

***Sifting the Trash: A History of Design Criticism* by Alice Twemlow (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2017). ISBN: 9780262035989, hardback; 312 pages, illustrated, hardcover (\$34.95).**

Alice Twemlow's degrees in literature and design history have informed a book based on her PhD which looks not at design, but rather at the discourses surrounding it. Twemlow defines design criticism very broadly as the ways in which design has been mediated, principally through text but also, in the penultimate chapter, through exhibitions and design itself. Just as *Sifting the Trash* is no doubt informed by Twemlow's role as Founding Director of the Masters Program in Design Research, Writing, and Criticism (DCrit) at the School of Visual Arts in New York City (2008-16) and currently as head of the Masters Program in Design Curating and Writing at Design Academy Eindhoven, so it will serve as a textbook for these programmes.

The book is premised upon an extended metaphor, that design criticism is a process of 'sifting the trash', of rescuing certain examples of design from scrapheap and consigning others to oblivion. There are two layers of sifting, though, as Twemlow has also sifted through the history of design criticism to discuss what she considers to be the most salient examples in this book. The five chapters each focus on a few years from each decade, 1955-2007.

Chapter one begins on familiar ground with a discussion of *Design* magazine in 1960, and most notably Richard Hamilton's article 'Persuading Image', and goes on to a valuable case study of less well-known women's contribution in an analysis of Jane Thompson and Deborah Allen's work on *Industrial Design* magazine (the latter being a car critic who did not like cars much). Chapter one closes with Twemlow's refreshing takedown of Reyner Banham's championing of an 'aesthetics of expendability', which put him at odds with currents in design and design criticism.

Banham leads us into the second chapter, which charts an inter-generational conflict at the Aspen design conference in 1970 and 1971 that will be familiar to readers of Twemlow's 2015 article on the same topic. Positing 1970/1 as a watershed between corporate, professional and unsustainable design and anti-establishment, ecological, young guns is a convincing strategy. This event marked a shift in design criticism, as well as design: design criticism need not take the form of worthy expounding; rather it can be disruptive and eventful.

Chapter three looks at design media in the designer decade, the 1980s. Part one offers an extensive treatment of *Blueprint* magazine including not only the priorities of its auteur-editor, Deyan Sudjic, but also the magazine's coverage of the International Slipper and Footwear Fair in Blackpool, which Twemlow damns as 'dismal-sounding'. She apparently enjoys exposing the pretensions of Stephen Bayley's V&A Boilerhouse gallery, but omits to trace its binaristic trash-or-treasure curatorial approach back to its precursor at the V&A. Its first incarnation, the Museum of Manufactures, showed exemplary designed goods alongside a 'Gallery of False Principles' (dubbed a 'Chamber of Horrors' by the press) which may, in turn, have been influenced by Augustus Welby Pugin's *True Principles of Pointed and Christian Architecture* (1841) which reproduced examples of good (Gothic, considered indigenous) and bad (classical, considered imported) architecture on its facing pages. Twemlow instead moves on to explore Dick Hebdige's 'pathological' design criticism; in its 'soothing rhythm' and repeated clauses, she perceives 'the voice of someone speaking to a mentally ill patient' (p. 186). This jarring metaphor was perhaps inspired by Hebdige's own mental health history, which Twemlow briefly discusses. The chapter progresses to admire Judith Williamson's Marxist-Feminist political conviction, if not her luminous cultural critique which is said to have reached a conceptual 'stalemate'.

The final two chapters are brief: chapter four is half the length of its predecessor and chapter five is only a few pages long. The fourth chapter begins with an account of two of curator Claire Catterall's exhibitions. Firstly, 'powerhouse::uk' (1998), commissioned from Branson Coates by the Department of Trade and Industry, is criticised by Twemlow whereas 'Stealing Beauty' (1999) for London's Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), is largely lauded. It left 'viewers space to elicit meaning or to remain confused by what they saw' (p.224). The same might be said of Dunne and Raby's work, discussed by Twemlow as a commentary upon mainstream design. But perhaps Catterall's exhibitions and Dunne and Raby's output are not as distant from the design industry as their forms, and the narrative in which Twemlow places them, suggest. The economic base for their creative, technophilial, experiments derived indirectly from the

Thatcherite co-opting of design to business ends which made design a commonplace topic in the media before the late 1980s recession and created an audience for exhibitions like Catterall's and Dunne and Raby's designs.

The last chapter examines the shift of design criticism from mainstream media into the unedited and sometimes amateur realm of blogs and blog comments. Rick Poyner's apparently lone voice eulogises the analytical standards achieved through editing until he, too, begins blogging for Design Observer in 2010. This was three years after the watershed of 2007 in which blogging was said by several commentators to have lost its edge and become corporatized.

Sifting the Trash is better on the inside than the outside. It's compact 7 x 9 inches format contains 42 color illustrations and 69 black and white illustrations. The hardcover is the colour of dust and my copy started to disintegrate as I read it. However, that is because I carried it with me; it has been one of the books I have most enjoyed reading this year and represents a real contribution to design discourse.

Grace Lees-Maffei is Professor of Design History and Director of DHeritage, the Professional Doctorate, at the University of Hertfordshire, UK. She leads the TVAD Research Group, working on relationships between text, narrative and image. Her books include *Design at Home*, on domestic advice literature, and *Writing Design: Words and Objects*.