compiled by the contemporary Dutch starchitect Rem Koolhaas and his Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA). New challenges are now more likely to arrive online than in a bookstore near you. And as the influence of architecture in print wanes, we should note that there has always been an equally rich tradition of great architects, such as Mies van der Rohe, who almost completely ignored it anyway.

Yet perhaps in retrospect the most striking element in Tavares' long history is how many architects, or architecture's friends, did after all seek to valorize or proselytize their work via the printed word in thoughtful combination with the printed image. Thanks to Vitruvius – a middling architect at best in the age of Augustus – architectural publications have long been seen as the architect's best back door to immortality. This, surely, is what motivates conservative and radical architect-philosophers alike, and it is merely architectural fashion that dictates whether they seek to place themselves as part of a long tradition or as a complete break with the past. What remains impressive is the profession's fidelity to the genre. This is what makes Tavares' book an invaluable introduction to the architect's special relationship with the printed monograph.

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Ellen Mazur Thomson. *Aesthetic Tracts: Innovations in Late-Nineteenth-Century Book Design*. New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press 2015. 208 pp.; US \$55 (Cloth) ISBN 9781584563365

In *Aesthetic Tracts*, Ellen Mazur Thomson has set out to explore developments in book design in the late Victorian period, and her book is a sturdily enthusiastic account of the emergence in the 1880s and '90s of a new approach to the book as an element of cultural growth. Her 'text' is taken from the American graphic designer, stained glass artist, and painter Sarah Wyman Whitman. Whitman was a feminist and one of the founders of Radcliffe College, and a devout Christian who brought evangelical zeal to her work in whatever medium. Thomson's title is drawn from a lecture on design delivered by Whitman in Boston in 1894, in which she maintained that books, because their tradition and history are implicit in their material form, have a special place in society. The mass-produced books of the time were badly designed and uninspiring, but Whitman believed that if

a book were beautifully designed and decorated it would act as an 'aesthetic tract' preaching the importance of beauty by attracting the eye and, inevitably, the hand of whomever saw it. The responsibility for so improving mass-produced books lay with their designers.

Whitman was referring in her talk to the cover of the book, the 'container' of the text. She was not herself a typographer, but a designer of book covers and illustrations, and in any case book design as we now know it was not a recognized trade or craft in the late Victorian period. Other than the binding, and sometimes an illustrated title page, books were not 'designed' at all. There was no time for fancy work. Book publishing had grown with bewildering speed throughout the century. The influx of workers into industrial centres and the introduction of public education had created a popular readership, and books were needed. Such books were not pretty: typographical arrangement was decided by compositors using a few badly designed founts, pages were crowded with text in small narrow type, all the margins were small to allow as much text as possible on each page, the printing was quick and slipshod, and the paper was shoddy and easily torn.

This of course represented only one part of the market. For more than three hundred years printed books had been read by the educated classes and collected by bibliophiles, and until the 19th century these books were in general decently printed on good rag paper. Thomson makes careful distinction between the bibliophiles and the mass of newly literate readers of popular books, and her concern is to examine "the reorganization of the book trade that occurred in response to the massive increase in book production" (xii). As she makes clear in her preface, she is interested in knowing why so many people in the late 19th century "prized the physicality of the book and wished to shape its design into ideological statements in Whitman's concept of *aesthetic tracts*" (xii).

There are fine and interesting things here, and Thomson's book is carefully thought through. Discussing the technological advances in book production, she takes some time for example to consider the pro-industrial, anti-artisanal attitudes of the American sociologist Theodore Veblen, for whom William Morris, with his insistence on the value of the workshop as opposed to the factory and his immaculately designed limited editions, was a particular *bête noir*. Thomson establishes two dichotomies here to which she often returns later in the book: first, the apparently irreconcilable oppositions of mass industrial manufacture and artisanal cottage industry; and

second, the unsentimental pragmatism represented in the thinking of Comte and Durkheim, opposed to the aesthetic concerns of such as Morris and Cobden-Sanderson in what she calls the 'Revival of Printing.' These two binary oppositions become both explicit and implicit touchstones throughout the book.

The central chapter of the book is a joyful exploration of the making of a French *livre de luxe*, the *Histoire des quatre fils Aymon*, one of the most celebrated pieces of printing in the last two hundred years. Published in an edition of 200 copies in 1883, this production nearly bankrupted its publisher. Its importance to Thomson's argument lies in its exquisite marriage of text and illustration, where Eugène Grasset's watercolours weave in and under the text that entwines them. The descriptive account of the production also acts as a prelude to the following chapter on text and image – their "conflict and compatibility," as the chapter heading has it. Here we have the expected discussion of the Kelmscott *Chaucer* in the context of the battles over the introduction of illustrations in literary texts, where writers worried that their texts would be sidelined by pictures, while illustrators, anxious to make their presence felt, pushed for more illustration and decoration, and many readers simply grumbled. The evolution of the *livre d'artiste* was consequent on this debate, and one of the most valuable parts of this chapter is Thomson's attempt to define the *livre d'artiste* in contrast to the Artist's Book.

As a book designer, editor, and compositor, I do have the impression that questions of typography are sometimes skimmed. Thomson's description of "Elzevir Roman, an Old Style typeface favoured in late-nineteenth-century French book printing" as "distinguished by narrow-bodied letterforms, high contrast between thick and thin strokes, and flat thin serifs" (62) is all very well, but for anyone unacquainted with type, the black and white illustrations provided from *Histoire des quatre fils Aymon* are so small and badly printed that one cannot view the type properly even with a strong glass, as the screening of the photograph impedes any close examination. Fortunately there are four nicely printed colour plates as well. But given the attention afforded page layouts, rather more about the character of individual typefaces, not merely their historical style *vis à vis* the date of the text, would have been useful. The initial statement of the maxim that a book should properly be an 'aesthetic tract' after all suggests that not only the outward appearance but the whole book – binding, text, paper, typography, illustration – should carry an iconic weight when put into the hands of someone who had

not previously thought of books except as objects conveying text. Yet much of the book is concerned only with the appearance of the book as an object, and with matters of illustration and style. All of this is useful and interesting, of course, but type only comes into its own in Chapter 7, "Privileging the Text: the Writer and the Reader." Even here, Thomson really should have untangled the origins of the type Pelletan acquired "from the firm of Deberny of Haarlem" (109), rather than leave a bemused reader hanging until the end notes clarified the matter: Deberny was a Parisian typefoundry, active when Pelletan was working; Johan Enschede en Zonen was the foundry in Haarlem.

Happily there is no mention in the book of Elbert Hubbard and the Roycrofters, but Thomson also omits Thomas Bird Mosher, who seems to me a key figure in the development from the artisanal aspirations of the British private presses to wider publishing for the broad range of society in America. Mosher, taking advantage of the absence of copyright protection of British texts in the US by pirating exuberantly throughout his career, published nearly four hundred editions, predominantly of British authors. His books were not experimental, but they were handsomely produced, well printed on good paper, not very expensive, and certainly conveyed an inherent regard for the text and the importance of the book as a 'tract.' His absence seems so noticeable as to be pointed, although I am not sure what the point might be.

Given the subject, a few words about the book itself must be said. It is ironic and unfortunate that a book concerned with the belief that "the form and decoration of objects [endows] them with meaning" (ix) should not have been better designed and presented. This is of course the publisher's fault, not the author's, and it is a shame she was not better served, as it seriously undermines an important part of her argument for any reader who actually cares about the physical appeal of books. The coloured plates are well enough done, but the exiguous black and white images set in the margins throughout the text are utterly useless. They convey nothing of value because they are too small, too coarsely screened, and too badly printed. The frontispiece portrait of Sarah Wyman Whitman is a disgrace: it looks like a rigged photograph from a Victorian séance. In other respects the book is adequate. It opens reasonably well, and is sewn rather than 'perfect bound' (that wonderful oxymoron).

Thomson has managed to cover a vast amount of material in a fairly short space, and has done it gracefully and congenially. There are a great many quotations, but except for the burlblings of one mad

semiotician they are well chosen and useful. The writing is detailed without being congested, and agreeably paced. Technical niggles aside, *Aesthetic Tracts* is an interesting and thoughtful book.

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