



Duffy, K. (2020) Revolutionary Nostalgia: Retromania, Neo-Burlesque and Consumer Culture. *Cultural Sociology*, 14(1), pp. 111-113. (doi: 10.1177/1749975520905535) [Book Review].

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Deposited on: 28 October 2019

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## Book review

### **Revolutionary Nostalgia: Retromania, Neo-Burlesque and Consumer Culture**

Marie-Cécile Cervellon and Stephen Brown

(2018)

Emerald Studies in Alternativity and Marginalization

Emerald Publishing UK

(pbk ISBN: 978-178769-346-3)

213 pp.

Review is 709 words

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In this fast paced exploration of consumer culture's longstanding fascination with nostalgia, Cervellon and Brown approach revolutionary nostalgia and retromania through the lens of neo-burlesque. Building on their previous work (Cervellon and Brown, 2014, 2018) and Brown's long-standing foray in the world of retro branding and retromania, this book starts with the premise that the nostalgia industry is 'bigger and better and bolder than ever' (2018, page 7). As such, the book is written in a manner to reflect the subject, with Brown's unmistakable literary influence, the tone is adventurous and bold as it delves into developments in 'yesteryearning, yesterearning and yesterlearning' (2018, page 8). Using the central focus of a socio-cultural study of a neo-burlesque community in France, the authors explore this collective of women and their passion of burlesque, how it is being commodified and also condemned by fourth-wave feminists. Drawing on examples throughout from popular culture past and present, the book is comprised of three sections: focusing firstly on Past and Present which sets out the background in the development of understandings and interest in nostalgia and retro, secondly Focus and Findings details the three year ethnographic study of Cervellon's immersion in the burlesque scene and presents an understanding of the trajectory of burlesque, finally the section Context and Concepts discursively approaches the ways in which neo-burlesque, retro and nostalgia are conceptualised within the marketing domain more generally. Contributing to consumer research and specifically the tradition of consumer culture theory, the book spans sociology, anthropology and history, whilst its positioning would also interest media studies, gender studies, and cultural studies scholars.

The conceptual jumping off point of the book commences with nostalgia and questioning if nostalgia is a dominant cultural force and if so, why. Exploring nostalgia as a 'universal panacea' (2018, page 17), Cervellon and Brown argue that nostalgia spans nationalities, geographies, ages, cultures and is present in the everyday. Taking on the conceptual confusion which has arisen from the abundant scholarly interest in nostalgia, Cervellon and Brown map the definitional development of the concept. Exploring that nostalgia once regarded as reactionary and reprehensible, is now a resource which is linked to wellbeing, product sales and has an established advertising canon. Describing nostalgia as the 'Gatsby of the humanities and social sciences' (2018, page 15), Cervellon and Brown chart the development of nostalgia scholarship from Hofer (1688/1934), to Boym (2001), to nostalgia as a critical and potentially transformative conceptual resource from a cultural studies perspective, and into the consumer research domain whereby nostalgia and the consumer has been explored in depth (Holbrook, 1993) and linked to consumer pleasure (Goulding and Saren 2009). Cervellon and Brown approach the difficult task of drawing

parameters to the usage of nostalgia and retro, positioning nostalgia as linked to thought and sentiment, and retro as the embodiment of nostalgia, which is manifested in objects and stuff.

The neo-burlesque community are ideally positioned to analyse these ideas in practice: framed as a collective who embrace traditions of a golden age, seek out and revere vintage products and services, whilst embracing their nostalgic tendencies to explore their emancipatory potential. Capturing the lived experience of the respondents, the authors approach the data collection using interpretive research methods in alignment with the consumer culture theory approach. The three year ethnographic focus starts from a non-participant vantage of the vintage and neo-burlesque scene, before a deep immersion in the burlesque community and interviews and then participation by Cervellon, then finally a meta-analysis by Brown of the entire cultural text including manuscripts, fieldnotes, photographs, secondary literature. The empirical work is impressive in scale and scope with the burlesque scene illuminated as vibrant, textured and daring. The book embraces the emic, but the power lies in the etic and the expertly woven theoretical insights and wide range of perspectives considered. The study reveals that nostalgia is potentially revolutionary, empowering and emancipating with neo-burlesque providing support and a political expression through a nostalgically laden art form.

Overall, this book provides a compelling overview and exploration into nostalgia, burlesque and retro culture. The rich ethnography serves to provide a deeply textured portrait of revolutionary nostalgia in action, whilst the authors admirably navigate the theoretical terrain with gusto and aplomb, which makes the arguments resonate and linger with the reader.

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