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## Sommario/riassunto

Commercials enjoy a privileged place in one of the most important institutions of everyday life - television. Such is their prominence that a comparison can be made to the icons gracing the walls of a much older institution, the medieval cathedral. Paul Rutherford admits that the analogy can be carried too far, but he sees commercials as 'the art of our times' and approaches them as an art historian would. Like icons, commercials can be 'read' for particular styles or for the myths of a national culture; like icons, they are instruments of cultural power. Rutherford is an aficionado of fine commercials, more interested in what commercials are than what they do, and his love of the subject infuses this illustrated cultural history. Tracing commercials from the late 1940s, when they made their first appearance, to the early 1990s, Rutherford focuses on the shape and character of actual commercials as well as on what we do with them. He has studied roughly six thousand commercials, from Sweden to Hong Kong, Canada to Ecuador, France to South Africa. This book concentrates on 'commercials of distinction,' or ads that have been singled out for special merit: the Classic Clios of the 1950s, the 'Marlboro Country' campaign of the 1960s, Coca-Cola and Pepsi ads, Canada's best (the Bessies), and the world's best (the Cannes Lions). Rutherford looks at the most celebrated pieces of work to understand the creativity and significance of this truly modern art form. The breadth of Rutherford's treatment is unique. He explores such diverse topics as the aesthetic response to commercials; how ads mirror viewers' anxieties, aspirations, and ideology; the importance of gender and age in the adworld; the prevailing ethos of consumption; the emergence of a global repertoire of images; and the persistence of national styles. This is a story of one kind of cultural power.; how it has been generated and stored, articulated and exercised, resisted as well as maintained.

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