaller, less financially robust firms that joined, "[t]he creation of the Association was essential to give them a united and influential negotiating position with booksellers (and increasingly authors)."<sup>90</sup> Another key objective of the Publishers' Association was to create a Net Book Agreement that would work for

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<sup>85</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, "Paul Hamlyn," 52.

<sup>86</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 14–15.

<sup>87</sup> Sue Thomson (former production manager, Thames & Hudson), "NLSC: Book Trade Lives," in discussion with Sue Bradley, (2004): NLSC: Book Trade Lives, C827/64/06, Tape Recording F15825, Tape 8 Side A of 18, The British Library, London UK. Accessed April 8, 2015.

<sup>88</sup> Thomson, "The Circles Make Themselves," 268.

<sup>89</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 11.

<sup>90</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 13–14.

both publishers and booksellers.<sup>91</sup> Once in place, the Net Book Agreement dictated the way the trade operated. Whitaker points out that “publishers controlled the retailers’ margin”, so publishers wanted high volume turnover at low prices and wide distribution.<sup>92</sup> Stevenson argues that essentially it amounted to price fixing controlled by the Publishers’ Association whereby “all booksellers who signed up for the scheme were obliged to sell net books at the prices specified by the publishers, no matter what discount terms had been agreed upon between the bookseller and publisher.”<sup>93</sup> From the booksellers’ viewpoint, adherence to the Agreement was essential to maintain a viable book-selling business. Non-adherence resulted in the closure of the bookseller’s account, which would have made it difficult to gain access to stock from publishers.<sup>94</sup>

## Colours galore

The advances in full-colour offset printing was one of the key factors in the popularisation of the coffee-table book. As I have argued, coffee-table format cook books are part of the coffee-table book’s story because their development was enabled by the same technology. Furthermore, cookery instructions and techniques were improved by the addition of full-colour, large-format images. When Hamlyn founded Paul Hamlyn Limited in 1960, he released the groundbreaking publication *Cookery in Colour* by well-known British cook Marguerite Patten. According to Patten, it was the “first ever cookery book to have full colour on every page.”<sup>95</sup> Thomson recalls that for a single fee of £800, Patten supplied all the recipes and illustrations for the book.<sup>96</sup> Hamlyn had *Cookery in Colour* printed in Czechoslovakia, where the printer had invested in new four-colour offset

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<sup>91</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 14.

<sup>92</sup> David Whitaker, “Elements of Truth: Net Book Agreement 1962,” in *The British Book Trade: An Oral History*, ed. Sue Bradley (London, UK: The British Library, 2008), 171. See also: biographical notes on David Whitaker’s book trade career, 313.

<sup>93</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 15–16.

<sup>94</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 15.

<sup>95</sup> “Paul Hamlyn: An Oral History.” According to Page, Marguerite Patten was a food advisor to government during the war years, consulting on how to make rations go further. She was also a broadcaster and an early version celebrity TV chef as well as writing numerous cookbooks during her career. Benedicte Page, “Let Her Eat Birthday Cake: British Cookery Icon Marguerite Patten, About to Turn 90, Offers Benedicte Page a Home-cooked Tea,” *The Bookseller* 5201 (2005): 20–21.

<sup>96</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 56.

machinery. This book was one of its first test products.<sup>97</sup> Yet, Patten acknowledges that she had not been aware of the huge risk Hamlyn was taking on publishing her book:

Practically all their money was going on that book. They were really gambling, if you may say, of it being a terrific success. Had I'd been told it was so important to them as a firm, I would have chickened out and wouldn't have done it but anyhow I did do it.<sup>98</sup>

Reflecting on the impact of a full-colour cookbook on a war-weary population, Patten describes the thrill of seeing her copy of the book for the first time:

And then one magic day my copy of the book arrived. Well, to say I was surprised was an understatement. You had vivid colour on vivid colour paper and it was an absolute shock but a wonderful shock because you know even in '62 our lives in Britain were still, I describe it as, rather grey.<sup>99</sup>

Patten remembers that there was colour galore and it provided the sort of exhilaration the country needed. Even though Britain had largely recovered from war, the nation was still poor; people did the best they could, but excitement was lacking.<sup>100</sup> Patten argues that even if *Cookery in Colour* had been a dismal failure, Hamlyn himself would never have been as he was capable of turning anything into a great success.<sup>101</sup> *Cookery in Colour* was a huge commercial success and according to Jarvis and Thomson, “after the first printing 50,000 copies the book was reprinted several times annually for many years.”<sup>102</sup> Page states that subsequent reprints effectively amounted to sales of more than two million copies of *Cookery in Colour* sold.<sup>103</sup>

As Jarvis and Thomson point out, Hamlyn's association with the “state-controlled Czechoslovak agency [ARTIA]” was a crucial component in Paul Hamlyn Limited's success. In order to further his intellectual capital, Hamlyn negotiated a deal granting him exclusive rights to sell their publications in English. “Soon Paul arrived in New York with suitcases of samples and dummies by

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<sup>97</sup> “Paul Hamlyn: An Oral History.”

<sup>98</sup> “Paul Hamlyn: An Oral History.”

<sup>99</sup> “Paul Hamlyn: An Oral History.”

<sup>100</sup> “Paul Hamlyn: An Oral History.”

<sup>101</sup> “Paul Hamlyn: An Oral History.”

<sup>102</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 56.

<sup>103</sup> Page, “Let Her Eat Birthday Cake,” 20–21.

Czech authors, artists and photographers.”<sup>104</sup> Jarvis and Thomson state that Hamlyn negotiated an impressive business deal with Western Printing to publish full-colour children’s books. The formation of this “joint (50/50) company called Golden Pleasure Books [gave Hamlyn] exclusive rights to edit Golden Books into British spelling and print and distribute them in the English-speaking markets other than the US.” Suffice to say, the company was a huge success. After recruiting two experienced marketers, “sales rose from £300,000 in 1959 to over £3m in 1964.” Hamlyn’s publishing successes were hard to ignore although Jarvis and Thomson claim “the doyens of the book trade pretended not to notice.”<sup>105</sup>

An overview of the Production Director’s job for Hamlyn Publishing Group, gives some insight into the Hamlyn’s publishing business and an indication of how central printing costs were to the economics of the Hamlyn model. Sue Thomson commenced as Hamlyn’s Production Director in 1966 after having worked at Foyle’s bookstore, Thames & Hudson, Condé Nast and the *Law Society Gazette*. She describes her role as responsible for the whole of production as well as facilitating operations for the various department managers.<sup>106</sup> The number of titles in production at any one time were two or three hundred. “The job was much less about producing individual books and much more about looking at where the group was buying its printing.”<sup>107</sup> Thomson recalls that the cost of production was somewhere between six and eight million pounds a year, which was huge in those days:

[Apart from] producing several hundred titles per year, [there] was a lot of reprints or [books] reproduced in a different format, [by] reusing existing materials.<sup>108</sup>

The success of any project depended on putting teams together who got on well and determining which staff would suit particular projects. Budget awareness, monitoring and timing were key

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<sup>104</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 57.

<sup>105</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 57.

<sup>106</sup> Thomson, “Biographical Notes,” 312.

<sup>107</sup> Sue Thomson (former production manager, Thames & Hudson), “NLSC: Book Trade Lives,” in discussion with Sue Bradley, (2004): NLSC: Book Trade Lives, C827/64/06, Tape Recording F15885, Tape 9 Side A of 18, The British Library, London UK. Accessed April 11, 2015.

<sup>108</sup> Thomson, “NLSC: Book Trade Lives.”



ingredients for success so that changes could be made when necessary. A global sense of the budget in relation to the market was crucial. If a book was slated for an American Christmas market, it needed to get there on time otherwise a publisher would lose sales. Achieving delivery dates for stock was imperative.<sup>109</sup>

According to Jarvis and Thomson, Hamlyn shocked the book trade when Cecil King of the Mirror Group acquired Hamlyn's company for £2.25m in 1964. The deal also included a "directorship in the International Publishing Corporation (IPC), plus responsibility for all the book publishing in the group."<sup>110</sup> It was the first major deal of its kind for a publishing house. The union-orientated IPC was not a good fit for Hamlyn but the new deal generated a new injection of funds for the Hamlyn Group, which continued to operate as if it was still independent. This resulted in a new surge of publishing:

New books and series poured out as if from a literary cornucopia. Every subject susceptible to the Hamlyn treatment was added to the catalogue. The core buyers remained the mass market of the modestly educated.<sup>111</sup>

According to Snowman, "[b]y the 1960s the cultural face of Britain had been substantially altered by the infusion of talent, drive and ideas from people [such as Paul Hamlyn], whose personal roots were once in Middle Europe."<sup>112</sup> Snowman notes that several European émigrés "[broke] through the invisible barriers that traditionally prevented purveyors of "high" culture from reaching a wide "popular" audience."<sup>113</sup> Snowman's point is particularly pertinent to Hamlyn's experience with sales of his coffee-table art books. As noted earlier, they sometimes sold better than other art books on offer. Hamlyn's books were intentionally aimed at a mass audience but the quality of his inexpensive books meant that he treated his market with respect. As Thomson states, "[the] Paul

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<sup>109</sup> Thomson, "NLSC: Book Trade Lives."

<sup>110</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, "Paul Hamlyn," 58.

<sup>111</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, "Paul Hamlyn," 58.

<sup>112</sup> Daniel Snowman, *The Hitler Emigrés: The Cultural Impact on Britain of Refugees from Nazism* (London, UK: Chatto & Windus, 2002), 286.

<sup>113</sup> Snowman, *The Hitler Emigrés*, 287.

Hamlyn team never underestimated the intelligence of the buyer.”<sup>114</sup> According to Snowman, breaking traditional barriers meant that:

the walls of exclusivity were under assault as the arts became ‘democratised’ and the expansion of the press and television brought in new audiences,” which Hamlyn used to his advantage.<sup>115</sup>

Hamlyn also innovated with book jackets by employing them as a marketing tool. Frequently overlooked by traditional publishers, Hamlyn used the front and back flaps to entice the consumer with messages as to why they should buy the book:

[The] book jackets were designed to show off and with the intention that the whole front jacket would be on display. Each title was explicit, in large type, always in colour and frequently with an encouraging slogan underneath.<sup>116</sup>

Hamlyn even put himself forward for publicity. Though he was a flamboyant dresser and overtly displayed his wealth, Jarvis and Thomson claim that underneath he was a shy person.

## **Hamlyn in Australia**

As Jarvis and Thomson note, Hamlyn “discovered” the book-buying power of the Australian market in the 1960s by finding that although well-known for indulging in outdoor activities, Australians consumed a lot of books per capita.<sup>117</sup> Any sense of the shy Hamlyn seemed to dissipate, however, when he arrived in Australia in 1965 to set up Paul Hamlyn Australia.<sup>118</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, there was much enthusiasm and energy among independent Australian publishers at the time, who had their own issues in trying to circumvent restrictions of trade imposed on them by the British book trade. Hamlyn had developed associations with local publishers such as Lloyd O’Neil when O’Neil worked for Cheshire, and it is likely that this connection would have aided Hamlyn’s entry into the Australian book trade.

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<sup>114</sup> Thomson, “NLSC: Book Trade Lives.”

<sup>115</sup> Snowman, *The Hitler Emigrés*, 287.

<sup>116</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 65.

<sup>117</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 58.

<sup>118</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 52–59.

Operating in a setting of heightened optimism and opportunity allowed Hamlyn's innovative spirit to flourish. For example, he utilised all forms of local Australian media to promote his books and music, which unsurprisingly generated much derision from the more conservative quarters of British publishing back home. As Jarvis and Thomson put it, "Paul became what we would now call, somewhat disparagingly, a 'personality' making radio and TV broadcasts and becoming well known for some of eye-brow-raising comments about the British Establishment."<sup>119</sup> His affinity with Australia was its casual lifestyle and was less steeped in tradition. Jarvis and Thomson state that Hamlyn was able to quickly establish a stake in the Australian market where department stores and supermarkets readily embraced the type of books Hamlyn published, which were "deliberately designed to be popular". This included exploiting what the Australian publishers had already discovered. If the word "Australia" was in the title, twice as many books would be sold.<sup>120</sup> Hamlyn's success was also underpinned by access to large funds from IPC. This allowed him to "[recruit] several irreverent Australians to set up for him a publishing and distributing base in Sydney." Jarvis and Thomson's use of the word irreverent underscores the "pioneering, devil-may-care spirit" that existed in the Australian book trade at the time.<sup>121</sup> According to Australian publisher Frank Thompson, the barriers of years of rigid restrictions on trade imposed by British publishers began to dissolve during the 1960s, resulting in what he prefers to call "larrikin" behaviour of Australian publishers.<sup>122</sup> Having finally been released from the shackles of Britain, Australian publishers were keen to make their mark on local publishing. "There [was] no doubt the 1960s and 1970s were the decades for entrepreneurial publishers who were capable of lateral thinking and game to take risks."<sup>123</sup> For Paul Hamlyn, this energetic, less conventional environment was far more aligned to his approach to publishing than the one he had experienced in Britain.

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<sup>119</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, "Paul Hamlyn," 59.

<sup>120</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, "Paul Hamlyn," 59.

<sup>121</sup> Thompson, "Sixties Larrikins," 33–34.

<sup>122</sup> Thompson, "Sixties Larrikins," 31–34.

<sup>123</sup> Frank Thompson, "Legends in Their Own Lunchtimes: Australian Publishing Since 1960," *Publishing Studies* 1, 1 (1995): 31.

In 1965, Hamlyn appointed Kevin Weldon as Chief Executive of Paul Hamlyn Australia. As Weldon himself explains, this was unexpected. “Word had got out that Paul Hamlyn wanted to set up in Australia, which was the talk of the town because everyone was thinking who was going to get the job?”<sup>124</sup> Being a country boy from Queensland, Weldon thought he would be the last person Hamlyn would choose but Lloyd O’Neil was instrumental in Weldon being interviewed for the position. O’Neil encouraged Hamlyn to consider Weldon for the position because of Weldon’s reputation for being an innovator and getting things done.<sup>125</sup> Hamlyn and Weldon had a simple vision for Hamlyn Australia. “[They wanted] to produce books about Australia for Australians that looked like the quality Paul Hamlyn books.”<sup>126</sup> After being appointed Chief Executive, Weldon went to England for three months and returned with a one million pound cheque to establish the business, which he set up in Dee Why in Sydney.<sup>127</sup> Like Hamlyn, Weldon was considered a maverick within the Australian book trade, particularly when he chose to rescind his membership of the Australian Book Publishers’ Association.<sup>128</sup> As Weldon recalls, an agreement had been reached among the members on the percentage discount that would be offered to booksellers. Upon discovering that several members were using underhand means, such as promotional cheques to encourage the purchase of their stock, he no longer wanted to be part of the Association. Considered an “outsider” when Australia had its first book stand at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1967, Weldon was excluded from the Australian stand even though O’Neil had tried to talk them around. Undeterred, Weldon went to Frankfurt with his samples, networked and successfully made sales.<sup>129</sup> Hamlyn had proved several times in Britain that non-conformity often worked to his advantage. For Weldon, like Hamlyn, joining the “club” would have stifled his vision for publishing, marketing

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<sup>124</sup> Kevin Weldon, (Australian publisher and former Chief Executive of Paul Hamlyn in Australia), “Coffee-table books and Paul Hamlyn,” in discussion with Christine Elliott, June 26, 2014, Sydney, Australia. Digital recording.

<sup>125</sup> Weldon, “Coffee-table books and Paul Hamlyn.”

<sup>126</sup> Weldon, “Coffee-table books and Paul Hamlyn.”

<sup>127</sup> Weldon, “Coffee-table books and Paul Hamlyn.”

<sup>128</sup> Weldon, “Coffee-table books and Paul Hamlyn.”

<sup>129</sup> Weldon, “Coffee-table books and Paul Hamlyn.”

and distributing books to a new and emerging market that consumed his general interest lifestyle and art coffee-table books.

## More cookbook success

Given Hamlyn's success in Britain with *Cookery in Colour* it is not surprising that he would emulate this style of cookbook in the Australian market. Hamlyn approached Margaret Fulton to write a cookbook by virtue of her high profile and cookery expertise. She had become a household name in the 1960s for her cookery writing and was a cookery editor for 16 years including at the magazine, *Women's Day*. The competitor magazine, *The Australian Women's Weekly*, will be discussed in the following chapter.<sup>130</sup> Commenting on Hamlyn's reputation and her proposed cookbook with Hamlyn, Margaret Fulton explains:

Paul Hamlyn had come out from England, and he was one of the most innovative publishers of all times. He'd had a lot of experience of publishing in Czechoslovakia, where they were doing colour printing and he had the idea that this book should be colour on every page, or almost every page or photographs on every page. And Australians hadn't had that.<sup>131</sup>

The combination of Hamlyn's experience in publishing popular books and Fulton's widespread appeal in Australia resulted in the release of *The Margaret Fulton Cookbook* in 1968. As Bannerman puts it, the book was "an instant best-seller and became the kitchen manual for hundreds of thousands of housewives."<sup>132</sup> Fulton also recalls, that after Hamlyn approached her about publishing a cookbook, she asked the book editor, "what market will I write it to?" The editor advised her to write it for herself, advice that worked well as Australians responded to the excitement Fulton herself felt for food at the time.<sup>133</sup> The publication of this cookbook had a wider influence beyond home cooking; it changed the range of available produce resulting in new cuts of meat in butcher shops and introduced dishes from an array of nationalities, reflecting those who had

<sup>130</sup> Colin Bannerman, *Acquired Tastes: Celebrating Australia's Culinary History* (Canberra, Australia: National Library of Australia, 1998), 79.

<sup>131</sup> Margaret Fulton, "Margaret Fulton," interview by Robin Hughes, *Australian Biography: Extraordinary Australians Talk About Their Lives*. (Canberra, Australia: National Library of Australia, 1997). 4. Online published transcript, Accessed October 12, 2016. <http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/subjects/fulton/interview4.html>.

<sup>132</sup> Bannerman, *Acquired Tastes*, 79.

<sup>133</sup> Fulton, "Margaret Fulton" 4.

migrated to Australia in the postwar era. Fulton notes that prior to her cookbook, Australian cooks would generally cook chicken by roasting it as a whole bird. Her book introduced domestic cooks to recipes requiring chicken to be cut into pieces and sautéed. “[T]hat was a big ... an enormous breakthrough, that a chicken wasn’t just always this round thing” and when the poultry industry realised that not all cooks were adept at segmenting a chicken, chicken breasts and legs began to appear on the shelves and shopping lists.<sup>134</sup> Fulton had travelled extensively for food editing jobs and was heavily influenced and excited by international cuisines. Drawing on these experiences, she included techniques and ingredients in the cookbook to introduce cooks to the foods of other countries. For example, she skillfully appropriated a familiar staple like mince meat to teach domestic cooks how to make Greek dolmades, thereby helping to promote knowledge of other cultures through food. *The Margaret Fulton Cookbook* achieved record sales and Fulton remembers people queuing for blocks outside department stores just to get their book autographed.<sup>135</sup> The initial print run was 10,000 but once the order came in the publisher had to increase it to 20,000, then 30,000 then 40,000, until it finally got to 80,000. They said, “we’ve got to stop here because we’ve never sold 80,000 cookery books [. . .] by a first time author.” However, it didn’t stop there because the book kept selling with nineteen reprints and eventually reached more than 1.5 million copies.<sup>136</sup>

There was a time when the role of cookbooks was that of an ideological handbook espousing domestic duties. Yet, large-format cookbooks such as *Cookery in Colour* in Britain and *The Margaret Fulton Cookbook* in Australia, brought a sense of excitement to daily meal preparation with their full-colour illustrations. Hamlyn achieved a wave of cookery excitement, which helped to create a new era of cooks who were increasingly comfortable with trying a new range of cooking

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<sup>134</sup> Fulton, “Margaret Fulton ” 4.

<sup>135</sup> Fulton, “Margaret Fulton ” 4.

<sup>136</sup> Fulton, “Margaret Fulton ” 4. See also: David Dunstan and Annette Chaitman, “Food and Drink: The Appearance of a Publishing Subculture,” in *Making Books: Contemporary Australian publishing*, eds. David Carter and Anne Galligan (St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2007), 335.

techniques and international cuisines.<sup>137</sup> Thomson notes that a second contributing factor to Hamlyn's cookbook success was their test kitchens and attention to detail, particularly when producing co-edition cookbooks. Measurements and varying terminology for foods in different countries had to be closely monitored and all recipes were tested in Hamlyn British and Australian test kitchens before being published.<sup>138</sup> Even though there was a high cost associated with producing Hamlyn cookbooks, the company's attention to detail created a reputation for reliability, which in turn made their cookbooks popular. As Weldon points out, "[w]ith a lot of cookbooks, nobody tested them and some of them just did not work."<sup>139</sup> Similarly, Thomson notes that some of their competitors thought they could quickly knock together a cookbook, sell it for the same price and nobody would notice if the recipes did not work. In Thomson's view, the audience does notice, which is why Hamlyn carefully researched its cookbooks in order to avoid complaints and encourage the reader's willingness to buy another Hamlyn cookbook.<sup>140</sup>

In 1969, O'Neil recalls Hamlyn commented on how ferocious the Australian book trade was, describing it as "the most competitive market in the world."<sup>141</sup> Unlike Britain, it was illegal for publishers to fix the price of books in Australia and this created a dynamic market. Anybody could sell a book at any price. Given that independent Australian publishers had struggled with the dominance of British publishers over the local market, Hamlyn's arrival in Australia may have raised some concerns. But, as the following chapter will demonstrate, the Australian publishing industry did begin to flourish in the 1960s and many Australian publishers did well. For those that did struggle with the economies of publishing, Hamlyn was instrumental in offering Australian

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<sup>137</sup> Jessamyn Neuhaus, "The Way to a Man's Heart: Gender Roles, Domestic Ideology, and Cook-books in the 1950s," *Journal of Social Science* 32, 3 (1999): 529. See also: McLeod, *Abundance*, 20.

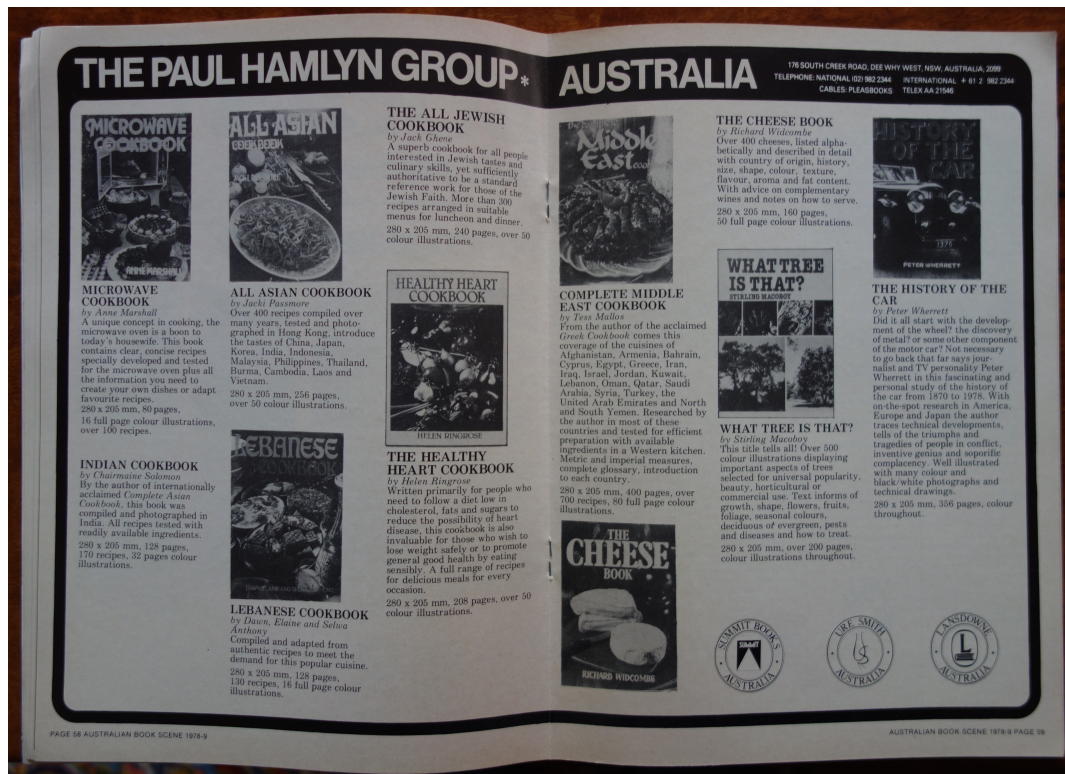
<sup>138</sup> Sue Thomson (former production manager, Thames & Hudson), "NLSC: Book Trade Lives," in discussion with Sue Bradley, (2004): NLSC: Book Trade Lives, C827/64/06, Tape Recording F15825, Tape 8 Side A of 18, The British Library, London UK. Accessed April 8, 2015.

<sup>139</sup> Weldon, "Coffee-table books and Paul Hamlyn."

<sup>140</sup> Thomson, "NLSC: Book Trade Lives."

<sup>141</sup> Lloyd O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," interview by Alec Bolton, *Trove*. (Canberra, Australia: National Library of Australia, 1991). Session 4 of 8. Sound recording, Accessed August 21, 2016. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.oh-vn1174695>.

publishers much needed investment.<sup>142</sup> In 1968, Hamlyn acquired 40 per cent interest in the independent Australian company, Sun Books, owing to its cash-flow problem. According to John Arnold, a contemporary newspaper reported that the arrangement was to the benefit of both parties.<sup>143</sup> While this may well have been the sentiment behind the deal, Arnold notes that the independence of Sun Books was “lost within the expanding Hamlyn Australian empire.”<sup>144</sup>



**Figure 6.4:** Pages 58–59 show a selection of The Paul Hamlyn Group Australia books advertised in *The Australian Book Scene*, 1978–79. (Source: John Currey’s personal collection. Photographed image.)

## Another publishing venture

While Hamlyn Australia was doing extremely well, back in Britain Hamlyn was concerned that IPC was struggling making the shipping of large volumes of books efficient and profitable, as a result of

<sup>142</sup> John Arnold, “Case-study: Sun Books,” in *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005*, eds. Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright (St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2006), 45.

<sup>143</sup> Arnold, “Sun Books,” 45.

<sup>144</sup> Arnold, “Sun Books,” 45.



union work practices. Hamlyn eventually resigned from the IPC board in 1969.<sup>145</sup> This opened up an opportunity to establish another publishing business. He established Octopus in 1971 which he assembled about twelve people, including a few of his former employees. “Having proved that the public would flock to his support if he offered them entertainment in attractive books at low prices, he decided to do it better and more efficiently.”<sup>146</sup> Freeman argues that one of the key ingredients for producing high-quality illustrated books is the printing, and as has been demonstrated, high-quality, competitively priced printing was a feature of Hamlyn’s publishing model.

Hamlyn’s ambitions reached far wider than the UK and Australia markets. The globalisation of Hamlyn publishing began in the summer of 1971 when he “set off on a world tour accompanied by enormous custom-made cases of samples.”<sup>147</sup> After learning the importance of negotiating deals as a young bookseller from Anton Zwemmer, Hamlyn turned the art of the deal into a fine art. During his trip he reached agreements with publishers in five countries:

Angus & Robertson in Australia, Gordon & Gotch in New Zealand, the Central News Agency in South Africa and Doubleday in Canada . . . In return for exclusivity, these ‘partners’ purchased their stocks outright . . . In the US, the Octopus list was split between Book Sales Inc and Crown Publishers Outlet.<sup>148</sup>

Freeman notes that several smaller publishers of illustrated books existed at the time but Hamlyn was the biggest and Octopus grew to a significant size in a short time. Part of the reason was high sales of books to America, which in those days really enabled the proliferation of illustrated books considering the market’s capacity to consume huge quantities. “You’d be disappointed if you didn’t get an order for 40,000 copies or 50,000 copies. Numbers we can only dream of today.” Freeman claims that one reason their illustrated books sold well in America is because the British and Australian publishers knew how to produce this style of book better than the Americans.<sup>149</sup> One reason may be that Australian publishers embraced the South-east Asian printing centres and

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<sup>145</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 59.

<sup>146</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 60.

<sup>147</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 61.

<sup>148</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, “Paul Hamlyn,” 61.

<sup>149</sup> Freeman, “Coffee-table books.”

produced superior quality illustrated books at cheaper prices. Jarvis and Thomson argue that much of Hamlyn's success was the quality of his books. He "[set] up Mandarin Publishers in Hong Kong, managed by a former Hamlyn graphic design Geoff Cloke [ . . . ] [W]ithin a decade, both Hong Kong and Singapore became recognized internationally as print centres for high-quality book production." Twelve years after Octopus was founded, it was floated on the stock market in 1983 for £55m.<sup>150</sup>

## Conclusion

One of Hamlyn's key achievements was creating a significant shift in the British publishing paradigm in terms of the way he published, marketed and distributed books. In doing so, he democratised the book market at a time of post-war social change. Hamlyn's innovations in publishing full-colour cookbooks in the coffee-table format are also significant. He created a whole new genre of cookbook, which was instrumental in producing a new generation of cooks who enthused over the large-format, full-colour illustrated recipes. Freeman acknowledges that large-format cookery books played a key role in the whole coffee-table book puzzle and claims Hamlyn as one of the key developers of the coffee-table cookbook, which are still prolific today.<sup>151</sup> Although Hamlyn came into the book trade as an outsider but his success and impact on British publishing had to be acknowledged eventually by the insiders. Perhaps, as Freeman argues, the real turning point of "acceptance" came when Hamlyn bought into more traditional trade publishing houses where he was regarded as a "real" publisher.<sup>152</sup> Though, in the eyes of the British publishing establishment, his early "barrow boy" image was never far away.

The practices and agreements of the British publishers managed to contain their industry but they also constrained them. Paul Hamlyn's "lack of tradition" and desire to be free of "the club" allowed him to innovate unencumbered by signed agreements and accepted practices, despite adhering to the principles of the Net Book Agreement. Hamlyn was able to take advantage of his freedom from the

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<sup>150</sup> Jarvis and Thomson, "Paul Hamlyn," 61.

<sup>151</sup> Freeman, "Coffee-table books."

<sup>152</sup> Freeman, "Coffee-table books."

Net Book Agreement by doing things differently and innovating in all areas of the book trade. However, as Mayer argues if the British publishing environment had not been so constrained by the Net Book Agreement, Hamlyn may not have “been so successful in a free-trading British market, because there would have been a multitude of Paul Hamlyns.”<sup>153</sup> In other words, the traditions and Agreements operating in British publishing enabled Hamlyn to stand out. This may have been the case, but Hamlyn operated with a certain amount of freedom because he was not part of “the Club” and this made him stand out. Whereas the majority of British publishers may have felt obliged to do business as usual because they were firmly entrenched in “the Club”. However, the level of success he achieved in Australia, which was full of innovative publishers in the 1960s, would suggest that Hamlyn was an innovator among innovators.

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<sup>153</sup> Peter Mayer, “The Question of Timing: Net Book Agreement 1995,” in *The British Book Trade: An Oral History*, ed. Sue Bradley (London, UK: The British Library, 2008), 237. See also: biographical notes on Peter Mayer’s book trade career, 309.

## Chapter Seven

### A publishing turning point: *Australia in Colour*

Australia was on the verge of a boom. The nation had emerged from the war emitting a deep sigh of collective relief, its borders tested but unviolated. The anxiety that had spread from the Great Depression, through to the threat of Japanese invasion, was now overtaken by a cosy inward-looking contentment.

Alasdair McGregor<sup>1</sup>

In 1945, while Lloyd O’Neil was working as a bookseller at the Angus & Robertson’s Castlereagh Street bookstore in Sydney a customer made a comment about the book she was purchasing. This interaction provided O’Neil with an important insight into the status of Australian books at the time. After spending some time helping the woman choose a large-format Australiana picture book, an Oswald Ziegler publication with a blue cover, O’Neil busied himself with the financial transaction and wrapping the book.<sup>2</sup> While doing so, he remarked to the customer “And what’s more it’s printed and published in Australia”. To this she replied, “Well in that case I don’t want it.”<sup>3</sup> O’Neil found it interesting that the customer felt she could openly make such a comment. Although not a view held by everyone, this remark reflected a surprising truth: that most Australians wanted to buy British books because “they looked better, they were more handsome, cheaper, and Australian publishing was still very primitive.”<sup>4</sup> Twelve years later, when O’Neil became a publisher, one of his driving motivations was to seek ways of publishing high-quality books about Australia for a general

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<sup>1</sup> McGregor, *Frank Hurley*, 399.

<sup>2</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 1 of 8. See also: Jenny Lee, “Australia in Colour” for an overview of other Oswald Ziegler titles, 52–53. Also, John Arnold notes that “Ziegler became a major packager/producer of commemorative and promotional publications. This included the substantial *This Is Australia* published in 1946 in collaboration with the Australian Department of Information.” John Arnold, “Reference and Non-fiction Publishing,” in *A History of the Book in Australia 1891-1945 : A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, eds. John Arnold and Martyn Lyons (St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 287-288.

<sup>3</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 1 of 8.

<sup>4</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 1 of 8.

reading audience. As Currey and Sessions note, O’Neil did not view the consumption of books as elitist and “approached publishing as a populist.”<sup>5</sup>

Lloyd O’Neil is a significant figure in the history and development of the Australian publishing industry. He embodies the central argument of this thesis: that the popularisation of coffee-table books occurred at the juncture of disruptive technology, social change, entrepreneurism and innovation. O’Neil not only took advantage of improved full-colour printing technology to print an Australian photographic book for a changing nation, he accessed this technology at the modern printing centres in Japan, which was an innovative and ground-breaking step for an Australian publisher. His pragmatism disrupted the printing cost structure of Australian publishing and his publications tapped into Australia’s questioning of its post-war identity and cultural change. The story of O’Neil’s publishing successes and his significance to the Australian publishing industry is therefore intrinsically linked to advances in full-colour printing technology, post-war social change and the formation of an Australian national identity.

Reflecting on O’Neil’s contribution to the industry, former colleagues, Currey and Sessions, highlight some of his achievements: O’Neil established Lansdowne Press in 1960. He published books on popular topics about Australia although not were all large-format books. As Currey and Sessions point out, “O’Neil adopted a deceptively simple philosophy: to publish books about things that interested him.”<sup>6</sup> These addressed a diverse range of topics within an Australian context: “politics, natural history, current affairs, children’s books, history and biography, to name a few.”<sup>7</sup> O’Neil was also one of the many independent publishers involved with education which, as Lee notes, became the “industry’s staple during the baby-boom years of the 1950s and 1960s.”<sup>8</sup> O’Neil was successful in whatever area of publishing he turned his attention to. He eventually sold

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<sup>5</sup> John Currey and Bob Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O’Neil: A Celebration of 20 Years of the Lloyd O’Neil Award 1992–2011* (Melbourne, Australia: Penguin, 2011). 4.

<sup>6</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O’Neil*. 2–3.

<sup>7</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O’Neil*. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 49.

Lansdowne to Cheshire and later established the Lloyd O’Neil Publishing Group in 1969. He later sold the O’Neil Group to Penguin Books Australia in 1987 where he was appointed an associate director.<sup>9</sup> As a member of the Australian Book Publishers Association (ABPA), O’Neil played an active role in advocating for independent Australian publishers, Australian authors and their books. He maintained his commitment throughout his career and was made a life member of the ABPA in 1989. In recognition of his contribution to Australian Publishing, O’Neil was made a member of the Order of Australia in 1991. Following his death in 1992, the Australian Publishers Association established an annual award in his honour—the Lloyd O’Neil Award—which is awarded to a publisher, author or bookseller for outstanding contribution to the Australian book industry.<sup>10</sup>

This Australian case-study draws on interviews featuring O’Neil and his former colleagues, together with publishing ephemera and secondary publishing studies sources, to shed light on Lloyd O’Neil’s career and the central place he holds in the history of Australian publishing. Notably, Alec Bolton conducted an extensive interview with O’Neil in 1991 asking him to reflect on his career, the publishing environment for independent Australians publishers and the significance of the printing of *Australia in Colour* in Japan in 1963. O’Neil was nationalistic and had a lifelong passion for publishing Australian stories. In his attempt to fulfil this desire, O’Neil innovated by publishing high-quality books at cheaper prices for a market eager to see itself reflected in Australian literature and illustrated books. According to O’Neil’s former colleague, John Currey, O’Neil was unapologetic in his nationalistic vision of publishing books on sport, Australian landscapes, folklore and art and published books on almost any topic.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O’Neil*. 5–8.

<sup>10</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O’Neil*. 6–8.

<sup>11</sup> John Currey, “Case-study: Lansdowne and Lloyd O’Neil,” in *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005*, eds. Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright (St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2006), 38–39.

Lloyd's interests were so wide there was almost no category of publishing that didn't interest him. He did increasingly produce illustrated books once he had made the connection with Asian printing, [which] was simply a way of getting more book for your money at that stage.<sup>12</sup>

The American case-study in Chapter Five focussed on the way David Brower played a significant role in popularising well-produced, inspirational coffee-table books, driven by his passion to change people's minds about the environment. In contrast, O'Neil's publishing motivations were not so much about changing Australian people's attitudes. Rather, he tapped into attitudes that were already emerging, particularly a new interest in Australia's national identity:

[Australians] craved the certainties of full employment, family life and home-ownership, the Holden car, the backyard, the beach, national sporting prowess, and the prosperity founded on an endless bounty of natural resources.<sup>13</sup>

## Background

Like Hamlyn, O'Neil was an astute businessman and innovator who used his own money to fund his publishing ventures. Independent Australian publishers operated in an environment of restrictive market practices, which had been imposed by British publishing trade agreements, and the status of Australian books was poor. These circumstances set O'Neil on a path to modern Japanese printing centres to seek better economies of scale for printing high-quality, full-colour illustrated books. The success of the publication of the Australiana coffee-table book, *Australia in Colour*, was a significant milestone for O'Neil, as well as for illustrated publishing, the Australian publishing industry and the democratisation of Australian stories. The publication of *Australia in Colour* and the strategies O'Neil used are central to this study because his actions helped to popularise Australiana coffee-table books in Australia in the post-war era. In fact, as this chapter will show, O'Neil's nationalistic fervour and passion for publishing came to the fore at the right time.

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<sup>12</sup> John Currey, (Australian publisher and former colleague of Lloyd O'Neil), "Coffee-table books and Lloyd O'Neil," in discussion with Christine Elliott, August 6, 2015, Melbourne, Australia. Digital recording. John Currey's first contact with Lloyd O'Neil was in 1964, as an author. He joined Lansdowne Press in 1967 as an editor and remained there until about 1971. By this time O'Neil had left, and after Paul Hamlyn had acquired the company. John Currey and Lloyd O'Neil later established the Currey O'Neil imprint, which published illustrated books.

<sup>13</sup> McGregor, *Frank Hurley*, 399.

The book, *Australia in Colour*, published in 1963, was the first commercially successful Australiana coffee-table book.<sup>14</sup> For the first time, full-colour, large-format photographically illustrated books could be produced on a large scale and distributed at an agreeable price point for both publisher and consumer. O’Neil’s offshore initiative encouraged other Australian publishers to follow his lead, with many moving also to print in Asia. This paved the way for the Australian publishing industry to flourish. As Currey and Sessions point out, off-shore printing “fundamentally altered the cost structure of book publishing in Australia.”<sup>15</sup> O’Neil himself also describes *Australia in Colour* as a turning point in Australian publishing. “For the first time in our history we had become competitive with printing prices with our British and American competitors.”<sup>16</sup> The book’s subsequent success symbolised a cultural shift away from colonial ties to Britain, as well as an increase in suburbanisation and a more relaxed lifestyle. These social changes reflected part of the Australian narrative at that time, which embodied a renewed interest in national identity.

### **The shaping of a nationalist publisher**

O’Neil was a fifth-generation Australian, born in the middle of the Depression on July 17, 1928.<sup>17</sup> His father worked as a wool classer and was a union organiser. His mother was a professional musician who worked as a piano accompanist in Ballarat before the family moved to Melbourne.<sup>18</sup> O’Neil’s father was also an active member of the Communist Party and, when he lost his job during the Depression, his political activities resulted in him spending some time in jail because at the time it was against the law to assemble.<sup>19</sup> Although O’Neil’s mother was able to support the family as the 3XY radio station’s accompanist at weekly concerts at the Princess Theatre, the family experienced

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<sup>14</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 53.

<sup>15</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O’Neil*. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Lloyd O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” interview by Alec Bolton, *Trove*. (Canberra, Australia: National Library of Australia, 1991). Session 2 of 8. Sound recording, Accessed May 12, 2016. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.oh-vn1174695>.

<sup>17</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 1 of 8.

<sup>18</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 1 of 8.

<sup>19</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 1 of 8.



some periods of separation, which resulted in O'Neil attending several schools.<sup>20</sup> O'Neil describes his family as bookish and remembers that his father encouraged self-improvement. During his time at Prahran State School and Caulfield Grammar School he spent several hours reading in the Prahran Municipal Library.<sup>21</sup> Even as a young boy, O'Neil was drawn to reading Australian books, mostly adventure stories written by authors such as Ion Idriess as well as reading a lot about the Aborigines.<sup>22</sup> "I guess what I was reading then, later became the subjects that I published in because they were my natural interests."<sup>23</sup>

O'Neil explains to Alec Bolton in interview that, by 1944, his family had moved to Sydney because his father got a job with the Department of Supply installing canteens in factories.<sup>24</sup> There, he lived with his parents and young brother for a short period before moving into boarding houses with friends to make his own way in life.<sup>25</sup> He initially wanted to become a librarian and applied to attend the Metcalf Mitchell Library School but his "Melbourne" Leaving Certificate was deemed an insufficient qualification to attend the Sydney Library School.<sup>26</sup> As a result, he enrolled in Ultimo Technical School to earn a New South Wales Matriculation qualification by attending night school five nights per week and worked at Angus & Robertson during the day to support himself. This was a serendipitous decision. After working at the bookstore for only a month, he ceased his library studies because he had found his vocation: "The minute I hit Angus & Robertson I knew this was the world that I wanted to be in."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8.

<sup>21</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8.

<sup>22</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8. "Ion Idriess averaged a book a year into the 1960s, books which were very successful commercially and which provided generations of readers with impressions of Australia's physical variety and colourful history." Laurie Hergenhan, *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia* (Ringwood, Australia: Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 1988), 274. Further biographical information on Idriess can be found at "Idriess, Ion Llewellyn (1998-1979)," Australian Dictionary of Biography, accessed June 8, 2016, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/idriess-ion-llewellyn-6786>.

<sup>23</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8.

<sup>24</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8.

<sup>25</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8.

<sup>26</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8.

<sup>27</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8.

O'Neil regarded Angus & Robertson as a strange workplace at the time because the company's staff profile reflected Australia's involvement in the Second World War. A large proportion of men were fighting in the war, which meant the company was run by women, older men and young men like O'Neil who were under the age of eighteen.<sup>28</sup> Starting out in the medical book section, O'Neil learnt that there was more to bookselling than merely selling books to consumers. Angus & Robertson's managing Director, Walter Cousins, who had a particular interest in medical books, had secured exclusive rights to sell and distribute several titles, including the popular *Drs. Hannah and Abraham Stone's Marriage Manual: The Famous Guide to Sex and Marriage Recommended by Doctors and Educators*.<sup>29</sup> Cousins' business acumen made an impression on O'Neil, who admitted that Cousins became his hero and role model; O'Neil particularly admired his entrepreneurial skills.<sup>30</sup> Cousins had strategically acquired "foreign rights from British and American publishers", a strategy that would soon provide a new source of revenue for Australian publishers.<sup>31</sup> According to renowned British publisher, Sir Stanley Unwin, publishers must possess a "wide-ranging mind" that can read the present mood of the market, have an appreciation for the past and perhaps most importantly, anticipate future trends.<sup>32</sup> These were the attributes O'Neil had recognised in Cousins. Importantly, it was here at Angus & Robertson that O'Neil learnt how to secure international and other book rights.

Working at Angus & Robertson also gave O'Neil first-hand knowledge of what books customers were buying; at the time, Australian book-buyers were limited in the choice of Australian books available. It was blatantly evident to O'Neil that the Angus & Robertson store bookshelves lacked Australian content. Almost every Angus & Robertson book was from England with only a few from America.<sup>33</sup> Recalling the books that filled the twenty counters at the bookstore, O'Neil states that

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<sup>28</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8.

<sup>29</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8.

<sup>30</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8.

<sup>31</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8.

<sup>32</sup> Unwin, *The Truth About a Publisher*, 310.

<sup>33</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8.

two big piles of Australian books, Angus & Robertson's own publications, were located at the front of the shop, which left the other eighteen counters groaning with British and American books. The same applied in the field of educational publishing. O'Neil cannot recall touching an Australian textbook because all were either British or American in origin.<sup>34</sup> As noted by Curtain, Australian children were being raised on British stories, such as *Peter Rabbit*, and books by Enid Blyton, well into the post-war era.<sup>35</sup>

The Angus & Robertson counters symbolised the domination of British culture over Australian culture, which had been instituted by the Statement of Terms and the Traditional Market Agreement. Lee describes it as "[Britain's] main anti-competitive instrument."<sup>36</sup> The "Statement of Terms determined selling prices, restricted discounting, and prescribed penalties for non-compliance while the Traditional Market Agreement gave British publishers control over Australia through territorial copyright."<sup>37</sup> As Curtain explains, the consequences of non-adherence to the conditions set out in the Statement meant that a bookshop would "no longer be entitled to a trade discount from any British or Australian publisher."<sup>38</sup> With British publishers operating under such favourable conditions, the Australian market was regarded as "the jewel of Britain's book trade."<sup>39</sup> Yet, despite its small population "antipodeans consumed about a quarter of all titles marked down for the export

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<sup>34</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8.

<sup>35</sup> Curtain, "Book Publishing," 109.

<sup>36</sup> Lee, "Australia in Colour," 46. Curtain notes that "The Statement of Terms was an extension into Australia of the 'Net Book Agreement' which governed the book trade at 'Home' [Britain]." John Curtain, "Distance Makes the Market Fonder: The Development of Book Publishing in Australia," *Media, Culture & Society* 15, 2 (1993): 235.

<sup>37</sup> McLean, "Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence," 68.

<sup>38</sup> Curtain, "Distance Makes the Market Fonder," 236.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Nile and David Walker, "The 'Paternoster Row Machine' and the Australian Book Trade, 1890–1945," in *A History of the Book in Australia 1891–1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, eds. John Arnold and Martyn Lyons (St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 10. See also: Craig Munro and John Curtain, "After the War," in *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005*, eds. Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright (St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2006), 3. For a comprehensive overview of the history of the book in Australia, see also: Chapter IV Publishing in the Twentieth Century in D.H. Borchardt and Wallace Kirsop, eds., *The Book in Australia: Essays Towards a Cultural & Social History*. (Clayton, Australia: Monash University, 1988).

trade.”<sup>40</sup> Nile and Walker state that one of the reasons for such high consumption was that the acquisition of books in Australia was indicative of a sense of culture and “cause for pride.”<sup>41</sup> “Serious” publishing emanated from Britain and was considered culturally superior.<sup>42</sup> The centrality of London publishing was the key to their power and profit margins. Even Australian booksellers colluded by stocking mostly British imprints.<sup>43</sup> These trade practice restrictions also had the effect of “greatly increasing obstacles for local publishers wishing to enter the Australian book publishing industry after 1947.” At the time, independent Australian publishers were booksellers of British and American books rather than publishers of their own titles.<sup>44</sup> As McLean notes, there was a certain irony in this prevailing situation. Australian publishers may have benefited from the collusion because it was more profitable to be a commercial bookseller, but they restricted their own development as publishers.<sup>45</sup>

During the Second World War, British book imports declined in Australia owing to disruptions to paper supplies, labour and shipping but the demand for books in Australia did not abate. In Australia, the war created an opportunity for Australian publishing to flourish even though “[local] production was hampered by paper and labour shortages.”<sup>46</sup> McLean states that independent Australian publishing houses increased production and new “Australian-owned companies emerged to meet an increased demand for books that could not be readily supplied by British publishers.”<sup>47</sup> This newfound opportunity saw “local firms [publish] new Australian works and reprints, as well as British titles under license for British publishers.”<sup>48</sup> This was a “striking reversal of fortune,” as demonstrated in figures cited by Nile and Walker — “in the decade to 1949, local publishers produced 596 titles to London’s 119.” This era is regarded as a peak period for Australian

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<sup>40</sup> Nile and Walker, “‘Paternoster Row Machine’,” 10.

<sup>41</sup> Nile and Walker, “‘Paternoster Row Machine’,” 11.

<sup>42</sup> McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence,” 60.

<sup>43</sup> Nile and Walker, “‘Paternoster Row Machine’,” 7.

<sup>44</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 49.

<sup>45</sup> McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence,” 70.

<sup>46</sup> McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence,” 64–65.

<sup>47</sup> McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence,” 65.

<sup>48</sup> McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence,” 66.

publishing.<sup>49</sup> However, this increase in Australian titles did not mean these books were easily accessed as bookstores were still reluctant to display Australian books.<sup>50</sup> According to O’Neil, the other factor that contributed to a poor attitude to Australian-produced books was that book design and quality was not of a high standard.<sup>51</sup> However, this period of optimism in the Australian market proved to be an aberration. Once the disruption of the War ceased, Britain re-established its “normal trade” in its Australian publishing territory and it was business as usual.<sup>52</sup>

Curtain, Lee, and McLean argue that the publishing politics of the Australian publishing industry and Britain in the pre-and post-war eras resulted in commercial and cultural tension and contributed to the slow development of the industry in Australia.<sup>53</sup> This tension extended to “nationalism [versus] internationalism, and the rights of ownership of producers and copyright holders and the rights of readers to have access to ideas.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, Australia’s geographical location and its status as a colonial outpost of the British book trade has largely determined the trajectory of the Australian publishing industry. As Munro and Curtain put it, “[t]he history of the book in Australia may be characterised as the movement of durable cultural goods over very large distances.”<sup>55</sup> McLean points out that British companies “enjoyed significant ‘cultural capital’ in Australia especially in relation to their power to consecrate Australian literature with a British imprint.”<sup>56</sup> The other consequence of Britain’s control over Australian publishing was that it left independent publishers and their staff under-skilled in various areas of the publishing trade.<sup>57</sup> Independent Australian publisher, Andrew Fabinyi, an emigrant from Hungary, tried to lift the standards of

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<sup>49</sup> Richard Nile and David Walker, “Marketing Literary Imagination: Production of Australian Literature 1915–1965,” in *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, ed. Laurie Hergenhan (Ringwood, Australia: Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 1988), 292. See also: McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence,” 66.

<sup>50</sup> Nile and Walker, “Marketing Literary Imagination,” 293.

<sup>51</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 2 of 8.

<sup>52</sup> Curtain, “Book Publishing,” 109.

<sup>53</sup> Curtain, “Book Publishing,” 108. See also: Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 43. See also: McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence,” 60–61.

<sup>54</sup> Curtain, “Book Publishing,” 108.

<sup>55</sup> Munro and Curtain, “After the War,” 3.

<sup>56</sup> McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence,” 63.

<sup>57</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 50.

production in Australia by drawing on his knowledge of European and British practices. He contributed to Australian culture through a regular column in the *Australian Book Review* where he wrote about excellence in book production and design.<sup>58</sup> Fabinyi also wrote annual reports on the state of the industry in *Meanjin*, in which he highlighted lost opportunities for local publishers.<sup>59</sup> Having outlined the publishing and bookselling atmosphere in pre and post-war Australia, O'Neil's future publishing exploits and nationalist titles were determined largely in response to what he had observed as a bookseller of Britain's imperial control of the Australian publishing industry.

### Exploring Australia and the book trade

After working in book sales at Angus & Robertson, O'Neil became a buyer and head of Angus & Robertson's art book department.<sup>60</sup> But by 1951, he had worked at the store for six years and was looking for a change. He took to the road on his motorcycle with a couple of mates, explored Australia and picked up casual labouring jobs along the way.<sup>61</sup> One job he recalls involved pruning pine trees and clearing the bush. Here he worked alongside migrants or "new Australians" as they were referred to at that time.<sup>62</sup> Forging friendships with his fellow labourers proved valuable because it exposed O'Neil to a "very interesting cross section of the new Australia as it was emerging."<sup>63</sup> Post-war migration was shaping a new Australian way of life.<sup>64</sup> Horne describes this period as having the effect of "leaven[ing] the lump in Australia." The country reached a level of sophistication not possible without an accelerated migration programme.<sup>65</sup> Evidence of this changing urban and cultural landscape was noticeable in the urban landscape and cultural behaviours:

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<sup>58</sup> Lee, "Australia in Colour," 50.

<sup>59</sup> John McLaren, "Case-study: Andrew Fabinyi and Cheshire," in *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005*, eds. Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright (St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2006), 20.

<sup>60</sup> Currey, "Lansdowne and Lloyd O'Neil," 38.

<sup>61</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8.

<sup>62</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8. See also: Donald Horne, *The Lucky Country* regarding the term "new Australians", 69.

<sup>63</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 1 of 8.

<sup>64</sup> Donald Horne, *The Lucky Country* (Australia: Angus & Robertson 1965), 71.

<sup>65</sup> Horne, *The Lucky Country*, 71.

[T]he development of small factories that have added specialist products to the Australian markets, in the development of specialist shops and restaurants, in changing taste in food and the arts.<sup>66</sup>

After travelling around Australia for more than a year, O’Neil returned to Sydney with a keen ambition to establish his own publishing house. But first he knew he had to learn all aspects of the trade. Lee notes that during the 1950s, British firms realised they needed local representation to further their book selling opportunities in Australia. With new expertise arriving from Britain, the local industry’s skill base broadened.<sup>67</sup> According to Currey and Sessions, O’Neil secured a position with British firm Cassell and worked as a country representative book distributor, which involved ten months’ travel out of every year for three years. Sessions, who also worked for Cassell, recalls a story that illustrates O’Neil’s innovative approach to securing a distribution deal:

When pitching to Cassell to distribute their books in Australia, O’Neil got his brother and three friends to put on suits and white shirts and ties, which was unusual, polish up their black Ford cars and stand by them against a backdrop of the sea. He wrote over and said: my team of eager salesmen are waiting to deliver your books.<sup>68</sup>

O’Neil turned out to be a stellar sales representative and forged friendships with bookstore owners along the way. He was a great networker, a skill that would be an asset to his publishing enterprises. As a testament to O’Neil’s natural affinity with the trade, colleague Andrew Fabinyi remembered years later that booksellers could still recall his salesmanship “with some shuddering admiration.”<sup>69</sup> In 1955, when visiting one of his regular customers, Brian Clouston at McLeod’s Book Store, O’Neil learned that Clouston had established his own publishing company, Jacaranda Press, and was offered the manager’s job.<sup>70</sup> He jumped at the opportunity and took out a 10 per cent investment in the business, with Clouston retaining 40 per cent and Pole Printers holding the other 50 per cent.<sup>71</sup> O’Neil explains that Clouston stayed on at McLeod’s, making him the sole employee. He

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<sup>66</sup> Horne, *The Lucky Country*, 71.

<sup>67</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 50.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Sessions (former Publishing Director of Penguin Books), “Australian publishing industry,” in discussion with Christine Elliott, July 9, 2014, Melbourne, Australia. Digital recording.

<sup>69</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O’Neil*. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Currey, “Lansdowne and Lloyd O’Neil,” 38.

<sup>71</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 2 of 8.

worked out of Pole's printing works and fulfilled every role from invoice clerk and book rep to packer.<sup>72</sup> O'Neil argues that although they were publishing books at Jacaranda Press, they knew little about book making or editing. This is evident in the company's early books.<sup>73</sup> For example, they folded in 32s because they did not know about folding in 16s and their choice of typography left a lot to be desired.<sup>74</sup> The Jacaranda list mainly comprised educational books along with some general books, such as a history of the Labor Party, as well as another on the way to minimise tax, which turned out to be a big seller.<sup>75</sup> After five years of learning the book trade with Jacaranda Press, it was time for O'Neil to move on.<sup>76</sup> Australian publishing contemporary, Frank Thompson, points out that O'Neil was only one of a few people at the time to have an understanding of both the bookselling and publishing trades and there was a dearth of trained staff in the 1960s.<sup>77</sup> In order to make money, independent Australian publishers "produc[ed] books cheaply and quickly for short-term profit", though most were distribution orientated.<sup>78</sup> This situation resulted in new and existing publishers "raid[ing] the retail book trade, perhaps on the grounds that at least they knew what a book looked like."<sup>79</sup> By the time O'Neil ventured out on his own, he was well placed as an all-rounder or, as Thompson observed, he and some of his fellow publishers were "jacks of all trades."<sup>80</sup>

O'Neil's travels around Australia were invaluable to his publishing career. It gave him an understanding of his future target audience by allowing him to gain firsthand insights into the thoughts, opinions and interests of the wide range of people he met along the way. The opportunity to experience the Australian landscape for himself gave O'Neil a great appreciation for its unique form, colour, flora and fauna. The Australian landscape coffee-table books gave urban Australians

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<sup>72</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 2 of 8.

<sup>73</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 2 of 8.

<sup>74</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 2 of 8.

<sup>75</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 2 of 8.

<sup>76</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 2 of 8.

<sup>77</sup> Thompson, "Legends in Their Own Lunchtimes," 30.

<sup>78</sup> McLean, "Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence," 63.

<sup>79</sup> Thompson, "Legends in Their Own Lunchtimes," 30.

<sup>80</sup> Thompson, "Legends in Their Own Lunchtimes," 30.



the opportunity to view images of their distinctive Australian land. These books offered a way of identifying with a nation through its landscape, which was vastly different from the English and European countryside that was part of the heritage of countless Australians.<sup>81</sup> O’Neil had recognised the significance of the Australian landscape early in his life and it played a central role in his decision to visit Japan in 1963 to print *Australia in Colour*.

### **Social change, colour printing technology and national identity**

The aforementioned trading constraints placed on independent Australian publishers were set against a backdrop of unprecedented growth in affluence, which was matched by a growing array of consumer products on offer. According to McLeod, “[t]he key to economic prosperity was the parallel growth of mass-production and mass-consumption.” Manufacturers embraced this surge in affluence by employing new techniques but the scale of mass-consumption still threatened to overtake production.<sup>82</sup> Mass-production opened up a larger market and transformed goods such as refrigerators and washing machines, previously regarded as luxury items, into domestic necessities. The period transformed traditional items such as coffee into instant coffee and produced a new material called nylon together with adhesive tape and baby food.<sup>83</sup> This was enthusiastically embraced by Australians who needed to furnish their individual homes with a whole range of furniture, goods and appliances.<sup>84</sup> As discussed in Chapter Four, this period reconfigured the function of the home. Living rooms were casualised and coffee tables and televisions became a focus for family activities. However, Lees and Senyard stress that Australia’s unique set of social circumstances emulated a consumption pattern similar to America rather than that of their British counterparts.<sup>85</sup> They argue that the preference for copying modern America was evident in advertisements in magazine such as *Home Beautiful*, where the “emphasis was on the desirability of

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<sup>81</sup> Lee, “Exploiting the Imprint,” 31.

<sup>82</sup> McLeod, *Abundance*, 1.

<sup>83</sup> Lees and Senyard, *The 1950s*, 53.

<sup>84</sup> McLeod, *Abundance*, 2.

<sup>85</sup> Lees and Senyard, *The 1950s*, 53. See also: Amanda McLeod, *Abundance: Buying and Selling in Post War Australia*, (North Melbourne, Australia: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2007), 2.

your home meeting American standards of modernity rather than traditional British style.”<sup>86</sup> The “traditions of British thrift” were overtaken by the American idea of “the greatest good for the greatest number.”<sup>87</sup>

In his 1960s classic, *The Lucky Country*, Donald Horne framed Australia’s connection to Britain and America in familial terms:

[Our relationship with England is] like growing away from one’s parents and seeking new patterns of identity with them, looking for common hobbies and topics of interest so that one can keep up a connection. Relations with America are those of a young cousin to an immensely successful and older cousin, with plenty of criticism, practically no hero worship; it is more of a straightforward relation.<sup>88</sup>

Horne’s inclusion of “no hero worship” of America is debateable. American films and Hollywood film stars were greatly admired by Australians and American television programs were a significant part of popular home entertainment in post-war Australian living rooms. The economy was booming, Australia was searching for its own identity and some sections of the population looked to American style for inspiration.

Changes in Australia and its publishing industry provide the context for O’Neil’s publishing motivations and achievements. Despite growth in national optimism, independent Australian publishers were still dealing with British cultural dominance and as O’Neil himself points out, Australia had been used as a “dumping ground” for British publishers’ books. British publishers offered a fifty-per-cent discount to Australian booksellers in order to bolster their commercial success while “we were trying to sell an Australian novel for a third off.”<sup>89</sup> It was difficult for Australian publishers to financially compete and find a sustainable way to assert Australia’s emerging print culture. O’Neil describes these tactics as a “nasty piece of colonialism”, but stresses that no one in particular was to blame – “they just thought we were a nice little colony where you dump the books” – and that it was wrong not to acknowledge the way British trade practices

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<sup>86</sup> Lees and Senyard, *The 1950s*, 23.

<sup>87</sup> Lees and Senyard, *The 1950s*, 53.

<sup>88</sup> Horne, *The Lucky Country*, 84.

<sup>89</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 1 of 8.

hampered Australian publishing.<sup>90</sup> O’Neil’s statement reflects the frustration Australian publishers felt towards Britain because the British practices restricted their publishing opportunities. O’Neil’s comment may also signify the way Australians felt toward Britain’s loyalty during the Second World War. For example, Curran and Ward argue that the fall of Singapore put a question mark over Australia’s reliance on Britain as an imperial defence force.<sup>91</sup> Despite cultural and commercial obstacles, O’Neil’s book trade experience and his preference for publishing books about Australia, positioned him well to make his own mark on Australian publishing history. Lee claims that a strong market for illustrated publications about Australia existed after the 1930s, a market that Hurley had tapped into, but costs were often too high for printing images in books, particularly in colour.<sup>92</sup> Technical advances in full-colour offset printing available via off-shore companies such as Toppan and Dai Nippon, which had established sophisticated printing centres to cater for an increase in demands, enabled independent Australian publishers to undertake large print runs of full-colour, large-format illustrated books at cost-effective prices.<sup>93</sup>

### **Lansdowne Press and off-shore printing**

O’Neil had always entertained the idea of establishing his own publishing company and although Jacaranda Press flourished under his management, O’Neil still wanted to be a publisher in his own right. This dream was realised in the establishment of Lansdowne Press in Melbourne.<sup>94</sup> To finance the venture, O’Neil and his wife Janet sold their Brisbane house and used the proceeds of the sale along with a small legacy Janet had received, to open Lansdowne Press in May 1960. Such was the state of independent Australian publishing at the time that some of O’Neil’s Sydney-based colleagues were sceptical about his chances of shifting the accepted paradigm by publishing

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<sup>90</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 1 of 8.

<sup>91</sup> Curran and Ward, *The Unknown Nation*, 60.

<sup>92</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 51–52.

<sup>93</sup> Lee, “Exploiting the Imprint,” 31.

<sup>94</sup> Currey, “Lansdowne and Lloyd O’Neil,” 38.

Australian books about Australia. They “made a £10 even-money bet that he would be out of business in six months.”<sup>95</sup>

As Currey notes, O’Neil’s colleagues lost their bets because O’Neil tapped into an audience ready to read Australian stories.<sup>96</sup> “Nationalism was [also] at the heart of Lloyd O’Neil’s publishing.” His drive and motivation had been shaped by his early exposure to the Australian landscape, its people and their interests.<sup>97</sup> His early years at Angus & Robertson with a dearth of Australian books on the shelves together with some customers’ negative attitudes towards Australian books gave him the resolve to publish Australian titles. Other publishers stayed afloat by operating a bookselling business or acting as agents for overseas publishers. In contrast, “O’Neil managed to keep afloat by publishing books that interested him—and his interests coincided with the mood of the Australian public in the 1960s.” Currey argues that this was one distinguishing feature that set O’Neil apart from other Australian publishers at the time.<sup>98</sup> Examples from his Lansdowne list included: *How to Play Aussie Rules* (hardcover), *Cricket the Australian Way* (hardcover), *Lucinda Brayford* (adult paperback), *The Birds of Australia* (large-format), *The Australian Women’s Weekly Cookbook* (large-format), *Bush Picnic* (children’s paperback) and *Power without Glory* (adult paperback).<sup>99</sup>

Yet, the real turning point for full-colour illustrated Australian publishing came when O’Neil demonstrated that offshore printing was not only attainable but more cost effective in Asia. According to Lee, the parallel growth in affluence and consumption of goods started to become evident for the Australian publishing industry when “[c]ommercial ‘coffee-table books’ began to appear in increasing numbers from 1963.”<sup>100</sup> As Lee points out “the story of Australian publishers’

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<sup>95</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O’Neil*. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Currey, “Lansdowne and Lloyd O’Neil,” 38–39.

<sup>97</sup> Currey, “Lansdowne and Lloyd O’Neil,” 38.

<sup>98</sup> Currey, “Lansdowne and Lloyd O’Neil,” 38–39.

<sup>99</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O’Neil*. Back cover.

<sup>100</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 53.

discovery of colour is an interesting one, because it marks the beginning of their involvement with the Asia-Pacific region,” an involvement pioneered by O’Neil.<sup>101</sup>

In 1963, O’Neil travelled to Japan and became the first Australian publisher to place significant printing orders in Asia. But what led him to make a move that may have seemed like trading with the enemy? As Sobocinska points out, Australians were wary about trading with Japan following the war, and this “remained an unsurpassable hurdle in many minds.”<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, by 1947, trade relations between Australia and Japan had resumed. Business trips to Asia recommenced and Japan and Hong Kong became the preferred destinations for entrepreneurial businessmen.<sup>103</sup> O’Neil states that his prime motivation was to improve on the quality of Australian books at the time. Their production values were poor compared to imported books due in part to labour conditions and cost factors.<sup>104</sup> Lansdowne’s printer Halstead Press also experienced technical limitations. Books were printed on “APPM fluffy flannel”, printers were working under Australian labour conditions and productivity, and “[the books] were about ten percent more expensive than British books.”<sup>105</sup> Colour was lacking to the extent that “we couldn’t even put colour on the dust jacket half the time.”<sup>106</sup> All of these factors led O’Neil to question why American and British book publishers could produce better books than Australian publishers?<sup>107</sup> His curiosity was piqued one day when he saw some books by New Zealand-based publisher, Reed, which had been printed in Kyoto. They were of high quality and good value for money.<sup>108</sup> As Currey and Session state, the “vigour of O’Neil’s publishing ideas could not be matched by the local printing industry. It was still using letterpress and British and American publishers had access to major new low-cost book printing centres in

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<sup>101</sup> Lee, “Exploiting the Imprint,” 31.

<sup>102</sup> Agnieszka Sobocinska, *Visiting the Neighbours: Australians in Asia* (Sydney, NSW: NewSouth Publishing, 2014), 45.

<sup>103</sup> Sobocinska, *Visiting the Neighbours*, 45.

<sup>104</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 2 of 8.

<sup>105</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 2 of 8.

<sup>106</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 2 of 8.

<sup>107</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 2 of 8.

<sup>108</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 2 of 8.

Asia.”<sup>109</sup> After deciding to explore the idea of sending his printing jobs to Japan, he made a connection with Toppan printers through a paper merchant, flew to Tokyo and experienced one of the great revelations of his life.<sup>110</sup> Entertained by the President of Toppan during his week-long stay, he was amazed to see that the company employed nine thousand employees. One of its factories had twelve Roland printers in a row and all Toppan workers ran while undertaking their tasks rather than strolling between the machines like the printers at Halstead Press back home in Sydney.<sup>111</sup>

Finally, O’Neil had found a way to access cheaper high-quality printing and signed up to get four books printed, *Australia in Colour* being one of the four. O’Neil’s use of a Japanese printing centre was a step towards accelerating the development of the Australian publishing industry. However, his strategic refocus to Asia should also be seen in the context of the vagaries of government maneuvers and machinations. As McLean notes “moves by Britain to join the European Economic Community (EEC) in the 1960s had a profound effect on economic relations between Australia and Britain” and new trading partners for Australia were keenly sought.<sup>112</sup> O’Neil’s offshore printing was “greeted with very little enthusiasm needless to say, particularly by the Australian printing industry” and was followed by much discussion and criticism.<sup>113</sup> According to McLean, the Australian Government’s adherence to the Florence Agreement favoured the Australian publishers who followed in O’Neil footsteps by sending their books to Asia for printing.<sup>114</sup> Import duties were not imposed because the books were regarded as completed products and “by 1967 [this practice] had become a serious problem for Australian book printers.”<sup>115</sup> John McEwen, the Minister for Trade

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<sup>109</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O’Neil*. 5.

<sup>110</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 2 of 8.

<sup>111</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 2 of 8. Halstead Press was owned and operated by Angus & Robertson. According to McLean the “vertical integration” between publishers and printers was more about maximising profits rather than ambitions of creating a monopoly, McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence,” 70.

<sup>112</sup> McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence,” 72–73.

<sup>113</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 2 of 8.

<sup>114</sup> McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence,” 188. The ‘Florence Agreement’ (1950) is a UNESCO Agreement, which precludes participating countries, of which Australia is a signatory, from imposing import duties on books because they are regarded as cultural materials that facilitate international cooperation and development, McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence,” 24–25.

<sup>115</sup> McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence,” 188.

and Industry responded to a submission from the printing industry calling for assistance because of the dramatic increase of Asian printers. The introduction of the Book Bounty in May 1969 was an interim measure while an inquiry was undertaken and continued to 1996.<sup>116</sup> McLean argues that the Bounty effectively “provided compensation to the industry for the commercial damage done as a result of the government’s culturally motivated policy of adhering to the Florence Agreement.”<sup>117</sup> Nonetheless, as O’Neil stated in interview, independent Australian publishers were inclined to use local printers but the argument to keep printing locally was hard to sustain because offshore printing reduced publishing costs by at least thirty percent.<sup>118</sup>

While Australian publishers eventually followed O’Neil’s path to Asia, several were reluctant to take advantage of Asian printing options owing to xenophobia, fear of the unknown, Japan’s involvement in the Second World War and their loyalties to the local printers.<sup>119</sup> As already noted, apprehension about doing business with the Japanese was a difficult obstacle for Australians to overcome. O’Neil had a friend who had been a prisoner of war in one of the Japanese camps for the entire war. He, and his fellow prisoners, were forced to work under dreadful conditions and only six survived.<sup>120</sup> Eventually the xenophobic attitudes among the Australian publishers gave way to the economic realities of publishing, which O’Neil knew could be improved by doing business in Asia.<sup>121</sup> Despite the advantages of printing in Asia, O’Neil explains that Australian printers were always given the opportunity to quote on printing jobs if possible but it was difficult for them to compete with the quality and price available in Asia. Independent Australian publishers gradually embraced the Asian region and became more competitive with British and American publishers.<sup>122</sup> Printing in Asia offered substantial financial benefits and it transformed the breadth of Australian publishing. According to O’Neil, this was a significant outcome because “it created an entirely new

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<sup>116</sup> McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence,” 190–192.

<sup>117</sup> McLean, “Culture, Commerce and Ambivalence,” 192.

<sup>118</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 3 of 8.

<sup>119</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 3 of 8.

<sup>120</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 3 of 8.

<sup>121</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 3 of 8.

<sup>122</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 3 of 8.

range of books.”<sup>123</sup> Lee argues that once Australian publishers had found the means to become commercially competitive, the mass-production of high-quality, full-colour illustrated books was made possible.<sup>124</sup> The sudden appearance and success of the Australiana coffee-table book genre in the 1960s, of which *Australia in Colour* was one, signaled a shift in what the local market wanted to consume.<sup>125</sup> This genre found new customers prepared to spend money on books about Australia that were luxurious in their production values for display in their newly acquired homes and for gifts.<sup>126</sup> After years of austerity, gloom and product shortages, purchasing large-format books full of colourful images of Australia tapped into a sense of connection to the remote Australian landscape and changing national identity.

### ***Australia in Colour***

*Australia in Colour* can be seen as a metaphor for post-war Australians emerging from the bleak years of the Second World War. O’Neil’s experience of working as a bookseller and book representative for British firms gave him first-hand knowledge of what types of books had sold well and direct access to customer feedback and bookstore owners. Robin Smith, originally from Christchurch, New Zealand, was O’Neil’s photographer of choice for *Australia in Colour*. Currey explains that O’Neil chose Smith to be the next Hurley. Smith had established a reputation as a landscape photographer with the Sydney firm John Sands, which had developed a successful business as printers of colour calendars and cards.<sup>127</sup> “Lloyd would have seen the calendars somewhere, found out who the photographer was and tracked him down. That was his way of going about things.”<sup>128</sup> Sessions notes that O’Neil took a quite a financial risk with *Australia in Colour*:

He funded Robin’s trip around Australia and the photography [. . .] Lloyd published it with a keen eye to where the market was, which was in the city. And, in a way he wanted to open up the country to the city dweller.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 3 of 8.

<sup>124</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 41.

<sup>125</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 41.

<sup>126</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 41.

<sup>127</sup> Currey, “Coffee-table books and Lloyd O’Neil.”

<sup>128</sup> Currey

<sup>129</sup> Sessions



According to Currey, *Australia in Colour* was “not an original idea”. As he recalls, O’Neil told him that it was based on *Australia in Natural Colour* by the pioneer Australian photographer Frank Hurley, published and printed by John Sands in 1956.<sup>130</sup> (See figures 7.1 and 7.2). The publication of *Queensland: A Camera Study* in 1950 coincided with O’Neil’s time at Angus & Robertson before he left to travel around Australia in 1951. Although, Currey recalls *Australia in Natural Colour* being the inspiration for O’Neil’s *Australia in Colour*, Hurley’s *Camera Study* books may have also struck a chord with O’Neil.



**Figure 7.2:** Front cover, *Australia in Natural Colour* by Frank Hurley illustrating images, text and layout of the book. (Source: State Library of Victoria website digitised pdf. Captured image.)

<sup>130</sup> John Currey, e-mail to Christine Elliott, July 23, 2015.



**Figure 7.2:** Four pages from *Australia in Natural Colour* by Frank Hurley illustrating images, text and layout of the book, [not paginated]. (Source: State Library of Victoria website digitised pdf. Captured image.)

Whether it was the format or popularity of Hurley's books that inspired O'Neil to publish *Australia in Colour*, full-colour, large-format photographically illustrated books were a natural fit for showcasing the expansive, colourful Australian landscape to an "awakened" book-buying market. Lees and Senyard argue that most commentators recognised the sprawling suburbs and their new homes as a symbol of modern Australia and the ordinary person now "enjoy[ed] a standard of living previously the preserve of the wealthy."<sup>131</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Lees and Senyard, *The 1950s*, 26–27.

*Australia in Colour* sold for 39s. 6d. In O’Neil’s own words, “[*Australia in Colour*] just went like a rocket and we sold 25,000 in the first year.” In total, it achieved well over 100,000 in sales.<sup>132</sup> The book was printed by Toppan in six colours rather than the customary four, although Currey notes, “this did not contribute greatly towards colour fidelity by later standards.”<sup>133</sup> O’Neil’s long-held vision for Australian publishers to print high-quality books about Australia became a reality. When O’Neil looked to South-east Asia for the answer, he helped to democratise Australian publishing and access to Australian stories. As he points out, it was unheard of in Australia to be able to achieve such a quality production result, which could be commercially viable with large print runs. Within months, every other publisher had found their way to Hong Kong, to Singapore, to Japan.<sup>134</sup> The success of *Australia in Colour* was significant enough to “warrant a second volume in similar format.”<sup>135</sup> Despite its simple design, *Australia in Colour* topped the Christmas bestseller list and had tapped into something that resonated with a large market.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 2 of 8.

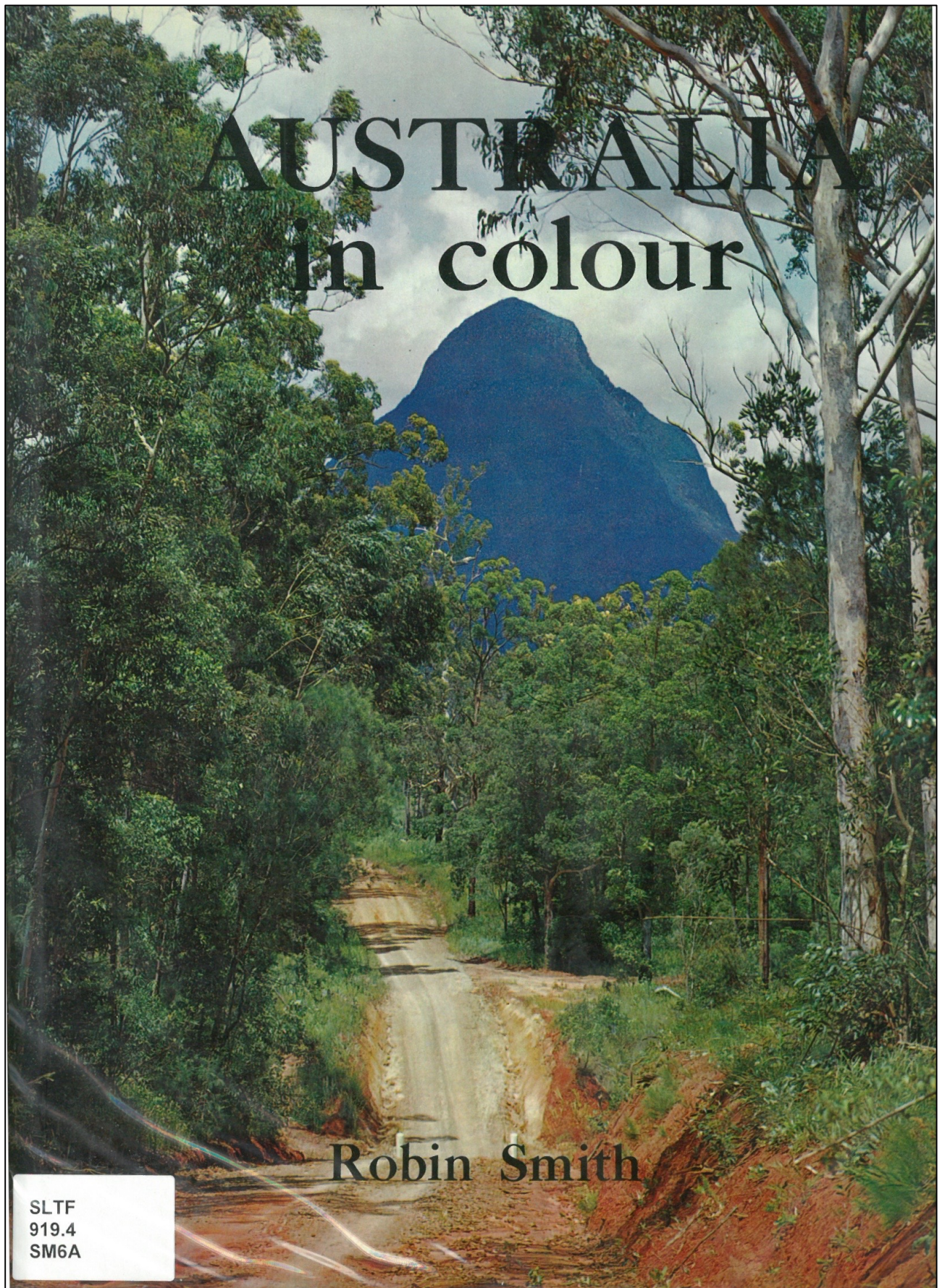
<sup>133</sup> Currey, “Coffee-table books and Lloyd O’Neil.”

<sup>134</sup> O’Neil, “Lloyd O’Neil,” Session 2 of 8.

<sup>135</sup> Currey

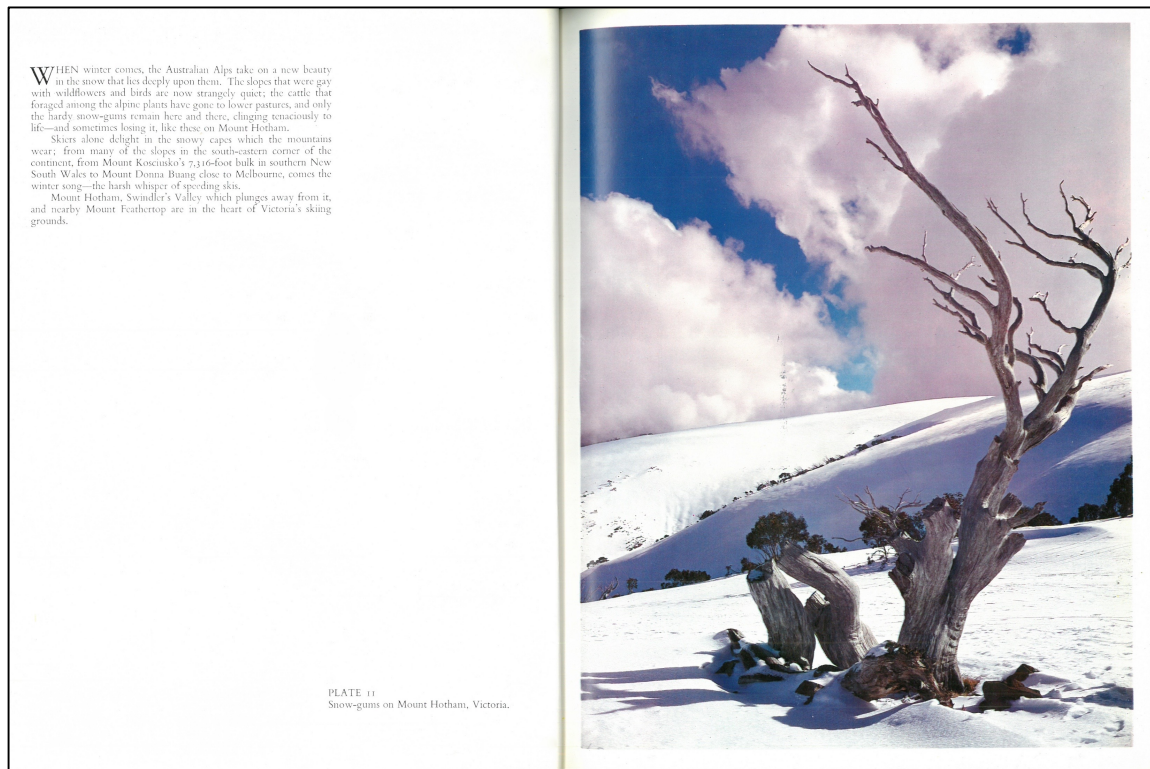
<sup>136</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 53.





**Figure 7.3:** Dust jacket, *Australia in Colour* by Robin Smith. Portrait orientation. (Source: State Library of Victoria. Scanned image.)

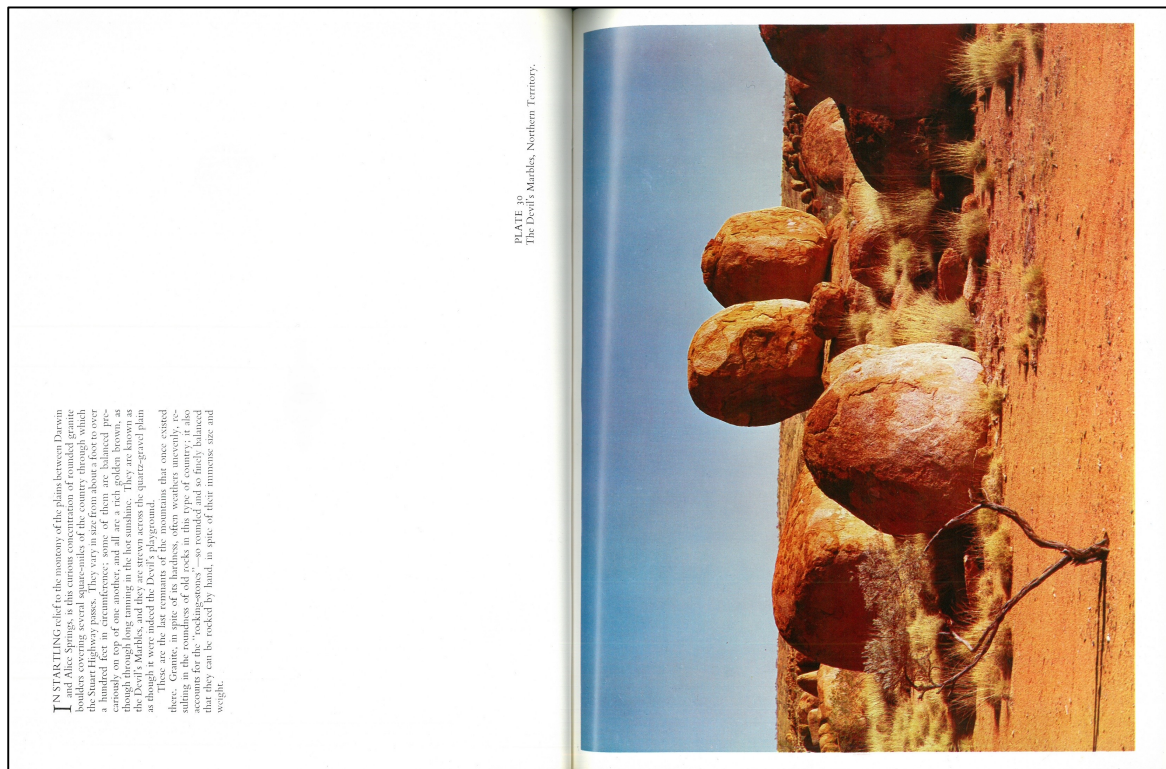




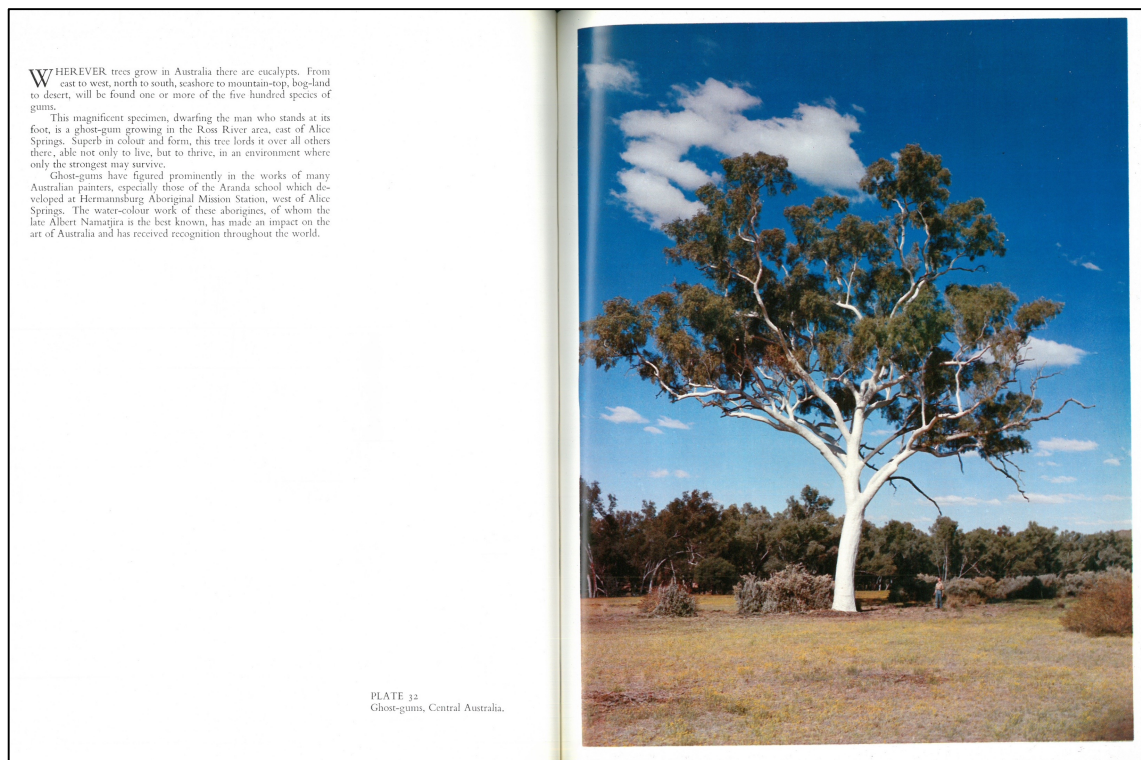
**Figure 7.4:** Text and plate 11— Snow Gums in Mount Hotham, Victoria, *Australia in Colour* by Robin Smith, [not paginated]. Portrait orientation. (Source: State Library of Victoria. Scanned image.)



**Figure 7.5:** Text and plate 14—Loch Ard Gorge, Victoria, *Australia in Colour* by Robin Smith, [not paginated]. Landscape orientation. (Source: State Library of Victoria. Scanned image.)



**Figure 7.6:** Text and plate 30—The Devil’s Marbles, Northern Territory, *Australia in Colour* by Robin Smith, [not paginated]. Landscape orientation. (Source: State Library of Victoria. Scanned image.)



**Figure 7.7:** Text and plate 32–Ghost-gums, Central Australia, *Australia in Colour* by Robin Smith, [not paginated]. Portrait orientation. (Source: State Library of Victoria. Scanned image.)



*Australia in Colour* is reminiscent of a postcard booklet, with text that would sit well in a tourist brochure. The book was published in portrait format, but the majority of images and accompanying text are landscape in orientation requiring the reader to rotate the book to view the images and text as illustrated in figures 7.4–7.7. Sessions confirms that this was a decision made on price. “The printer said [to O’Neil]: to get this price it has to be this shape.”<sup>137</sup> Lee describes *Australia in Colour* as “little more than a collection of 52 scenic photographs.”<sup>138</sup> But, its simplicity may hold the key to part of its success. This period was one of increasing social complexity and mobility. With growth in car ownership and leisure time, *Australia in Colour* may have inspired people to visit sites pictured in the book. Whether the book was purchased for personal use or as a gift, the book reflected a landscape and lifestyle vastly different from the British heritage of much of Australia’s population at the time.

When *Australia in Colour* was released, its success was perhaps not surprising after an extended diet of British literature.<sup>139</sup> As Curtin notes, it was a diet that had been consumed “in the lecture theatre, the drawing room or read by torch under the blankets.”<sup>140</sup> Following the success of *Australia in Colour*, Lansdowne Press extended its list of large-format colour illustrated books with major publications such as, “the nature photography of *Michael Morcombe*, the Periwinkle series of field guides and the ambitious *Australian Art Library*.”<sup>141</sup> Rigby Limited also wanted to emulate the format and printing quality of *Australia in Colour* and proposed this idea for *Australia’s Natural Wonders*, at its Director’s meeting in November 1963:<sup>142</sup>

[Rigby publisher] Mr [Vern] Branson recommended [*Australia’s Natural Wonders*] for publication similar to the format of the Lansdowne book “Australia in Colour”. He approximates costs to be £9,000 for an edition of 20,000 copies. Costs would go towards accomplished photographer Mr Phillips travelling interstate. They had hoped that Griffin

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<sup>137</sup> Sessions

<sup>138</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 53.

<sup>139</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 53, 58.

<sup>140</sup> Curtin, “Distance Makes the Market Fonder,” 235.

<sup>141</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O’Neil*. 5.

<sup>142</sup> Manuscript 3, Folio 9. “Minutes of the Directors’ Meeting November 25,” 1963, 2, ‘in’ *BRG 12 State Library of South Australia. Adelaide, Australia, Minutes of Directors’ and Annual General Meeting Reports 1960s*, ‘in’ Mixed material, 2.

Press would have given a quote to be tabled at the meeting, but the minutes indicate that “Australia in Colour” was tabled at the meeting with the point being made that it had been printed in Japan. “The book which is now tabled has been printed in Japan.” Mr Branson proposes that [*Australia’s Natural Wonders*] would be directed at the overseas gift market and the school library market.<sup>143</sup>

At the following December meeting, Branson reported that a quote for 14/- had been received from Griffin Press. This was regarded as unsatisfactory and further quotes would be sought from three Japanese printers.<sup>144</sup> Rigby had noted *Australia in Colour’s* material quality as well as the superior colour images that advances in colour print technology had enabled, which McGregor compares to Hurley’s celebratory books.<sup>145</sup>

Visually, [Hurley’s] work could not compare with a new generation of celebratory ‘coffee table’ presentations from publishers such as Lansdowne Press and Reader’s Digest, books that benefited from rapid advances in colour reproduction, printing and layout.<sup>146</sup>

With one Australiana coffee-table book, O’Neil had disrupted Britain’s dominance over Australia’s publishing viability with offshore colour printing, transformed the quality of Australian books and changed the reading diet of Australians.

## The Australiana genre

Although Australia largely comprises a population of urban dwellers, images of the Australian landscape, flora and fauna featured heavily in the 1960s Australiana coffee-table books. And, as mentioned in Chapter Two, the Australiana coffee-table books frequently featured “Australia” in their titles.<sup>147</sup> As Australia comprised a large immigrant population, Lee notes that several immigrants purchased Australiana coffee-table books “for relatives overseas, to show those at home something of Australia; even if the recipients couldn’t read the text, they could at least admire the

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<sup>143</sup> “Minutes November 25, 1963” 1963, “Minutes November 25, 1963” State Library of South Australia, ‘in’ Mixed material, 2.

<sup>144</sup> Manuscript 3, Folio 9. “Minutes of Directors’ meeting December 9,” 1963, 1, ‘in’ *BRG 12 State Library of South Australia. Adelaide, Australia, Minutes of Directors’ and Annual General Meeting Reports 1960s*, ‘in’ Mixed material, 1.

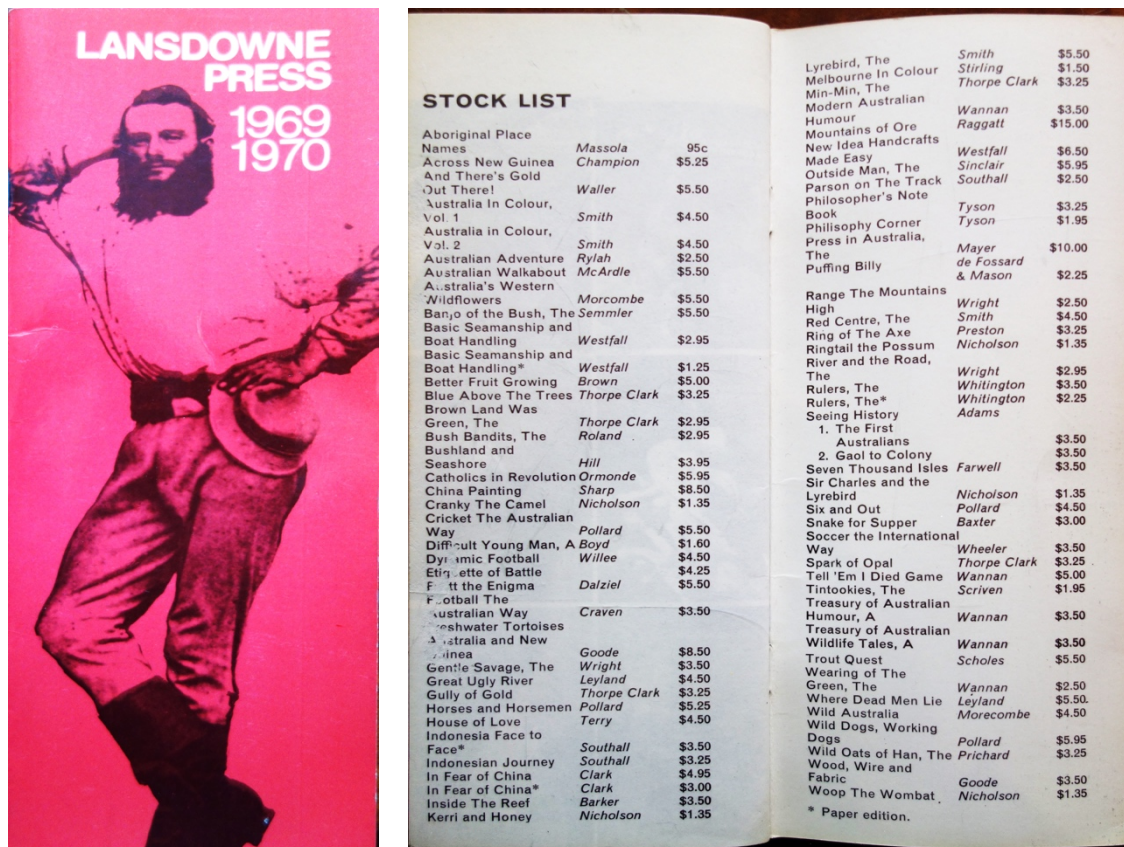
<sup>145</sup> McGregor, *Frank Hurley*, 412.

<sup>146</sup> McGregor, *Frank Hurley*, 412.

<sup>147</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 42.



images.”<sup>148</sup> As previously mentioned, O’Neil published many Australian-themed books other than the coffee-table book format. Currey argues that there was no one better at the Australian genre than Lloyd O’Neil. Being a pragmatist at heart, Currey recalls one of O’Neil’s sayings when presenting their titles to booksellers, “we do the cliché (pause) *better!*”<sup>149</sup> O’Neil was confident that the Australian cultural narrative at the time would sell well and his early publications “reflected the popular nature of the old Lansdowne list.”<sup>150</sup> As an example of how clichéd the Australian genre became, it is instructive to compare the *Lansdowne Press 1969/1970 Catalogue* stock list with the *Lansdowne Press Catalogue 1972* stock list in the images below. Currey points out that the 1972 titles reflect a huge appetite for any book that featured Australian culture.<sup>151</sup>



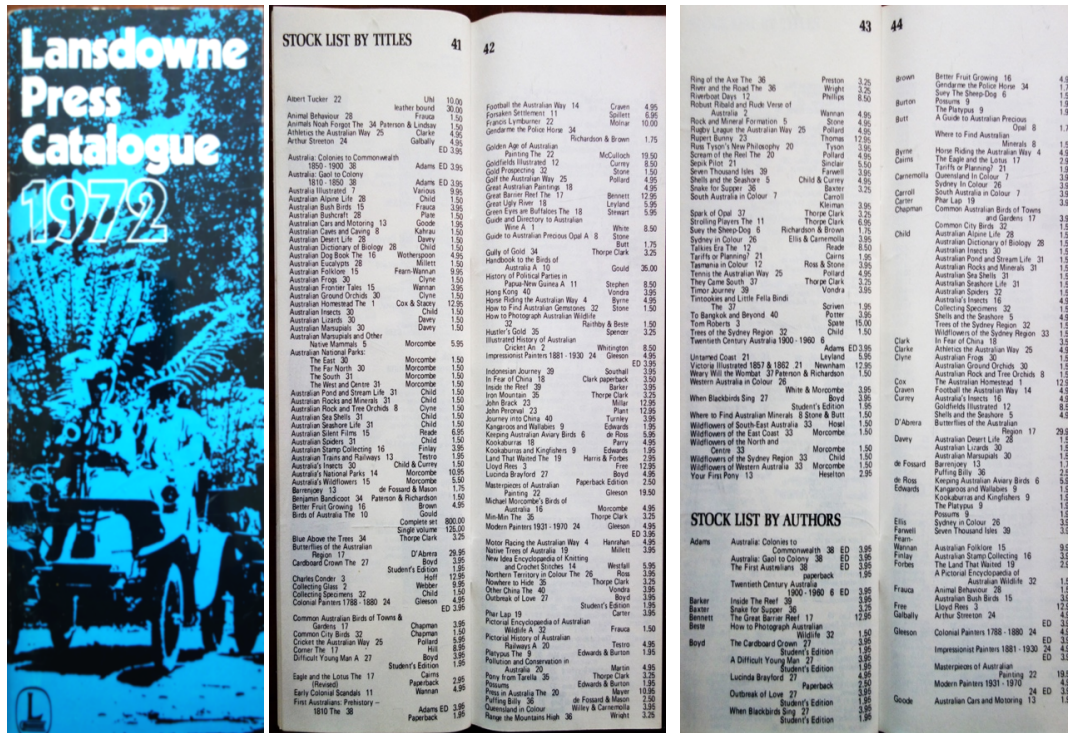
**Figure 7.8:** Front cover and stock list, *Lansdowne Press Catalogue*, 1969/1970, [not paginated]. (Source: John Currey’s personal collection. Photographed image.)

<sup>148</sup> Lee, “Australia in Colour,” 55.

<sup>149</sup> John Currey, e-mail to Christine Elliott, July 23, 2015.

<sup>150</sup> Currey, “Coffee-table books and Lloyd O’Neil.”

<sup>151</sup> Currey, “Coffee-table books and Lloyd O’Neil.”



**Figure 7.9:** Front cover and pages 41–44 of stock list by titles, *Lansdowne Press Catalogue*, 1972. (Source: John Currey's collection. Photographed image.)

By 1972, Lansdowne's titles addressed a vast array of subjects, mostly about Australia, which include Australian flora and fauna, sports, hobbies, icons and artists to name a few. Some examples of these titles are highlighted in the table below. Additionally, of the 157 titles listed in the 1972 catalogue 'Stock List of Titles', 70 included the word "Australia" or "Australian" in the title.

TITLE	AUTHOR	COST
<i>Australia: Gaol to Colony 1810 – 1850</i>	Kenneth Menzies Adams	\$3.95
<i>Australian Bushcraft</i>	Harry Frauca	\$3.95
<i>Australian Eucalypts</i>	Mervyn Millett	\$1.50
<i>Australian Marsupials and Other Native Mammals</i>	Michael Morcombe	\$5.95
<i>Tennis the Australian Way</i>	Jack Pollard	\$4.95
<i>Australian Cars and Motoring</i>	John Goode	\$1.95
<i>Phar Lap</i>	Isabel Carter	\$3.95
<i>John Perceval</i>	Margaret Plant	\$12.95

**Table 7.0:** A sample list of Australiana titles, authors and cost from the 1972 *Lansdowne Press Catalogue* stock list.



As the 1969/1970 catalogue shows, O'Neil extended his *Australia in Colour* concept to an *Australia in Colour Series* to include Australian states: *Queensland in Colour*, *South Australia in Colour*, *Sydney in Colour*, *Tasmania in Colour* and *Western Australia in Colour*. Additionally, he published *Melbourne in Colour* as listed in the 1969/70 catalogue with *Victoria Illustrated* listed in the 1970 catalogue in figure 7.10:



**Figure 7.10:** Front cover and pages 45-46 of stock list by titles, *Lansdowne Press Catalogue*, 1970. (Source: John Currey's collection. Photographed image.)

Ultimately, the Australiana genre had its day. As Currey puts it, the era of the Robin Smith landscape type book was overtaken by television because you could see images on the television for free.<sup>152</sup> He also notes that magazines were another contributing factor, citing that Frank Packer's Australian Consolidated Press had already produced magazine using full-colour offset printing:

*The Australian Women's Weekly* [switched] from gravure, which was an imperfect sort of thing, to offset photography and that enabled them to produce magazines. [A] 120-page magazine called *Australia in Colour* or animals or cakes or anything, anyone could buy them.

<sup>152</sup> Currey, "Coffee-table books and Lloyd O'Neil."

They were very long runs, [nothing] under several hundred thousand a time, so the era of the Robin's [books] faded away. Towards the end, we were trying to milk out his style by trying to find a new market.<sup>153</sup>

Australians were also becoming more politicised, and as Lee argues, it was no longer acceptable to sideline Australia's Indigenous people from the pages of Australiana coffee-table books.

Unfortunately, many independent publishers who rode the heady Australiana wave did not take enough care in diversifying their businesses, which left them vulnerable to the Australiana wave crash.<sup>154</sup>

O'Neil, on the other hand, did diversify into book distribution and also had great success with the publication of large-format cookbooks. Currey and Sessions argue that by 1969 Lansdowne Press had achieved such a high level of success, it could not continue to expand without an injection of additional capital. This was not the first time O'Neil had sought capital: in 1963 he sold Lansdowne to Cheshire but continued to run the business. However, as Cheshire could not provide additional capital in this instance, O'Neil "struck out for the second time in his career to start his own publishing company" and established the O'Neil Publishing Group.<sup>155</sup> Drawing on his experience with Lansdowne/Cheshire, O'Neil innovated in book distribution because he felt that, from an economic or business viewpoint, warehousing books tied up too much capital.<sup>156</sup> Preferring to concentrate his efforts on publishing books for the Australian market, he chose selected distributors, generally publishers, who "often distributed books to the retail trade under their own imprints."<sup>157</sup>

## **Cookbook success**

One of the first successes of the O'Neil Publishing Group was *The Australian Women's Weekly Cookbook* (1970), a coffee-table format cookbook. It was produced for Golden Press, owned by

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<sup>153</sup> Currey, "Coffee-table books and Lloyd O'Neil."

<sup>154</sup> Lee, "Australia in Colour," 57.

<sup>155</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O'Neil*. 5–6.

<sup>156</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O'Neil*. 6.

<sup>157</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O'Neil*. 6.

Packer's Australian Consolidated Press which published the popular *Australian Women's Weekly* magazine.<sup>158</sup> The magazine had already led the way by publishing a colour cookbook in 1954, *The Australian Women's Weekly Picture Cookery* book, which confirms Freeman's claim that magazines had embraced four-colour printing well before the book publishing industry.<sup>159</sup> Bannerman states that the aim of the *Australian Women's Weekly* magazine was to produce a cookbook that illustrated recipes with pictures more than words.<sup>160</sup> The design, layout and colour elevated the cookbook into a new domain with cookbooks that were beautiful to look at and easy to use:

[They] set the pattern for future popular cookery books: large format, a riot of colour, an enticing array of new ideas and old faithfuls rejuvenated, and recipes designed to take the risk out of cooking.<sup>161</sup>

The only real competition to O'Neil's cookbook at the time was *The Margaret Fulton Cookbook* published by Paul Hamlyn in 1968, which is perhaps not surprising as O'Neil and Hamlyn were both great innovators and astute businessmen.<sup>162</sup>

O'Neil's cookbook, *The Australian Women's Weekly Cookbook*, measures 11½" x 8½" and comprises 257 pages of recipes including fondues, international cookery, drinks and punches to name just a few. It was an immediate commercial success and proved that a large market existed for full-colour, large-format cookbooks. Bannerman argues that this style of cookbook was a revelation to Australian cooks with its concise recipes accompanied by twenty-four full-colour plates plus black and white images, which illustrated both cooking methods and completed dishes.

This style of cookbook was a great advance on the full-text British-centric recipes books, which comprised detailed descriptions of cooking methods.<sup>163</sup> I would argue that O'Neil's cookbook also

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<sup>158</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O'Neil*. 6.

<sup>159</sup> Derek Freeman (British publisher and former colleague of Paul Hamlyn), "Paul Hamlyn and coffee-table books," in discussion with Christine Elliott, April 15, 2015, London, UK. Digital recording. See also: Dunstan and Chaitman, "Food and Drink," 334–335.

<sup>160</sup> Bannerman, *Acquired Tastes*, 45.

<sup>161</sup> Bannerman, *Acquired Tastes*, 45–46. See also: Dunstan and Chaitman, "Food and Drink," 335.

<sup>162</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 4 of 8.

<sup>163</sup> Bannerman, *Acquired Tastes*, 45.

had a democratising effect on Australian cooking. Given its popularity, Australian home cookery became more interesting and easy to execute. *The Australian Women's Weekly Cookbook*, which was the first cookbook set and designed in Australia and printed in Hong Kong, sold more than 1.5 million copies [and] was, for a time, the biggest selling hardcover [book] published in Australia.”<sup>164</sup> Ever the pragmatist, O’Neil had tapped into the extensive and loyal *Australian Women's Weekly* magazine market. The publication of these new-look coffee-table cookbooks coincided with an era of increased consumption of kitchen appliances, which were marketed as convenient, less labour-intensive timesavers freeing up women’s time for family and leisure pursuits.<sup>165</sup> *The Australian Women's Weekly* magazine, in conjunction with the O’Neil Publishing Group created a trend for full-colour coffee-table cookbooks, which are in abundance in bookstores today.

### Testing the market with art books

Like many of the other publishers previously mentioned in this thesis, O’Neil also published art books. However, as an unabashed nationalist, his books solely featured Australian artists. Currey notes that it was affordable full-colour printing that enabled O’Neil to publish large-format art books in the mid-seventies. “One of Lloyd’s most ambitious projects, *The Australian Art Library* by academic John Henshaw, who photographed the paintings,” included *Masterpieces of Australian Painting*, and a number of monographs. And, with similar motivations to other post-war art publishers, O’Neil want to make access to art more affordable. However, as Currey points out, O’Neil’s foray into art book publishing was not as successful as cookbook publishing: “the production and editorial costs were enormous and I doubt if the [*Australian Art Library*] series was ever profitable.”<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O’Neil*. 6.

<sup>165</sup> McLeod, *Abundance*, 38–45.

<sup>166</sup> John Currey, e-mail to Christine Elliott, July 23, 2015.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census Book Publishing figures for the period 1964 to 1969, Australian publications (including books and pamphlets) had almost doubled and O'Neil had played a central role in its growth. (See Figure 7.12).

BOOK PUBLISHING		551
Book publishing		
<p><b>Australian book publishing</b></p> <p>Statistics about Australian book publishing are prepared from data supplied by the National Library of Australia (see page 533). Through the deposit provisions of the <i>Copyright Act</i> 1912-1966, its overseas collection agents and its own efforts, the National Library receives practically all books and pamphlets published in Australia (including the External Territories), although not necessarily in the year of publication. Where the statistics compiled and shown hereunder are classified according to the year of publication, the figures are subject to revision as publications come to hand subsequent to the year of publication.</p> <p>The method of counting conforms with international practice. Each title is counted as one unit. The figures cover all non-periodical publications published in Australia. They refer to all publications of five pages or more and include pamphlets, new translations and re-editions. They include government publications, educational textbooks, published university theses, etc., but exclude publications not available to the general public, advertising material, publications of transitory interest, musical works, and maps and charts.</p> <p><b>Number of publications</b></p> <p>The first table following shows the number of books and pamphlets published in Australia during the years 1964 to 1968 and cumulative number received by the National Library, and the second table the number published during the years 1964 to 1968 classified according to State or Territory of publication.</p>		
NUMBER OF AUSTRALIAN PUBLICATIONS (1964 TO 1968) RECEIVED BY THE NATIONAL LIBRARY		
Received by the National Library to the end of—	Published during—	
	1964 1965 1966 1967 1968	
1964 . . . . .	1,385 . . . . .	
1965 . . . . .	1,934 2,039 . . . . .	
1966 . . . . .	2,117 3,180 1,712 . . . . .	
1967 . . . . .	2,123 3,306 2,659 2,319 . . . . .	
1968 . . . . .	2,123 3,306 (a)2,744 (a)3,038 (a)2,646	
(a) Incomplete—see text in first paragraph of section.		
NUMBER OF AUSTRALIAN PUBLICATIONS (1964 TO 1968) RECEIVED BY THE NATIONAL LIBRARY, BY STATE OR TERRITORY OF PUBLICATION		
State or Territory	Published during—	
	1964 1965 1966 (a) 1967 (a) 1968 (a)	
New South Wales . . . . .	723 1,263 1,203 1,216 1,004	
Victoria . . . . .	539 710 603 782 726	
Queensland . . . . .	208 286 183 195 213	
South Australia . . . . .	146 252 163 211 181	
Western Australia . . . . .	105 168 63 113 139	
Tasmania . . . . .	59 98 48 51 42	
Northern Territory . . . . .	9 19 9 7 4	
Australian Capital Territory . . . . .	313 478 447 420 316	
Papua-New Guinea . . . . .	21 30 20 35 21	
Nauru . . . . .	.. 2 5 8 ..	
Total . . . . .	2,123 3,306 2,744 3,038 2,646	
(a) Incomplete—see text in first paragraph of section.		
The next table shows the numbers of books and pamphlets published during the years 1964 to 1968 and received by the National Library, classified by subject-matter.		

EDUCATION, CULTURAL ACTIVITIES, AND RESEARCH		552
NUMBER OF AUSTRALIAN PUBLICATIONS (1964 TO 1968) RECEIVED BY THE NATIONAL LIBRARY, BY SUBJECT-MATTER (a): AUSTRALIA		
Subject-matter	Published during—	
	1964 1965 1966 (b) 1967 (b) 1968 (b)	
Bibliography, libraries, general . . . . .	42 101 111 103 75	
Philosophy, psychology . . . . .	18 21 19 15 22	
Religion . . . . .	78 117 65 83 62	
Social sciences . . . . .	775 1,233 954 1,257 1,023	
Philology . . . . .	32 45 64 48 43	
Science . . . . .	215 302 282 271 237	
Technology, business . . . . .	428 607 475 502 426	
Art, amusement . . . . .	115 142 174 140 159	
Literature—		
Criticism, anthologies, school editions . . . . .	20 137 45 17 16	
Australian poetry . . . . .	33 29 34 46 48	
Australian drama . . . . .	22 5 4 4 3	
Australian fiction . . . . .	156 236 186 195 158	
Australian essays . . . . .	4 2 3 .. 1	
Australian humour and miscellany . . . . .	3 12 9 14 8	
Other literature . . . . .	20 21 72 93 89	
Total, literature . . . . .	258 442 353 369 323	
Travel, biography, history . . . . .	162 294 247 250 276	
Total . . . . .	2,123 3,306 2,744 3,038 2,646	

(a) The classification is based on the divisions of the Dewey Decimal Classification. (b) Incomplete—see text in first paragraph of section.

#### Commonwealth Literary Fund

In 1908 the Commonwealth Government, under Alfred Deakin, first established the Commonwealth Literary Fund. The Fund was entirely a compassionate one devoted to literary pensions for aged or infirm authors, for the families of literary men who died in poverty, and for writers who were unable for financial reasons to continue their activities.

In 1939, in an endeavour to encourage the development of Australian literature and to foster appreciation of it, the Commonwealth Government greatly enlarged the scope of the Fund. The Fund now awards fellowships each year, assists in the publication of manuscripts of high literary merit, makes annual grants for lectures in Australian literature, and awards pensions to writers who have achieved a nation-wide reputation for their work in the field of creative literature. The fellowships are awarded each year to writers who have proved their capacity in the field of creative literature and to writers of promise, to enable them to devote their time to working on a literary project they specify. A fellowship carries a maximum value of \$6,000 a year. The Fund does not seek out people on whom to bestow fellowships, but considers only those who submit applications.

The Fund also assists in the publication of manuscripts which have outstanding literary merit, but which, in the opinion of publishers, may constitute a commercial risk. This assistance takes the form of a guarantee of assistance to the publisher. The Fund does not itself enter the field of publishing, nor does it make outright grants to authors to enable them to arrange publication.

From 1940 to 1965 the Fund made grants to universities for special lectures in Australian literature. In 1940, with rare exceptions, universities ignored Australian writing, but by 1964 the majority of them were actively engaged in its study, and Australian literature had become an accepted field of university scholarship. The Commonwealth Literary Fund lectures played an important role in stimulating interest in Australian literature. At present universities may apply for a grant to enable lectures to be given on special occasions.

In 1956 the Fund initiated a scheme of lectures to the general public and to schools, mainly in country areas, with the co-operation of State adult education authorities and Education Departments. All States receive grants for this purpose. The Fund also assists certain literary magazines of recognised literary value.

**Figure 7.11:** Pages 551–552 of the 1964–1969 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census summarise book publishing figures from that period. (Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics website. Captured image.)

By the early 1970s, O'Neil notes that Australian books could be found in prominent positions in bookstores. Rigby Press, which represented Hamlyn in Australia as well as O'Neil, were able to command the counters they wanted because of the volume of Australian books being published and their popularity:

For a long while, not for a brief four or five years, there was a big Rigby counter at the front of every shop and on one side was Paul Hamlyn (popular books about cats and dogs and vintage cars) and on the other side was Rigby Australiana and Lloyd O'Neil Australiana.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>167</sup> O'Neil, "Lloyd O'Neil," Session 4 of 8.

These bookshop counters contrast greatly to O'Neil's experience of working in Sydney's Angus & Robertson bookshop in the late 1940s when Australian books were few and far between.

## Conclusion

In his attempts to gain traction in a post-war market dominated by British books, O'Neil established relationships with offshore printers, which was crucial because it afforded Australian publishers the ability to financially support the production and publishing of books and gain a return on the investment. This book production strategy was significant because it disrupted the colonial domination of Britain over Australian publishers. According Currey, the distinguishing feature of O'Neil's offshore printing was that "he was certainly the first to exploit it for pictorial books in a large way."<sup>168</sup> He took a personal risk, selling his home to set up his first publishing house and borrowed when necessary, but he was also financially responsible and discerning. He was confident in his publishing interests, knew his market and diversified his business interests. All of this was set against what Thompson describes as an era of excitement—one in which "old barriers and rigid traditions were collapsing and there was a keen sense of adventure and even camaraderie among publishers."<sup>169</sup>

O'Neil's innovative strategies resulted in the successful mass-production of Australiana coffee-table books together with a variety of Australian publications for an eager local market. However, O'Neil did not consider "popular" to be synonymous with "trivial" and engaged with a range of topics he felt people would be interest in reading.<sup>170</sup> Currey states that "O'Neil's nationalism sat quite comfortably with his commercial instincts and he knew where we were going. Like all successful people [he was] a creature of [his] time."<sup>171</sup> O'Neil's titles also helped to reverse the cultural cringe towards Australian books by, in Session's words, "picking subjects that were very dear to Australian's hearts, [such as] Australian birds, bushrangers [and] pictorial books of

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<sup>168</sup> Currey, "Coffee-table books and Lloyd O'Neil."

<sup>169</sup> Thompson, "Sixties Larrikins," 33.

<sup>170</sup> Currey, "Lansdowne and Lloyd O'Neil," 39.

<sup>171</sup> Currey



Australia.”<sup>172</sup> A combination of O’Neil’s value-for-money, high-quality books on local topics that were “becoming more and more in vogue” meant that the success of his illustrated books and his impeccable timing made O’Neil a significant figure in the development of the Australian publishing industry.<sup>173</sup>

This case-study demonstrates a significant working example of the main argument of my thesis. Higher quality colour printing, social change and innovation are encapsulated in the story of the publication of *Australia in Colour*. Although O’Neil could not have foreseen how an Australiana coffee-table book would become a pivotal part of his contribution to Australian culture and its publishing industry, this modest coffee-table book, by today’s standards, symbolises O’Neil’s long-held motivations for publishing his own books. The publishing success of *Australia in Colour* also illustrates how an Australiana coffee-table book found a broader cultural purpose. As an independent Australian publisher, Lloyd O’Neil recognised that Australians wanted to see large-format, high-quality, full-colour images of the country they inhabited and adopted high-risk yet pragmatic and innovative strategies to reflect Australian post-war culture and broaden Australia’s reading choices.

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<sup>172</sup> Sessions

<sup>173</sup> Currey and Sessions, *The Australian Publishing of Lloyd O’Neil*. 8.

## Conclusion

This study has set out to locate the historical emergence of the coffee table book as a cultural form. It has sought to identify their cultural function, particularly in relation to a field of publishing that is dominated by text-filled books. I have also reflected on the term ‘coffee table book’ and considered reasons why it has acquired derogatory overtones. The coffee-table book has been set in the context of the post-war era, a period of heightened innovation and social change in America, Britain and Australia, all of which share similar cultural and social histories. The thesis has applied an interdisciplinary approach to these questions, allowing the coffee-table book to be understood through the prism of the lifecycle of books, technology, visual and material culture and enterprise. In doing so, it has drawn, in particular, on Darnton’s approach to book history in which books are seen as the result of interactions between people and technology.

My overall argument throughout the thesis has been that the popularisation of the coffee-table book in the post-war era was enabled by three key factors: disruptive technology, social change and the entrepreneurial and innovative efforts of key individuals.

The most obvious of these factors is technology. Central to the emergence of the coffee-table book was the development of photography and the process of image reproduction, a development that disrupted the content options for illustrated books. Photographically illustrated books became an important tool for photographers, many of whom used the medium to document the landscapes and cultural identities of America, Britain and Australia. The key technological disruptor that marked the emergence of coffee-table books came with the development of full-colour offset printing in the post-war era. The technology commercialised the production of photographically illustrated books and demonstrates Christensen’s theory on sustaining and disruptive technology. Full-colour, offset printing not only improved the overall production of books, it completely transformed the production of photographically illustrated books because text and photographs

could be printed together on one page. This made their design and production more flexible and reduced printing costs.

A second major factor was developments in material and visual culture. In the mid-twentieth century, Americans, Britons and Australians were seeking alternatives to the bleakness and frugality of the war years by taking advantage of the opportunities the new era presented. The burgeoning suburbs in America, Britain and Australia were at the forefront of these post-war lifestyle changes. Growth in affluence, home-ownership, suburbanisation, and a new interest in interior decoration produced a heightened consumption of new, mass-produced items, including coffee tables and coffee-table books. Coffee tables became a focal point in modern living rooms as central heating liberated families from the need to gather around fireplaces. Often located between the lounge suite and the television, coffee tables became an ideal place for displaying or browsing coffee-table books.

The book acquired a new status in this postwar suburban culture. Previously the realm of intellectuals and the wealthy, they began to be consumed by a new book-buying market and became part of the domestic space. High-quality, full-colour, coffee-table books appealed to what Bourdieu would describe as the “middle-brow”, social class tastes of suburbia, which was frequently reinforced in book reviews by “arbiters of taste”. Image-driven books, in contrast to text-filled books, started to play a significant role in cultural identity by reflecting images of nationhood. As this study has shown, questions about national identity emerged as a central question in post-war America, Britain and Australia and many of the coffee-table books featured in this study reinforced these ideas.

A third factor was also crucial in the emergence of the coffee table book: entrepreneurial and innovative publishers who sought to exploit disruptive technology and changing social conditions. The efforts of figures like David Brower, Paul Hamlyn and Lloyd O’Neil meant that the genre became widespread, accessible and affordable, and the mass-consumption of this style of book

marked the birth of the coffee-table book in earnest. These three figures not only occupy a central place in the history of illustrated publishing in America, Britain and Australia, respectively, their publications also produced supplementary outcomes.

As an environmental activist, with little regard for the economics of publishing, David Brower's single-minded commitment to *The Exhibit Format Series* helped the Sierra Club broadcast its environmental message, which had significant influence on environmental policies and attitudes. The coffee-table book medium, in Brower's opinion, had longevity and could be displayed on coffee tables in the home and returned to at any time. This *Series* of coffee-table books is one of the clearest known examples where such display was clearly intended from its inception.

Paul Hamlyn, by contrast, had stronger business motivations. He created his own publishing conventions and innovated in every area of the book trade by ignoring traditions and establishing new ways of operating in the British publishing industry. Hamlyn demonstrated that innovations in the conception, production, publication and distribution of books made the consumption and ownership of books a more accessible and pleasurable experience for a market that had been previously overlooked. In doing so, Hamlyn made a significant contribution to the modernisation of the British book trade and the democratisation of knowledge through well-published, affordable art and lifestyle coffee-table books.

As an influential player in the development of a viable Australian publishing industry, Lloyd O'Neil was a pragmatist who was not afraid to innovate, given the limitations of the Australian book industry. He determined that Australian books would no longer be second-rate and would equal those in the international market. Despite Australia's xenophobic attitudes towards the Japanese and lingering resentment at the brutality towards Australian prisoners of war during World War II, he found the solution in Japan. By travelling there in 1963, he located the cheapest available high-quality printing facilities to print *Australia in Colour*. The book was a great commercial and cultural success, and O'Neil's non-conventional, offshore enterprise demonstrated the advantages of

printing in Asia. The strategy was taken up by other independent Australian publishers and acted as a significant fillip in the development of the Australian publishing industry.

Brower, Hamlyn and O’Neil’s transformative actions illustrate Schumpeter’s claim that entrepreneurs and innovators disrupt accepted patterns of operating to create new pathways for commodities or business processes.<sup>1</sup> Brower had little interest in financial success.<sup>2</sup> Driven by his passion for the environment (although some may also suggest by his own ego), he ran his publishing program within a grassroots, not-for-profit environmental organisation. As Executive Director, he should have made the responsible management of the Sierra Club’s funds a top priority. Instead, he drained the Club’s funds to publish an expensive series of environmental coffee-table books. Brower’s argument was that the environment had to be well presented if people were to take its protection seriously.

Hamlyn and O’Neil contrast with David Brower, who paid close attention to learning the art of publishing but had little aptitude or time for the business side of publishing. According to de Bellaigue, “business held no terrors” for Hamlyn who in fact loved the stimulation of doing deals.<sup>3</sup> Lloyd O’Neil had a range of working experiences before embarking on a successful publishing career and, like Hamlyn, carefully noted the business acumen of people he admired. Their early work experiences—the coal mines and Angus & Robertson bookstore respectively also reflect the social consequences of World War II beyond the armed conflict itself. Hamlyn and O’Neil were able to invest their own money to establish publishing houses and were astute in their business dealings. Hamlyn was fortunate to have access to some money set aside for his education, which he used to establish his first publishing adventure. He eventually turned that money into a sizable fortune by creating ways of engaging new book-buyers. O’Neil, on the other hand, risked the revenue provided by the sale of his home to establish his own publishing company. This revenue,

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<sup>1</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, 117.

<sup>2</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, 117.

<sup>3</sup> de Bellaigue, *British Book Publishing* 95–96.

together with a small inheritance from his wife's family, permitted O'Neil to establish Lansdowne Press. He subsequently built on that success and became a major figure in Australian publishing.

Brower and O'Neil had early experiences with the book trade and developed a life-long love of publishing. Hamlyn, in contrast, had "no sense of tradition, and regarded books as a commodity."<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, his grab bag of jobs as a young man demonstrated that he was willing to give anything a go and he welcomed opportunities as they arose. At the same time, Hamlyn's lack of "tradition" also freed him from the usual book trade models that constrained and contained the industry and enabled him to innovate. Like O'Neil, Hamlyn embraced full-colour printing and sought cheaper high-quality printing elsewhere, so that he could mass-produce full-colour illustrated books and sell them at a price point more cost-effective for him and more affordable for his customers.<sup>5</sup> While O'Neil and Hamlyn focused on solutions to produce quality, affordable books, Brower maintained a single-minded focus on quality.

In tracing the development of the coffee-table book, the thesis has also sought to establish its general cultural significance. In Chapter Three, I focused on three examples in particular. Firstly, I examined the publishing trajectory of *Hi-Tech: The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home*, which highlighted the book's role in shifting tastes in architecture and design in America during the 1960s and 1970s. Secondly, I argued that the ongoing success of Phaidon's coffee-table art book, *The Art Book*, exemplified the popularisation and democratisation of art. Making art accessible to a general audience was an explicit intention of the founders of both Phaidon Press and Thames & Hudson. It was also significant that these two publishing houses were part of a cohort of Jewish émigrés who contributed much to the cultural life of America, Australia and Britain. And finally, the Australiana coffee-table book, *The Australians*, presented a powerful pictorial and textual narrative of the Australian landscape and its people. Its resonance with Australia's changing national identity was reflected in its sales figures, particularly at Christmas. In addition to these

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<sup>4</sup> Graham, "Changing Hands," 286.

<sup>5</sup> Stevenson, *Book Makers*, 217.

three cases, Chapter Three examined the way visual expression in design, layout and materiality, all hallmarks of coffee-table books, brings further understanding to the coffee-table book as an aesthetic object and necessary characteristics for “reading” image-filled books.

These claims to cultural significance run up against a common prejudice against the cultural form, which was often framed with the binaries of “legitimate” taste and “popular” taste, linking the consumption of cheap coffee-table books to “lower” classes. As de Bellaigue noted, when Hamlyn’s Octopus group published books under their St Michael imprint priced at £1.99 “one wag [referred to the books] as coffee-table volumes for the council estates.”<sup>6</sup> The term “coffee-table book” has often been used as a derogatory term and has generally been avoided by publishers. As cited in Chapter Two, a book reviewer in 1968 noted that no publisher admitted to publishing coffee-table books, and yet they existed.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Turner notes that Sierra Club publisher, David Brower, also rejected the term “coffee-table book”, and yet during the conceptual stage of *This Is the American Earth*, Brower, Adams and Newhall imagined the coffee table as a destination for their book:

[Brower] has designed, edited, written forewords to, and overseen publication and distribution of many books for the club, including the celebrated Exhibit Format series of oversize photo-and-text books (don’t say “coffee table book” within earshot), most of which were published to assist one conservation campaign or another.<sup>8</sup>

Even today, confusion remains as to the way *The Exhibit Format Series* is characterised by the Sierra Club. As the Sierra Club’s website indicates, a page summarising Brower’s key achievements, refers to the *Series* as coffee-table books.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, “Our History” timeline page refers to the publication of *This Is the American Earth* in 1960 as “the first in a series of “Exhibit Format” photographic books”.<sup>10</sup> Also, I neither read or heard on audio recordings Hamlyn or O’Neil

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<sup>6</sup> de Bellaigue, *British Book Publishing* 94.

<sup>7</sup> Leonard, “Three Long,” 8.

<sup>8</sup> Turner, *David Brower: The Making of the Environmental Movement*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Sierra Club, *Sierra Club*. “David R. Brower.” June 14, 2018.

[https://vault.sierraclub.org/john\\_muir\\_exhibit/people/david\\_brower.aspx](https://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/people/david_brower.aspx)

<sup>10</sup> Sierra Club, *Sierra Club*. “About the Sierra Club.” August 26, 2017. <http://www.sierraclub.org/aboutus/>

directly use the term coffee-table book. Although, Freeman claims that when working with Hamlyn they used the term quite freely.<sup>11</sup>

I have been interested, throughout the thesis, in why large-format illustrated books came to be called coffee-table books. The rise of the term “coffee-table book” and its connotations in the post-war era meant that the term was not fully embraced. A distinction between “high-brow” books or legitimate culture and “middle-brow” photographically illustrated, commercially driven, popular culture books is one explanation as to why the term “coffee-table book” became pejorative. As the term was used particularly in book reviews and advertisements during gift-giving periods, but not by publishers or authors, it suggests that the term “coffee-table book” sat well in the commercial vernacular, but not within the book trade. Tebbel’s observations about the display of large-format photographic books in the home goes some way to explain why this occurred. The term “coffee-table book” became associated with the conspicuous, superficial display of taste and cultivation of status, and an assumption that coffee-table books were used more as *objets d’art* than for reading.<sup>12</sup> As I have argued throughout the thesis, the democratisation of book ownership and coffee-table books exemplified a weakening of earlier associations between books and intellectuals or the wealthy. Coffee-table book owners could gain pleasure from leafing through books that were predominantly photographic. While the coffee-table book’s symbiotic relationship with coffee tables may appear obvious, it was not conclusive that coffee-table books were always displayed on coffee tables as a matter of course.

Different terms used to describe large-format photographically illustrated books and the avoidance of the term suggests an adherence to the meaning attributed to the term “coffee-table book” in the post-war era.<sup>13</sup> As I have discussed, there are historical reasons as to why publishers and photography historians wish to distance themselves from coffee-table books and their

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<sup>11</sup> Derek Freeman, Interview with Christine Elliott (London, April 15, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Tebbel, *History of Book Publishing in the U.S.*, vol. IV, 455.

<sup>13</sup> These include: large-format illustrated books, photobooks, photographic books, art books and coffee-table books.



“nonbook” ancestors. After all, what *auteur* or publisher wishes to produce a superficial book? As outlined in the Introduction, coffee-table books were excluded from Parr and Badger’s three-volume history of the photobook. As a way of distinguishing coffee-table books from photobooks, Parr and Badger used the term “photobooks” to describe large-format photographically illustrated books that displayed evidence of serious essayism in their photographic narratives. This boundary or dividing line between photobooks and coffee-table books constitutes a binary cultural divide in the field of large-format photographically illustrated publishing. Hence, I concluded that the coffee-table book is a discursive object because taste is subjective and authors, *auteurs*, reviewers, commentators and publishers shifted in their determinations of when a large-format photographically illustrated book would be ruled *in* or *out* as a coffee-table book. Though, it is possible to describe an archetypical coffee-table book that most people would recognise, as I did in the Introduction.

In summary, this thesis has given an account of the reasons the coffee-table book was popularised in the post-war era. Part of its popularity was its role as an aesthetically pleasing, decorative object in a changing social landscape. But, its significance as a democratising medium has enhanced our understanding of the coffee-table book as an influential cultural artefact. As noted in the Introduction, Stafford acknowledged that the status of coffee-table books could be considered outside of being judged solely on the “nature of photography itself.”<sup>14</sup> By focusing on a period that saw advances in colour printing technology, changing lifestyles and publishing entrepreneurship and innovations in America, Britain and Australia, this study has offered a reading of the coffee-table book that places it at the centre of significant cultural developments, the democratisation of book ownership and access to art, and challenges the idea that the coffee-table book is a one-dimensional artefact.

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<sup>14</sup> Stafford, *Photo-texts*, 82.

I argue that the heyday of the coffee-table book *was* the post-war era considering volume of sales and its cultural influence at the time. As Derek Freeman points out, that heyday has now passed, particularly through the development of reference and crossover books and the Internet. Although Phaidon and Thames & Hudson continue to publish a substantial number of coffee-table art and lifestyle books each year, the market for these books is a shadow of its former self.<sup>15</sup> Despite this, coffee table books remain a staple fixture in the global book market and their presence is evident in bookstores, art galleries and museums. The subjects they now cover have expanded enormously since the post-war era and professions such as architecture use the medium to showcase their work. These factors may suggest that the materiality of coffee-table books is still appealing and that their large-format pages remain a perfect space for exhibiting high-quality images. These attributes can only be achieved to a certain size and quality on a hand-held device.

This study has provided a broad but not exhaustive assessment of the contribution coffee-table books have made to illustrated publishing in America, Britain and Australia in the post-war era. It leaves many other aspects of the coffee-table book to research. It would be interesting to examine the role of coffee-table books in other countries during the post-war period. Also, looking beyond the post-war period, how was the genre further developed and what is its cultural role and status today? The question is particularly pertinent in light of the migration of books onto digital devices. Will the materiality of coffee-table books and their decorative attributes make them more appealing as material artefacts as people tire of looking at images on screens? Another considerable area of research could concentrate on the coffee-table book's role in promoting professional industries such as architecture, fashion or sport.

During my interview with Derek Freeman, in which he recalled Hamlyn's innovations in publishing, marketing and distributing his books, he offered this reflection on the coffee-table book's role in the post-war era: "So the dear old coffee-table illustrated book has done a lot

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<sup>15</sup> Derek Freeman (British publisher and former colleague of Paul Hamlyn), "Paul Hamlyn and coffee-table books," in discussion with Christine Elliott, April 15, 2015, London, UK. Digital recording.

actually.”<sup>16</sup> It is hard to dismiss the genre as wholly superficial or merely fulfilling the role of decoration or as a statement of self-aggrandisement. The coffee-table book played a central role in the democratisation of book ownership, culture and the arts.

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<sup>16</sup> Derek Freeman, Interview with Christine Elliott (London, April 15, 2015).

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Curated list of coffee-table books published in <i>The New York Times</i> , New York, USA 1960–1979							
Database: <i>The New York Times</i> historical newspapers archive (1851–2008)							
No	Document	Date	Title and Author	Category	Publisher	Format	Cost
1	Review: “Books of The Times” by Charles Poore, page 13	Dec 24, 1960	<i>The Past We Share: An Illustrated History of the British and American Peoples</i> edited by Peter Quennell and Alan Hodge	History	Putnams	308 pages	\$9.95 until Jan 1, thereafter \$12.50
2	Article: “Books Today: Fiction”, page 36	Oct 18, 1962	<i>The Coffee Table Book of Astrology</i> edited by John Lynch	Spirituality	Studio Book-Viking	350 illustrations, 6 colour pages, 8 ½” x 10 ½”	\$12.50
3	Display Ad 55: “Reward for shopping now! Special Pre-Christmas Prices”, page 19. A short description of 28 coffee-table books	Nov 26, 1962	<i>In Wildness is the Preservation of the World</i> photos by Eliot Porter, text by David Thoreau	Nature	Sierra Club	Colour photos, 10 ½” x 13 ½”	Before Christmas \$20, thereafter \$25
4	Article: “The Collector and the Collected” by Aline B. Saarinen, page 242	Dec 15, 1963	<i>Great Private Collections</i> by Douglas Cooper	Art	Macmillan	Outsized, colour and black and white photos with a glazed jacket	\$19.95 until Dec 31, thereafter \$25
5	Article: “Books of The Times: End Papers” by Ada Louise Huxtable, page 15	Dec 24, 1963	<i>Buildings, Plans and Designs</i> by Frank Lloyd Wright	Architecture	Horizon Press	32 pages, 100 plates, 16” x 26”	\$75
6	Review: “Measured by the Eye: Measured” by John Canaday, page BR6	Dec 5, 1965	<i>Drawings of Michelangelo</i> , critical notes by Mario Salmi and Paola Barocchi	Art	Braziller	12” x 12 ½”, two inches thick, 11 lbs	\$75
7	Article: “Books of The Times: Over the Counter and Under the Tree” by Eliot Fremont-Smith, page 45	Dec 9, 1966	<i>Coaching Days of England</i> edited by Paul and Elizabeth Elek	History	Imported by Timelife	24 “outsized” colour plates	\$32.95
8	Display Ad 1238: “A Royal Selection of Beautifully Illustrated Volumes”, page 364	Nov 19, 1967	<i>The Windsor Years</i> by Lord Kinross	Royalty	Studio	250 photographs, 9 ¾” x 13”	\$16.00
9	Review: “The Writing on the Wall” by Sheldon Nodelman, [age BR6	Jan 7, 1968	<i>The Writing on the Wall: Treasures of Prehistoric Art</i> by Andre Leroi-Gourhan	Art	Harry N. Abrams	Illustrated 543 pages	\$40

Curated list of coffee-table books published in <i>The New York Times</i> , New York, USA 1960–1979							
Database: <i>The New York Times</i> historical newspapers archive (1851–2008)							
No	Document	Date	Title and Author	Category	Publisher	Format	Cost
10	Review: “The American Heritage History of ...” by Edgar Kaufmann Jr., page BR74	Dec 7, 1969	<i>The American Heritage History of Antiques: From the Civil War to World War I</i> by Marshall B. Davidson	Antiques	American Heritage Publishing Co.	Illustrated 415 pages	\$14.95 until Dec 31, thereafter \$17.50
11	Article: <i>As They Saw Him</i> by Thomas Lask, page 31	Oct 2, 1970	<i>Beethoven: A Documentary Study</i> edited by H.C. Robbins	Music	Macmillan	400 pages	\$22.50 until Dec 31, thereafter \$25
12	Article: “As They Saw Him” by Thomas Lask, page 31	Sep 8, 1972	<i>From the Sketchbooks of the Great Artists</i> by Claude Marks	Art	Crowell	Illustrated 480 pages	\$19.95 until Dec 25, thereafter \$25
13	Review: “More Than a Coffee-Table Book” by Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, page 45	Dec 14, 1973	<i>Graphic Design</i> by Milton Glaser	Graphic Design	Overlook Press/Viking	Illustrated	\$30
14	Display Ad 444: “Books: Some of the Year’s Better Reading”, page 248	Dec 15, 1974	<i>Sooner</i> by Bill Bruns, photographs by Rich Clarkson	Sport	Josten’s	144 pages	\$12.50
15	Article: “Machu Picchu at Delphi” by Sherwin Smith, page 359	Dec 7, 1975	<i>Classic Lines: A Gallery of the Great Thoroughbreds</i> by Richard Stone Reeves and Patrick Robinson	Animals	Oxmoor House	16” x 12 ¾” weighing 5lb 15oz	\$50 until Jan 31, thereafter \$75
16	Article: “Cooking: Cooking” by Mimi Sheraton, page 271	Dec 5, 1976	<i>The Complete Book of Preserving</i> by Marye Cameron-Smith	Cooking	Bobbs-Merrill	Illustrated with text	\$18.95
17	Article: “‘The Kitchen Book’: From Cave to Microwave” by Mimi Sheraton, page 78	Sep 15, 1977	<i>The Kitchen Book</i> by Terence Conran	Design	Crown	Illustrated with text	\$27.50 until Oct 26, thereafter \$30
18	Article: “Architecture: Buildings” by Paul Goldberger, page BR6	Dec 3, 1978	<i>Summer Places</i> by Brendon Gill and Dudley Witney	Architecture	Methuen	Illustrated, 224 pages	\$29.95 until Jan 1, thereafter \$35
19	Article: “A Special Kind of Theatre: Broadway Musicals Musical” By Harold C. Schonberg, BR4	Sept 30, 1979	<i>Broadway Musicals</i> by Martin Gottfried	Performing Arts	Harry N. Abrams	Illustrated, weighs 6lbs, measures 13 ½” x 10 ½”, 353 pages, 395 illustrations	\$40 until Dec 31, thereafter \$45

Curated list of coffee-table books published in <i>The Times</i> , London, UK 1964–1980							
Database: <i>The Times</i> Digital Archive 1785–1985							
No	Document	Date	Title and Author	Category	Publisher	Format	Cost
1	“Elegant for Whom?” by Nathaniel Tarn, page 25	Oct 12, 1968	<i>Dawn of the Gods</i> by Jacquetta Hawkes	Archaeology	Chatto & Windus	Text and illustrations	75s
2	Review: “Art Choice” by David Piper, page IV. A review of 13 coffee-table art books.	Nov 29, 1969	<i>Negro Art</i> by D. Olderoggo and Werner Forman	Art	Hamlyn	A series of excellent photographs both plain and coloured	50s
3	Review: <i>Island that has Escaped the Twentieth Century</i> by Richard Harris, page II	Dec 28, 1970	<i>Island Ceylon</i> Roloff Beny, text by John Lindsay Opie	Travel	Thames & Hudson	A mixture of colour and half-tone photographs and line-drawings	£6 6s
4	Review: <i>The Great Classifier</i>	Aug 12, 1971	<i>The Compleat Naturalist</i> by Wilfrid Blunt	Botanical	Collins	Text and images	£3.50
5	News: “Peking reveals discovery of Han princely couple clad in suits of jade in a Chinese equivalent o Tutankhamun’s tomb” by Peter Hopkirk, page 7	Jul 12, 1972	<i>New Archaeological Finds</i> , author not listed	Antiquities	Published in Peking	Not listed	Not listed
6	Review: “Escape from Reality” by Stanley Sadie, page 13	Nov 22, 1973	<i>Tchaikovsky</i> by John Warrack	Music	Hamish Hamilton	175 pictures, many in colour	£5
7	News: “Some Time-Stopping, Vivid Visions” by David Piper, page VII	Nov 29, 1973	<i>Albrecht Durer : The Landscape Water-Colours</i> by Walter Koschatsky	Art	Academy	Not listed	£15.75
8	Review: “Feverish Industry and Activity” by Derek Parker, Page 8	Oct 30, 1975	<i>Trollope</i> by C.P. Snow	Biography	Macmillan	Illustrated	£6.50
9	Review: “Visual Aides to Composers” by William Mann, page XXIII	Nov 26, 1976	<i>Mozart: the Man, the Musician</i> by Arthur Hutching	Music	Thames & Hudson	Illustrations and supporting text	£16

Curated list of coffee-table books published in <i>The Times</i> , London, UK 1964–1980							
Database: <i>The Times</i> Digital Archive 1785–1985							
No	Document	Date	Title and Author	Category	Publisher	Format	Cost
10	Review: “High Road to Modern Art” by John Russell Taylor, page XII	Nov 24, 1978	<i>Cézanne: The Late Work</i> edited by William Rubin	Art  In connexion, originally with a big exhibition last year at MoMA	Thames & Hudson	Large number of black and white reproductions and a number of “superbly accurate”, colour reproductions	£20
11	Review: “Comprehensive guide is a decade’s labour of love” by John Blunsden, page 12	Jan 18, 1980	<i>Autocourse 1979-80</i> edited by Maurice Hamilton	Sport	Hazelton Securities Ltd	Colour and black and white photographs	£10.95

Curated list of coffee-table books published in Australian newspapers and magazines 1965–1979							
Database: Trove, Digitised newspapers and more, National Library of Australia							
No	Document	Date	Title and Author	Category	Publisher	Format	Cost
1	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Old Masters and New Reputations” by Donald Brook, page 11	Oct 23, 1965	<i>The Drawings of Leonardo and Michelangelo</i> by Jaromir Pecirha	Art	Paul Hamlyn	29 reproductions of Leonardo drawings and 37 Michelangelo plates	\$84/-
2	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Memories of Degas” by Donald Brook, page 11	Sep 10, 1966	<i>Viking Art</i> by David M. Wilson and Ole Klindtjenson	Art	Allen and Unwin	Photographic illustrations are remarkably clear and businesslike	\$9.80
3	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “O’Shaughnessy as a Strolling Player: A Specialist Views Us” in Leisure-The Arts section	Jul 27, 1967	<i>The Restless Years: Being Some Impressions of The Origin of The Australian</i> by Peter O’Shaughnessy, Graeme Inson and Russel Ward	Australiana	Jacaranda Press (1968)	Not listed	Not listed
4	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Hal Porter’s Japanese Ordeal” by John Gaiger, page 13	Nov 2, 1968	<i>The Actors: An Image of the New Japan</i> by Hal Porter	Travel	Angus and Robertson	200 pages	\$5.25
5	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Books for Christmas Reading” by a Special Correspondent, A review of 21 book suggestions for Christmas, including 2 coffee-table books page 9	Dec 24, 1969	<i>History of the Royal Navy</i> edited by Peter Kemp	War	Arthur Barker	Text and illustrations	\$8.40
			<i>The Princes’</i> by H.D. Molesworth		Weidenfeld and Nicolson	Illustrated, some colour	\$9.35
6	Article in <i>The Australian Women’s Weekly</i> : “At Home . . . with Margaret Sydney” by Margaret Sydney, page 56	May 27, 1970	<i>A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World</i> by James Cook	History	South Australian Libraries Board	Two-volume Bi-Centenary souvenir facsimile edition with text and more than 100 pictures	\$22.50
7	Article in the <i>Tribune</i> : “Books”, A review of 8 books including 1 coffee-table book, page 8	Aug 11, 1971	<i>The Aborigine Today</i> Roderick Hulsbergen et al	Australiana	Paul Hamlyn	Colour photographs and accompanying text	\$6.95
8	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Bird Pictures” by Hugh Elliot, page 12	Jul 15, 1972	<i>Birds of Australia</i> by Michael Morcombe	Birds	Lansdowne Press	80 pages	\$4.95

Curated list of coffee-table books published in Australian newspapers and magazines 1965–1979							
Database: Trove, Digitised newspapers and more, National Library of Australia							
No	Document	Date	Title and Author	Category	Publisher	Format	Cost
9	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “For the Potter”, page 20	Mar 22, 1973	<i>The Complete Book of Ceramic Art</i> by Polly Rothenberg	Art	Allen and Unwin	276 pages, 690 illustrations in both black and white and colour	\$15.95
10	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “D.H.L. with Pictures” by Maurice Dunlevy, page 9	Apr 5, 1974	<i>D.H. Lawrence, Novelist, Poet, Prophet</i> edited by Stephen Spender	Literature	Weidenfeld and Nicolson	250 pages, more than 80 black and white photographs	\$9.50
11	Article in <i>The Australian Women’s Weekly</i> : “Book Present to Pope”, page 12	Jan 29, 1975	<i>A Big Country: Stories from the ABC Series about the People of Australia</i> by Ron Iddon and John Mabey	Australiana	Australian Broadcasting Commission in 1974	Not listed	Not listed
12	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Jewry” by Patricia Rappolt, page 14	Sep 25, 1976	<i>Next Year in Jerusalem</i> edited by Douglas Villiers	Biography	Harrap	346 pages	\$33.10
13	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Edna Dives Between Covers” by Roger Pulvers, page 12	Feb 26, 1977	<i>Dame Edna’s Coffee Table Book</i> by Barry Humphries (Edna Everage)	Australiana	Sydney Australasian Publishing Company in association with George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd, London	Black and white, and some colour snaps and recipes	\$8.95
14	Article in <i>The Australian Women’s Weekly</i> : “Books: Reviewed by Heather Chapman”, page 131	Aug 23, 1978	<i>Don Dunstan’s Australia</i> by Don Dunstan, photographs by Julia Featherstone	Australiana	Rigby	Text and photographs	\$8.95
15	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Coffee table tomes and serious social history” a review of 8 coffee-table books by Maurice Dunlevy, page 15	May 27, 1979	<i>The Birth of Australia</i> by Robin Smith	History	Rigby/John Curry, O’Neil	223 pages, 265 colour photographs	\$19.95

Curated list of quotes about coffee-table books published in <i>The New York Times</i> , New York, USA 1960–1979				
Database: <i>The New York Times</i> historical newspapers archive (1851–2008)				
No	Document	Quote	Date	Title
1	Review: “Books of The Times” by Charles Poore, page 13	“It is a coffee-table book. The young man who is waiting in your living room to take the daughter of the house to a party they are already late for can improve his mind by turning its pages.”	Dec 24, 1960	<i>The Past We Share: An Illustrated History of the British and American Peoples</i> edited by Peter Quennill and Alan Hodge
2	Display Ad 55: “Reward for shopping now! Special Pre-Christmas Prices”, page 19. A short description of 28 coffee-table books	“A huge, lavish, entertaining and sophisticated book—the conversation piece of the year!”	Nov 26, 1962	<i>The Coffee Table Book of Astrology</i> edited by John Lynch
3	Display Ad 55: “Reward for shopping now! Special Pre-Christmas Prices”, page 19. A short description of 28 coffee-table books	“. . . we see nature and New England in a new dimension.”	Nov 26, 1962	<i>In Wildness is the Preservation of the World</i> photos by Eliot Porter, text by David Thoreau
4	Article: “The Collector and the Collected” by Aline B. Saarinen, page 242	“It is outsize—an inch or so too wide to fit on a normal bookshelf—so that it can be placed face up on a coffee table with a sense of appropriateness rather than ostentation.”	Dec 15, 1963	<i>Great Private Collections</i> by Douglas Cooper
5	Article: “Books of The Times: End Papers” by Ada Louise Huxtable, page 15	“It is big enough, 16x26 inches, to be not just a coffee-table books but a coffee table.”	Dec 24, 1963	<i>Buildings, Plans and Designs</i> by Frank Lloyd Wright
6	Review: “Measured by the Eye: Measured” by John Camaday, page BR6	“An evaluation of the year’s art books—those, big elaborately illustrated, usually expensive affairs that have come to be called coffee-table books . . .”	Dec 5, 1965	<i>Drawings of Michelangelo</i> critical notes by Mario Salmi and Paola Barocchi
7	Article: “Books of The Times: Over the Counter and Under the Tree” by Eliot Fremont-Smith, page 45	“The subcategory Coffee Table Book has been mentioned. But The Coffee Table proper is a different and rarer breed. It is a gift book so large that if you put legs on it, you have a coffee table.”	Dec 9, 1966	<i>Coaching Days of England</i> edited by Paul and Elizabeth Elek
8	Review: “The Writing on the Wall” by Sheldon Nodelman, [age BR6	“The present sumptuous—and expensive—book is a translation of the author’s “Prehistoire de l’Art Occidentale,” published in 1965. The title supplied by the American publishers obviously intends to suggest, for sales reasons, a lush coffee-table book.”	Jan 7, 1968	<i>The Writing on the Wall: Treasures of Prehistoric Art</i> by Andre Leroi-Gourhan
9	Review: “The American Heritage History of . . .” by Edgar Kaufmann Jr., page BR74	“This spectacular coffee-table book for collectors of knick-knacks could almost be described by the cadenced phrases of a 1900 Burnum & Bailey poster: “The dazzling dancing scene in the magical mighty workless play.”	Dec 7, 1969	<i>The American Heritage History of Antiques: From the Civil War to World War I</i> by Marshall B. Davidson



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Database: <i>The New York Times</i> historical newspapers archive (1851–2008)				
No	Document	Quote	Date	Title
10	Article: “As They Saw Him” by Thomas Lask, page 31	“There’s more to this, Beethoven book than meets the eye. On the surface it bears all the stigmata of a coffee table book: elaborate make-up, tinted paper, pages of glossy prints in black and white and attractive colour.”	Oct 2, 1970	<i>Beethoven: A Documentary Study</i> edited by H.C. Robbins
11	Review: “Of Art and Its Makers” by Thomas Lask, page 30	“One of the dividends of the cultural revolution, along with the increase in museum attendance, museum tours of Europe and the like, has been the proliferation of art books for popular consumption.”	Sept 8, 1972	<i>From the Sketchbooks of the Great Artists</i> by Claude Marks
12	Review: “More Than a Coffee-Table Book” by Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, page 45	“Call it elegant, lavish, a colorful feast for the eyes. Say its reproductions of book jackets, record cases, magazine covers, illustrations, posters and advertisements are faithful to their originals. Celebrate how good it looks on the coffee table and how pleasant it is to leaf through when the after-dinner conversation fails to absorb.”	Dec 14, 1973	<i>Graphic Design</i> by Milton Glaser
13	Display Ad 444: “Books: Some of the Year’s Better Reading”, page 248	“The perfect coffee-table book for an Oklahoma football fan who can’t go to a bowl or watch his team on TV.”	Dec 15, 1974	<i>Sooner</i> by Bill Bruns, photographs by Rich Clarkson
14	Article: “Machu Picchu at Delphi” by Sherwin Smith, page 359	“Categorizing gift books is a difficult matter—it isn’t just one of your holiday games, though it flourishes during the holiday season. First of all, there’s the coffee-table book that the family see daily even if they seldom look inside once the thank-you notes have been sent.”	Dec 7, 1975	<i>Classic Lines: A Gallery of the Great Thoroughbreds</i> by Richard Stone Reeves and Patrick Robinson
15	Article: “Cooking: Cooking” by Mimi Sheraton, page 271	“As with [The Complete Book of Fruits and Vegetables], The Complete Book of Preserving could be considered a coffee-table book with a thoroughly practical side. Originally published in England, this beautifully illustrated work covers all methods of preserving . . .”	Dec 5, 1976	<i>The Complete Book of Preserving</i> by Marye Cameron-Smith
16	Article: “Architecture: Buildings” by Paul Goldberger, page BR6	“These are the days in which Architectural Digest’s pages of pictures of lavishly decorated houses sell out each month at the newstand . . . Books about ‘great houses’ are nothing new, but this season they seem to dominate the Christmas selection. What publishers have decreed for the coffee table of the architecturally minded is a book about someone else’s coffee table, most likely a very old and very expensive one.”	Dec 3, 1978	<i>Summer Places</i> by Brendon Gill and Dudley Witney
17	Article: “A Special Kind of Theater: Broadway Musicals Musical” by Harold C. Schonberg	“Some coffee-table book: about six pounds, 13 ½ inches by 10 ½, 353 pages, 395 illustrations (about a third of them in colour). It is intended as a reading or browsing book rather than as a reference . . .”	Sep 30, 1979	<i>Broadway Musicals</i> by Martin Gottfried



Curated list of quotes about coffee-table books published in <i>The Times</i> , London, UK 1964–1980				
Database: <i>The Times</i> Digital Archive 1785–1985				
No	Document	Quote	Date	Title
1	Review: “Renewed Lures Check Fall in Book Club Membership”, page 16	“On the other flank is the more uncertain territory dominated by the so-called “coffee-table book”, the big richly-illustrated volume designed to be looked at rather than read, and left casually round the house rather than put on a shelf.”	Jul 2, 1964	Article about the impact of television of the book club trade. Book club in this instance refers to club that sends out books to members to buy, like the World Record Club.
2	Review: “Elegant for Whom?” by Nathaniel Tarn, page 25	“The reluctant conclusion is that this is a coffee-table book after all, for there is no new material to hand and the discussion of such air-raising problems as that of Linear B decipherment is scanty and only tangential.”	Oct 12, 1968	<i>Dawn of the Gods</i> by Jacquetta Hawkes
3	Review: “Art Choice” by David Piper, page IV. A review of 13 coffee-table art books.	“Homage to the book beautiful: better perhaps that the malign epithet, ‘coffee-table book’, had never been hit upon. Devastatingly apposite as it so often is, it can also be only too easily and often applied as sufficient and complete dismissal of almost all books that are large and lush with colour plates. Indeed it must now take some courage for a man of sensibility to leave such a book lying about in his rooms on any kind of table. But in fact there are produced each year, a number of large-scale, expensive, even glossy books that need justification for their existence in a secular age no more than did the illuminated missal in a religious age.”	Nov 29, 1969	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Ben Nicholson</li> <li>•A History of Modern Art</li> <li>•Turning Points in Twentieth Century Art</li> <li>•Movements of Art since 1945</li> <li>•Pietro Longhi</li> <li>•Later Georgian Pictures</li> <li>•National Portrait Gallery, Tudor and Jacobean Portraits</li> <li>•Negro Art</li> <li>•The Drawings of Raphael</li> <li>•The Complete Paintings of Raphael</li> <li>•Europe in the Dark Ages</li> <li>•The Gothic Cathedral</li> <li>•Indian Painting: The Scene, Themes, and Legends</li> </ul>
4	Review: “Art Choice” by David Piper, page IV. A review of 13 coffee-table art books.	“The Paul Hamlyn production belt, tending to print exotically in Prague or Hong Kong, is not to be sniffed at: recent examples include . . . <i>Negro Art</i> . . . which makes accessible many of the West African masterpieces . . .”	Nov 29, 1969	<i>Negro Art</i> by D. Olderoggo and Werner Forman
5	Review: “Island that has Escaped the Twentieth Century” by Richard Harris, page II	“Of course the vivid blue and green on the dust jacket, the enormous size, the delicate off-white text paper and the dramatic colour photographs program this coffee table book. But that label will never do for a book about Ceylon. A tea table book, then, which escapes for the most part the pejorative implications of the coffee table tag while living up to the sumptuousness that is its hallmark.”	Dec 28, 1970	<i>Island Ceylon</i> Roloff Beny, text by John Lindsay Opie
6	News: “Peking reveals discovery of Han princely couple clad in suits of jade in a Chinese equivalent of Tutankhamun’s tomb” by Peter Hopkirk, page 7	“Now in a splendid coffee-table book worthy of any capitalist publisher.”	Jul 12, 1972	<i>New Archaeological Finds</i> , author not listed

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Database: <i>The Times</i> Digital Archive 1785–1985				
No	Document	Quote	Date	Title
7	Review: “Escape from Reality” by Stanley Sadie, page 13	“It is a coffee-table book and much more. There are about 175 pictures, many in colour.”	Nov 22, 1973	<i>Tchaikovsky</i> by John Warrack
8	News: “Some Time-Stopping, Vivid Visions” by David Piper, page VII	“[The book] may look suspiciously like the dreaded coffee-table book, but justifies its format by reproducing all the known examples around the size of the originals . . .”	Nov 29, 1973	<i>Albrecht Durer: The Landscape Water-Colours</i> by Walter Koschatsky
9	Review: “Feverish Industry and Activity” by Derek Parker, Page 8	“This is one of those elegant books designed and produced by George Rainbird Ltd, who have helped to make the fully illustrated “coffee-table book” an acceptable form for the serious biographer or social historian.”	Oct 30, 1975	<i>Trollope</i> by C.P. Snow
10	Review: “Visual Aides to Composers” by William Mann, page XXIII	“. . . at first glance much suggests a coffee-table book for idle perusal, with its “pictorial essays” and profuse illustrations (one on almost every page).”	Nov 26, 1976	<i>Mozart: the Man, the Musician</i> by Arthur Hutching
11	Review: “High Road to Modern Art” by John Russell Taylor, page XII	“Who, if anyone, reads the text of a coffee-table book? It is easy enough to sidestep the question: coffee-table books, like pornography, can be defined by superior persons to exclude anything they actually have to approve of. This is not a coffee-table book because it is scholarly, even if its size and lavishness of illustration would seem to include it. That is not a coffee-table book because its subject is sufficiently obscure to preclude the casual picture-browser from ever picking it up in the first place. And so on, until finally what is left is merely the bottom of the barrel. Perhaps intelligent people are not supposed to have coffee tables; or read large books only on lecterns; or have no use for pictures at all. Well, if so, none of these new art books is for them. But for the rest of us, who still like to get pretty and not totally brainless presents, they still have their uses.”	Nov 24, 1978	<i>Cézanne: The Late Work</i> edited by William Rubin
12	Review: “Comprehensive guide is a decade’s labour of love” by John Blunsden, page 12	“Facts and figures can be compressed into a small-format publication but the wide spaces of the so-called coffee table book are, I believe, essential to recapture effectively the glamour, colour, excitement and atmosphere of grand prix racing.”	Jan 18, 1980	<i>Autocourse 1979-80</i> edited by Maurice Hamilton

Curated list of quotes about coffee-table books published in Australian newspapers and magazines 1965–1979				
Database: Trove, National Library of Australia				
No	Document	Quote	Date	Title
1	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Old Masters and New Reputations” by Donald Brook, page 11	“It is not a work of scholarship (or if it is it is slight, and unnecessary) nor is it quite a coffee-table art book (only the dustjacket is glossy). It is a moderately useful introductory textbook suitable for art students and amateurs, moderately priced as art books go.”	Oct 23, 1965	<i>The Drawings of Leonardo and Michelangelo</i>
2	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Memories of Degas” by Donald Brook, page 11	“Not a coffee-table art book, unless you take your coffee in fairly scholarly company.”	Sep 10, 1966	<i>Viking Art</i>
3	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “O’Shaughnessy as a Strolling Player: A Specialist Views Us” in Leisure-The Arts section	“Television too draws on [O’Shaughnessy’s] talents and he on its opportunities, some of which are unexpectedly extended. He scripted, then played 10 parts in ABC television’s <i>The Restless Years</i> , which is now being turned, with two collaborators, into a coffee-table book which will be sold together with a recording of highlights of the programme.”	Jul 27, 1967	<i>The Restless Years: Being Some Impressions of The Origin of The Australian</i>
4	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Hal Porter’s Japanese Ordeal” by John Gaiger, page 13	“No cheap postcard impressions form Hal Porter. He has written a book of 200 pages, well produced and illustrated with his own drawings. A coffee-table book? No — an antidote for those of us who have so foolishly swallowed the “pretty” and “progressive” syrup about Japan.”	Nov 2, 1968	<i>The Actors: An Image of the New Japan</i>
5	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Books for Christmas Reading” by a Special Correspondent, page 9	“The first [book dealing with the grim business of war] is a handsome volume in coffee table style . . . and, in spite of a tendency to some quarters to belittle these books, most of them bring together with their text a find collection of illustrations dredged from various archives worth possessing in their own right.”	Dec 25, 1969	<i>History of the Royal Navy</i>
6	Article in <i>The Australian Women’s Weekly</i> : “At Home . . . with Margaret Sydney” by Margaret Sydney, page 56	“. . . It is absorbing to read, and usually attractive to look at because of its superb steel engravings. This is a combination that all good coffee-table books should have, and if you want to treat it as just that, for once the Joneses will find it hard to keep up with you. WARNING: You may need a new coffee table. It’s in two great volumes, and my bathroom scales allege that the two together weigh 9lb . . .”	May 27, 1970	<i>A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World</i>
7	Article in the <i>Tribune</i> : “Books”, a review of 8 books including 1 coffee-table book, page 8	“This beautiful collection of colour photographs, is no ordinary coffee-table book. The text accompanying the pictures has been written by specialists who have studied Aborigines as human beings and not just for the purposes of academic exercise. They include Frank Stevens, Colin Tatz, Denis O’Brien, Kath Walker and Frank Hardy. The genocidal ferocity of Australia’s early white settlers wiped out Aborigines by the thousands, setting a pattern for generations of cruelty, neglect, discrimination and total disregard. Perhaps the appearance of this book show the stirrings of social conscience.”	Aug 11, 1971	<i>The Aborigine Today</i>

Curated list of quotes about coffee-table books published in Australian newspapers and magazines 1965–1979				
Database: Trove, National Library of Australia				
No	Document	Quote	Date	Title
8	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Bird Pictures” by Hugh Elliot, page 12	“The coffee-table book of our flora and fauna is usually a document who value as a record or reference is often concealed by its glitter, the unhandiness of its large size and its scanty textual information. Michael Morcombe’s ‘Birds of Australia’ is such a book.”	Jul 15, 1972	<i>Birds of Australia</i>
9	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “For the Potter”, page 20	“It is as exciting as a ‘coffee-table book’ and a practical compendium of all that is best, ancient and modern, in this fascinating art-form.”	Mar 22, 1973	<i>The Complete Book of Ceramic Art</i>
10	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “D.H.L. with Pictures” by Maurice Dunlevy, page 9	“One way to sell dull prose is to decorate it with pictures, so the coffee-table book has become ubiquitous. Now it is even being used to sell literary criticism . . .”	Apr 5, 1974	<i>D.H. Lawrence, Novelist, Poet, Prophet</i>
11	Article in <i>The Australian Women’s Weekly</i> : “Book Present to Pope”, page 12	“‘A Big Country,’ a coffee-table book about the television series, which tells the story in words and pictures of some of the interesting individuals who people Australia and have appeared on the TV show, rest on some illustrious coffee tables. Prince Charles was one who was ‘very pleased’ to have a copy of the book, and the latest recipient is Pope Paul.”	Jan 29, 1975	<i>A Big Country: Stories from the ABC Series about the People of Australia</i>
12	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Jewry” by Patricia Rappolt, page 14	“Among new coffee table books is ‘Next Year in Jerusalem’ . . . a formidable publication which concentrates on some formidable characters in all kinds of business and the arts.”	Sep 25, 1976	<i>Next Year in Jerusalem</i>
13	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Edna Dives Between Covers” by Roger Pulvers, page 12	“But it is sheer modesty on the part of the publishers, the Australasian Publishing Company of Sydney, Australia to call this a coffee table book for it is a volume literally to be relished, savoured, and digested.”	Feb 26, 1977	<i>Dame Edna’s Coffee Table Book</i>
14	Article in <i>The Australian Women’s Weekly</i> : “Books: Reviewed by Heather Chapman”, page 131	“‘Don Dunstan’s Australia’ . . . looks like one of those bland coffee table books that no one ever really reads, but the South Australian Premier has a lot of strong opinions and gives then with gusto.”	Aug 23, 1978	<i>Don Dunstan’s Australia</i>
15	Article in <i>The Canberra Times</i> : “Coffee table tomes and serious social history” a review of 8 coffee-table books by Maurice Dunlevy, page 15	“Robin Smith’s ‘The Birth of Australia’ . . . is a coffee table book consisting of 265 colour photographs illustrating aspects of Australian social history from the time of Cook to federation.”	May 27, 1979	<i>The Birth of Australia</i>