David Raizman and Carma R. Gorman, eds., Objects, Audiences and Literatures: Alternative Narratives in the History of Design. Newcastle, U.K.: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. 184 pp., 62 b/w ills., index. $69.99, £34.99.

Apart from an added chapter, this book derives from a session of the College Art Association 2005 conference, entitled "Reading, Writing, and Consuming Design: Commodities and Their Reception in Literature." The book's altogether more ambitious title, Objects, Audiences and Literatures: Alternative Narratives in the History of Design, promises it will treat the ways audiences contribute to the meanings of objects, and the way "literatures" (in the plural) can be shown to inform understanding of objects, and it will offer "alternative narratives." These titular "narratives" presumably include the five chapters in this book, but they might also be "narratives" presented in the sources here used to illuminate understanding of cultural artifacts, or indeed the narratives that objects can be shown to communicate. To what, exactly, are these "narratives" alternatives? Mainstream design history, such as it is? This is a big promise on which to deliver, and the title demands that it is the one by which the success of the volume should be measured.

Following a three-page explanatory introduction, Ethan W. Lasser's "Reading Japanned Furniture" contextualizes a study of an individual chest of drawers (known as the Pickman chest, Boston, 1730-1740) in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) with appropriate reference to secondary sources and professional manuals, novels, and poems to illuminate the narrative quality of the chest's surface decorations. The second half of his chapter opens with the assertion that "Scholars have long associated chinoiserie goods, including japanned furniture, with women" (p. 16). Lasser reviews some of the ways in which objects can be imbued with masculine or feminine qualities and demonstrates how audiences for such objects are sometimes assumed to be of the same gender as the gendered qualities with which the objects are associated. This, however, is contrary to a common conceptual paradigm, critiqued by post-colonialists, in which cultural artifacts gendered

feminine, such as those termed chinoiserie, attract a masculine audience. Edward Said has decried the Orientalist pattern of a feminized East being misrepresented for a masculine Western market.[1] Lasser shows that the chests of drawers forming his case study attracted a male audience, not a female one, not only in terms of purchasing power but also in terms of consumption.

In her chapter "Illuminating Texts: Louis Comfort Tiffany's Lamps and the Rhetoric of Production, Authenticity, and Consumption," Elizabeth E. Guffey claims to turn to

> documents that fall outside the scope of the literature that art historians typically draw on. Consulting a greater number of different genres of literature—including advertising, criticism, home decorating manuals, and fiction—makes it clear that Tiffany was a skilled entrepreneur with a shrewd grasp of salesmanship as well as craft (p. 27).

Guffey's assertion that art historians have not used such sources is debatable when design historians have made advertising a key object of analysis, as well as using it extensively for understanding all kinds of designed objects; historians of design and culture routinely refer to domestic advice literature; and the UK Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior has been highly successful in harnessing literary analysis for design-historical understanding.[2] Perhaps we can infer a distinction between the use of such sources by self-identified design historians and the relative neglect Guffey points to on the part of art historians.

While the attention Guffey pays to home decorating manuals is welcome—she names a number of specific titles—she generalizes about the content of the genre as it evolved between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: "While decorating manuals had previously promoted elaborate displays of carefully selected contemporary handcrafted objects as fit expressions of the homeowner's artistic sensibility, gradually experts begin to urge home decorators to furnish in a less

flamboyant, more historicizing taste. Amateur decorators were encouraged to avoid `newness' and to buy `antiques"' (p. 46). This implies that that all decorating advice writers were in agreement, while also seeming to contradict Guffey's earlier reference to "decorating experts who cared little about Morris or `authenticity"' (p. 42). Further, this section of Guffey's essay is illustrated with figures from both a magazine, House Beautiful, and a book, Elsie de Wolfe's The House in Good Taste without distinguishing between the serial and the definitive forms represented. The author misses an opportunity to publish spreads from less-known home decorating manuals: following Penny Sparke's work on Elise de Wolfe, that decorator's published works are very well known.[3] Notwithstanding these minor issues, Guffey's chapter is valuable as a case study of what can be discovered about a particular type of object through reference to a useful blend of textual sources, and as such it considerably enhances knowledge and understanding of the reception of Tiffany's lamps.

In "Writing and Reading about Artistic Dress: Artists' Intentions and Public Reception," Jennifer Barrows provides an informed and informative account of what is to be gained from consulting not only designers' descriptions of their work published in the art press but also a range of "many other contemporary sources on the topic" (p. 68). Barrows draws useful conclusions from such a comparative method, for example: "Whereas art patrons were urged to see Artistic Dress as a replacement for fashion, followers of the fashion pages were encouraged to see it merely as a new fashion" (p. 69). My only concern here is that Barrows's interchangeable use of the terms "artist" and "designer" is sometimes confusing. For example, "Two hundred seventeen designers of Artistic Dress are recorded in contemporary journals, books, and newspapers. It is likely that the artists documented in the media represent only a fraction of those active in the field" (p. 80, n. 1). While Barrows notes that "only Artistic Dress designers considered their garments to be works of art" (p. 59), she goes on to discuss a dress by the designer and architect Peter Behrens as exemplary. Given that the subject of the chapter is a phenomenon that was, at the time, referred to as "Artistic Dress,"

greater care about terminology would have been advisable for clarity.

Elizabeth Hornbeck's "Architecture in Vogue in 1925" presents a welcome close reading of this subject, supported by extensive references to a wide range of relevant literature. Vogue, and fashion writing more generally, is attracting more scholarly attention these days, especially from historians of design and culture.[4] In explaining that French Vogue in the 1920s was "written for an affluent audience" and that Henry Bidou's articles within it "reached a large lay audience," (p. 89) Hornbeck implies a large, affluent readership in interwar France; this point needs substantiation through reference to evidence. Hornbeck's argument that "architecture, like clothing in the same period, responded to the emerging `physical culture': a culture of the body concerned with sports, physical recreation, and new ideas about health" (p. 92) invites further discussion of sanatoria, solaria, lidos, and the representation of figures in modernist architectural representations, but the focus of her essay is on what Henry Bidou's articles for Vogue on the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris tell us about modern architecture that other sources do not.[5]

Lucinda Kaukas Havenhand closes the book with "The `Dream House' and Constructions of Masculinity in 1940s American Literature." This is the only essay not to have been presented at the College Art Association session from which the other essays were drawn, and it is characterized by a slightly different purpose and method. Havenhand's stated aim is to "focus on the role that two popular 1940s novels (and the films subsequently based on them) played in promoting the association of masculinity with home owning and home building" (p. 146). The essay's strength, however, is as a comparative analysis of the two films, The Fountainhead and Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House. Havenhand acknowledges her debt to Merrill Schleier's analysis of the former, but she might also have found Kathleen McHugh's critique of Hollywood representations of domesticity useful as an account of femininity with which to compare the representations of masculine home building that form her own topic.[6] Havenhand presents an engaging, informed, and

extremely useful analysis, but in attempting to use film to enrich knowledge and understanding of a broad conceptual link between masculinity and home building, she separates her work from that of her co-authors, who each use a range of texts to illuminate specific objects or type forms, or, in Hornbeck's case, a particular exhibition. Havenhand thereby makes the job of producing an authoritative and comprehensive treatment of her subject more difficult to deliver neatly in the confines of a single essay. If she had more closely followed the pattern set by the other contributors, she might have taken the two films she discusses here as her primary focus, and used various other texts through which to understand them, as well as other filmic representations of the intersection of masculinity and domesticity of the period. Havenhand's contribution to the book thereby raises the question how to define the primary object of analysis and what should be the contextualizing "literatures."

The book contributes to a growing concern about the relationships between objects and narratives.[7] The five essays presented in this book are united by their message to readers, which might be characterized as: "If you look at these untapped texts (professional manuals/ sea narratives/ advertising/ criticism/ domestic advice/ fashion journalism/ Witzblatter/ Hollywood films), you'll see the objects we discuss (japanned furniture/ Tiffany lamps/ Artistic Dress/ modernist architecture at the 1925 Expo/the association of masculinity and home building) in new ways." Three of the five authors represented here were completing doctoral degrees at the time of publication, and the editors are to be congratulated for having introduced them, presenting together five new and highly interrelated papers that form a coherent whole. Though Cambridge Scholars Publishing is to be thanked for giving the editors and authors a forum in which conference papers could be developed in length and treatment, a book about objects deserves to be appraised as an object itself: narrow margins make annotation difficult, while lending a truncated appearance to the page layouts. The printing is of basic photocopy quality so that the figures, all of which are black-and-white, are difficult to use when consideration of details is invited: see, for example, the decorative drawer

fronts for figs. 1-4 and 1-6. The effect is disappointing, but it does not overshadow the achievements of the scholarship within. The case studies are valuable for the ways in which they use primary sources to challenge assumptions about how objects were received in the past.

Ultimately, while this group of five excellent chapters constitutes a considerable achievement, the editors might well have extended the book into a broader collection with at least double the number of contributions. In this way, a more accurate presentation might have been made of design history that has used "alternative" "literatures" of the kinds employed here.

Grace Lees-Maffei
Senior Lecturer in the History and Theory
of Design and Applied Arts
University of Hertfordshire

NOTES

1. Edward Said, Orientalism (New York, 1978). See also John Mackenzie, Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts (Manchester, U.K., 1995); Peter Wollen, "Out of the Past: Fashion/Orientalism/The Body," New Formations 1 (Spring 1987): 5-33, repr. in Peter Wollen, Raiding the Icebox (Bloomington, Ind., 1993).

2. The theorizing work of the Visual Art and Design research group (tVAD) at the University of Hertfordshire is just one example disproving Guffey's assertion: here art historians, design historians, media scholars, and curators come together to work on relationships among text, narrative, and image, using many of the sources that Guffey claims "fall outside the scope of the literature that art historians typically draw upon." See http://www.herts.ac.uk/artdes1/research/tvad/index.html. For a critique of the use of domestic advice literature in histories of design and culture, see Grace Lees-Maffei, "Studying Advice: Historiography, Methodology, Commentary, Bibliography," Domestic Design Advice, ed. Grace Lees-Maffei, a special issue of Journal of Design History 16, no. 1 (2003): 1-14.; idem, "From Service to Self-Service: Etiquette Writing as Design Discourse 1920-1970," Journal of Design History 14, no. 3 (2001): 187-206; idem, "Modern Living? Domestic Advice Literature and Design Discourse in Post-War Britain" (Ph.D. diss., University of Portsmouth, U.K., 2005). Jeremy Aynsley and Charlotte Grant, eds., Imagined Interiors: Representing the Domestic Interior since the Renaissance (London, 2006). Both editors are at the Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior, based at the Royal College of Art, London. The Centre's website is at http://www.rca.ac.uk/csdi/.

3. Penny Sparke, Elsie de Wolfe: The Birth of Modern Interior Decoration (New York, 2005).

4. Scholarly analysis of magazines is burgeoning. Four recent studies specifically of Vogue appeared in a session at the 2003 Design History Society Conference titled "Sex Object: Desire and Design in a Gendered World" at the Norwich School of Art and Design, U.K., September 11-13, 2003: Becky Conekin, "A Gendered Gaze in Interwar Vogue? Lee Miller's Early Fashion Photography"; Leslie Eden-Harris, "The Aesthetics of Kinetics: Women, Fashion and the Automobile in Vogue, 1918-1939"; and Bronwyn Edwards, "Shopping with Vogue." At the 31st Annual Pacific Coast Conference on British Studies at the Center for British Studies, University of California, Berkeley, March 26-28, 2004, the session "Not Just Fashion: Technology, Design and War in the Pages of British Vogue, 1918-1945" comprised contributions by Leslie Eden-Harris, "The Aesthetics of Kinetics: Women, Fashion and the Automobile in Vogue, 1918-1939"; Becky Conekin, "`It Seemed so Incongruous in Our Pages of Glossy Fashion': Lee Miller's Photographic and Journalistic Coverage of WW2 for British Vogue"; and Christopher Reed, "Designs for [queer] Living: British Vogue and the `Amusing Design of the 1920s.'"

5. Flora Samuel, Le Corbusier: Architect and Feminist (London, 2004), provides an interesting

counterpoint.

6. Merrill Schleier, "Ayn Rand and King Vidor's Film The Fountainhead: Architectural Modernism, the Gendered Body, and Political Ideology," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 61, no. 3 (September 2002): 310-31; Kathleen Anne McHugh, American Domesticity: From How-to Manual to Hollywood Melodrama (New York, 1999).

7. See, e.g., "Show/Tell: Relationships between Text, Narrative and Image," a special issue of Working Papers on Design 2 (2007) http://www.herts.ac.uk/artdes1/research/papers/wpdesign/index.html, and the journals Word and Image and Image and Narrative http://www.imageandnarrative.be/index.htm.