



Supplemental Income

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SUPPLEMENTAL INCOME

British newspaper colour supplements in the 1960s

Richard Farmer 

The introduction of colour supplements by three 'quality' newspapers during the 1960s was a key development in the British press during the decade, and was described by the editor of the Sunday Times as 'perhaps the most successful single innovation in post-war journalism'. This article provides an overview of the advent of the colour supplements, explaining why they emerged when they did and developed in the manner they did, and exploring some of the difficulties and issues that attended their arrival. The article also demonstrates that sections of the British press were capable of taking advantage of changes in print and advertising culture brought about by the arrival of the post-war consumer society. However, the term 'colour supplement' became pejorative shorthand for the perceived vacuity of this new society, in part because of the tension that existed between the editorial and advertising content of these modish new publications. Consequently, the success of the colour supplement experiment was not universally celebrated.

KEYWORDS Colour supplements; quality newspapers; *Sunday Times Magazine*; *Observer Magazine*; *Weekend Telegraph*; Roy Thomson

In his memoirs, Denis Hamilton described the *Sunday Times Magazine* as 'perhaps the most successful single innovation in post-war journalism'.¹ Hamilton, who was editor of the *Sunday Times* when the first edition of the colour supplement was published on 4 February 1962, was hardly an impartial observer, and the decision to single out the *Magazine* for special praise was no doubt made easier by the success and status it had come to enjoy by the time that Hamilton was writing in the late 1980s. However, we should be wary of dismissing Hamilton's claim as self-congratulatory grandstanding, for where the *Sunday Times* led, others soon paid it the 'supreme compliment' of following: within weeks of each other in September 1964, both the *Observer* and the *Daily Telegraph* brought out their own colour supplements, issued on Sundays and Fridays, respectively.² The colour supplements issued by these three 'quality' papers would all eventually prove to be commercially successful, and the income earned by each would go a long way to keeping their mother publications financially healthy.

This article will provide an overview of the advent of the colour supplements, exploring why they emerged when they did and developed in the manner they did, and analysing some of the difficulties and issues that attended their arrival. Despite their undoubted success, and the role they played in advancing a certain kind of glossy consumerism, the *Sunday Times Magazine*, the *Observer Magazine* and the *Weekend Telegraph* have received insufficient attention. The colour supplements, as these publications collectively became known, feature in the autobiographies of those who brought them into existence,³ in

the histories of the institutions involved,⁴ and in general histories of the post-war British press or British society in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵ Such work is somewhat fragmentary, and has a tendency to address each of the different colour supplements either in isolation or in passing; there is a scarcity of detailed work on the phenomenon as a whole. This is an oversight that might usefully be addressed for a number of reasons. Firstly, the success of the colour supplements showed that sections of the British newspaper industry were capable of taking advantage of changes in British print and advertising culture that followed in the wake of the introduction of commercial television. Secondly, the content and ideas contained in the colour supplements escaped the confines of the printed page and entered British culture more widely. The widespread use of the phrase 'colour supplement' as shorthand for the 'pseudo-sophistication' of a particular type of vacuous, modish and expensive consumerism suggests both that these publications shared sufficient characteristics to be understood collectively, and that, despite the growing influence of television, the press continued to be integral to British cultural life in the 1960s.⁶ Thirdly, the colour supplements attracted an uncommon degree of attention and hostility, often because of the dissonance visible between editorial and advertising content. Placing serious editorial content and photojournalism alongside advertisements for supposedly sophisticated consumer goods (alcoholic drinks, clothes, furniture, cars) and services (airlines, holiday destinations), the colour supplements embodied something of the uneasiness with which the affluent, consumer society continued to be viewed in Britain in the 1960s, a decade or so after it first emerged.

The *Sunday Times Magazine* was the brainchild of Roy Thomson, the Canadian media magnate ennobled as Lord Thomson of Fleet in 1964. Thomson had purchased his first British paper, the *Scotsman*, in 1953 and taken ownership of the *Sunday Times* in 1959 when he acquired the Kemsley group of newspapers as part of a rapid expansion of his British interests. In 1955, two things happened that had the potential to affect the advertising revenues generated by, and the relative cultural importance of, British newspapers. Firstly, in August, it was announced that newsprint rationing, in place since 1940, was to end. Whilst this would allow for larger papers, any increase in size promised to raise production costs whilst simultaneously reducing advertising rates, a prospect that alarmed some proprietors.⁷ Secondly, in September, Independent Television (ITV) launched in London, heralding the arrival of commercial broadcasting in the United Kingdom. It would be 1962 before all of Britain could access the new service, but much of the country was covered by commercial television by the end of the 1950s. Although on one level commercial television was intended to provide competition for the BBC, it was also intended to provide advertisers with a new media by which 'to promote the expanded range of consumer goods' then becoming available after a decade of austerity,⁸ and also, according to James Garrett, to act as a means of cutting the 'arrogant newspapers ... down to size'.⁹

Apocalyptic predictions of press penury did not come to pass. Although by 1960 television had come to account for approximately one quarter of total advertising expenditure, this still left the press with some 70% of the pie, and the pie was getting bigger.¹⁰ As affluence became more widespread, the amount of money spent on advertising increased, more than doubling between 1954 and 1960.¹¹ When Walter Taplin gathered data on early television commercials in Britain, he found that in more than half of cases,

money spent on television advertising was additional to, rather than a reallocation of, money spent on other media: multiple-media advertisers predominated.¹² However, because television commercials were often broadcast nationwide, television advertising was believed to compete directly with the national daily and Sunday papers. The provincial press, catering to a local market that television found hard to make pay, therefore increased its proportion of total press advertising revenues following the introduction of ITV.¹³

Although hindsight allows for a sanguine view of the distribution of advertising revenues following advent of commercial television, it might not have been so clear at the time that the new medium was not going to inflict lasting damage on more established means of advertising. Indeed, between 1955 and 1960 magazine circulation declined by 8%, and *Illustrated*, *Picture Post* and *Everybody's*, three of Britain's most high-profile general interest magazines, all ceased publication.¹⁴ What optimism there was, was often tempered by a degree of apprehension and uncertainty.

Thomson had an 80% stake in, and was chairman of, Scottish Television (STV) and recognised that the *Sunday Times* might increase revenue by offering advertisers things which television could not. Most important amongst these were colour and access to the *Sunday Times*' wealthy readership. Colour television commercials would not be broadcast in Britain until November 1969, but the British press was, at the time of the first television commercials, capable of printing colour advertisements.¹⁵ That in the mid-1950s it did not often do so—in 1956 the *Glasgow Daily Herald* was the only British daily paper which carried four-colour advertisements with any regularity—was, one commentator believed, due to a combination of innate conservatism and newsprint rationing:

Many of the older and smaller local newspapers, some of them still family businesses, have felt secure in their entrenched positions, with little incentive to introduce new ideas, while nearly all good newspapers, large and small alike, have had more advertising offered to them than they could accept for many years past, and this this is not a condition which engenders great initiative.¹⁶

Further, as Ernest Biggs noted in his survey of colour print advertising, the structure of the British newspaper industry militated against the use of significant amounts of colour. The highest circulation dailies were sold nationally and competed directly for readers and advertisers. Despite the higher rates that could be charged to advertisers, and despite increased interest in and use of colour by the national dailies from the late 1950s onwards, colour printing was not always an attractive proposition for such papers because it was tricky, time-consuming and increased the chances of production delays. It was more difficult to incorporate colour advertisements within papers that often had print-runs of several million and which were acutely aware of the need to remain up-to-the-minute if they were to maintain market share.¹⁷ A stand-alone colour supplement offered a way around this problem, as it could be planned, written, laid-out and printed ahead of time and then incorporated with the main body of the paper at point of sale.¹⁸

In North America and many parts of Europe, the newspaper industry was more often structured at a city, state or regional level, resulting in smaller print runs and less cut-throat competition. This meant that colour was more commonly used in such markets, and, consequently, that there was both greater capacity for colour printing and more plant capable of printing colour on both sides of a page. Indeed, early editions of the *Weekend Telegraph*

were printed at the Burda works in Germany as a result of the British print industry's shortage of colour plant and a dearth of skilled workers resulting from the print unions' decision to restrict entry so as to keep members in work and in demand. Transporting hundreds of thousands of colour supplements half-way across Europe was an unsatisfactory and expensive solution, but the prospect of further alienating the unions was potentially more costly: there was talk of industrial action at the *Telegraph's* own printing works in London which, had it occurred, could have disrupted the production and threatened the income of the daily paper. It is not surprising, then, that the *Telegraph* and the unions moved swiftly to find a compromise, and it was announced that as soon as enough skilled—and card-carrying—printers had been trained, production of the *Weekend Telegraph* would move to Bemrose's of Liverpool.¹⁹

In their early years, the colour supplements were not printed entirely in colour and until back-to-back colour printing became more widely available in the second half of the 1960s, something in the region of 50% colour was the most that could be offered. The number of pages and advertisements in colour tended, in the early years, to grow absolutely rather than proportionally, but there were instances where advertisers were so keen to reach the readers of the quality Sundays that they placed advertisements in black and white for products that would have benefitted from being in colour—including colour televisions.²⁰ It says a lot about the attractiveness of colour that Thomson was prepared to overcome the difficulties and costs associated with its production to use it to entice advertisers.

Similarly, the perceived value of the *Sunday Times'*—and, later, the *Observer* and the *Telegraph's*—readers was such that advertisers were willing to pay a premium to reach them via the colour supplements. The *Sunday Times* had the largest circulation of the quality Sunday papers, selling almost 1 million copies per week in 1960; the *Observer* sold just over 700,000 copies. The *Sunday Telegraph*, introduced in February 1961, had sales in its early years of 600–650,000, a number that, in part, came at the expense of the *Sunday Times*, which suffered an approximate 10% fall in circulation following the introduction of this new rival. Indeed, this decline in sales prompted Thomson to explore means by which he might differentiate his title and, in the words of an early biographer, 'set [it] way ahead of all other quality Sunday papers'.²¹ Having previously toyed with the idea of expanding the number of sections (it already had two, the main paper and the Review), Thomson alighted instead on the idea of a colour supplement.²²

Compared to the popular Sundays, sales of the quality Sundays were puny: in the early 1960s, the *News of the World* regularly sold more than 6 million copies, the *People* and the *Sunday Mirror* more than 5 million each, and even the *Sunday Express*, the runt of this particular litter, could each week confidently expect to sell more than the three quality Sundays combined.²³ However, although sales and circulation figures mattered, they were not the be all and end all for advertisers. To charge the highest rates, papers needed to demonstrate that they were read by what advertisers considered the right kind of people. The *Daily Herald* was 'probably amongst the twenty largest circulation dailies in the world' at the time of its demise and relaunch as the *Sun* in 1964, but its readers, predominantly drawn from the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled working class (social groups C2 and DE), 'did not constitute a valuable advertising market'.²⁴ As Thomson noted in his memoirs, the same was also true of the *Sunday Express* in the

early 1960s; its mooted colour supplement was never brought to fruition because the cost of producing and printing millions of copies each week was significantly more than advertisers could be charged to reach that paper's readers.²⁵

Conversely, the quality Sundays drew nearly 40% of their readership from the upper middle class and the middle class (social groups A and B, which in 1975 accounted for 13.5% of the British population).²⁶ Such people very definitely *did* constitute a valuable advertising market, in part because they were thought less likely to watch commercial television.²⁷ The high rates that each of the quality Sundays was able to charge for 'selling its readers' incomes to advertisers' allowed them to survive on relatively small circulations.²⁸ In 1973, the *Sunday Times*, *Observer* and *Sunday Telegraph* accounted for only 14% of national Sunday circulation, yet earned 20% more advertising revenue than all the popular Sundays combined.²⁹

As it sought to sell advertising space in advance of its first issue, the *Sunday Times Magazine* stressed the affluence of its readers. Readers of the *Financial Times*, for example, were advised that

Whether your interests are in fashion or furniture, cars or cake-mix, if the products are above average in quality they find a natural market among the top third of the population ... These are the men and women who appreciate excellence and are prepared to pay for it – the people who largely influence the mass buying trends of the future ... No other advertising medium offers the selling power of full colour on such a broad-based high status market.³⁰

Ahead of the launch of its own magazine, the *Observer* promised advertisers 'the immediacy of a newspaper with the impact of a colour magazine' and insisted that the *Observer Magazine* would reach 'leadership groups ... opinion formers, people with power and influence.'³¹

As the first colour supplement to enter the market, the *Sunday Times Magazine* might have been expected to clean up. After all, in the first half of 1962 there was increased interest in colour press advertising, and the *Daily Herald*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* persuaded companies such as Kellogg's to pay handsomely for the privilege of placing full-page colour advertisements.³² The *Sunday Times Magazine*, however, initially found it difficult to attract advertisers: it was an unknown quantity, and the vast cost of getting the magazine off the ground meant that there were nagging concerns—and a whispering campaign, possibly orchestrated by Beaverbrook and the *Sunday Express*³³—that it would not long survive. Such concerns might have been exacerbated by the *Magazine's* arrival in the wake of Thomson's frustrated attempt to merge his company with Odhams Press, and that organisation's subsequent takeover by Cecil King's Fleetway Publications in early 1961.³⁴ This was an embarrassingly public failure which Thomson conceded was 'a pretty severe disappointment'.³⁵ Although Thomson would enjoy the last laugh, noting that the *Sunday Times Magazine*, and all the success it enjoyed, was a project that the Thomson group 'would not have been able to tackle had we gone in with Odhams,' the initiative still carried the taint of Thomson's earlier failure to gain access to the magazine publishing industry.³⁶ The Canadian tycoon's reputation for relentless, successful expansion was shaken, and the *Magazine*, in its early days, might have suffered as a result.

So real were concerns about the prospects of the *Sunday Times*' colour supplement that although advertisers booked space for one-off advertisements, most were wary of making a longer term commitment. During the spring and summer of 1962 there were as few as four pages as colour advertisements in some editions. When in August that year *Private Eye* published a parody of the *Magazine* it asked 'Why are there no ads in this take off? Because there aren't enough in the *Sunday Times* colour section to make it worthwhile.'³⁷ During its first year the *Sunday Times Magazine* lost money at an eye-watering rate: as much as £20,000 in some weeks,³⁸ and as much as £800,000 in total.³⁹ However, such losses were offset by the profits generated by Thomson's other papers and STV, which after a shaky start had by the early 1960s become, to quote its chairman, a 'license to print money'.⁴⁰ The *Observer* and the *Telegraph* could not call on similar resources. As such, they had to wait on the side-lines, ready to launch their own colour supplements should the *Sunday Times Magazine* prove a success, yet wary of committing themselves too soon.

Although agencies such as Collett Dickenson Pearce (CDP) were quick to recognise the potential of the colour supplement, and encourage their clients to buy space, the advertising industry as a whole remained cautious.⁴¹ Thomson, speaking at his newspaper group's AGM in June 1962, noted that the *Sunday Times Magazine* was 'too new a development for its advantages as an advertising medium to have been appreciated so far by all advertisers and advertising agencies'.⁴² As losses mounted, the decision was taken to slash advertising rates, by as much as 40% in some instances. This brought in some larger accounts—most notably Ford and the Central Office of Information—and the *Sunday Times* marketing team, without the knowledge of the advertisers, used these prestige accounts to persuade the major advertising agencies of the *Magazine*'s long-term viability. This, in turn, allowed them to sell enough space for the magazine to break even by October 1962.⁴³ The *Sunday Times* then went all out to get its colour magazine into profit, taking every available opportunity to advertise its *solus* situation—'The Only One With Colour', boasted its posters and advertisements.⁴⁴ It also continually banged the drum for its own success. 'We have,' the *Magazine* announced in February 1963 on the occasion of its first anniversary, 'nearly 400 pages of advertising already booked this year. And so much of it is in colour that we are planning to re-organise technically to take it all in.'⁴⁵ The first birthday celebrations also resulted in the 'Moscow picnic', a widely publicised trip to the Soviet Union that Thomson held to be critically important in raising the profile of the *Magazine*.⁴⁶

As it became apparent that the *Sunday Times Magazine* had turned the corner, the *Observer* and the *Telegraph* made their moves. Concerns that the market might only support two Sunday colour supplements determined the course of action taken by both papers. The *Observer* worked as quickly as it could to beat the *Telegraph* to print—something it managed by less than a month. Its plans for swift action were, though, hampered both by a lack of capital (the trust that kept the *Observer* independent also made it more difficult to raise the large sums needed to launch a colour magazine) and by managerial indecision. David Astor, who to many people was the *Observer*, was initially scornful of the colour supplements, believing that they did not chime with his paper's sincere intellectual outlook and fearing that introducing one would change the *Observer*'s tenor.⁴⁷ His concerns were, perhaps, not unfounded. Richard Cockett, for example, singles out the need to chase advertisers as the moment when the *Observer* 'lost its intellectual momentum' and

started to become just another 'attractive advertising medium, an entertainment sheet and "life-style" magazine'.⁴⁸ However, the advent of the *Sunday Telegraph* in 1961 and the publication of the *Sunday Times Magazine* in 1962, coupled with lingering advertiser suspicion of the *Observer* resulting from the critical stance it had adopted on Suez,⁴⁹ focussed Astor's mind on the need to bring in more money. For the *Observer*, the decision to publish a colour supplement was linked not simply to a desire to maximise income—Astor and Thomson had distinct attitudes regarding the business of newspapers—but rather to a desire to survive: if the *Observer* was not profitable, it would fold, despite its long and impressive history.

The *Telegraph* decided to issue the *Weekend Telegraph* on a Friday. Because the *Sunday Telegraph* was a relative newcomer, and had the smallest circulation of the quality Sundays, it was, perhaps unfairly, associated with uncertainty and instability.⁵⁰ Issuing the *Weekend Telegraph* on a Friday thus associated it with the better established and far stronger *Daily Telegraph* brand whilst providing access to a different stream of advertising revenue. 'Perfectly timed to catch the week's peak shopping period,⁵¹ consumers who read it on a Friday could then buy what they saw on a Saturday. Whilst there was considerable overlap between advertisers purchasing space in the three 'quality' colour supplements, there were also differences, and these were most marked in the *Weekend Telegraph*, which, because of its parent paper's overtly conservative leanings and older readership, appealed to a certain kind of advertiser. As such, it was a perfect medium for a business such as Dunn & Co., which even John Salmon of CDP, the agency that handled its account, described as 'a spectacularly dull men's outfitters'. Salmon found it difficult to convince this rather staid retailer that the lion's share of its advertising budget would be best used buying a series of full-colour pages in the *Weekend Telegraph*, but having done so in 1968, the company didn't look back: 'the merchandise wasn't colourful, but it looked better in colour'. Sales increased to the extent that Dunn & Co. eventually became a national television advertiser.⁵²

The colour supplements were more often associated with advertisers seeking to appeal to the young. When Hamilton became editor of the *Sunday Times* in October 1961, he sought to make the paper more attractive to younger readers of the sort who had previously tended to favour the *Observer*. The introduction of the *Sunday Times Magazine*, with its focus on fashion, travel, home and consumption, was one part of this strategy, the adoption of a more independent-minded and heterodox political outlook, another.⁵³ The fight for young, educated, A and B readers mattered, because reaching this particular group of consumers was a priority for many advertisers; 'young married couples whose key purchases are ahead of them and who take readily to new ideas'⁵⁴ constituted that 'section of the population which is most interested in fashion and spends the most money on it'.⁵⁵

In his quest to make the *Sunday Times Magazine* 'attractive to people below the age of 35'⁵⁶—a fairly arbitrary cut-off point that was further lowered in the first edition of the supplement, which stated that to 'be of the Sixties ... you should be under 30'⁵⁷—Hamilton determined to develop a 'new journalistic treatment'⁵⁸ to take advantage of the 'build-up of brilliant new graphic design—the outpourings of art schools in the late forties and fifties'.⁵⁹ In this, the colour supplements built on foundations laid by magazines such as the Royal College of Art's *ARK*, Clive Labovitch and Michael Heseltine's *Town*,⁶⁰ and Jocelyn Steven's *Queen*, this last a modish, high-end publication whose delicate grasp of,

and ability to squeeze profit from, 'the magic bubble of up-to-dateness' Hamilton hoped to emulate.⁶¹ Indeed, Mark Boxer, the 'iconoclastic' 30-year-old Hamilton appointed as the *Magazine's* editor in the hope of realising his bold vision, had previously been art director at *Queen*.⁶²

The *Sunday Times Magazine* was, though, not alone its desire to take advantage of contemporary trends in graphic design. At the *Daily Mail*, Mike Randall instituted 'revolutionary changes' in the early 1960s that took the paper 'out of the "straightjacket" of "the old restrictive orthodoxy";' whilst as design director at the *Express* between 1959 and 1964, before his move to and reinvigoration of the *Observer*, Ray Hawkey was tasked with introducing something akin to 'a magazine flavour, polished, sophisticated, modern.'⁶³ The period also saw a move towards more rationalised newspaper front pages—less cluttered, more spacious; fewer stories, larger banners.⁶⁴

However, the speed with which each edition of a newspaper had to be written, laid out and printed, and the need to be able to react—often at very short notice—to a swiftly changing news agenda made it all but impossible to make each edition unique in terms of design; the conventional 'jig-saw puzzle structure' remained standard in the British press.⁶⁵ Additionally, printing technologies and issues pertaining to the quality of newsprint made it very difficult to include or do justice to more exciting developments in design. The colour supplements did not seek to intervene in current affairs—it was 'wildly expensive to have last-minute [colour] printing'⁶⁶—and could therefore be laid out weeks in advance; this made it possible for them to play with design more energetically, and more radically, than could either broadsheets or tabloids. The magazine format permitted different layouts, with longer-form articles or themed content spread of a number of pages—sometimes successive, sometimes not—and this allowed for changes in the compositional relationship between advertising and editorial content. In an attempt to distinguish the colour supplements from the traditional newspaper, layouts sought wherever possible to avoid presenting undifferentiated, regimented columns of text. With their large print runs the colour supplements were unusually visible and so constituted some of the earliest examples of truly 'mass circulation postmodern media in Britain.'⁶⁷

The 'ultra-modern' style, visible to varying degrees in each of the colour supplements, was not universally popular.⁶⁸ The *Observer* was criticised by one reader for descending 'to the level of a woman's glossy magazine'—all 'technical brilliance' in terms of presentation and 'dreary banalities' in terms of content.⁶⁹ The first edition of the *Sunday Times Magazine* prompted more than 1000 letters of complaint, many of them about layout and visual style.⁷⁰ Hamilton responded the following week, declaring himself to have some

sympathy with the objections of elderly readers who found themselves bewildered, if not repelled by what they sometimes called the 'too modern' appearance of the section. Perhaps it *was*, for its first number, too unconventional in typography and layout. But it follows a modern trend in design, as younger readers familiar with the contemporary illustrated magazines are well aware.⁷¹

The colour supplements, though, were not aimed at 'elderly readers,' and the *Sunday Times*, the *Observer* and the *Daily Telegraph* paid little heed to threats to cancel subscriptions 'after ... 25 years'.⁷² Equally easy to dismiss were criticisms that the *Sunday Times Magazine*

was 'nothing more than a vehicle for colour advertising ... Out of forty pages only three are devoted to news items and one of these is the front cover!'⁷³

The relationship between advertising and editorial proved more contentious for the colour supplements than for the newspapers. Some readers found it difficult to distinguish between advertisements and the more consumerist elements of the editorial content. Boxer himself noted that 'The sense of style and the creativity of the ads from CDP have set us at the *Sunday Times* standards to match in the editorial.'⁷⁴ The photographers engaged to provide the pictorial accompaniment to 'probing editorial enquiries into social conditions in the Black Country' were often the same as those whose photos graced advertisements for 'candy-striped shirts or speeding sports cars'—with the same techniques and visual language used 'interchangeably' until, Christopher Booker claimed, 'the whole world through their viewfinders had been reduced to the same grainy, pacey, ever more "realistic" dream.'⁷⁵

The discrepancy between the serious, conscientious content of some of the editorial and the glamorous sophistication of much of the advertising created a tension that haunted the colour supplements. In December 1969, the *Sunday Times Magazine* carried a piece by Karl Miller, editor of the *Listener*, which took the colour supplements to task for promulgating an 'ethos of spending, of ownership and of opportunity and expansion' by means of advertisements that were not simply consulted, but actually 'read and enjoyed.' (Miller's article was punctuated by advertisements for Ronson pipes and Findlater's sherry). Miller's main concern, though, was the juxtaposition between the advertising and editorial, especially in terms of how the former crowded in on and mediated the latter. True, Miller averred, the 'respect for affluence that radiates from the advertisements is tempered by sharp feelings of guilt and social responsibility' prompted by the photojournalism. But, he suggested, the supplements' privileging of advertising meant that it was more likely to be the case that a reader's feelings of outrage, concern or distress, of affection, joy or amusement, were contained within a framework of affluence and consumption. The resulting dissonance meant that the supplements had little substance and no real sense of integrity, making it hard to recognise, let alone take seriously, the frequent descents into thoughtfulness.⁷⁶ John Berger arrived at a similar conclusion.⁷⁷

However, it is surely too simplistic to assert, as one *Observer* reader did, that the colour supplements were just 'another propaganda sheet for the Affluent Society.'⁷⁸ True, many editions married stylish colour advertisements for airlines or holiday destinations with beautifully photographed pieces on the joys and hardships of exotic travel or photogenic places of historical interest, but the supplements' photographic content was intended, according to Hamilton, to differentiate them from publications such as the *Illustrated London News*, i.e. 'another ... nice, cheerful but slow-moving record of the events of the world.'⁷⁹ The colour supplements provided an outlet for some striking photojournalism on both domestic and international subjects, providing compelling visual accounts of drug addiction, old age, mental health issues, colonialism and wars in Vietnam or Nigeria. Such images were far from apolitical, and implicit or explicit criticism of British and American involvement in global affairs was not uncommon.⁸⁰

The colour supplements, to a greater degree than even *Picture Post*, provided a stimulating and challenging medium in which 'pictures were allowed to run over several pages in the true documentary style.'⁸¹ This differed from the newspapers, where the

use of photographs was illustrative rather than provocative, literal rather than poetic, safe rather than challenging. Indeed, at their best the colour supplements were capable of subverting established narratives. For example, on 28 March 1965 the *Sunday Times Magazine* carried a number of pieces on the theme of 'The North [of England]'; John Bulmer's contribution was a series of colour photographs that showed a bright and vibrant region, thereby disrupting some of the (metropolitan) prejudices and assumptions about a part of Britain that was all too frequently stereotyped according to the tropes and preoccupations of 'kitchen sink' literature and New Wave films.⁸² Indeed, it was in the widespread use of photography that the colour supplements were probably most distinctive. In commissioning photographers to provide pictures, be they colour or monochrome, on a wide range of different subjects, the supplements both provided employment to photographers and placed their work before a large audience, elevating its status and helping to create an appreciation of the medium as a serious artistic endeavour.

As James Curran has noted, advertising affords the quality press a disproportionate influence. In 1973, more than 60% of the total income of popular Sunday newspapers came from sales. This led these papers to chase readers and reduced the space given over to 'serious' issues. However, in 1973, the quality Sunday papers got almost three quarters of their total revenue from advertising and could therefore afford to devote more space to news and current affairs, knowing that this approach was likely to attract wealthy, high-brow readers and in this way make themselves more desirable to advertisers. Establishing a 'virtual monopoly' on serious issues afforded the quality daily and Sunday papers a significant political role.⁸³ This may be too gloomy and reductive a prognosis, however, for although it is certainly possible to view the *Sunday Times Magazine*, the *Observer Magazine* and the *Weekend Telegraph* as birds of a feather—they often carried exactly the same advertisements and ran near-identical features—the papers that they propped up advanced, and continue to advance, quite divergent editorial agendas. What's more, because they did not need to stand alone, the colour supplements were able to take risks, providing space for longer-form writing and dedicating entire issues to single themes that could not have been accommodated within the main paper. Boxer recognised that the pitfalls of this 'big bite' approach were more than compensated for by its potential strengths: 'You may not like it this week, but next week there should be something that holds you; and we will treat it fully ...'⁸⁴

The colour supplements also worked to introduce broadsheet readers to types of content not often associated with newspapers, or presented familiar types of content in fresh and unfamiliar ways. As such, the supplements reflected, and perhaps even advanced, some of the social and cultural changes then underway in Britain, most obviously by means of exploring and expounding the links between consumption and the construction and refinement of identity. The prominence within the various colour supplements of features exploring 'lifestyle'—a word and a concept that these publications did much to popularise—offers rich material to the cultural historian, but also worked to show British consumers (or a small subset of them, at least) to themselves.

Colour photographs fetishising food and dining abounded, speaking to increased interest in gastronomy as a source of pleasure and as means of self-expression. The 'Cook-strip' columns drawn by Len Deighton, alumnus of the Royal College of Art and sometime contributor to *ARK*, exemplified this trend. Having first appeared in the *Observer*, the

Cookstrips found a more natural home in that publication's *Magazine*; their male-oriented, predominantly pictorial representations of food preparation speaking to nascent changes in gender roles and taking advantage of the possibilities afforded by gravure printing and the celebration of graphic design.⁸⁵ Also in the *Observer Magazine* were Shirley Conran's regular features on décor, furniture and interior design, articles that were complemented by one-off pieces on specific aspects of the home beautiful. Even though such pieces were mocked contemporaneously—the Beatles' trendy house in *Help!* was in many ways a tongue-in-cheek pastiche of the aesthetic promoted by the colour supplements—they were also forward looking, suggesting to readers that they could embrace the new and the individual and reject the tired and the traditional.

The colour supplements were also a forum in which popular culture could be examined and celebrated (although this was truer in the *Observer* and the *Sunday Times* than in the *Telegraph*). Pop groups such as the Beatles and the Who adorned the front covers of the colour supplements, and were discussed in some detail inside, and the bright, colourful and vibrant pop art produced by, for example, Peter Blake and Any Warhol, and the striking op art created by Brigit Riley, chimed with the supplements' design principles and interest in the immediate. Although this coverage could sometimes read like a primer for people with no previous exposure to the subject, the supplements rarely sneered at the pleasures afforded by popular culture; rather, they recognised its importance and paid it the compliment of treating it seriously and intelligently.⁸⁶ Wittily combining consumerism and popular culture, the colour supplements demonstrated that these phenomena were accessible to, and could be enjoyed by, all sections of British society, and promoted the idea that knowledge of changing fashions and the development of personal taste could be sincere components of one's life, not adjuncts to it.

The colour supplements became crucial to the prospects of the newspapers that issued them. Without the income generated by its magazine, for instance, the *Observer* might not have survived.⁸⁷ Similarly, the profits generated by the *Sunday Times*—much of it by the *Magazine*—were used to keep *The Times* afloat after it was purchased by Thomson in 1966.⁸⁸ And profits there certainly were. For the year ending August 1968, the combined advertising revenue generated by the quality colour supplements was £9.4 million; in the same period, the national Sundays earned £26 million.⁸⁹ There was sufficient advertising money for each of the three colour supplements to survive and, to different degrees, thrive: Thomson's *Sunday Times*, the longest established and with the largest weekly sale, tended to be the most lucrative, and in late 1968, for example, it attracted approximately half of all colour supplement advertising revenue, with the *Observer* and *Telegraph* accounting for about one quarter each.⁹⁰ This advertising windfall did not draw advertising away from the main paper; the colour supplements brought in additional advertising, and additional readers. The first half of 1967 saw the *Observer's* audited weekly sale rise to more than 900,000, the highest in the paper's history, with the colour supplement—bringing in more advertising than ever—closely linked with this increase.⁹¹ The first editions of the *Sunday Times Magazine* were estimated to have boosted sales by almost 20%, an impressive achievement in itself, but one that was all the more lucrative because it did not result in any significant dilution of its A and B readership: 'an additional source of revenue had been opened up. Advertisers were offered more middle-class readers and a new outlet to appeal to them in.'⁹²

By the end of the 1960s, the words ‘colour supplement’ had, according to Karl Miller, become a ‘favourite term of abuse’.⁹³ Pejorative uses of the term could be found in reviews of plays and films, positioning the colour supplements as trite or superficial. Although such criticisms are frequently arresting—it feels as if some critics sought to out-do each other with their slights—they should not obscure the fact that the colour supplements were easy to snipe at because they had, in a short period of time, come to enjoy such prominence. Yet the colour supplements also need to be understood in terms of their wider significance, both in newspaper culture and British society more generally. Their increased use of colour, and their desire to better integrate image and text, instituted formal changes that continue to resonate within the British press to this day. Their eagerness to provide a platform for photographers ushered in a greater appreciation of that art in Britain. Their eventual triumph spoke to the print media’s ability to innovate and adapt in order to forcefully assert its continuing relevance. Their sincere, but not portentous, appreciation of various cultural forms and products helped to integrate the popular within the high-brow. One suspects, however, that for Roy Thomson and his fellow proprietors, most satisfying of all was the colour supplements’ commercial success: for all their avowedly polychromatic intentions, these publications helped keep their newspapers in the black.

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Notes

1. Hamilton, *Editor-in-Chief*, 111. Initially known as the *Colour Section* and then the *Colour Magazine*, the colour supplement was renamed the *Sunday Times Magazine* in 1964, and shall be referred to by this title throughout this article. I have also used a single name for the colour supplements put out by the *Observer* and the *Daily Telegraph*.
2. Giles, *Sundry Times*, 154.
3. See, for example, Hamilton, *Editor-in-Chief*, 104–20 passim; Thomson, *After I was Sixty*, 121–7.
4. Cockett, *David Astor*, 246–8; Hobson et al., *Pearl of Days*, 347–74; Hart-Davis, *House the Berrys Built*, 200–1.
5. Booker, *Neophiliacs*, 49–50; Wintour, *Rise and Fall*, 116–7; Cox and Mowatt, *Revolutions from Grub Street*, 93–4.
6. *Television Mail*, 20 September 1968, 18
7. Tunstall, “British Press,” 27.
8. Johnson and Turnock, “From Start-up to Consolidation,” 16; see also Taplin, *Origin of Television Advertising*, 87.
9. Garrett, “Commercial Production,” 386.
10. Taplin, *Origin of Television Advertising*, 37–9.

11. Fletcher, *Powers of Persuasion*, 31.
12. Taplin, *Origin of Television Advertising*, 37–9.
13. Tunstall, "British Press," 19.
14. Fletcher, *Powers of Persuasion*, 30–1.
15. It should be noted that BBC2 broadcast in colour from mid-1967.
16. Biggs, *Colour in Advertising*, 55, 60, 63.
17. *Ibid.*, 59.
18. On contemporary colour printing technologies, see *Worlds Press News*, 28 July 1967, 17.
19. *The Economist*, 12 September 1964, 1043; *The Economist*, 26 September 1964, 1213. There were also disagreements with the National Federation of Retail Newsagents about charges made for combining the supplements with the main paper and about whether additional charges could be made for home delivery. *Daily Telegraph*, 2 October 1964, 1.
20. Television commercials promoting colour supplements were, of course, also broadcast in black and white until November 1969.
21. Braddon, *Roy Thomson*, 301.
22. Greenhill and Reynolds, *Way of the Sun*, 125.
23. Hirsch and Gordon, *Newspaper Money*, 73.
24. Curran, "Advertising and the Press," 252.
25. Thomson, *After I was Sixty*, 121–2. See also the *Daily Mirror's* short-lived move into the colour supplement market in 1969, which was rumoured to have lost £1 million pounds a month for the six months it survived. Cleverley, *Fleet Street Disaster*, 59.
26. Hirsch and Gordon, *Newspaper Money*, 15.
27. Curran, "Advertising and the Press," 256.
28. Hirsch and Gordon, *Newspaper Money*, 40.
29. Curran, "Advertising and the Press," 247.
30. *Financial Times*, 9 November 1961, 5.
31. *Financial Times*, 27 August 1964, 9.
32. *Observer*, 24 June 1962, 5.
33. Braddon, *Roy Thomson*, 310–11; Thomson, *After I was Sixty*, 125.
34. On Thomson, King and Odhams, see Braddon, *Roy Thomson*, 291–300. Braddon claims that had Thomson been successful, he would have become 'the most powerful publisher in the world.'
35. Thomson, *After I was Sixty*, 101.
36. *Ibid.*, 121.
37. *Private Eye*, 24 August 1962, 9.
38. Hobson, Knightley and Russell, *Pearl of Days*, 353.
39. *The Economist*, 9 May 1964, 632. Thomson put the total loss at £900,000 in the first eighteen months. Thomson, *After I was Sixty*, 122.
40. See Thomson's speech at Thomson Group AGM in *The Economist*, 8 June 1963, 1078; Thomson, *After I was Sixty*, 56.
41. Salmon and Ritchie, "Once Upon a Time," 12–13.
42. Quoted in *The Times*, 12 June 1962, 19.
43. Hobson et al., *Pearl of Days*, 366.
44. Fletcher, *Powers of Persuasion*, 87.
45. *Sunday Times Colour Magazine*, 10 February 1963, 39.

46. Thomson, *After I was Sixty*, 126–7. During the trip to Moscow, Thomson, during an interview with Khrushchev, offered to buy *Pravda*.
47. Cockett, *David Astor*, 246–7.
48. *Ibid.*, 243.
49. See, for example, Astor's 'folly and crookedness' editorial. *Observer*, 4 November 1956, 8.
50. Thomson was, allegedly, not above dropping hints that the *Sunday Telegraph's* prospects were poor at best. See Hart-Davis, *House the Berrys Built*, 201.
51. *Campaign*, 15 November 1968, 9
52. Salmon, "Spectacularly Dull," 159–61.
53. Young, "Rupert Murdoch and the *Sunday Times*," 383; Hamilton, *Editor-in-Chief*, 108; Braddon, *Roy Thomson*, 304.
54. *Financial Times*, 9 November 1961, 5. See also Thomson, *After I was Sixty*, 124–5.
55. Thomson quoted in *Advertiser's Weekly*, 4 May 1962, 9.
56. Hamilton, *Editor-in-Chief*, 108.
57. *Sunday Times Magazine*, 4 February 1962, 20.
58. Thomson, *After I was Sixty*, 124–5.
59. Hamilton quoted in Hobson, Knightley and Russell, *Pearl of Days*, 350.
60. See Braybon, "About Town," 95–106.
61. Booker, *Neophiliacs*, 46.
62. Hamilton, *Editor-in-Chief*, 108. On Boxer's university career, which became the stuff of legend, see Wollheim, "Mark Boxer," 28–30.
63. Collins, "Journalism and Design," 37, 39.
64. For examples of these transformations, see Evans, *Editing and Design*, 28–35.
65. Irving, "Can Newspapers Move," 114–5.
66. Boxer, "Colouring up Sunday," 248.
67. Seago, *Burning the Box of Beautiful Things*, 47
68. Pat Long, quoted in Cox and Mowatt, *Revolutions from Grub Street*, 196.
69. A. C. Gosling, letter, *Observer*, 13 September 1964, 34.
70. Hobson, Knightley and Russell, *Pearl of Days*, 363.
71. *Sunday Times*, 11 February 1962, 42.
72. Diana Imber, letter, *Observer*, 13 September 1964, 34.
73. H. Shaw, letter, *Sunday Times*, 11 February 1962, 42.
74. Salmon and Ritchie, "Once Upon a Time," 13.
75. Booker, *Neophiliacs*, 48.
76. Miller, "Sunday Dilemma," 27–32.
77. Berger, "Ways of Seeing," 145–6.
78. Ken Garland, letter, *Observer*, 13 September 1964, 34.
79. Hamilton, *Editor-in-Chief*, 108.
80. See Woudhuysen, "Ranged Left," 17–19.
81. McCabe, "War Camera," 33.
82. Some stereotypes remained, and readers were treated to a monochrome shot of a coal-blackened miner about to step into a pit-head shower.
83. Curran, "Advertising and the Press," 247–8. See also Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain*, 582.
84. Boxer, "Colouring up Sunday," 248.

85. In a sly piece of intertextuality, a Cookstrip column can be seen on the wall of Harry Palmer's flat in the cinematic adaptation of Deighton's *The IPCRESS File* (1965).
86. Boxer, "Colouring up Sunday," 248.
87. Cockett, *David Astor*, 248.
88. Thomson, *After I was Sixty*, 169–70.
89. *Campaign*, 27 September 1968, 24.
90. *Campaign*, 1 November 1968, 16.
91. *Worlds Press News*, 21 July 1967, 2.
92. Hirsch and Gordon, *Newspaper Money*, 75–8.
93. Miller, "Sunday Dilemma," 27–32.

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