THE BOOK AS DEMOCRATIC ART OBJECT:
A STUDY OF TARA BOOKS' ALTERNATIVE PUBLISHING MODEL

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B.I.B., Carleton University, 2003

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ABSTRACT

Art book publishers, particularly those producing artists’ books and fine press titles, often cater to a high-end niche market, in terms of their positioning in the marketplace and pricing. Maintaining high levels of quality production and content while keeping prices accessible is often seen as an improbable balance. Formal distribution channels often do not include these titles in their offering.

Through a combination of innovative production techniques, multiple distribution channels on a global-scale, and strategic product positioning, it is possible for fine press titles to sell alongside offset-printed art books, making the art book object available to a wider audience.

Treating the book as a democratic art object, Tara Books (based in South India) has successfully been producing exquisite and accessible art books objects for the past fifteen years. This study considers Tara Books’ alternative publishing model through a marketing lens to present their unlikely positioning and success.

Keywords: Handmade books; book art; artists' books; fine press; livre d'artiste; Tara Books; art books; publishing model; Indian publishing; democratic art objects; book art objects
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1 INTRODUCTION

"Beyond object and icon there is a more complex concept of the book: the book as a work of art."

- PETER RUTLEDGE KOCH

There is a crisis brewing. The twenty-first century’s digital mania has brought about a transition in content distribution and the viability of the book as a form for content dissemination is being rethought. Doomsayers forecast the death of the book, as is the theme of Toronto’s The Scream Literary Festival this year (2009), and many publishers are shifting partly or entirely to electronic platforms. Even worse off, many argue, is the art book market – costly products attached to a withering audience, as Christopher Lyon laments.1 While others are calling for a book renaissance of sorts, such as suggested by James Gleick in a late 2008 The New York Times article that apparently stirred ohs and ahs across the publishing industry. He urged, “go back to an old-fashioned idea: that a book, printed in ink on durable paper, acid-free for longevity, is a thing of beauty. Make it as well as you can. People want to cherish it.”2

Gleick’s suggestion is not a new or revolutionary concept. Books have been produced, in varying forms, for at least a couple of millennia. Intentionally aesthetic books, complete with a variety of visual elements, have become a staple over the last several hundred years. Visual books and artists’ books, however, did not become common until the twentieth century. The recent popularity of the graphic novel is an obvious example of the former, while Joanna Drucker’s A Century of Artists’ Books comprehensibly delineates the case of the latter throughout the nineteen hundreds.

Like the vinyl record, there is also a buzz brewing about the return to the authentic,

1 Christopher Lyon, “The art book’s last stand? Drawing on interviews with numerous industry insiders, the author perceives a mounting crisis in art book publishing,” Art in America (September 2006).
beautiful book. As the Codex Foundation (a US organization that is devoted to the promotion and preservation of the art and craft of the book, led by fine printer Peter Koch) suggests, "the book—in the era of digital reproduction—is an object of pleasure as well as a container of information."

From the dawning of the book as a technology for relaying content, the book has evolved from a medium of recording information, to a revered and rare object of religion or a status symbol for the wealthy elite, to an item of mainstream ephemera. Gutenberg's revolutionary printing press meant that text could be endlessly replicated, which enabled the mass production and thereby commercialization of books. Prior to Gutenberg, only the elite, wealthy, religious and scholarly were able to read or access books. Gutenberg Museum's curator, Dr. Maywald, encapsulates, "by enabling mass production of books, Gutenberg played an instrumental role in spreading democracy." With the ability to mass-produce books, encouraged by economies of scale and a free market, prices dropped significantly and books became accessible to the masses, launching a social, cultural and scientific revolution.

Incunabula (the first printed books, often finely made, produced during a creative, experimental stage leading up to sixteenth century) gradually developed, with inspiration along the way from Aldus Manutius, William Morris and other defining figures. This led to the birth of artists' books, 'livres d'artistes', and fine press titles; all of which, still to this day, continue to co-exist alongside the mainstream democratic book though catering to different audiences: niche pockets of aficionados with thick pocketbooks versus the mainstream and budget-minded hoi polloi.

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3 Laura Byspalko, "Thinking Outside of the Book: Three Free Lunches to go, Please and Thank You," (MPub dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 2008).
This paper’s intention is not to celebrate the book or argue for its future long life but rather to consider a small publishing house that has been thriving for the past fifteen years, doing just what Gleick suggested. Based in South India with international distribution, Tara Books (Tara) is an independent English-language visual books publisher that specializes in handmade books. Particularly special to Tara is their collective organizational structure, fine bookmaking and alternative publishing mission to elevate the book to art object status while maintaining the book’s intrinsically democratic nature, to bridge high and low-end markets. This report is a study of how they have succeeded in doing so.

For the purposes of this paper, some working definitions should be clarified. By democratic object, I mean an item that is accessible to a mainstream audience in terms of availability (its approachability), its price (afforded by those with a disposable income), as well as its content. More formally defined, democracy implies “the absence of hereditary or arbitrary class distinctions or privileges”. It should be understood that a reasonably priced book with popular content that is available at the local bookstore does not discriminate and invites a wide audience to pick it up. Accessible and democratic are herein used interchangeably.

Democracy in the Indian context also requires further clarification since the country is defined by significant socioeconomic factors, namely: language barriers (18 official languages exist); literacy (only 65% of the population is literate in one of the many languages) and; extreme economic divides (75% of the population live on less than $2 a day). Publishing in English, as Tara does, immediately narrows the audience to an educated, urban middle or upper class audience with a disposable income. This

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segment of society represents about 350 million Indians (tenfold the size of Canada's population). In their domestic market, Tara has made their titles accessible to this bracket of the population (those who are literate, English-speaking, and possess a disposable income).

In effect, Tara binds quality and innovative production values with accessibility through content, pricing, distribution and marketing. The popularity of Tara's handmade book collection, as will be further discussed throughout the paper, suggests that a mainstream audience exists for accessible art objects and that Tara has been unconsciously filling a void that has not been acknowledged before.

With Tara's distinct publishing vision in mind (to elevate the book to art object status and make it democratic), this paper will unpack their publishing model. In doing so, a view will be afforded of how they operate to fulfil these potentially mutually exclusive objectives and succeed in current turbulent publishing times.

This report looks at the book as an object – and its impulses to be, on the one hand, an accessible and democratic object, and somewhat oppositely, an object of great beauty. To understand Tara's objective and positioning, a brief history of the common book and the emergence of various forms of art books will first be outlined, including the book's politics which has triggered dynamic forms. Through this, the concept of the book as an accessible and democratic object will be discussed, as well as the notion that the book can be, and has been, a cultural and artistic object in itself. Once this has been established, the report will look at Tara as a case study of a publisher that positions the book as a democratic art object.

The body of this paper is organized as an extended marketing mix, based on E. Jerome McCarthy's famous Four P's of the Marketing Mix, which incorporates Product, Pricing,

Placement and Promotion, with fifth and sixth P's added to include People and Process. Since Tara addresses the book as an art object, the Product and Process are both vital ingredients to its construct, whereas to understand Tara's efforts to ensure the book's democracy, Pricing and Placement are the obvious elements that steer the product's accessibility. For a more human and qualitative approach, People and Promotion are also considered, crucial since both elements incorporate public relations and how the public perceives Tara Books as a brand.

This paper draws on Tara’s fifteen years of handmade bookmaking experience, as well as the author’s eight months of observations while working there. The author interned in the Chennai office in a sales, marketing and public relations capacity. Being a small operation, the author worked closely with the core management team (collective) and was exposed to, and often involved in, Tara's overarching strategies and operations.

The body of this report consists of: i) the organizational structure/culture; ii) the product mix; and iii) the marketing model. The first section, organizational structure, discusses the people (those that run the organization as a collective, the office employees, as well as those that are employed in the workshop to make the product), their politics and the organizational culture – and to a degree the public relations of Tara – how the company is shaped and how it may be perceived. The second section considers the book as a product, and the various elements that make this product, such as form, structure, content and production. Lastly, the marketing model analyzes the traditional Four P’s through a definitive marketing lens to understand the brand positioning.

Through this description of operations, various initiatives, strengths and limitations relating to Tara’s publishing model will be observed. Conclusions will then be drawn, proposing potential opportunities that Tara, or other publishers, might consider for continued success as a producer of mainstream visual books in an evolving publishing industry.
(2) THE CONTEXT OF THE VISUAL BOOK

"[The press] remains the greatest means of communication across time. The press has also become and remained a symbol of freedom... [and] apart from its importance as a means of communication, printing has had, and continues to have, an impressive life as an art and craft."

- ROBERT BRINGHURST & WARREN CHAPPELL

2.1 The Book

Philip Smith best defines a book, in his 1996 statement 'the whatness of bookness':

Bookness: The qualities which have to do with a book. In its simplest meaning the term covers the packaging of multiple planes held together in fixed or variable sequence by some kind of hinging mechanism, support, or container, associated with a visual/verbal content called a text...

The book is not the text, although it is traditionally associated with it, and these two elements appear often to be mistaken for the same thing. The book is the hinged multi-planar vehicle or substrate on which texts, verbal, or tactile... may be written, drawn, reproduced, printed or assembled.12

As Smith suggests, the book is an object and not simply the content (text) that fills the book's pages, which is also how this report refers to the book.

The book is often disregarded as a technology since technology is more typically considered as an advancement that occurs or emerges during our lifetime. The basic form of the book evolved well before the dawn of the printing press, from carved clay tablets to papyrus or parchment scrolls to codices and illuminated manuscripts. These works were commonly used for recording and documentation purposes. The library of Alexandria is said to have housed some 700,000 volumes in 47 AD when it caught fire.13

Robert Bringhurst and Warren Chappell recount, "printed texts have been a part of human life for some twelve centuries in China, and for nearly six in Europe."14 Woodblock printed on paper, Buddhist scripts were first compiled in a book format as early as the eighth century in China and Japan.15 Xylography (wood carving) didn’t reach Europe, however, until the fourteenth century. Though crude, the process enabled carvings to be inked and replicated, thereby more easily reproducing several copies of one work, still on a relatively small scale since it remained a manual process.

Since “few could read, the need for books was limited.”16 It is worth noting that the first book printed by Gutenberg, the first European pioneer to use moveable type and the mechanical printing press, was in fact the Bible, in 1452. During this period, book production was predominantly inspired by and for religion. As easier methods of reproduction developed over the following two centuries, the book as an object began to secularize. At the beginning, however, the few non-religious books that were produced were afforded by the wealthy elite only. “Books were relatively scarce in the fifteenth century. Copying manuscripts by hand was laborious and costly work. A bound manuscript at that time cost as much money as an average court official received in a month.”17 Referring to the significant price decrease with the advent of the press, Project Gutenberg’s founder, Michael S. Hart, points out, “from the equivalent of the cost of a family farm, books became so inexpensive that you could see a wagonload of them in the weekend marketplace in small villages.”18

Another significant contributor to this movement was Aldus Manutius, an Italian printer and publisher, who introduced small format inexpensive books or the

'paperback book' of his era. Of his best-known works is the octavo version of *Dante*, published in 1502 using italic type in a pocket-sized book format.\(^{19}\)

Referring to the incunabula period as an era “of exalted work by the pioneers of the printed book form”, David Jury in *Book Art Object* then summarizes the slip of the printed book from “an astonishing and revolutionary object” to an ordinary object.

Predictably... the production of books became a standardized activity... [A] more entrepreneurial spirit began to dominate both the purpose and the process of making books, developing printing into a substantial and high regulated industry...

It is for these reasons that printing historians generally describe the art of the book to have slipped into a slow, but inevitable, decline during the 400 years following 1500. It is not that there was a lack of technical and aesthetic refinement, but the assumption is always that the combination of mechanization and commercial imperatives, both traditionally considered to be the antithesis of creative endeavor, made it impossible for more personal, idealistic motives to be sustained in the making of books.\(^{20}\)

Printers were entrepreneurs and as a business, it was clear “that the key to profits was inexpensive mass production.”\(^{21}\) Slowly, the printing press began to reform the book – becoming a standardized object, which intrinsically led to its democratic quality, particularly in the western world. The Press gradually allowed for the mass production of books, naturally making them less expensive to produce, more widely available and less costly. The Renaissance and the rise of universities in Europe also pushed this movement forward, creating “a system of demand for books as well as a system for the use of books in ways not used with religious texts.”\(^{22}\)

Erupting seventy years following the advent of Gutenberg's press was the Protestant Reformation. "It seems difficult to exaggerate the significance of the Press, without which a revolution of this magnitude could scarcely have been consummated." 23

As Elizabeth Eisenstein, who wrote one of the classic works on the rise of mass printing in Europe, put it, Protestantism was "the first movement of any kind, religious or secular, to use the new presses for overt propaganda and agitation against an established institution."...

Religious and financial interests merged in the Protestant Reformation, where printing was both a lively business and a potentially powerful form of religious communication. Martin Luther became the first mass-mediated publicist or propagandist... [who] quickly and effectively reached large audiences with thousands of pamphlets.... making them cheap to print and distribute in the interest of printers and publishers...

This merger of financial and religious interests made printing the first truly mass medium in Western history... 24

This movement saw the power shift, triggered by the Press, from the church to the individual. 25 With it, "new information [was] put into books that [had] important consequences for European life and society." 26 So as the printing process became more and more accessible, the book transformed into its intrinsically democratic form – an object available to the masses, as Luther showed with the vernacular Bible. This also marked the beginning of mainstream content, which quickly introduced the printed book as a regular object in the world. By 1501 there were 1,000 printing shops in Europe, which had produced 35,000 titles and 20 million copies. 27 Five hundred years later, 172,000 new titles totalling 4.15 billion books are being produced annually in the US alone. 28

25 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
Referring to the changes brought on by the Industrial Revolution, David Jury noted, “inks became thinner while mass-produced paper became grayer, rougher and weaker... Changes aimed at increased speed of production were a major cause of poor workmanship.”29 Having been revered objects, the printing press commercialized the book, thereby democratizing it too in the name of better business, making books bountiful, cheaper and less precious, resulting in smaller, less colourful and poorer quality books.

A pure text mass-market paperback book is not often considered an art object (unless perhaps Marcel Duchamp says it is so, or it was conceived of by Stéphane Mallarmé). It is, rather, a low-cost format with no or few frills, intended to be read quickly and disposed of. The scope of the book that Tara produces, and therefore this paper considers, is specifically the visual book (a book created with an intentional aesthetic quality and visual elements to guide the reader), which can be considered an art object and therefore requires defining.

In The Art Book, Sue Ward suggests that an art book is more than simply “a beautiful book”, and should be considered as “an artifact, a cultural vehicle.”30 Johanna Drucker distinguishes even further, in A Century of Artists’ Books, between the various members of the art book family, which is comprised of the artists’ book, ‘livre d’artiste’ and fine press title.31 Her idea is worth consideration since each grouping appeals to different politics and distinct audiences. Titles that fit within these categories have existed for more than a century, and remain relevant today.

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Drucker defines the artists’ book as a book object that is:

1. created by an artist who is conscious of its structure, and the meaning as a book as a form;
2. offset- or fine-printed, often produced on a tight budget, it need not be well-printed;
3. made or conceived by an artist, often a collaboration with writers, publishers, editors; and
4. often in numbered or limited editions.32

In contrast to an artists’ book, Drucker considers the ‘livre d’artiste’ to:

1. use the book as an unconscious medium, without intentionally interrogating the conceptual/material form;
2. alternate between text and art within a spread, distinguishing between word and image;
3. be made using high production values (i.e. thick paper, fancy typefaces, thick margins);
4. be a publisher or editor’s vision, involving a commissioned known artist, to cater to and exploit a specific market; and
5. be assembly line made by people not necessarily working in collaboration but guided by a publisher/editor.33

Often, the primary defining difference between the artists’ book and the ‘livre d’artiste’ is that the latter is a book showcasing art objects, whereas the former is the art object itself.

Thirdly, there’s the fine press title, which can overlap with either of the above defined book forms. Drucker suggests they most often consist of:

1. careful production using any print medium, though most often made by hand, using handset type or letterpress;
2. fine quality printing with artistic merit in the aspects of its making;
3. a vision of dimensional physicality, of a tactile nature;
4. lacking innovative in form or concern with the book as an artistic concept; and
5. a limited and editioned work.34

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
Fine presses are publishing presses that are devoted to the art of fine printing and bookmaking, often making books in limited editions. A more fluid definition of the fine press book follows.

Printed in editions that run from fewer than 100 to maybe 1,500 copies... fine press books are meant to celebrate the written word by masterly use of typography, illustration, layout, paper, binding and press work. Many of them are still printed by hand, with the time-honored letterpress method, but the latter part of the century has seen a little more technology creep in, like the use of offset lithography.\(^{35}\)

Of these, only artists' books and fine press titles could be considered as art objects (depending on the book) since the aim of the 'livre d'artiste' is to contain the art objects within its pages instead of being a packaged art object in itself. However, the handmade book could fit in to any of Drucker's three categories.

At the low-end of the handmade book market are chapbooks\(^{36}\), which are crudely woodblock-printed or letterpressed ephemera, often without a cover or intricate binding, and are cheap (CAD $5-20), such as titles by Small Beer Press, BookThug and Leaf Press (all North American examples). They often feature poetry and short stories by regional and/or emerging writers. They tend to sell directly to customers either by mail order (often through a subscription basis) or online, if the publisher has a storefront, or at a handful of local bookstores, however, no formal distribution channels exist for chapbooks.

In the arena of fine press titles in North America are publishers and printers such as The Arion Press, Heavenly Monkey and Pie Tree Press, which make exquisite limited editions at high prices (CAD $500-20,000). These books tend to feature the classics or celebrated texts, include ornate illustrations by talented artists, and are produced by

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36 It is worth noting that chapbooks have been in existence since the mid-sixteenth century, then often printed and distributed on the cheap as 'halfpenny' ephemera.
master printers. One bookstore in Canada (Arts on Atlantic Gallery in Calgary) stocks some of Heavenly Monkey’s titles, however, The Arion Press and Pie Tree Press both require direct mail orders (as also does Heavenly Monkey). Subscriptions are also a common selling method.

Neither the chapbook, nor the fine press title, are sold in mainstream marketplaces and the latter is certainly not accessible, in terms of pricing alone (though arguably worth every penny). Both appeal to very niche audiences and are distributed through alternative bookselling channels to target the very specific markets to which they appeal. Often, these presses are very small and focused on the production process more than marketing and distribution.

In between these two extremes are many art and artists’ book publishers and producers, however, their works are not sold or distributed through common channels either. Rarely are these books sold alongside offset-printed books in average bookstores, as Tara’s are. Tara’s books sell through formal bookselling channels at competitive prices (CAD $15-50) to the books with which they share bookshelves. More on Tara Books’ marketing and distribution will be discussed in the following chapter, however, it is important to understand Tara’s positioning among its peers.

The most similar publishing house to Tara is Taller Leñateros who publishes artists’ books using screen-printing and letterpress technologies and combine elements of indigenous storytelling from Mexico. Their titles retail for CAD $40-200 though they do not have formal distribution channels established and seemingly sales are either for purchase in Mexico, direct from their website (with minimum orders of US $200) or at a handful of stores in the US that stock a couple of titles intermittently.

This paper considers the positioning of a revered book art object in a mainstream context, through a snapshot view of Tara, a publisher of visual book objects that is
noteworthy since it penetrates a mainstream market through conventional and alternative channels. Before diving in to Tara’s publishing model though, the history of artists’ books ought to be better understood in terms of the markets they have catered to (through their marketing) and their associated politics.

2.2 Art Books, Artists’ Books and Book Art Objects

Artists have long been active in using the book form as a medium of creative expression. Despite the Gutenberg press having revolutionized the bookmaking process, many artists and publishers have continued to experiment with older technologies. Even once the Press was in use, illuminators were employed to add colour accents to decorate a printed book and give the illusion of the original hand-copied illustrated manuscripts. And though illustrations have been used to accompany text since the early days of bookmaking, these images were not intended to be viewed as art. Drucker states, “this mechanical repetition of the conventional distinction between image and text returns these works to the category of illustrated books, rather than artist’s books.”

After 400 years of the printing press, a Renaissance of sorts emerged in the nineteenth century as a response to the standardization brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Several prominent printers and cultural figures launched a counter-revolt to return to the earlier ways of bookmaking, moving away from the characteristics of mechanized printing.

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William Blake (circa 1780) is credited with creating the first artists' books with *Songs of Innocence* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in which his wife hand coloured the sheets of prose, poetry, and illustrations he etched and printed.\(^{41}\) He was far ahead of his time, as the artists' book took another century to develop. The 'Private Press Movement' mixed with the 'Arts and Crafts Movement' in the UK at the end of the nineteenth century resulted in Kelmscott Press. Led by William Morris, aware of an increasingly industrialized world and “unhappy with the shoddiness of Victorian printing”\(^{42}\), he set out to produce books by traditional methods, using, as far as possible, the printing technology and typographical style of the fifteenth century... responding to the mechanization and mass-production of contemporary book-production methods and to the rise of lithography, particularly those lithographic prints designed to look like woodcuts. It operated until 1898, producing more than 18,000 copies of 53 different works.\(^{43}\)

“Yet the importance of Morris’s work as a printer was not so much in his results as his example,” Jury argued. “By meticulously rebuilding the print process from its most basic components, the act of printing could once more be perceived as a bold and daring medium – imaginative, inventive, and modern.”\(^{44}\)

Walter Benjamin noted this period too, stating, “around 1900 technical reproduction had reached a standard that not only permitted it to reproduce all transmitted works of art... it also had captured a place of its own among the artistic processes.”\(^{45}\)

It is the 'livre d'artiste', however, that emerged first and acted as a key precursor to the artists' book genre.\(^{46}\) At the start of the twentieth century, Parisian art dealer Ambroise

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THE BOOK AS DEMOCRATIC ART OBJECT

Vollard began to produce “lavishly illustrated books, designed to exploit the widening market for modern art and poetry amongst the Parisian middle classes.”47 Observing a burgeoning luxury market, books featuring art by thriving artists, such as Matisse and Picasso, were combined with deluxe edition qualities, using large sized format, elaborate production values such as hand colouring, virtuoso printing, fine binding, use of rare materials, texts, or images which catered to a sophisticated or elite market – [which] had long been an established part of the publishing industry. The ‘livre d’artiste’ took advantage of the expanded market for visual art which had grown in the 19th century, along with the other luxury markets expanded by industrial growth, the accumulation of capital, and an educated upper middle class with an appetite for fine consumer goods. The market for these books was developed as an extension of the market for painting, drawing, and sculpture.48

Artists’ books also began to thrive, led by Italian and Russian avant-garde artists rebelling against World War I. “Avant-garde artists throughout the 20th century have also produced many books as part of their artistic endeavours...”49 Done in chapbook style, books were intended to affordably disseminate ideas.

In this moment the book becomes first and foremost a means of direct communication, a multiple which can be readily circulated, given away, or sold for very little money... Most of the work [of the Russian avant-garde artists of the 1910’s] reflects the fact that books could be done by artists, with limited means, by making use of the skills and technology at their disposal. This work radically reconceptualizes the book as an artistic form, not a publishing enterprise, not a fine press production, not a portfolio of prints, but a new hybrid form without rules or limits.50

The Dada movement pushed the artists’ book forward while the offshoot Surrealist movement continued in the way of the ‘livre d’artiste’. Dadaism, set against the bourgeois capitalism, emphasized low pricing and pamphleteering, which emerged in a political divide with the Surrealists: “Dada rejected categories and labels, [while]

Surrealism would advocate the idea that ordinary and depictive expressions are vital and important.51 This divide signifies the divergent paths that artists’ books and ‘livres d’artistes’ followed.

Referring to the Futurists, Constructivists and Dadaists, Jury explains that these movements, often artist-led, turned to print at this time to express, “a contempt for rational outcomes.” Any accessible medium for relaying ideas – books, magazines or brochures – became an artist’s medium for public outreach.

Magazines, for example, complete with poor printing on cheap paper, offered ‘art’ that could be bought at a newsstand, carried home in a coat pocket, and viewed on a bus, on the kitchen table, or in fact anywhere except on the walls of an art gallery.52

Benjamin argued in his landmark 1935 essay, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, that art, prior to the age of mechanical reproduction (and this age of accessible mediums, as the Futurists and Dadaists embraced), had been basically fascist but that

with the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction, photography, simultaneously with the rise of socialism, art sensed the approaching crisis which has become evident a century later. At the time, art reacted with the doctrine of l’art pour l’art, that is, with a theology of art. This gave rise to what might be called a negative theology in the form of the idea of “pure art”, which not only denied any social function of art but also any categorizing by the subject matter…

For the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility.53

In a commercial movement that took advantage of the public’s craving for accessible art, Phaidon then entered the art book scene in the late 1930’s in Austria, “with the

objective of delivering high-quality books at affordable prices"\textsuperscript{54}, thereby commercializing the offset-printed art book. As Mancini wrote in her 2004 paper on the art book market, it wasn’t simply Phaidon’s large format that led to widespread sales but rather “the low price, derived from what some refer to as a ‘brilliant marketing strategy’, publishing large print runs of beautiful books for the price of a novel.”\textsuperscript{55} In her paper, Mancini goes on to quote Horovitz and his notion “that a much wider and so far untapped market existed for books on art, and that even with a low profit margin, if an art book was good enough and cheap enough and produced in sufficient quantities, it would prove financially successful.”\textsuperscript{56}

Though Phaidon is not what Benjamin or Drucker had in mind when discussing art designed for reproducibility or artists’ books, respectively, Drucker observes a similar theme of the era, relating to artists’ books, in the book publishing industry.

The book as a democratic multiple... comes into its own in the post-1945 era of art and literary activity. Nonetheless, it seems that this concept is linked to even earlier history. Books, after all, were not always democratic – until industrial modes of printing appeared in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century – mechanized type-setting and casting, high-speed presses, and industrial paper making – the book was still a rare commodity, expensive and labour intensive. The association of industrial production with the democratization of the book supports the 20\textsuperscript{th}-century idea of mass-produced books as “democratic” multiples.\textsuperscript{57}

A publishing model similar to Phaidon’s caught on in the US market, following World War II which resulted in a creative shift from Paris to New York City, led by Harry Abrams and Milton Fox.

The oversize art book, extensively illustrated with large color illustrations, is a distinctive feature of post-World War II culture in the U.S. The purpose of such books was to reach beyond the specialized

\textsuperscript{56} Kimberly Anne Marie Mancini, “Navigating the Challenges of the Art Book Market: Co-Publishing Raven Travelling” (MPub project report, Simon Fraser University, 2006) p. 4.
audiences of scholars, collectors and others with a financial or professional interest in art to engage an extensive new readership hungry for culture.

The phrase "coffee-table book," still a term of distaste and dismissal, perfectly captures the ambivalent attitude of the keepers of high culture toward these often very beautiful books. Yet it must be admitted that these titles succeeded in bridging the gap between the core audiences for books about art and the general reader.5

As the US grew to become the world’s economic superpower, pockets of Americans grew more politically conscious too, following a path similar to the avant-garde artist movements during the beginning of the century.

Artists’ books began to proliferate in the sixties and seventies in the prevailing climate of social and political activism [in the US]. Inexpensive, disposable editions were one manifestation of the dematerialization of the art object and the new emphasis on process… It was at this time too that a number of artist-controlled alternatives began to develop to provide a forum and venue for many artists denied access to the traditional gallery and museum structure. Independent art publishing was one of these alternatives, and artists’ books became part of the ferment of experimental forms.59

Though the artists’ book, ‘livre d’artiste’ and fine press title emerged from the same pod, their shared history shows that each genre had its unique political stance, which led to divergent directions in the book’s positioning. They continue to thrive.

At a time when electronic books are gaining popularity, many artists are making the low-tech predecessor their medium of expression. Today books are emerging, phoenix-like, from bookshelves folding-out, standing-up, popping up, scrolled, boxed, in sculptures and mobiles. Artist books and book arts generally are gaining ever wider recognition in academia, at galleries and with the public.60

Bringhurst further elaborates, “Printing from movable metal type, like the making of woodcuts, also remains a creative and vital artistic medium, even if commerce has all

but forgotten it."61

The printing press commercialized and made accessible the bookmaking process, positioning the book as a democratic container for information and ideas by allowing for relatively quick and inexpensive reproduction. A parallel evolution has been that of the book as an art object, experimenting with form to repackage an object so common it lost its object-ness and honouring authentic processes, as also discussed above. Mass-production has been the differentiating factor between the common book and the book art object, the former not possessing the ‘aura’ element that Benjamin refers to, that makes a mere object an art object.62

Tara, as well as other fine press publishers mentioned in this paper, manages to maintain that element of aura in its books, despite large-scale reproduction. As Benjamin insisted, it is art intended to be reproduced. And it is the reproducibility of the art object that allows Tara’s books to be democratic and accessible, while still remaining an art object.

The following section will consider the union of the democratic container with the art object and Tara’s pledge – to use the words of Alan Loney – to “value the book without rendering it ‘sacred’.”63

(3) AN ALTERNATIVE PUBLISHING MODEL: TARA BOOKS

3.1 Introduction to Tara Books

Tara Publishing (renamed Tara Books in 2008) was founded in 1994 by Gita Wolf and gradually evolved into a collectively owned and operated publishing house comprised of writers, designers and artists. Ten people, including the collective members, are based in Chennai, South India with New York, London and Bangalore-based designers and a stable of authors and illustrators located around the world.

Beginning as a children's book publisher, Tara's list of titles has grown to include adult visual titles ranging from topics such as Indian street art to retellings of Greek classics. Tara primarily publishes English-language visual titles for adult and children audiences, as well as a stationery line, and specializes in handmade books. Approximately eight to twelve new books are published each year, many of which are created in-house by members of the collective, and active backlist of titles is supported.

Perhaps the part of Tara's catalogue that most defines the publishing house and sets it apart is Tara's list of handmade editions. Unlike most trade publishers worldwide today, a quarter of Tara's list of titles is produced by hand, using silk-screen-printing or letterpress technologies. Some titles are offset-printed, some hand-printed and some combine both. To date, over twenty titles, published as handmade editions, have been created, with editions ranging from 1,000 to 40,000 copies per title. Typical print runs are between 1,000-3,000 copies (per language edition) but due to increased and unpredictable popularity, these titles often require reprinting (sometimes within a matter of weeks) and the handmade production workshop is unable to keep up with market demand.
AMM Screens is the handmade production arm of Tara, run by C Arumugam. It is officially a separate entity that provides printing services to Tara and its clients (foreign rights purchasers) only.

In the mid-1990s, desktop laser printers were not yet widespread in India so dummy copies of forthcoming titles were prepared using makeshift means to simulate what a book would look like once offset-printed in colour. Fourteen years ago, shortly after the founding of the publishing house, the publisher, Gita Wolf, presented these silk-screen-printed mock-ups to foreign publishers at Tara’s first appearance at the Frankfurt Book Fair. The dummy books were so well received that Canada’s Annick Press placed an order for 7,000 copies of a children’s book, *The Very Hungry Lion,* (See 3.1.1. Case Study #1) to be silk-screen-printed on handmade paper. This sale led to Tara’s handmade collection of books, which filled a void in the market, and jump-started production at AMM Screens.

Pioneering handmade processes for over a decade now, AMM Screens’ high-quality hand-bound silk-screen-printed and letterpressed books are printed on handmade paper (made from a mixture of cotton cloth waste and tree bark, rice husk or grass), in minimum editions of 1,000 copies. On an average, this computes to nearly 400,000 ‘impressions’ for a print run of 2,000 editions. To date, twenty-one unique titles have been produced by the AMM Screens workshop for a total of more than 165,000 handmade books in which each page of every book is an original print (each page being hand printed). To the best of the author’s knowledge, Tara is the only publishing house in the world that produces books by hand in this quantity. However, it is not simply fine books in great quantity, per se, that is unique to Tara but rather the

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64 See Appendix Seven for an overview of AMM Screens’ screen-printing process.
65 Using screen-printing processes, a print run of 2,000 copies of a 48-page book with four colours per page works out to 384,000 impressions. An ‘impression’ is the act of dragging a single colour of ink across a mesh stencil-like screen to impress the image/text (text block) on a page.
66 See Appendix Two for a full list of handmade titles produced by Tara Books.
intentionally accessible and democratic nature of these books that sets Tara’s publishing model apart and makes it worthy of study.

For years, the Indian book market has been an importer of books. Tara, along with a couple of other Indian publishers, have begun a new trend of a democratic exchange between the east and west – exporting Indian books to Western countries while still providing Indian content for an Indian audience.

Tara attends annual book fairs in Frankfurt and Bologna and nurtures relationships with several worldwide publishers. Foreign rights have been sold across nineteen countries, which include production at AMM Screens for handmade titles. Tara has sold rights to Farrar, Straus & Giroux and Houghton Mifflin in the United States, Actes Sud, Seuil and Gallimard in France, Adelphi and Feltrinelli in Italy, and Hanser in Germany, to name a few.

Additionally, Tara has been engaged in co-editions with museums, such as the handmade Greek Plays series (Hippolytos, Antigone, Oedipus the King and The Bacchae) with the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles and a project with the Museum of London. Discussions are on for current projects with the Tate in the UK, and the Musee du Quai Branly and Centre Pompidou in France.

Tara’s publishing model will be presented from three angles: i) the organizational structure, ii) the product mix, and iii) the marketing model. Simply stated, the following section covers: the who and why (the people and vision), the what (the book as an art object) and the how (the book’s democratic positioning). Before delving into the publishing house’s mode of operations, it is worthwhile to consider a couple of examples of output, as produced by Tara’s handmade workshop, AMM Screens.
Two case studies of successful titles follow to shed light on the actual product being discussed in this paper. The first, *The Very Hungry Lion*, is a children's book, and one of Tara's first publications. It was also the first handmade title, which propelled Tara and AMM Screens forward. The second, *The Night Life of Trees*, is a visual title for both adults and children and Tara's most successful handmade book to date sold under the Tara brand (as opposed to foreign rights sales).

3.1.1 Case Study #1: *The Very Hungry Lion* (see Appendix Three)

**Overview:**

*The Very Hungry Lion* is a handmade children's book written by Gita Wolf, the founder and a member of the Tara collective with illustrations by Indrapramit Roy. The story is the retelling of a folktale illustrated in the Warli-style of folk painting from Western India.

It was first published in 1996 as a screen-printed title, at which time the English North American rights were sold to Annick Press and Tara distributed within India and the UK only. The rights eventually reverted to Tara, which then took over US and Canadian distribution of the title in 2006, under the Tara brand.

To date, over 40,000 copies have been produced by hand at the AMM Screens workshop. The English-language copies in India, the UK and North America were sold out at the time of printing this paper.

**Specifications:**

978-81-86211-02-1
INR 450 | USD $20.95 | CAD $24.95 | GBP £12.99
Children 4-8 years
Hard cover; Colour
24 pages; 216 x 273 mm
Breakdown of number of copies sold per publisher/country:

- 3,000 English (Tara: India, UK and US/Canada post-2006)
- 20,000 Dutch (Novib, branch of Oxfam: Holland)
- 8,000 English (Annick Press: Canada, US)
- 5,000 French (Seuil Jeunesse: France)
- 4,000 Italian (L’Ippocampo: Italy)

Labour:

A screen-printed book, the process employed three colours per page of the 24-page book, along with cover and endsheets (for a total of 30 printed surfaces per copy) on 150-grams per square meter (GSM) handmade paper (text block and cover use rice husk white paper; end sheet uses brown handmade paper). This works out to be 90 impressions per copy for 40,000 copies, which results in a massive grand total of 3.6 million manual impressions for the production of this one title.

For a print run of 3,000 copies, printing takes approximately 35-45 days while binding requires an additional 15-25 days. Since binding is also completely done by hand, the process is lengthy – requiring the dried pages to be assembled in order, holes punched, the pages hand-stitched together, the endsheets pasted on, the text block trimmed, the cover glued to board and the cover, endsheets and text block assembled together.

Production Costs Per Unit:

In 1997, it cost approximately CAD$2.13 (INR 85) per unit to produce a 3,000-copy print run. By 2009, it cost nearly 35% more (CAD $3.13 or INR 125) due to increased prices of labour, paper, etc.

The setup cost is approximately CAD $625 (INR 25,000). Therefore, for small print runs (1,000 copies, for example) the unit book cost will increase by about CAD$0.60, which is an especially significant increase in Indian Rupees. Larger print runs allow for setup costs, relating to registration (alignment) time and colour matching, to be spread across more editions. Screens need to be replaced after about every 3,000 impressions.
to maintain sharpness of image, however, there is still benefit and time/cost savings to print runs of 3,000 editions and over (preferably in 3,000-copy batches).

### 3.1.2 Case Study #2: The Night Life of Trees (see Appendix Four)

**Overview:**

*The Night Life of Trees* is a handmade visual book that suits both a child and adult audience, first published in 2006. Gond art featuring trees by three of the best-known artists from this tradition have been combined with folkloric tales from this central Indian tribe. Screen-printed on brush-varnished black handmade paper, it is a numbered edition. It won the BolognaRagazzi award in 2008 at the annual Bologna Children's Book Fair.

A ten-minute film was created by Tara to demonstrate the step-by-step screen-printing process of AMM Screens during the making of *The Night Life of Trees*. Posted on both the Tara website, as well as YouTube.com ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=om6i3enGZ8c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=om6i3enGZ8c)), more than 5,000 people viewed the video within the first week of its posting (likely due to the link’s simultaneous appearance on Drawn.ca, a popular blog on illustration) and the fifth English edition of 1,000 copies was sold out within a month of its production.

**Specifications:**

978-81-86211-92-2  
INR 850 | USD $39.95 | CAD $48.00 | GBP £25.00  
All ages  
Hard cover; Colour  
40 pages; 229 x 330 mm

**Breakdown of number of copies sold per publisher/country:**

- 5,000 English (Tara: India, UK, US, Canada)  
- 4,500 Italian (Salani: Italy)  
- 6,000 German (Nord Sud/Baobab: Switzerland)  
- 3,000 Spanish (Kalandraka: Spain)
Labour:
This being Tara's most expensive handmade book, which requires more resources for production than other existing titles, minimal print runs of the English-language edition have been produced in 1,000-copy batches. This translates to approximately 350 copies of each batch to each of Tara's three markets (India, UK, North America), which have repeatedly sold out before production of another batch has been feasible. Though 1,000-copy batches do not maximize production output, 1,000-copy batches have been produced to date to balance expenses, reduce risk of slow (or lost) sales and inventory space required, and ensure time for the production of other handmade books in a tightly crammed production schedule. Since the success of this book has largely been fuelled by viral Internet campaigns and store-led promotions, sales numbers have been difficult to forecast.

A book of 48-pages (text block plus endsheets and cover), requires 82 impressions using 40 different colours (each colour being a unique mixture of inks) – on average three impressions/colours per illustrated page. For a print run of 1,000 copies, this works out to nearly 90,000 manual impressions. This takes 20-25 days for printing 1,000 copies and 5-10 days for binding them, however setup times are significant, particularly due to the several colours used. For 3,000 copies, it takes approximately three months for setup, printing and binding.

Production Costs Per Unit:
In a print run of 3,000 copies, the total cost is approximately CAD $4.63 per unit (INR 185). The setup cost is approximately CAD $625 (INR 25,000). Therefore, for small print runs (1,000 copies, for example) the unit book cost will increase significantly. Larger print runs allow for setup costs, relating to registration (alignment) time, film and screen preparation, and colour matching to be spread across more copies. Screens need to be replaced after about every 3,000 impressions to maintain sharpness of image, however, there is still benefit and time/cost savings to print runs of 3,000 copies and over (preferably in 3,000-copy batches).
3.2 Organizational Structure, Collective Culture & the Human Element

The foundation of any organization is made up of the people that build the structure. Therefore worthy of study is the group that is Tara and their shared vision; generally as an organization, and more specifically as a book publishing house. The organizational structure, after all, is the foundation on which the company was built, the corporate culture decrees the politics that govern their operations and, to a degree, this affects public perception and branding.

At the core of Tara is a humble, humanistic vision, which inevitably comes through in the books they produce. The group is dedicated to experimenting with book form and engaging bibliophiles worldwide with visual books, while not compromising on integrity, quality or content. They do not subscribe to a capitalist methodology of ever-expanding growth or economies of scale, and are determined to make their book art objects accessible to a large public. As Tara's founder, Gita Wolf, put it, "Our business model is different. We have kept the business small and creative."\(^67\) There is also concern, however, that expanded operations will decrease control over quality and consistency, as well as take away from the current team’s dynamic.

An independent press, with little fear that it will cease to operate as such, the organization is run as a collective by a core group of like-minded individuals, comprising:

**Gita Wolf**

The founder of Tara, a Director, a member of the collective and an author. Gita has written fourteen books for children and adults. An academic by training with a research focus on comparative literature, she is most interested in exploring and experimenting with the form of the book and its status as a cultural object.

Sirish Rao
A Director, a member of the collective and an author. Sirish has authored eighteen books, from retellings of myths to children’s books to pop art collections. His writing reflects his interest in nature, kitsch, travel, eccentric people and the oddities of language.

V. Geetha
A writer, translator, social historian and activist, V. Geetha is a freelance editor with a number of small research journals. She is a leading intellectual from Tamil Nadu and has been active in the Indian women’s movement since 1988. V. Geetha has written widely, both in Tamil and English, on gender, popular culture, caste, and politics of Tamil Nadu.

C. Arumugam
A master printer with two decades of experience, Arumugam founded AMM Screens over a decade ago and has been with Tara from the beginning. A man with a “nothing is impossible” motto, he is the production manager and liaison between Tara and AMM Screens.

Rathna Ramanathan
A Communications Design graduate from the Central St. Martin’s College of Art and Design and a PhD from the University of Reading, Rathna now heads the design program at Central St. Martin’s and runs her own graphic design studio, minus9. With Tara from the start, she has pioneered innovative children’s book design in India. Her main interests are typography and book form experimentation.

As a team, this core group has been working together, crafting books, for over a decade. There is little desire for growth or expanded operations amongst the team. Partly, this is because their current system works – they work well together as a group, producing books that sell (often at a speed faster than can be produced), and are able
to financially sustain operations as they are. As the founder, Gita Wolf owns a majority share of the organization (51%) and, as the organization's leading member, has the final word, however, the collective leans toward group thought and shared decision-making.

Despite free market theory that governs most enterprises, and as an organization run by its shareholders (the collective's members, as listed earlier), Tara's primary motivation is not revenue-based. Though demand has surpassed supply for several of the handmade titles, and elementary economics suggests that a price increase is the obvious response to this, this would also undermine their principle for keeping their books democratic.

The team's predominant ambition is to experiment with book form, create fine books (elevating the book to art object status) with socially-conscious messaging and distribute them democratically worldwide, while sustaining itself financially and offering nourishing employment.

The collective nature of the publishing house reinforces that the members consciously choose to take a part in a shared vision – it is not just a job that pays the bills, so to speak. There is an element of buy-in, many of the members being shareholders, and a sense of ownership in one's work.

For several years the directors of Tara, Gita Wolf and Sirish Rao, as well as other members of the collective, took minimal salaries (less than all employees, approximately a tenth of what they currently earn, now that it has been readjusted to meet Indian market standards, which equates to about 25% of an equivalent Canadian salary for a similar position) and continue to draw relatively low salaries in an effort, at first, to keep the company afloat and, later, to minimize fixed expenses. Also, the members of the collective, who are also in-house authors (the directors and V. Geetha), do not take advances, do not get paid for writing per se (just their regular monthly
salaries for running the company) and feed their portion of royalties from book and rights sales back into the company. The designer, Rathna Ramanathan is also treated as an author on design-intensive books, and a portion of the royalties is paid out to her. C Arumugam, apart from being a member of the collective, runs AMM Screens. Set up as a sole proprietorship, AMM Screens prints for Tara exclusively and adds a profit margin to the production cost of the books ordered by Tara and foreign rights buyers.

Independent and operating on a minimal financial cash flow, Tara pays all employees Indian “market standard” rates plus approximately 25% (the total of which is approximately equal to 10-25% of an average Canadian wage for a comparable job). All employees receive medical insurance, provident fund (the Indian equivalent of a pension plan), four weeks of paid vacation and an annual ‘festival bonus' of one month's salary, split between the Indian holidays of Diwali and Pongal.

As for external contributors; authors, artists and designers’ contributions to a title are all treated equally in terms of compensation (rights fees and royalties are divvied equally) since text, illustration and design elements are weighted equally as components to the overall development and shape of the book’s content.

Many artists and authors in India prefer a one-time lump sum of cash upfront for their work, instead of an advance and royalty model, since visual books often sell little nationally and most Indian publishers are not big foreign rights sellers. Tara, however, insists on a minimal advance fee and royalty model, and instead invests effort in foreign book fairs (such as Frankfurt and Bologna, which are both annually attended), typically guaranteeing at least three foreign rights sales per title, which results in a large portion of the contributor’s remuneration for a book project. Tara’s titles have been translated into seventeen languages through foreign publishers and are distributed under the Tara brand in India, the UK and North America.
In some cases, handmade book rights have been sold for offset reproduction, however most of the time, as with both case studies, foreign rights sales of handmade books include the handmade production at AMM Screens with the purchasing publisher’s branding and negotiated specifications.

Since Tara’s books are sold mostly outside of the country (70% in the US, Canada and the UK through formal distribution channels; 30% remains in India) and 30% of Tara’s overall income is derived from foreign rights sales, a royalty model works out better for contributors while minimizing the initial risk and financial burden on Tara. This risk-sharing model also further involves the contributors in the process, taking ownership of their work and the title’s success. This model also nurtures creativity, inspires trust, appeases contributors’ needs and creates a space for dependability and future work together.

Though the core team (office and production) is based in Chennai, Tara works with authors, artists and designers who are geographically scattered across India, Europe and North America. What brings these people together is shared vision – the desire to collaborate and experiment with the book arts, combined with socially aware messaging. However subtle or overt, Tara has a socialist edge and is committed to politically and socially aware messaging in its titles. Members of the collective hold leftist views and stand for feminism, equality, environmentalism, socialism and encourage creativity, the arts and Indian culture, particularly tribal and folk art and tales. These convictions are reflected in content themes. Combining such messaging with a visual emphasis and high production values (a rarity in India, which will later be discussed in the Product Mix section), a range of creative people interested in creative dialogue and collaboration are drawn to the organization’s team of creative people, their vision and the final handmade output.

The handmade book line is an in-house collaboration. Often the designer, writer, artist and production manager work together to create a book and then the AMM Screens
team sees it through the handmade production process to completion, as was the case with *The Night Life of Trees* (see 3.1.2. for a case study). The conception of the book happened during an artist's workshop, which Tara conducts from time to time to scout new talent and share India's art traditions within the community. It was noticed that one of the artists, Ram Singh Urveti, a member of the Gond tribe from central India, featured a tree in every single drawing he made. When members of the collective asked him whether he could do a drawing without having a tree in it, he said it was impossible. This led to a session of storytelling, in which it became apparent that the tree was a central figure in Gond tales, and in their cosmos. The in-house writers warmed to the story (of trees living their own lives at night since they are too busy during the day offering shade and feeding animals), the designer also got involved in the concept and proposed it be printed on black paper to give the illusion of evening, the production manager suggested it be screen-printed to convey the ritual tradition and the production team perfected the colour separations and screen-printing – all working together, experimenting, to come up with a form that emphasizes the content and reading experience.

C Arumugam, the founder of AMM Screens, divides his time between pre-press activities in the office and overseeing workshop operations. Both he and workshop manager, Manikandan, are master bookmakers and employ a team of fifteen village artisans, many of whom have been trained at AMM Screens.

The workshop runs on the same principles as the office but takes the collective structure a step further. The entire AMM Screens team live and work together in a communal building.

Fair trade and employment practices are in effect. Workshop employees work six days a week, eight to ten hours a day, as is the norm in India, must be sixteen years or older, and working/living conditions are comfortable. Seniority, experience and skill also factored in, they are paid 25% more than a similar position in a machine-operated
printing press in India. In addition to their salaries, they are also provided room, board and other amenities, for both themselves and their families (spouses and children). As already mentioned, they are also given two bonuses annually, each equivalent to a month's salary. A small raise is given each year, rewarding seniority and loyalty.

Different to the office workers, vacation time at AMM Screens is not specified per se, however, the group goes on three to six days trips together a couple of times a year, with expenses fully paid, to reward the team for project completions. When an employee does take leave, their full salary is paid. Often, a wedding will entail up to forty-five days off. In the case of a medical issue, their full salary is paid along with the associated medical expenses.

Currently only men are employed in the workshop, though women have been in the past, and the wives of current employees have also been invited to join the team. This is primarily due to the common societal structure in India in which women reside at home with their family until they are married, and once married are likely to begin a family and stay at home. The nature of the collective living and working arrangement has encouraged employee loyalty (though not women hires) – many of the men have worked at AMM Screens for more than five years and some of the original members have remained from the beginning, more than ten years ago. When a position becomes available, a family member of one of the existing staff members often fills it. Turnover rates are very low and job security high. Interest-free loans are also provided to employees for weddings and health care matters, as well as to fund employees in their own business enterprises.

Small enterprise logic is used, motivating employees and creating a sense of ownership, which results in quality production. Instead of an assembly line approach, whereby each person is responsible for one duty alone that is repeated for the length of a shift, all the artisans are competent in all matters of bookmaking. For example, when screen-printing pages for a book, four stations will be setup with three men at
each. One man carefully aligns the page, another pulls the ink across the screen (creating an impression), and the other takes the page, placing it to be dried on a rack. This activity happens simultaneously at all four stations (though the men often rearrange themselves). Once all the pages have been printed and dried, they all begin the folding, gluing or binding together. This results in an entire print run of a title going through a linear process, step-by-step.

Since the whole team is involved in the entire process, from the making of mesh screens to the binding, a sense of ownership is felt in creating a final, tangible product and pride is taken in the work. Media reviews and comments from co-publishers and buyers are passed along to the team, including press stories featuring the AMM Screens team – the feedback and recognition is another motivating factor. Meetings are held bi-monthly to discuss any issues or errors, communicate how it affects the company and consider innovation. An open forum for communication and recognition is emphasized.

Since all handmade bookmaking operations are done in-house at AMM Screens, all the know-how generated over years of experimentation and trial and error has become a major asset. Though pioneering costs are high, particularly difficult for a small independent publishing house to absorb, Tara and AMM Screens have profited on this investment. To the author’s best knowledge, Tara has produced more handmade books than any other fine press in the world.

That stated, there is also pressure to increase production. The handmade books have been quickly selling out, both by Tara directly as well as through foreign rights purchasers, sometimes within weeks of the print run being completed. This is both a blessing and a curse, since AMM Screens, as it currently is, cannot produce enough supply to meet this demand – and the demand seems to be consistently increasing through new distribution channels, increased public awareness and growing foreign orders. Already run as a tight ship, if quantity is increased on print runs, fewer titles will
be able to be produced at AMM Screens. As it is, Tara only produces about four new handmade titles each year, while backlist titles and foreign rights orders assure a busy production schedule.

### 3.3 The Product Mix: Balancing Content, Form & Production

With the human aspect introduced in the previous section, the collective culture, which inevitably comes through in the content, has been established and will be again be touched on lightly in this section. The emphasis of the handmade book as a product and its position as an accessible art object are here considered by considering the elements that constitute a book, such as form, design, content and production. Though these elements are components of every book to some degree, most publishers tend to concentrate on just a couple of these aspects. Fine presses focus primarily on design and production at one extreme (often reproducing existing classics, such as Jim Rimmer's Pie Tree Press & Type Foundry that produces exquisite limited editions of titles such as Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* and Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*), whereas children's book publishers emphasize structure and content (didactic in nature, its focus is the visual and narrative story and the overall message being conveyed). In the middle of the road, is the offset-printed art book publisher that strongly considers most of these elements, often omitting awareness of the form and outsourcing its production to Asia.

The Artists' book, 'livre d'artiste' and fine press title were earlier defined. Tara's handmade book collection doesn't neatly fit in to any of these categories but rather straddles them all, leaning more towards one genre than another, depending on the book, but often balancing the elements of form, structure, design, content and production.
Tara’s product mix combines these elements to create both an art object and popular content in the form of an affordable and attractive book, which appeals to diverse audiences from average conventional families to highbrow fine book collectors. The dividing lines between artists’ books, ‘livres d’artistes’ and fine press titles become blurred, creating books that contain art, are a vision of art, consciously use the book form as an artistic medium, and are, as a visual object, a work of art in itself.

For example *Tsunami*\(^{68}\), a 2008 publication, is a screen-printed book in an accordion form that mimics the scroll used in the West Bengali Patua art tradition of artists who document current events in the form of a song and, using lyrics as text accompanied by an image, sprawls the length of a ten-foot fabric scroll. The image becomes complete as the scroll is unfurled and the text/lyrics are part of the image. *Tsunami* is both an artists’ book and a fine press title. An artists’ book in the sense that it was a collaboration between artists from West Bengal that painted and wrote/sang the lyrics, the publishers at Tara who imagined it in book form and the AMM Screens team who worked with the artists and publishers to fulfil the vision as true to its original form as printing could allow. It can also be considered a fine press title since it was a tactile vision with emphasis placed on being a completely handmade production, requiring extensive labour and attention to detail.

Another example is *The Night Life of Trees*, earlier featured in a case study, a numbered-edition screen-printed book of Gond tree art accompanied by tribal folkloric tales printed on brush-varnished black handmade paper, which can be considered all three. It is definitively an artists’ book, as it was collaboration between the Gond artists, the publishers/writers and the production team, and conscious of its form through a thematic collection. It is also a ‘livre d’artiste’ as it is composed of art by Gond artists with standard alternation between text and art. As well, it is a fine press title since

\(^{68}\) See Appendix Five for title information and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZFWtvvgZYo> to view a video of *Tsunami*’s creation, produced by Avinash Veeraraghavan and Laura Byspalko.
emphasis is placed on its screen-printing and the tactile nature of traditional Gond art being printed unconventionally on black handmade paper in book form.\textsuperscript{69}

A third and final example is \textit{Fingerprint}, a 2009 screen-printed publication featuring a visual narrative through a series of fingerprints, including an historical essay on the politics of the fingerprint. Created by Italian designer and artist Andrea Anastasio, who often creates one-off items, this book is both an artists' book and a ‘livre d'artiste’ in the sense that it is Anastasio's art put in a book form for the first time. It does make use of its form, as its sequence tells a narrative story, though the included essay at the end of the book is distinguished from the main narrative, offering an after thought. Though it is an individual art piece by Anastasio, an established artist; the editors, publishers and design team worked with Anastasio to realize it. He, however, was not involved in the hand-printing of copies for distribution. It also belongs to the fine press category as a hand-printed and hand-bound, well-crafted tactile object of beauty.\textsuperscript{70}

All three examples would appeal to various audiences, due to their visual nature, high production values, as well as the popular content. Though Tara’s handmade collection of books straddle all three genres of deluxe art books, it does lean to the artists’ books category while AMM Screens is definitively a fine press. This widens the market while paying homage to book arts and experimentation.

In essence, Tara is commercializing the artists’ book to make it more accessible while maintaining the aura that comes from the ritual of bookmaking by hand. Art designed to be reproducible, as Benjamin suggested photography enabled. Similarly, Drucker in \textit{A Century of Artists' Books} refers to the movement of photographic art books in the early twentieth century as the dawning of the commercial artists’ book.

These were “crossover” books. That is, they were works that, no matter what the aesthetic motivation for their conception or production, were successfully published for wider distribution than either artists’ books or

\textsuperscript{69} See Appendix Four for title information. Also refer to 3.1.2 Case Study.
\textsuperscript{70} Refer to Appendix Six for title information.
livres d'artistes. Many of these would not have been easy for an artist to reproduce... because of the expense and labour involved. They extend the possibility of artistic expression into a more commercial venue, sometimes with a mainstream audience, more often a limited one. In this regard they show that a form of artists’ books can be industrially produced and widely distributed to a larger audience... They were made largely as inexpensive editions, freely circulated, and part of the common currency of artistic expression and exchange... These were works which were considered avant-garde, experimental, and innovative when they were made; they broke with the formal conventions of earlier book production, establishing new parameters for visual, verbal, graphic, photographic, and synthetic conceptualization of the book as a work of art.\(^\text{71}\)

Though Tara is firmly different in that their books are not mass-produced in an offset manner, there is that element of ‘crossover’ with Tara’s handmade line that shadows the emergence of the photographic book – an art object, that is approachable in nature, being suddenly circulated on a large-scale.

### 3.3.1 Accessible Content (Textually & Visually)

Though the form and physical construction of a handmade book are a primary objective, the content is weighed with equal importance. These books reach beyond form and high production values to include content (textual and/or pictorial) that has universal resonances, which are rarely seen in books. Sources could be folktales, which are then retold for a contemporary audience, myths, tribal and pop culture art, and playful verse, which make the titles accessible to a wide audience. Content is often sourced from oral narrative traditions, or street culture, forms which have a communicative energy to them, but often don't find their way into mainstream publications.

Of Tara’s twenty-one handmade titles to date, half are intended for adults (such as the Greek classics, like *Oedipus the King*) and the other half for children. Though often,

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books crossover easily and suit both groups, as with *The Night Life of Trees* which won the BolognaRagazzi award (a children’s book prize) despite the written content catering more to an adult audience (particularly the reference to the marriage of the ganja and mahua trees). Most of the children’s books cater to a four-to-eight-year-old audience with fun and simple wording set to exquisite visuals, which adult co-readers also appreciate.

As discussed in the previous section, Tara’s collective culture also comes through, inevitably and intentionally, in the books’ narrative. Tara’s in-house writers (Gita Wolf, Sirish Rao and V. Geetha) along with Anushka Ravishankar (a former member of the collective and now a loyal author) have authored the bulk of Tara’s titles. Socially conscious and inclined to the left, the storytelling in children’s titles is friendly, humourous and colloquial while instilling values such as equality, friendship, imagination and honesty.

These books often include Indian content and context too, a concept that is slowly emerging in India following a legacy of imported books from the West, as well as feeding the multicultural sway popular in cosmopolitan centres in the US, Canada and the UK. Several of Tara’s titles have been placed on the Oxfam list and adopted in school curricula as recommended reading or early literacy modules in India, the UK, and Holland.

The book buyer need not be a highbrow literary type, nor a member of an artistic niche or handmade book community, in order to enjoy the content. The average middlebrow individual or family can appreciate the book’s nature – the narrative and the art – as much as the objet d’art aficionado or bibliophile who admires its form. Since the books are priced competitively with offset-printed and other visual books (art; children’s), which will be later discussed, the content as well as the price point make these books accessible to a mainstream book-buying audience.
3.3.2 Design: Experimenting with Form, Minimizing Costs

In addition to the art that fills the pages (though it is sometimes the design that constitutes the book's art, as is the case with the forthcoming release *The Land of Punctuation*, a letterpressed book which uses colour and typographic illustrations to visually depict a Christian Morgenstern poem), the design element bridges text and image while experimenting with form.

Tara's leading designer and member of the collective, Rathna Ramanathan, has two guiding principles that steer Tara's design. First, the book is a dynamic medium and therefore the form will and must change. Second, she contends that the book designer be treated as a book author – reasoning that the design shapes the book as much as the text or artwork.\(^\text{72}\)

Tara is always experimenting with new formats that are intrinsically linked to a book's content, such as scroll-like accordion books that can double as wall hangings, books in bags or boxes and purely visual narratives. Fuelled by financial constraints to minimize production costs and maintain an accessible price point, design at Tara is consciously navigated to make best use of limited resources. Comparable to avant-garde artists of the early twentieth century whose supplies were limited by World War I, external obstacles and limitations encouraged innovation and experimentation, which resulted in design that used “structure and format as part of the content, rather than merely as instruments for delivering meaning in an effective or eye-catching way.”\(^\text{73}\)

To operate within resource constraints (primarily to negotiate expensive full-colour printing in an offset context, or several expensive and labour intensive plates/screens in a letterpress or screen-printing scenario) while maintaining high production values and an aesthetic that enhances the content, the design is a conscientious balance of cost savings and visual impact. The smart use of two- or three-colour printing has been

\(^{72}\) Based on a discussion with Rathna Ramanathan in January 2009.

used for several titles (minimizing handmade labour and associated costs with plates or screens), as has the trimming and tipping in of four-colour images (significantly reducing four-colour printing to only one plate, which is labour-intensive but also adds a handmade value to a title).

The design and the form as characters or ingredients in the book’s makeup are realized with the treatment of the designer as a contributor equal to the author. Understanding design as an integral component to a book opens a forum of creative communication (a democracy amongst the players) between author, artist, designer and production team to conceive of a book as a joint collaboration – and venturing into artists’ book territory.

Working with designers (Rathna Ramanathan, Avinash Veeraraghavan and Natasha Chandani) who are gifted artists themselves, engages design elements, such as typography, as illustrations in their own right. Though the design experiments with innovative ways to keep costs down (making Tara books accessible), it also conceives of looking at the book as a dynamic object, resulting in its position as an art object.

3.3.3 Production Values, Innovation & Quality Control

This experimentation with form, through design and production, has largely been a process of trial and error. With no formula, per se, to work with, Tara has been pioneering the mutation of the artists’ book as an accessible art object. As founder, Gita Wolf, stated in an article for an Italian magazine:

> Offset printing in India is expensive – and what is more unfair – also of poor quality... Under Indian conditions, we could never hope to come anywhere near the crisp four colour offset printing from elsewhere.

> We needed desperately to experiment with other options available to us, where we had far more control over the process and quality of production. This meant finding those things we could do well traditionally, and putting them to new uses. A chance meeting with a skilled silk-screen printer brought up the idea of making a book entirely...
by hand printed on handmade paper, where each sheet was an original print. It would not only bring back the tactile quality of books, but for us, also the luxury of experimenting with form.\textsuperscript{74}

Tara has weathered the risks of pioneering (and absorbed them within the small organization) while negotiating an Indian context, which lacks infrastructure and is notorious for its inconsistencies. Though handmade products are both prevalent and conventional in India, since labour is cheap though a legacy of artisanship exists, ensuring quality artisanship has also been a major hindrance in the process. Wolf continues:

Of course, the handmade book is not a completely new concept. It has been done before, mainly as limited edition artists' books. Our challenge was to give it a new form – to combine a fine quality of bookmaking with affordable pricing. We had to 'mass' produce a handmade product – all the while maintaining accuracy and a high production quality, despite the number of times a book needs to be handled at various stages before it is completed.\textsuperscript{75}

The greatest challenge has been to maintain accuracy and high production quality despite the number of times the book needs to be handled at the various stages, through thousands of repetitions, of printing each of the colours, drying, stacking, folding, stitching, and gluing the cover, end sheet and slip case.

The AMM Screens workshop team is highly skilled and operates meticulously. However, as the popular expression goes: \textit{to err is human}. Mistakes are made so a system of quality control has been enforced. Each page of every book is inspected and errors/defects are discarded. Since much waste is generated, a stationery line, \textit{Flukebooks}, was launched to make use of the scrap. The innovative result is a handmade notebook, each cover a completely original one-off since it occurred as an error, or fluke, as the name suggests. Recycling and eco-friendly practices also happen in unusual ways – for \textit{The Night Life of Trees}, the hardboard in the binding was salvaged.

\textsuperscript{74} Gita Wolf, "Surviving As a Publisher in India: 'Anything is Possible',' Sfoglialibro (Italy), March 2001.  
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
from a shipment of remaindered non-Tara books heading for the pulp machine. The boards were ripped off the remaindered books, and used to back *The Night Life of Trees*, and only the text block went on to be pulped. Handmade paper is also constituted of largely recycled materials (old paper, cotton rags and bits of bark and twig, and is completely tree-free). AMM Screens has also recently done a successful experiment with non-toxic printing inks, and is considering trying a range of soy-based inks that have just emerged on the market.

The quality of Tara’s handmade titles is recognized worldwide: numerous international awards have been won (See Appendix Two), including ‘Outstanding Book of the Year’ at the Independent Publisher awards (US), and first prize at the American Association of Museum Publications awards; and Tara has produced a specially commissioned handmade line for the J. Paul Getty Museum.

Based on the need for quality control with handmade work, subcontracting is not a reliable option, a lesson Tara learned firsthand when subcontracting the tipping-in of colour images for a title that had been ordered by a Dutch publisher. By the time the 8,000 copies of the title had reached Holland, the entire shipment of books had grown fungus due to the use of a cheaper, vegetable-based glue that the subcontractor had opted for. Sourcing quality handmade paper and ink has also been a struggle. Many paper suppliers try to save money by using less of an expensive pigment, resulting in constantly different coloured paper, despite a specific swatch being ordered. Also inconsistency occurs with available quantity, colours, weight and delivery times so changing supplies and conditions are a constant factor with each title, which results in increased trial and error and unplanned for delays. Since Tara is unable to reliably outsource any of the production (acquiring handmade paper is hassle enough that has led to the consideration of becoming a paper producer as well) and the handmade production is a core element to these titles, diversifying product offerings, employing additional support and maximizing output while minimizing efforts have recently gained priority.
Most of Tara’s titles are screen-printed, however, this process requires extensive labour. Meanwhile the letterpress has been used little – only a few titles have been printed using it to date. The entire staff has been trained how to use it though there is one employee who is specialized.

Also acquired has been a trimming and gluing machine to reduce labour-intensive processes that add no value by being hand crafted (cutting of sheets of cardboard and evenly applying glue to stick endsheets and covers together).

AMM Screens adds a 10-15% profit margin to their work (earning an annual turnover of approximately CAD $60,000), about 60% of which goes to covering human resources related expenses (such as salary, accommodation, food, insurance, etc). Since production is based purely on manpower, it is difficult to assess the exact speed of production and so it is difficult to measure profit and efficiency levels. Though AMM Screens is clearly turning a profit and shows annual financial growth, they have reached their peak of production as current operations stand. The production schedule is booked solid a year in advance, and demand for the handmade titles has surpassed possible production. They are not in a position to expand significantly and outsourcing is decidedly a non-option. Operations can continue as they are, however to meet Tara’s objective of making these art object books accessible and democratic, production would have to increase.

3.4 The Marketing Model: In India & Abroad

Tara’s marketing model is the third and final component that will be considered to understand their uniquely balanced publishing model. The traditional business marketing mix is composed of the four P’s: product, pricing, placement (distribution) and promotion; elements that are overviewed through a definitive marketing lens.
here below. Since the Tara team, inclusive of AMM Screens, and the collective culture were discussed in the first section, the perception of the Tara brand name will only be briefly discussed under the product section here, to consider the convergence between what Tara is and how it is perceived by the trade, media and the book-buying public.

The emphasis in the marketing model section is to dissect how Tara positions the book as a democratic art object, to understand its mainstream accessibility, which is in essence what distinguishes Tara's handmade books from other artists' and fine press books. The product itself equates the book to art object status, however, it is the pricing and placement that achieve a state of democratic accessibility.

3.4.1 Product

Tara's product mix was discussed in the previous section, which considered the balance of form and structure with production values and content. Though Tara does lean toward the product approach (make a good product/book, and let the customers come), effort has been made to establish the Tara brand name and distinct packaging associated with their name.

In 2008, to mark the shift to a collectively owned organization, Tara Publishing (the company's operational name for fourteen years) became Tara Books and a new logo was established. 'Tara', meaning 'star' in several Indian languages, remains, which has been used informally within the industry for several years. Tara (Tara Publishing, Tara Books) is a recognized brand name within certain circles, particularly in India and the UK; within global publishing, design and art/museum communities, people working in the creative industry, and handmade book aficionados.

Based largely on feedback from sales representatives and booksellers, the Tara brand is often associated with: handmade/fine books (and the book arts), socially-conscious
messaging, traditional Indian arts, being an independent publisher, and high design and production values.

Unlike other handmade book producers, Tara's handmade books are priced similarly to offset-printed art books (CAD$25-48), produced in comparatively large quantities (over 1,000 copies, unlike other handmade or fine press titles in print runs often between 50-200 copies with CAD$100+ price tags) and are distributed through regular bookselling channels alongside offset-printed art books – on the same shelves in the same bookstores. The pricing is intentionally competitive with offset-printed books, intending to make art object books accessible to the average book buyer, and not just the niche book collector. The product is visibly positioned as an art object (like other artists' books producers), though its accessibility (through placement and pricing) affirms the book's democratic qualities. Tara straddles and penetrates two seemingly opposed markets: the handmade/fine press/artists' book bibliophile niche AND the mainstream [art] book buyer/lover. A loyal following of Tara also exists who subscribe to the publisher's e-newsletter, attend events, follow new releases and often buy directly from the publisher. The targeted market will later be discussed further.

Tara's handmade books are delivered to stores and direct buyers shrink-wrapped. Due to the handmade paper, additional inserts, sometimes irregular shape (i.e. accordion style, box, etc.), these books are easily prone to damage if mishandled. The shrink-wrap ensures that the package remains complete and that the book is in the same shape it was when it left the handmade workshop.

Returns are generally not accepted, especially if the shrink-wrap has been removed so booksellers are likely cautious to keep the book in its original packaging. Since customers cannot view inside the book, unless already opened by the bookseller, customers are unsure of what lies between the covers. Also, without being able to feel the paper and the texture created from hand-printing processes, a potential buyer is potentially unaware of its handmade nature. This is likely detrimental to purchases by
new customers though existing/knowing customers might appreciate the quality assurance and gift-friendly package. Stores part of Tara’s handpicked store program are given sample display copies, though most stores do not benefit from such treatment.

A paper inset is included within each handmade book to explain the handmade bookmaking process, however, customers likely wouldn’t find this until after it has been purchased and opened. If the book has been opened, the loose slip will likely have fallen out.

An attractive bellyband was produced in late 2008 to wrap around the exterior of all handmade titles, under the shrink-wrap, in an attempt to educate the public of the book’s handmade nature without having to physically open the book. Die-cut with a filigreed pattern on the front with the Tara logo and a ‘handmade’ notice, the front cover of the book remains visible, while the handmade process is depicted on the back.
Similar to a ribbon tied around a gift, the bellyband both educates the audience of the fine quality, as well as emphasizes the gift-like nature of the handmade collection. The bellyband is sized and positioned individually for each title so as to allow the front cover, back blurb, ISBN and other important information to maintain visibility. Of course, the beauty of the book, the handmade quality and the actual content can only be appreciated when opening the book, so the plastic sealed book remains problematic for browsing shoppers.

3.4.2 Pricing

Democracy and accessibility being a primary goal in Tara’s positioning, pricing is of major importance. Pricing Tara’s handmade books on the same scale as offset-printed full-colour art books, particularly in markets outside of India, makes it easier for readers to approach these book art objects without hesitation. Though there is a temptation to increase prices to signal to booklovers that a book should be perceived as precious and valuable, Tara’s strategy is to penetrate the offset-printed art/children’s book market with art object books at competitive prices.

Book publishers worldwide operate on a very thin margin, which also holds true in India. Being geographically located in South Asia, production costs and operating expenses are significantly lower than in developed countries. However, offset-printed art book publishers (such as Chronicle Books and Phaidon) send their printing to China, Singapore and Thailand, also taking advantage of the same reduced Asian production rates as Tara. Since Tara is selling alongside these publishers, which are mostly based in the West and not other handmade book producers, Tara is able to maintain comparable prices by taking advantage of significantly lower overhead expenses due to operating in an Indian context. This is also reflected, however, in wages paid, which is of benefit to reduced human resources spending but also must be considered in the pricing of books for the Indian market.
As discussed earlier, the Indian market is massive and to appeal to the entire market is not feasible in many respects. Though the Indian population is significantly larger than that of the other markets Tara sells in, there is a large (roughly comparable in size to the US or UK market) book-buying audience with a disposal income. Very price conscious, particularly in the Indian market, Tara prices its books using a minimal profit margin, which is often on par or cheaper than offset-printed art books competing for the same audience.

A common formula for arriving at a book’s price is to price it at five to eight times the production cost per unit. Tara also employs this industry standard – often pricing books for the Indian market at five times the production cost per unit, while UK, US and Canadian prices are closer to eight or ten times the unit cost.

Table 1: Price ranges for Tara’s titles (across currencies/markets)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indian Rs.</th>
<th>US $</th>
<th>UK £</th>
<th>CAD $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(CAD $11-22)</td>
<td>(CAD $22-43)</td>
<td>(CAD $23-45)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Selling price of case study titles (across currencies/markets)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Indian Rs.</th>
<th>US $</th>
<th>UK £</th>
<th>CAD $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Night Life of Trees</em></td>
<td>850 (C$22)</td>
<td>39.95 (C$43)</td>
<td>25.00 (C$45)</td>
<td>48.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Very Hungry Lion</em></td>
<td>450 (C$11)</td>
<td>20.95 (C$22)</td>
<td>12.99 (C$23)</td>
<td>25.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To make books accessible to an Indian market, minimal pricing (and thereby minimal profit margin) is required – therefore the informal industry minimum 500% increase for the Indian book market is used. (If a book costs $2.00 to produce, it will sell for the Indian equivalent of $10.00.) Foreign exports (to UK and US distributors) are subject to higher distributor discounts and exorbitant shipping costs – also, the foreign book buying market is accustomed to higher book prices, often with higher disposable

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77 Canadian equivalent prices as based on currency exchange rates as of August 24, 2009.
incomes, than an Indian market. Book prices in the UK and US should be reflective of this and can be higher, based on market tolerance. Often an 800% increase of the unit cost is the standard for foreign markets. Any additional profit is used to subsidize the Indian price, to ensure maximum accessibility, particularly in Tara’s domestic market.

Unlike in Canada, there are no subsidies or support from government bodies or arts councils to independent publishers. Sometimes Tara partners with cultural organizations to further subsidize book prices for Indian distribution. An example of this is the French Focus series, launched in 2008 with the French Embassy in India, an initiative to introduce art books from French publishers to India. The first in the series was an offset graphic novel, Revolution, priced at INR 395 (or CAD $10) – the cost of a mass-market paperback novel – for the Indian market (priced at US $22.95 for the foreign market). At the time of writing, a handmade book had not been scheduled through this collaboration, though there are such plans.

3.4.3 Placement (Distribution)

Unlike most artists’ and fine press books, Tara’s handmade collection is made available for purchase via regular bookselling channels, making artists’ and fine press books accessible to a mainstream audience in terms of placement and location. Traditional outlets include regular brick-and-mortar independent bookstores and bookstore chains, such as Chapters Indigo (Canada), Barnes & Noble (US), Borders (US & UK), and Waterstone’s (UK). Additionally, they are distributed to lifestyle stores, museum shops, online storefronts (distributors’ websites, booksellers’ websites, Amazon.com, etc.), and from the publisher directly. With competitive prices and wide distribution, Tara is optimizing the accessibility of their book art objects.

Tara’s handmade titles are created in Chennai, India and then distributed in India by Rupa & Co., in the UK by Frances Lincoln and in the US and Canada by Consortium Books Sales & Distribution (CBSD). Typically, a print run is divided into thirds for
distribution: a third for the Indian market and web-orders; a third for the UK; and a third for the US and Canada. This is mostly based on demand, though also a loose strategy to distribute books evenly across markets. Tara’s books also appear around the world, from Hong Kong to South Africa, through direct relationships with formal and informal booksellers (represented as ‘other’ below).

Table 3: Book copies distributed and sold worldwide, as a percentage of total book copies distributed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distribution Channel</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CBSD – US/Canada</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances Lincoln – UK</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rupa &amp; Co. – India</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara Direct to Retailers – India</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TaraBooks.com Direct to Buyers - Worldwide</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distribution through established book distributors (Rupa & Co., Frances Lincoln and CBSD) accounts for approximately 78% of copies sold. Tara is also very active in their domestic market and selling direct from their website, while North American and UK sales are managed exclusively through formal distribution channels.

Formal Distribution Channels

Though little sales data exists for the Indian market, sales trends in North America are rather reflective of both the Indian and UK markets.\(^78\)

Table 4: CBSD sales breakdown by business type for *The Very Hungry Lion* (based on the sale of 446 copies)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift/Specialty</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet (Amazon)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museums</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBSD</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Chain (Barnes &amp; Noble only)</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Independent</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^78\) Based on information provided by Sirish Rao, a Tara Books director who specifically handles distribution, during interview dated April 2009.
Table 5: CBSD sales breakdown by business type for *The Night Life of Trees* (based on the sale of 1269 copies) 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift/Specialty</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet (Amazon)</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museums</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBSD</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Chain (Borders, Barnes &amp; Noble)</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Independent</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though both titles used as case studies are handmade, they would appeal to different audiences – one being explicitly a children’s title and the latter intended for all ages. The significant price difference is also likely a factor in some instances (US $20.95; US $39.95). Also potentially affecting this comparison of sales breakdowns is that *The Very Hungry Lion* had been distributed already in Canada and the US through Annick Press as a 1996 release. Tara then reprinted and re-released the title in 2006, the same year as *The Night Life of Trees*. It could be argued either way that this increased demand (due to its existing popularity/presence) or diminished it (since backlist titles have more of a long tail effect). As a new Tara publication to enter the US market, it may have been treated as an entirely new release and not affected orders and purchases.

Higher internet sales (through Amazon.com and Amazon.ca) for *The Night Life of Trees* is clearly linked to the blogosphere buzz that was generated by a video distributed by Tara on the handmade bookmaking process featuring this title. Within a week of the video being posted on YouTube.com, and linked to various bloggers’ sites, specifically its appearance on Drawn.ca, more than 5,000 people viewed the video online. Web sales on TaraBooks.com also significantly increased for this title at this time. Since *The Night Life of Trees* is a fairly pricey book, it is possible that shoppers looked around for the deepest discount, which they likely would have found on Amazon.

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79 These statistics were gathered over the life to-date (2006 to May 2009) of these titles in the US/Canada using CBSD’s online reporting system, Helix. These figures are based on net quantity sold (after returns). Since the titles had been on the market for more than two years, it is unlikely that any large number of returns will occur, which would sway these numbers.
Though *The Very Hungry Lion* had slightly higher museum sales as a percentage than *The Night Life of Trees*, this equates to fewer than 30 copies. It is possible that museum stores have an already wide array of adult art titles, linked to ongoing exhibitions and art (for adults), whereas the children’s art book market is less saturated. It is also possible, though unlikely, that the museum stores were affected by pricing – opting to offer lower priced titles.

In the US, Borders did not order any copies of *The Night Life of Trees* likely due to the higher price point, and Barnes & Nobles’ orders were leaner, probably for this same reason. It’s also possible that larger bookstores have trouble deciding where to place this visual title since it straddles genres, whereas *The Very Hungry Lion* fits neatly in the children’s book section.

As for independent retail stores, significantly more copies of *The Night Life of Trees* were ordered than *The Very Hungry Lion*. The independents really championed this title, likely since *The Night Life of Trees* was promoted at these stores as a universal Christmas or holiday season gift book because of its content and lush production. The bulk of this book’s sales occurred over the holiday season in the UK and US.

Last, wholesale is a bit of a wild card grouping since it is unclear from the sales data as to which retailers the wholesalers are supplying. For Tara’s handmade titles, though not applied to *The Night Life of Trees*, a “no returns” policy is stipulated. Though returns were in fact received for *The Very Hungry Lion* (despite the stipulation), they were minimal (about 10%). It may be for this reason, however, that significantly larger orders for *The Night Life of Trees* were made by wholesalers, unafraid of being burdened with a title that cannot be returned, and due to the success of the book, few returns were actually made considering they were allowed (about 11%).
Though there is no explicit museum or library (included under the ‘wholesale’ category) buying in India, the rest of the findings appear universally representative of business type distribution, applying both to the UK and Indian markets.\textsuperscript{80}

In India, Tara’s books (both offset-printed and handmade) are distributed through Rupa & Co., one of India’s largest publishers, distributors and importers of books. Rupa deals exclusively with bookstores, both independent and chain (Landmark, Oxford, Crossword). Since Rupa does not return books to publishers (unless they arrive damaged), nor warehouse books for Tara, ordering is conservatively low compared to American and English distributors. Aside from Rupa & Co., few national distributors exist as most distributors operate regionally because of geographic and logistic barriers – there are more than 18 official languages that are commonly used across the country and English is often concentrated in urban centres and touristy areas. In fact, Tara deals separately with several geographic divisions of Rupa & Co. across India.

Though UK and North American book distributors deal with bookstores (independent and chain), as well as alternative outlets, none of the distributors have experience with handmade titles – and Tara’s handmade collection is their sole representative in a very niche category. Though Tara’s handmade titles are poised to compete alongside offset-printed titles (what the distributors are used to handling), they likely lose their marketing spotlight potential.

Tara’s titles straddle many genres and since there is no fixed “artists’/handmade books” section in bookstores, the handmade books are often placed in either the art or children’s book section. All visual books face this problem. The advent of the graphic novel and its rise in popularity forged a new section in bookstores. The French have their own section, “Beaux Livres”. Tara’s handmade books need a ‘handmade’ section, however, they are currently in a market all to themselves.

\textsuperscript{80} Based on an interview with Sirish Rao, 20 April 2009.
In general, “big-box bookstores generally do a poor job of displaying art titles. The books are relegated to an art ghetto in the back of the store or on an upper floor, with no knowledgeable staff available to answer questions or make suggestions.” With no marketing budget, these books are rarely face-displayed in bookstore chains and become lost amidst a sea of books. The handmade books do significantly better in independent stores where titles are championed, displayed and hand-sold by knowledgeable staff.

Of further detriment to Tara’s book sales in bookstores – though this is changing – is the attitude of the average Indian book buyer who is often very price-sensitive and tends towards text-heavy/only books, even for children. Heavy emphasis is on reading to gain knowledge rather than for leisure and enjoyment. Despite efforts to maintain low prices to appeal to a mainstream Indian audience, quality production attaches a higher-end price tag. There is certainly some friction between offering quality and affordable pricing. That said, Tara books do appeal to a growing market in India – the burgeoning middle class. Tara’s typical Indian buyer is often well-travelled or has lived outside of India, belongs to the middle- or upper-class and is a creative and/or socially-conscious type.

Though little concrete evidence exists, namely due to lacking research on the Indian book-buying market (no statistics agency in India collects such data), Radhika Menon of Tulika Publishers, an Indian children’s book publisher, confirms by explaining, “two very different target groups shape the Indian book market. On the one hand, there is the English-speaking urban elite who expect books in better quality, and on the other, the growing middle class for whom mediocre to bad books are produced.” Tara bridges this divide by creating quality books priced accessibly for this middle class,

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81 Christopher Lyon, “The art book’s last stand? Drawing on interviews with numerous industry insiders, the author perceives a mounting crisis in art book publishing,” Art in America (September 2006).
who are more commonly offered poor quality books. The lower class (more than half of the Indian population) is illiterate and/or does not have a disposable income with which to purchase books.

A seemingly similar parallel exists in the North American context too. Christopher Lyon, an editor and writer specializing in contemporary art, describes the MOMA’s revamped bookstore as a microcosm of the US art book market, stating

there are now two audiences for modern art, "downstairs" and "upstairs": the audience of the street, general-interest consumers who don't know or care enough to engage seriously with art; and the far smaller audience of "culture workers" and aficionados.  

Though traditional bookstore channels cannot be dismissed (The Night Life of Trees, for example, sold 300 copies through Rupa in traditional bookstores and 300 copies via Tara's online storefront in 2007), it is through alternative outlets in India where Tara's handmade collection is most likely to engage its target market.

**Informal Distribution Channels**

Tara manages distribution directly with a variety of alternative stores across India, including hotel boutiques, art/design stores, lifestyle stores/cafes and gift/tourist shops. These relationships are often initiated by the store itself, seeing a market potential and fit with Tara books. As in other non-book retail stores, it is the shop that decides how to merchandise their stock and they often feature, hand-sell and display Tara books without charge.

The success of book sales in alternative outlets led to Tara's handpicked store program, which was launched in the fall of 2008 by the author. Since visual books naturally benefit from being face-displayed and hand-sold, a program was initiated to partner with lifestyle stores and boutiques across major Indian cities to champion

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Tara’s books. With a couple of select stores per city, Tara directs its customers to these stores certain of stocking the full book line, while the store displays, markets and hand-sells these titles and benefits from combined marketing with Tara.

An example of this is Amethyst, an upscale traditionally Indian contemporary lifestyle boutique in Chennai, which was the first store to pilot this program. Set in an old colonial mansion, the grounds include the store, a popular café and a flower shop. There is consistent traffic and the place is popular with a middle- and upper-class clientele. Prior to the partnership arrangement, Tara books occupied a small shelf with book-faces displayed and, as it was, sales were relatively high compared to bookstore chains. As part of the new arrangement, a large four-shelf armoire was dedicated to Tara with distinct branding, and some titles were included in the store’s newsletter. Over the course of the first six months of the handpicked program, a marked sales increase of approximately 300% was seen.\(^{84}\)

Also, a major account was developed with Fabindia, a leading Indian retail chain of a hundred stores that sells handcrafted, mostly textile-based products. Launched in the spring of 2009 at twenty-five outlets, books are planned to reach all hundred stores by year-end. This new partnership is expected to significantly increase Indian distribution and sales, which will also result in required increases to existing print run quantities. The partnership will also involve co-marketing and combined events. Again, this lifestyle outlet caters to Tara’s prime demographic.

**Direct from Publisher Distribution**

Tara’s online storefront, TaraBooks.com, also generates many sales – about 10% of total book unit sales. Indian addresses pay rupee prices, while all foreign orders pay US prices with a 25% discount for ordering direct from the publisher. Shipping within India is free (in lieu of a discount) while foreign shipping is charged according to the

\(^{84}\) As based on sales order data, collected in the Tara Books office.
courier's fees. Though industry arguments suggest that this dissuades booksellers and publishers from carrying a publisher's books since it negatively affects their sales, there is no evidence that supports this for Tara book buyers.

The website has a minimalist design that is very storefront friendly ("order here!") and encourages visitors to register for Tara's quarterly newsletter that includes information on new titles, events and other developments. The contact database has proven successful with subscribers (about 2,000 contacts; and approximately 35% of these subscribers open these emails) and an increase in web traffic and sales results occur with each newsletter. This will be further elaborated on in the following section.

There are also plans to open Tara's very own brick-and-mortar bookstore as an extension of the office to sell both their own and publishing partners' books, similar to Drawn & Quarterly's Montreal store. Though no venue has yet been established, tour groups and direct buyers do visit the office.

3.4.4 Promotions

The bulk of Tara's operating expenses go to production, supplies and human resources, with little left over for marketing. No funds are spent on direct advertising. Tara's books sell mainly based on word-of-mouth, bloggers' links, mainstream media exposure, brand name recognition and through visual displays in retail outlets. A minimal marketing budget has resulted in few sales in large bookstore chains, whereas independent bookstores and lifestyle stores opt to champion the promotion of books themselves at no cost. Tara also regularly sends samples and advance copies of books to various informal champions of the books, mostly well-known writers and artists who support Tara's work and are willing to spread the word by contributing endorsements, or writing about new books or the company in newspapers and blogs.
Over the years, annual rotations of interns have been handling Tara’s marketing and promotions efforts. This has led to inconsistent marketing strategies, often more reactive than proactive, with little long-term follow-through. Instead of relying on transient interns and inconsistent marketing efforts (often the spring/summer titles that were released during the intern changeover lost their steam in the hand-off), it was recognized that a constant marketing effort was needed and in early 2009 a marketing and promotions position was created.

Since Tara’s Indian distributor does not offer marketing services, only distribution, Tara also tries to massage relationships with booksellers, make them aware of new titles through newsletters, news releases, media clippings, personal visits, and invitations to events, including tours of the AMM Screens workshop. Tara’s direct relationships with booksellers have proven very fruitful, with higher orders, hand-selling and sales a clear result.

In the US and Canada, CBSD handles representation and distribution only. A former Tara intern, Jennifer Abel, now works on a part-time basis as Tara’s North American publicist, based in Seattle. In the UK, Frances Lincoln provides marketing and publicity services, along with distribution. All marketing communications and efforts are routed through the Indian office, with follow-up by local representation.

Through repeated experiences and observations, it is apparent that when book-buyers become aware of the handmade nature and process of Tara’s handmade collection, they are impressed and buy. The most obvious examples of this phenomenon are when tour groups visit the Tara office, such as a group of forty American oral storytellers that visited in December 2008. Since the group was large, they were divided into two groups – one group would watch a video on the handmade process while the other group browsed books put out on display. It was clear that the group first to browse enjoyed the books and they placed their orders. The groups then switched activities, and the group that had seen the video came to browse the books.
The second group's orders were significantly larger – about double the units – and their attitudes clearly more excited and treated the book as a special item. After the video, the first group returned to increase their orders and revel over the handiwork.85

As referred to earlier, when the same video mentioned above was posted to YouTube.com and linked to from Tara’s website, as well as several bloggers’ sites, more than 5,000 views of the video occurred within the week and the 1,000 newly printed copies of *The Night Life of Trees* promptly sold out (again) – mostly through online purchases.

Another situation that has shown a marked difference in the reception of handmade books has been when C. Arumugam (fine bookmaker and Tara’s production manager) has attended book fairs and set up screen-printing demonstrations. The Frankfurt Book Fair in 2006 was the first time that many of Tara’s co-publishers saw Tara’s process, which resulted in an increase of orders. Similarly, at Basel Book Fair, the public quickly purchased all titles on display upon seeing the process.

When people see the handmade bookmaking process, the book before them can immediately be recognized as an art object. Therefore, it is clear that marketing energies to educate the market and draw attention to the book as a handcrafted object are paramount and intrinsic to sales. Though all handmade titles come plastic-wrapped, making it difficult for book browsers to get a ‘feel’, a bellyband denotes the book as a handmade product, along with an introduction about the handmade process, while accentuating the gift-like nature of the handmade titles. A second video was also created, featuring the handmade production of *Tsunami*.86 At the time of writing, the video had not yet been circulated so its effect on book sales remains unknown.

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85 As observed by the author who hosted the specific group mentioned and took their orders at the Tara Books Chennai office, in November 2008.

86 Created by Avinash Veeraraghavan and Laura Byspalko in January 2009.
Since no formal advertising is used, Tara relies on free publicity. As found in a 2005 Heritage Canada study on Leisure Reading Habits, 40% of people find out about books through recommendations from friends, while 24% do through receiving a book as a gift.\(^7\) This suggests that 64% of Canadians become aware of books through their peer network. This statistic likely holds true in the US and the UK, which are similar markets, and perhaps even stronger in India due to the collective nature of society. Regardless of the exact numbers, it is clear that trusted recommendations are a crucial component in the popularity and spread of any book. The blogosphere is an online form of word-of-mouth recommendations, which has proven to be a successful medium for spreading the word of Tara’s handmade collection. The viral marketing effect that *The Night Life of Trees* video had clearly resulted in heightened sales, particularly reflected in online purchases.

Though it is difficult to track the direct relationship between media appearances and sales results, international media coverage in newspapers, magazines and on television has also boosted sales. The direct correlative is easiest established in the US, where CBSD’s real-time reporting sales data shows a 100-400% increase in sales (often by wholesalers and libraries) following a review or a feature in an established trade journal or newspaper, such as *School Library Journal*, *Kirkus* or *Publisher’s Weekly*. An example of this occurred with *The Night Life of Trees* when it was featured in *Fine Books & Collections* in the September/October 2006 edition and received a starred review in the May 8\(^{th}\), 2007 edition of *Publisher’s Weekly*. CBSD’s reporting system, Helix, showed 120 copies sold in the month after the former review and almost 400 copies following the latter, compared to approximately 20-25 copies selling per month prior to this.

Within the industry, Tara is an established name and has a presence at international book fairs and festivals, including Bologna, Frankfurt, London, Delhi and Jaipur. Tara

has carved a name among industry members (often the purchasers), as well as with cultural alliances, such as the French Embassy’s French Focus series, the Alliance Francaise, the British Council, among several others.

Like all publishers, Tara gives formal distributors significant discounts (on a sliding scale of 55-74% off) and books come with a suggested retail price so discounted pricing in retail outlets is not done. On Tara’s own online storefront, a consistent 25% discount on the US rate is offered on all purchases outside of India and free shipping is offered to orders sent within India.

TaraBooks.com web statistics show, not surprisingly, that by far the most visitors to the website are in India, followed by the US and then the UK. Visitors from Canada are sixth on the list. This is likely explained both by market presence, as well as by the population size of these targeted markets. On average, there are about 2,000 unique visitors to the Tara website per month. The daily traffic triples on days when a newsletter is dispatched and the number of web orders through the TaraBooks.com storefront also triples on the day a newsletter is sent.

As a holiday promotion, and to encourage Tara’s books as gift items, Tara offers complimentary handmade paper gift-wrapping on online orders over the winter holiday season. At hand-picked stores, various promotional efforts include free cloth bags and bookmarks. Signed copies by authors and artists are also on the roster. Free customised display stands are provided to handpicked stores, and local store staff members are offered tours of the Tara offices and printing press.

The Tara brand name has a loyal customer following based on the publishing house’s reputation for innovation and social vigour. The organization tries to maximize direct relationships with its customers. Book launches, author readings and workshops are occasionally held across major Indian cities, though most often in Chennai, and in London, UK.
Relative to the size of the company and the number of titles published per year, Tara has had more than its fair share of publicity in India and abroad. Unusually, many media appearances have featured the publishing house itself, apart from reviews and features on particular books. This has helped build the Tara brand name and gain exposure. Largely due to Tara’s uniqueness of being one of relatively few handmade book publishers, the media tends to view Tara as story-worthy, and as a creative endeavour in itself. Though Tara isn’t widely distributed in Canada, The Globe & Mail featured a story nonetheless, titled “India’s implausible publishing success story”88 and telling the story of Gita Wolf’s publishing venture.

It is Tara’s unique positioning and alternative publishing model, herein overviewed, which makes the publishing house both a loved media story and a popular publishing brand.

(4) CONCLUSION

Over the ages, the book, particularly its content and form, has changed to meet shifting market demands and desires – and reflect society. From a revered object for the wealthy elite or religious to a mainstream item for the masses, both forms continue to exist today, catering to different audiences. Pie Tree Press, The Arion Press and other high-end fine presses delight wealthy bibliophiles while at the opposite extreme are simple, cheap and/or crudely made chapbooks (such as by Small Beer Press), both of which are not available to a mainstream audience through traditional bookselling channels. As mentioned earlier, comparable publishing houses like Taller Leñateros also lack accessibility. So, Tara seems to be selling to the same audience as mainstream art books from publishers such as Chronicle, Phaidon and Taschen. Though these are all exquisite art book publishers, they do not produce handmade books, which is one of Tara’s distinct features.

In observing Tara’s publishing model, as discussed in this paper, it is clear that many of the publishing house’s operations directly contribute to the book being created and sold as a democratic art object, while others are mere functions or strategies common within any organization. Since Tara’s core mandate is to produce beautiful art objects in book form and make them accessible to the widest public possible, it is worthwhile to consider future strategies to maximize output, create loyalty, increase revenue (to create more cash flow, pad the organization, allow for a larger production and marketing budget) while not losing sight of the organization’s primary vision. After all it is the accessibility – through quantities produced, wide distribution, competitive prices, and the balance of quality form with mainstream content – of these book art objects that is Tara’s defining feature, making these objects available in thousands of stores, enabling them to reach large audiences and compete in a mainstream market.

Despite the doom forecasted in the art book publishing industry, Tara is currently positioned very well. They produce a unique product that has a larger demand than
production can meet. Distribution and marketing efforts must continue to maintain this interest, however, it is the production arena that offers potential opportunities. Difficult to navigate for most small enterprises is the logic of expansion and how to balance growth. Since significant expansion is not aligned with Tara’s organizational goals, growth of the production arm, AMM Screens, is not a preferred option. However, emphasis on increased efficiency and improved predictability of production operations could reduce hiccups and increase output.

It’s clear that there is a strong market demand for handmade books (all of Tara’s handmade editions continue to sell out), so the agenda should stress maximizing output while maintaining the book as a democratic art object.

Some final observations relating to potential opportunities follow, namely in distribution, marketing and production capacities.

4.1 Distribution Opportunities

A prime component that establishes Tara’s mandate of the book as a democratic art object is the book’s availability. Their handmade books travel through the traditional bookselling channels (such as chain book stores, independent stores and online storefronts) in both their home market, as well as the two other main English language markets: the UK and North America. Tara’s books thrive best in independent bookstores and lifestyle boutiques so emphasis on developing the handpicked store program, which has shown early success at the pilot stores in India, through all markets in which they operate would establish a strong relationship with booksellers to champion Tara’s books. Selecting a handful of large accounts (such as the recent partnership with Fabindia of India) makes a conscious effort to reinforce the Tara brand name with established organizations that cater to the same market group and can introduce Tara’s handmade book collection to prime audiences. Museums, galleries, design stores, boutiques and lifestyle stores should all be included.
The handpicked program can make efforts to inform potential book buyers of the handmade status, however, finding these books in more typical venues is the challenge. Booksellers don’t know which genre these books fall under and potential buyers mostly aren’t aware that such products exist in the average bookstore at an affordable price. Like the recent success of the graphic novel in establishing its own distinct section in bookstores, handmade books also deserve and require their own section. Creating a handmade book section can begin with handpicked stores and large accounts, and special signage or shelving should be provided to willing stores.

Another effort to emphasize is direct publisher-to-reader selling through the Tara website. This need not cut in to the existing buyers that purchase Tara books through bookstores but to attract more web users (particularly blog readers) directly to TaraBooks.com’s storefront. Offering special promotions to Tara’s existing subscriber list can also be encouraged – create direct promotions and sales, and enable pre-ordering to gauge audience interest.

4.2 Marketing Opportunities

Though Tara’s marketing efforts have been sporadic and little budget exists, it is clear that little endeavours, such as the video on the making of The Night Life of Trees, go a long way in terms of creating brand awareness and book sales.

Positioning the book as a democratic art object builds public goodwill, as does Tara’s mandate to include socially-aware messaging. A slight price increase may better reflect the value of the book art object. Based on the success of The Night Life of Trees, which was linked to and driven by the video on the process (educating the audience of the book’s value), there is a market willing to pay for well-made handmade books. Handmade books can remain accessible without being undervalued and the market
that Tara is currently reaching is unlikely price hypersensitive and able to spend a couple of extra dollars on a book.

As the experience with the video showed, the audience, when educated about the product, recognizes the value and art 'objectness' of Tara's handmade books. Videos of the bookmaking process should continue and tours of the bookmaking workshop should be regulated and promoted. A program to inform distributors, sales representatives, and booksellers should be fixed, as well as a program for these key intermediaries to relay this information to the book buyer. Tara's bellyband is effective in conveying the process – and making the book stand out, provided the book is picked up, however more notice needs to be drawn to the distinct bookmaking process which sets Tara apart from the other publishers in the same shops.

These activities listed so far can help to maintain or increase the demand for Tara's handmade books. More imperative though, at present, is the ability for production to keep up with the demand. The most obvious formula is to increase production operations – to double the AMM Screens staff. As previously mentioned, there are not sufficient resources to accommodate additional staff without having to significantly restructure and reorganize. Not wanting to do that, it is evident that focus must be emphasized instead on the efficiency of the production arm of Tara.

4.3 Production Opportunities

The production process could potentially be better streamlined to consistently maximize output without requiring more manpower. Since all employees are trained in both printing and binding, and enjoy taking part in the complete process, roles can be rotated, however, printing and binding could occur simultaneously so that the workshop is continually turning out finished products. Also able to occur concurrently is book production using screen-printing and letterpress technology. If more attention
and advance planning were done, both printing technologies could occur at the same time, producing two or more titles at a time. Fixing the number of handmade books annually produced and consciously using both screen-printing and letterpress technologies would optimize production output. Also, longer-term production planning and scheduling could make room for joint print runs (several language editions could be done at a time) reducing many setup costs, ink waste and colour-matching time.

Increasing print runs should also be considered, perhaps even focusing on fewer titles per year, thereby reducing per unit cost. This would extend the life of Tara titles (many of which get sold out while demand maintains and backorders existing for these books, ending in lost sales), allowing for the long tail effect, and reduce reprinting. Prioritizing production scheduling could consider favourable orders, such as order quantity (larger orders get priority) and minimum orders should be established for foreign publishers. Since an output of 3,000 copies is optimal for screen-printed titles (new screens are needed at that point and setups costs are reasonably absorbed), foreign rights buyers could be required to place orders in that quantity (or not be given priority). Also, Tara could consider always printing in that quantity. As was the case with *The Night Life of Trees*, five print runs of 1,000 copies each time, were done over two years. Since the setup costs are approximately INR 25,000 (CAD$625), about INR 100,000 (CAD $2,500) was wasted, as well as extra time spent and the shipping expenses of sending five loads to the UK and US.

Further discussion between designers and the production team to improve awareness of the production process in the design stage would maximize resources while avoid unnecessary extravagances, increasing output at a lesser cost. An example of this that could be avoided if such communication occurred was with *The Night Life of Tree* in which forty different colours were used, though an average of only three colours per page. This incurred significant costs and setup time while providing little perceived value. The hand-binding process could also be reconsidered since the handcrafted
nature of the book is largely based on hand-printing onto handmade paper. Avoiding this step would allow for more time to focus on letterpress and screen-printing, which are clearly value-added activities when performed by hand.

Since Tara aims to appeal to a mainstream market in terms of accessible pricing, establishing layers of production could be employed. Similar to the hardcover/paperback book model used with literature, a model of offering a higher-end product to bibliophiles and collectors and a lower-end product to a more mainstream and price-sensitive market. This is aligned with Tara’s goal of making books accessible to the masses, while also providing an opportunity to concentrate on exquisite bookmaking. A special limited edition of each title could be issued, with all the bells and whistles of the ‘livre d’artiste’, numbered and signed by the artists, which could then subsidize a simplified edition of the book, still handmade. Another option is to experiment with the production of cheaper chapbook-style editions. Catering to a different market, these editions could appear in vernacular languages and appeal to highly price-sensitive markets, such as India’s education system.

A final production consideration is to increase the hybrid handmade and offset-printed book, such as *Nurturing Walls*, in which pages displaying colour photographs were offset-printed while the others were screen-printed. This translates into less work for the production team while still offering handmade value. Cover and endsheets only could be hand-printed, with the body of the book being offset-printed, or the title could alternate between hand- and offset-printing.

Since Tara’s primary issue at present is to match production output with market demand, changes to increase or maximize output are required. Tara’s vision to remain a small publishing enterprise is in conflict with their mission to democratize the art object since these book art objects have reached a level of popularity which has resulted in making the revered object scarce: quantities are selling out and therefore
not available to the masses. To maintain their unique publishing model, they must continue to produce rare and revered objects that are accessible to a large audience through pricing, availability and general interest appeal (through content and aesthetics). In aligning production output with market demand, their democratic book art objects can continue to thrive in the hands of both bibliophiles and the hoi polloi.

Questioning how to best manage output and production efficiencies while maintaining the aura, Simon Fraser University Professor and project report senior supervisor, John Maxwell, encapsulates, “Tara's democratic mix consists of not only the balance between artfulness and accessibility, but also the corporate culture and the spirit of the workers.”

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89 John Maxwell. Email to Laura Byspalko. 11 September 2009.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE: Tara’s Handmade Book Catalogue

1. Legend of the Fish (letterpressed and screen-printed)
2. Tiger on a Tree (screen-printed)
3. Catch That Crocodile (screen-printed)
4. Elephants Never Forget (screen-printed)
5. Sultana’s Dream (screen-printed, cover only)
6. The Night Life of Trees (screen-printed)
7. Beasts of India (screen-printed)
8. Hen-sparrow Turns Purple (screen-printed and tipped-in offset)
9. The Very Hungry Lion (screen-printed)
10. Antigone (screen-printed)
11. Bacchae (screen-printed)
12. Hippolytos (screen-printed)
13. Oedipus the King (screen-printed)
14. The Tree Girl (letterpressed and tipped-in offset))
15. In the Dark (letterpressed)
16. The Circle of Fate (screen-printed)
17. Nurturing Walls (screen-printed and offset)
18. Tsunami (screen-printed)
19. The Flight of the Mermaid (screen-printed)
20. I Like Cats (screen-printed, cover only)
21. Fingerprint (screen-printed)
APPENDIX TWO: Awards Won by Tara’s Handmade Titles

MAJOR AWARDS & RECOGNITION FOR OUR HANDMADE TITLES

THE NIGHT LIFE OF TREES
- Winner, Bologna Ragazzi Award, New Horizons category, Bologna Children’s Book Fair, 2008

BEASTS OF INDIA
- Silver Medal, Fine Art Reproductions, FESPA, 2007;
- Spanish National Edition Award, Ministry of Culture, 2007
- Johannes Gutenberg Award for Excellence in Printing, Madras Printers' & Lithographers' Association, 2007

THE LEGEND OF THE FISH
- Honourable Mention, US Independent Publisher Awards, Best Book Arts Craftsmanship, 2006

SOPHOCLES' ANTIGONE
- Outstanding Book of the Year, US Independent Publisher Awards, Best Book Craftsmanship, 2002;
- Honourable Mention, Museum Publication Design Competition, 2002

SOPHOCLES' OEDIPUS THE KING
- Winner, University & College Design Association's Golden Cube Award for Best Book Design, 2006;
- Winner, Association of American University Presses’ Competition, 2005;
- Winner, American Association of Museums’ Publications Design Competition, 2005;
- Gold, University and College Designers Association’s Design Competition, 2005

IN THE DARK

HEN-SPARROW TURNS PURPLE
- Biennial of Illustrations Bratislava, 1999

THE VERY HUNGRY LION
- Alcuin Citation for Excellence in Book Design, Canada, Children’s Book Category, 1996
APPENDIX THREE: The Very Hungry Lion – Advance Information

The Very Hungry Lion
Gita Wolf
Illustrated by Indrapramit Roy

The Very Hungry Lion is an adaptation of a traditional folk tale about a lazy lion who would rather trick other animals into cooking for him than hunt for his food. The vibrant and humorous art is rendered in the Warli style of folk painting from western India, usually painted on the walls of tribal houses.

This award-winning children's tale has sold over 35,000 copies in five languages worldwide. The book is silkscreen printed on special handmade rice paper from India and then bound by hand, making each book a work of art and a special collector's piece.

Selling Points:
• Award winning book
• Translated into many European and other languages
• Adaptation of an appealing traditional folktale
• Illustrations in the style of Indian tribal art
• Handmade edition: silk-screen printed on handmade paper
• Multicultural book introducing children to indigenous art and storytelling traditions

Author: GITA WOLF
Gita Wolf has written more than fourteen books for children and adults. Considered one of the most original and creative voices in contemporary Indian publishing, she has pursued her interest in exploring and experimenting with the form of the book and its status as a revered cultural object. Several of her children's books have won major international awards.

Illustrator: INDRAPRAMIT ROY
One of India's finest up-and-coming contemporary artists, Indrapramit Roy also teaches painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, MS University, Baroda, in western India. He has exhibited widely in solo and group shows all over India and in the US. A versatile and erudite artist, book illustration is one of Indrapramit Roy's passions, and he has worked closely with Tara on a number of successful projects.
APPENDIX FOUR: The Night Life of Trees – Advance Information

The Night Life of Trees
Durga Bai, Bhajju Shyam & Ram Singh Urveti

The Night Life of Trees is an exquisite hand-bound and screen printed book of paintings by three of the finest artists of the Gond tribal art tradition. From central India, the Gonds are traditionally forest dwellers. They believe that trees are hard at work during the day providing shelter and nourishment to all beings. Only at night can they finally rest, and reveal their true spirits. These luminous spirits are captured in The Night Life of Trees, a fascinating and haunting foray into the Gond imagination.

Each painting is accompanied by its own poetic tale, myth or lore, narrated by the artists themselves, which recreate the familiarity and awe with which the Gond people view the natural world. Screenprinted by hand on black paper, every page of this book is an original print.

Artist: DURGA BAI
Durga Bai is a young tribal artist of the Gond tradition of central India. Gond is a ritual and functional art style with distinctive decorative elements, mostly painted on walls of houses using natural colours. Durga constantly reworks and pushes the borders of the Gond form to create art that sparkles with a distinctive energy. She is the illustrator of Sultanâ€”s Dream and One, Two, Treet, which was recently translated into German and has garnered acclaim in Europe.

Artist: BHAJJU SHYAM
This brilliant Gond artist has received international acclaim since his runaway success in 2003 with The London Jungle Book. His captivating visuals and easy storytelling style fuse his perceptions of the modern world with his tribe's unique visual language. His work has been exhibited widely in India, Germany, Russia, the U.S., Milan, The Hague, Paris and London. Bhajju uses inherited forms in very current and expressive ways, while experimenting with innovative subjects and new ideas. He is awaiting the release of his newest title with Tara, Thatâ€”s How I See Things, a humorous and profound tale about the power of art and the imagination.

Artist: RAM SINGH URVEI
Ram Singh Urveti is one of the most brilliant living artists of the Gond tradition. His work has spread the myths and stories of the Gond community throughout Asia, Europe, Australia, and South America and has won him awards nationally and internationally. His work creates a world of fantasy and metamorphosis, coming alive with finely detailed organic forms.

"...an alluring glimpse into an integrative worldview thatâ€”s in poignant contrast to the fragmented postmodern world."
- Publisher’s Weekly (starred review)
APPENDICES

APPENDIX FIVE: Tsunami – Advance Information

BOOK DETAILS

Tsunami
Art | Current Events
Hardcover
12 pages
Colour
380 x 150 mm
Screen-printed by hand
978-81-906756-4-2
Rs. 750 | $29.95 | €14.99
21st December 2009

Tsunami
Moyna & Joydeb Chitrakar

Rendered by Patua scroll painters from West Bengal, Tsunami recalls a terrifying event in our common history. In the traditional manner of Patua art, this innovative scroll-book transforms dramatic news into a moving and artfully rendered fable. Dirge-like in tone and translated from the original Bengali, the Tsunami ballad evokes, as all ancient forms of keening do, the persistence of life in death.

The first Patua scroll to be rendered into the form of a book, Tsunami is silk-screen-printed by hand. The Patua is a form of narrative graphic art, comprising a series of panels, stitched together to form a scroll. It belongs to a nomadic performance tradition when song-writer and artist went from home to home, showing pictures and singing out their stories. Traditional stories and local news were part of their repertoire. Now contemporary artists also look to events reported in the mass media, especially drawn to news that is dramatic and emotionally charged. Their extraordinary imagination introduces an old fashioned empathy into modern reportage—and in the process, creates a moving tale that transforms the ephemera of newsrooms into art with a universal resonance.

For more information or to request a review copy, contact: promotions@tarabooks.com

www.tarabooks.com

3W/1A Shoreham, Fifth Avenue, Besant Nagar, Chennai 600090, India | +91 44 2452 3696 | promotions@tarabooks.com
APPENDIX SIX: Fingerprint – Advance Information

Fingerprint
Andrea Anastasio

Fingerprint is a visual fable that celebrates resistance to state surveillance and control. Actual fingerprints, letter-pressed onto the pages of a book, create progressively complex patterns and sequences, transporting the fingerprint from the world of forensics and law into the freeing world of art and imagination.

Playful yet provoking, this is both an art piece and a political communiqué. High-level political issues, such as international borders, immigration and state control, are addressed, simplified and made accessible. A poignant afterward adds to the visual tale; inciting deeper thought.

The Artist
Andrea Anastasio, a philosophy graduate, has designed for world-class groups like Memphis and Artemide, and his work is in the permanent collections of museums around the world. He was the 2005 artist-in-residence at Boston's Gardner Museum. This is the first time his work appears in book form.

Andrea lives between Italy, India, Japan, Hong Kong and the US.

Special features
• This will be the first book version of Andrea's work.
• Andrea's art is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art and Architecture in Denver, the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal and the Museo degli argenti del XX secolo in Sarirana, Italy.
• Each copy is an original handmade, letter-pressed book printed on handmade paper.
• A many-layered visual puzzle that meshes the line between art and politics.
• A timely and powerful visual tale that offers perspective on current events.
• Includes a powerful and thought-provoking essay by V. Geetha, an Indian intellectual, on the fingerprint as a tool of identification; its history, use and evolution.
• Could be used in classroom settings to provoke discussions about racial boundaries, globalization, immigration, homeland security, conceptual art, among other topics.
• Will appeal to art and politics enthusiasts, activists, artists, politicians and anyone who has ever taken an international flight.

BOOK DETAILS
ISBN: 978-81-906756-2-8
Subject: Art/Politics
Price: Rs.650 | £14.99 | $29.95
Pages: 104
Size: 7.5 x 5.5 in
Binding: Hardcover
Illustrations: Colour
Publication Dates:
India & UK - August 2009;
US - August 2009
TARA BOOKS' HANDMADE BOOKMAKING PROCESS

STEP 1: An image is imposed on to a fine silk-screen mesh using light and light-sensitive liquid to transfer it.

STEP 2: The printer uses a 'squeezer' to pull the ink over a stencil-like screen and onto a sheet below, at an exact angle of 45 degrees.

STEP 3: The ink registers on the paper and the freshly printed page is placed to dry. Step 2 and 3 are repeated for each colour and screen used.

STEP 4: When all the pages of the book are dried, they are arranged sequentially in preparation for stitching and binding.

STEP 5: The ordered pages are then threaded and stitched together by hand, compiling the full book.

STEP 6: The binder makes a hardcover by wrapping the printed cover over cardboard sheets.

STEP 7: When both the cover and the inside of the book are ready, the binder pastes in the end sheets.

STEP 8: Once assembled the Production Manager, C. Arumugam, checks each book to ensure top quality.

STEP 9: The production team, twelve talented bookmakers from local villages, retire for the day.

www.taraBOOKS.com
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