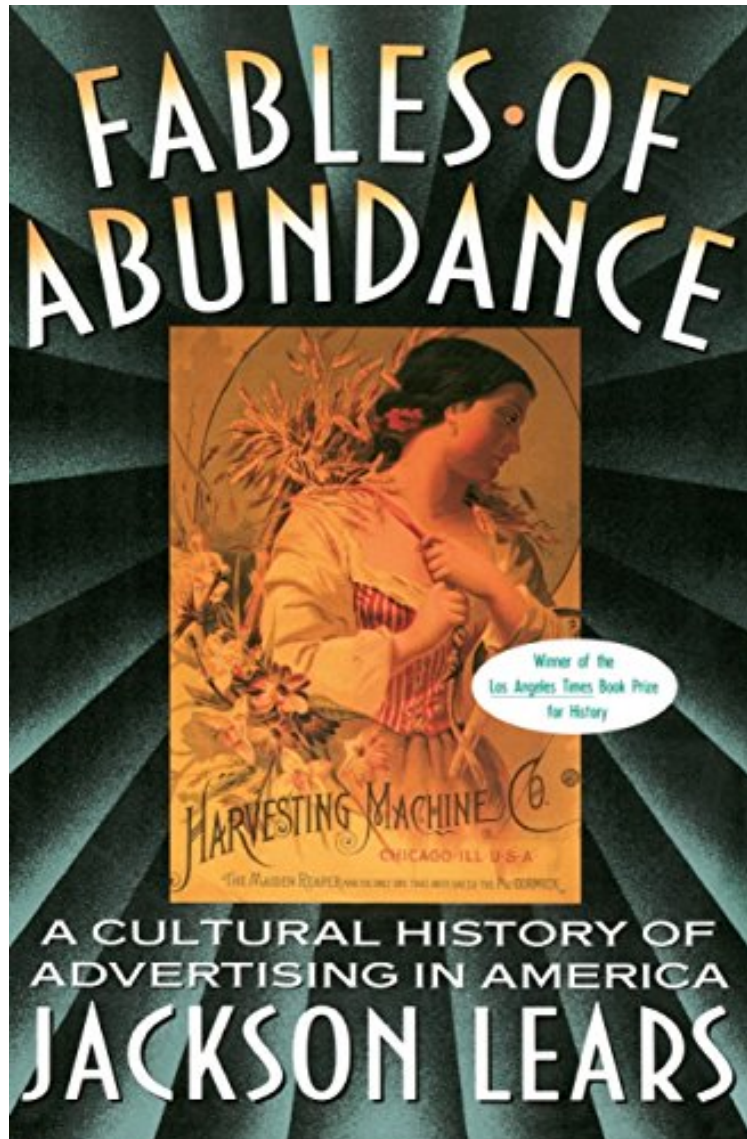


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## Fables Of Abundance: A Cultural History Of Advertising In America

Jackson Lears

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**Jackson Lears : Fables Of Abundance: A Cultural History Of Advertising In America** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Fables Of Abundance: A Cultural History Of Advertising In America:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. No problems here!By CustomerProduct arrived quickly and as expected!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy JsfDense and/but brilliant.19 of 21 people found the following review helpful. Excellent, and counterintuitiveBy pnotley@hotmail.comMost people find

advertising very irritating. This is not only understandable, but necessary and just. But what is it about advertising that should put one's teeth on edge? It is easy to believe that advertising encourages a world of greed and gaudy consumerism, a life of sterile self-indulgence. This was the view of the great American critic Thorstein Veblen. But one should avoid this temptation. In this book Jackson Lears provides a book that is not only revelatory about advertising but will help the reader about culture, nostalgia, memory, even life itself. Lears, a historian who is not afraid to quote Marxists, agrees with Adorno that Veblen's attack on consumerism was an "attack against culture." Veblen represented a puritanical producerism that did not recognize the aesthetic and imaginative elements of consumption. Lears throughout this subtle and evocative book argues that advertising did not present the triumph of hedonism, but in fact the regulation of consumption to a strict regime of productivity, a trade-off between "routinized labor and zestful consumption." The book does not follow a simple narrative. But it does provide a fascinating account with many pregnant aperçus about the cold presence of an inhumane positivism, as well as the flaws of both the jargon of authenticity and the New York Intellectuals conflation of politics and style. Starting with the image of the breast and the cornucopia, and going on to the illusions of the Plain speech tradition, Lears looks not only at advertisements, but also cites much literature and theory to help him along. Melville, Dreiser, James and Proust are all invoked, Little Nemo and Krazy Kat are properly praised, coming to a benediction looking at the special achievement of Joseph Cornell and his boxes. Some readers of this review may find this summary pretentious, but those who go on to read Lears will find much that is truly revelatory.

*Fables of Abundance* ranges from the traveling peddlers of early modern Europe to the twentieth-century American corporation, exploring the ways that advertising collaborated with other cultural institutions to produce the dominant aspirations and anxieties in the modern United States.

From Publishers Weekly History professor Lears's study of the rise of American consumerism explores the repressive aspects of advertising's equating of material abundance with social status. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Lears (history, Rutgers Univ.) offers a scholarly, multidisciplinary discussion of the relationship between advertising and culture, straying into literature, art, religion, and other areas to show how advertising has affected culture rather than merely reflecting it. He views as false and even harmful the ad industry's attempt to portray itself as rational rather than emotional and imaginative, arguing that the emphasis on managerialism and rational thought have permeated and impoverished our culture by removing the "magic." In addition, the founders of the major ad agencies are seen as belonging to a different socioeconomic class than the class of those they are trying to reach. Though one often needs an unabridged dictionary at hand to read this densely written work, it provides a cogent assessment of the ad industry's need to be more connected with our past and our culture. Recommended for relevant research collections. Sue McKimm, Cuyohoga Cty. P.L., Parma, Ohio Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus s Excessive ambition weighs down this important revisionist history of advertising in the United States. Lears (History/Rutgers; *No Place of Grace*, 1981) argues that modern advertising does not, as most think, promote hedonism but on the contrary serves class and state interest by controlling social energies. In fact, he says, scientific and nationalist myths promoted by advertisers alienate Americans from the potentially subversive pleasures of material objects. Lears casts previous critiques of advertising--in particular those in the sociological tradition of Thorstein Veblen--in a new light, claiming that their puritanical condemnations of consumption further this containment of pleasure. These sophisticated arguments will make a significant impact on cultural studies. The difficulties here arise from Lears's efforts to embed his reflections in a social history of American advertising and a meditation on its relationship to art. Tracing traditional New World themes of magical abundance through the 19th-century era of peddlers and medicine shows, he shows how Protestant values of personal authenticity and plain speech formed an uneasy dialectic with promises of transformation offered by commercial culture. But his narrative dissipates as it moves into a string of meandering mini-biographies of figures like P.T. Barnum, Theodore Dreiser, and Edward Steichen while eschewing the case studies of particular advertisements and their reception that might have lent more weight to his theoretical contentions. In the final chapters he interprets treatments of advertising by novelists from Frederick Exley back to Henry James, concluding with a paean to American artist and ad designer Joseph Cornell. Lears seems to claim that the artistic imagination, high or low, can transcend our culture's dualisms. But these artists, with their fabled neuroses, seem problematic sources for a new vision of everyday life. While Lears's inquiry bears abundant fruit, he has stunted some of his ideas by cramming three books' worth of intellectual goods into one package. -- Copyright copy; 1994, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.