

Book review

The World We Made

Jonathon Porritt. Phaidon, London, UK, 2013, ISBN 978-0-7148-6361-0, £24.95, 320 pp.

The World We Made is a different, more populist, view of future urban living. Porritt tells the story of Alex McKay, a history teacher in 2050, who takes a retrospective view in 50 'snapshots' of how the world has changed since 2014. The book is very readable with numerous tables, diagrams and computer-generated pictures of life in the future. The topics cover a truly holistic view of future living including, apart from the obvious, spiritual militancy, biotechnology and health. Porritt's view of future urban living is at first glance naively optimistic, with the governments of the world deciding to 'do the right thing' with respect to climate change, food shortages and poverty – albeit after a few drastic events such as food riots, floods and hurricanes and internet wars.

At the end of the book, Porritt gives a brief basis for his thinking on each issue and a list of further reading; this section itself makes interesting reading. He comments that the

issues I've been grappling with in *The World We Made* are vast and daunting – runaway climate change, the future of capitalism, collapsing eco-systems, unpredictable technology shifts and so on. The sheer scale of these things tends to obscure all the astonishing initiatives already going on out there to help put the world to rights.

It makes a welcome change to see some of these positives in what often tends to be a selection of doomsday scenarios for our future living.

It is easy to write off the book as lightweight fantasy, but a while after reading it, this reviewer did find his mind going back over some of the issues and getting frustrated at the lack of insight of many politicians and corporate leaders: there is a great need to change and to move away from short-term self-satisfaction. Porritt has helped to provide a view of what a sustainable world could look like, based on research into engineering, science and technology, but also politics, society and medical developments. The book is a good, easy read – and one that helps spread the ideas of a sustainable future beyond the academics and technocrats.

Peter Braithwaite