

Gift books: oversize, overstuffed, outrageous

By Richard Dyer

The largest and most expensive book published in the 17th century is one of the largest and most expensive gift books published in time for the Christmas season 2005 — **"Atlas Maior of 1665,"** prepared and published by the Dutch cartographer Joan Blaeu (Taschen, \$200). The 593 pages reprint a hand-colored copy of the atlas that is in the national library of Austria; it is gorgeous, heavy, and fascinating. Most of North America was still little known in the 17th century, and Blaeu did not have access to some of the best maps, which were still closely guarded by the governments that were vying to explore, and control, the area. Each section of maps is preceded by an allegorical drawing. America's features a seminude female Native American, skirted in feathers, and standing atop a severed head that has been pierced through by an arrow; cherubs and a conquistador fly aloft, and the other figures on American soil are additional Native Americans mining what looks like gold. Nearby crouches what the scholarly annotator Peter Van Der Krogt calls a "lurking armadillo," although it looks more like an alligator or a crocodile.

The other huge book, also from Taschen and also \$200, is **"Jazz Life,"** a collection of photographs and essays documenting a journey across America in search of jazz by the photographer William Claxton and the writer and jazz maven Joachim E. Berendt back in 1960. The book was initially published a year later, and has become a collector's prize. Claxton has written a new preface and has included many additional photographs. Famous names and faces are here — Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, John Coltrane, as well as many figures not as well known or now forgotten, all caught in the clothes, hairstyles, and social context of the America of 45 years ago. Best of all, with the CD that's included, you can hear recordings Berendt made on the trip — singing in a church in Zachary, La., or Coltrane improvising on Irving Berlin's "Soft Lights."

A more serious cinematic book is **"The Stanley Kubrick Archives"** (Taschen, \$200). This contains images from all of the great director's films, presented without commentary, as well as an equally large section of documents related to the films drawn from the Kubrick archives. The book, another luxury product, includes a CD with a 1966 interview with Kubrick and a strip of frames from a print of "2001: A Space Odyssey" owned by the director. Some readers may be drawn especially to the section on "Lolita," perhaps not the filmmaker's finest effort, but one of the most difficult projects he ever undertook. The chapter begins with a reproduction of a telegram from the creator of Humbert Humbert and the nymphet — "I might consider it . . . Nabokov" — responding to an offer to write the screenplay. He subsequently submitted a 400-page draft, and Kubrick's producing partner James B. Harris remarked that they could "hardly *lift* the script, much less film it."