**Penny Sparke, 1948-**

Penny Sparke is one of the foremost designing historians working today, and one of the field’s foundational figures. Sparke took her first degree, in French literature, in 1971 from the University of Sussex, and her doctorate ‘Theory and Design in the Age of Pop’, about British design theory and practice in the 1960s, from Brighton Polytechnic (now the University of Brighton) in 1975. She also taught design history at Brighton until 1981, when she moved to the post-graduate only Royal College of Art, London. At the RCA, Sparke chaired the History of Design MA and PhD Programme and the Humanities Department, working with colleagues including Gillian Naylor and Jeremy Aynsley. In 1999, she moved across London to Kingston University, where she remains as Professor of Design History, and Pro-Vice Chancellor (Arts). She is an Honorary Senior Fellow of the Royal College of Art and a Fellow of the Society of Arts.

Sparke's oeuvre has defined as well as reflected the changing preoccupations of design history for more than three decades. Early teachers of the subject, such as Sparke and Gillian Naylor, began writing design history texts partly as a way of generating teaching materials for their students in the face of a considerable gap in the literature. Sparke’s work extends from designer-led analyses, such as *Ettore Sottsass Jnr* (1982) and *Consultant Design: The History and Practice of the Designer in Industry* (1983) and national surveys *Japanese Design* (1987) and *Italian Design: 1870 to the Present* (1988), via the introductory texts so useful for identifying areas for further research and teaching and for attracting a general readership—such as *An Introduction to Design and Culture 1900 to the Present* (1986, 2004), *The Design Source Book* (1986, 1992), *Design in Context* (1987) and *A Century of Design: Design Pioneers of the 20th Century* (1998)—to materials and typological studies, *The Plastics Age* (1990, 1993) and *A Century of Car Design* (2002).

Since the mid-1990s, Sparke has made a focused study of the intersections of gender, modernism, interior design and the domestic interior, as shown in her monographs, *As Long As Its Pink: the Sexual Politics of Taste* (1995) and *Elsie de Wolfe: The Birth of Modern Interior Decoration* (2005). As Director of Kingston’s Modern Interiors Research Centre (MIRC), Sparke has overseen the expansion of the annual Dorich House conference into an energetic publishing programme, including books such as *Women's Places: Architecture and Design 1860-1960* (2003), *The* *Modern Period Room: The Construction of the Exhibited Interior, 1870 to 1950* (2006), *Designing the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today* (2009) and *Performance, Fashion and the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today* (2011).

Sparke’s life story has been recorded as part of an oral history project supported by the Design History Society, under the auspices of the Voices in the Visual Arts (ViVA) project at Camberwell College of Arts, University of the Arts London.

See:

Sparke, P. (2004). *An Introduction to Design and Culture: 1900 to the present*. London: New York, Routledge.
Sparke, P. (1995). *As Long as it's Pink : The Sexual Politics of Taste*. London: Pandora.

Dr Grace Lees-Maffei, Reader in Design History, University of Hertfordshire.

Cross References: Gillian Naylor; Gender and Design; Domestic Interior; Interior Design.