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Liz McFall

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Liz McFall : Advertising: A Cultural Economy (Culture, Representation and Identity series) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Advertising: A Cultural Economy (Culture, Representation and Identity series):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. McFall Poops the Postmodern Party By C. Hackley Liz McFall's scholarly, carefully researched and well-written book has a simple narrative. Advertising is fun, interesting, multi-faceted and culturally significant. But it isn't new. The not-new-ness of advertising is McFall's refrain throughout this

resoundingly anti-epochal tome. Semiotic critiques of advertising have, according to McFall, suffered from three main failings. Firstly, they assume that culture is a place that can offer meanings for economic manipulation. The author points out that culture and economy are mutually constitutive and it makes little sense to imply that they were once two separate domains, one tainted by commerce, the other a sort of anthropologists' Eden. Secondly, most post-Marxist critiques of advertising (and McFall leaves us in no doubt of the post-or-neo-Marxist credentials of the leading semioticians) suppose that advertising is more pervasive and persuasive than ever before. This complaint, we learn, has been made for the best part of three centuries, at least in the UK, which is the main source for McFall's historical research. If we look at ads in historical context, the use of integrated media, subtle typography, and emotional appeals have been part of the power of 'puffery' for a very long time. Advertising was never quaintly factual. McFall calls her approach a genealogical one, which brings us to the third criticism of cultural critiques of advertising. Which is that some of the most prominent authors who used semiotic critique to locate advertising as an instrument of false consciousness didn't know much about the nuts and bolts of the ad game. Throughout McFall's book we are treated to many insights about the way advertising is made, and this illustrates well the limits of critical analyses of advertising texts that take little account of the way material practices have influenced and shaped advertising (or marketing communications, as it is known) and the way we understand it. Along the way the book takes many swipes at authors who base their claims about advertising's cultural influence on an alleged epochal new-ness. As she points out, even the wiles and wheezes of persuasive, pervasive advertising are not entirely new, at least not if we look at the way advertising was made, produced and understood since the 1700s. McFall accepts that advertising technology has changed, and concedes that the modern-day mediated consumer cornucopia might just have some dimensions or effects that are new. And in the latter end of the book McFall uses reports of analyses of advertising archives (started, though no longer at, US agencies Ayer and JWT) to discuss the emergence of a hybrid discipline of copywriting that drew on post-war psychology, art and literature. JWT, indeed (after the influence of JWT himself had waned) became doyens of persuasion by using emotionally loaded copy. Still, though, she remains resolutely in epoch-denial and argues powerfully that cultural critiques of advertising are flawed because they take insufficient account of the historically specific material practices of the field. Advertising is a set of diverse and irregular material practices that are constitutive of culture. After McFall's repeated references to the salutary intellectual effect of the material practices of advertising it comes as a slight disappointment that her sources are a couple of historical archives and a few ethnographies. McFall successfully shows that advertising has always been tricky and everywhere, but takes no account of the effects technology and integrated media interests (and the material practices therein) have had on the way 20th century advertising is made and understood. Another issue is her characterisation that semiotic critiques of advertising depend for their coherence on an illusory binary of culture/economy. So, stimulating, carefully argued, informative, an essential read for researchers in this field, but perhaps the PoMos can party on after all.

Advertising is often used to illustrate popular and academic debates about cultural and economic life. This book reviews cultural and sociological approaches to advertising and, using historical evidence, demonstrates that a rethink of the analysis of advertising is long overdue. Liz McFall surveys dominant and problematic tendencies within the current discourse. This book offers a thorough review of the literature and also introduces fresh empirical evidence. *Advertising: A Cultural Economy* uses a historical study of advertising to regain a sense of how it has been patterned, not by the 'epoch', but by the interaction of institutional, organisational and technological forces.