

**THE BIRTH OF A SALESMAN:  
ERNEST DICHTER AND THE OBJECTS OF DESIRE**

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Ernest Dichter (1907-91), an émigré psychologist influential in the development of new methods of market research, articulated an unbounded optimism about the new consumer culture. Trained as a psychologist in Vienna, after his arrival in the U.S. in 1938 he made a handsome living by using Freudian methods to help corporations and nonprofit organizations understand the psyche of American consumers. In the years after World War II, he worked to reshape American identity. In the process, he linked democracy with purchasing, redefined the roles of middle-class women, and asserted that affluence would aid his adopted land in the fight against Communism abroad. In books, in articles, and in thousands of studies carried out for corporations, he promoted a decidedly anti-puritanical vision, as he called into question the wisdom of social critics such as Vance Packard, and John Kenneth Galbraith. With the approach of a salesman who could not easily separate the selling of the self from the selling of his product, Dichter offered a vision of a world filled with consumable goods that

were symbols of personal growth and creative self-expression. Yet at moments, he acknowledged that fruits of affluence were not very satisfying. Several of the most influential critics of advertising--including Packard and Betty Friedan--attacked Dichter's work. However, they often shared with him a focus on white, middle-class America and a sense that the problems of consumer culture could be solved by self-actualizing humanistic psychology.

#### **THE MAKING OF AN EMIGRE, PSYCHOLOGIST, AND SALESMAN**

Dichter came to maturity under inauspicious conditions, in a household racked by poverty and in a nation traumatized by events stretching from the outbreak of World War I in 1914 to the invasion by Nazi Germany in 1938.<sup>1</sup> Born in Vienna on August 14,

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<sup>1</sup> ## Among the best sources of biographical information are "Ernest Dichter" Contemporary Authors (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1976): vol 17-20 [?]: 190; Who's Who in America [get citation]; obituary, NYT, 21 November 1991, p. 12; Ernest Dichter, Getting Motivated by Ernest Dichter: The Secret Behind Individual Motivations by the Man Who was Not Afraid to Ask 'Why' (N.Y.: Pergamon Press, 1979). Getting Motivated, Dichter's autobiography, is somewhat disorganized and, on some key issues, vague as to details and chronology. Moreover, boastful and unqualified claims necessitate care in unquestioning reliance on the book. There are two sets of Dichter's papers, which consist mainly of the reports he did for corporations and advertising agencies; one is at the library of Mercy College in Yorktown, N.Y. and the other may be transferred from the Dichter residence in Peekskill, N.Y. to the Library of the University of Vienna. There is virtually nothing written on Dichter. One exception is ## Barbara B. Stern, "Literary Criticism and the History of Marketing Thought: A New Perspective on 'Reading' Marketing Theory," Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science 18 (Fall 1990): 329-36. For a narrowly focused but nonetheless useful introduction to ideas about market research, see ## Robert Bartels, The History of Marketing Thought (2nd ed.; Columbus,

1907, he was the oldest of three sons of William and Mathilde Dichter. His father was "a small itinerant businessmen" who sold sewing accessories and textiles. Dichter considered him "a spectacularly unsuccessful salesman," someone of whom he was "ashamed," whom he could neither "look up to" nor tear down since "he was never high enough up for that." In contrast, being the first born, Dichter remembered, entitled him "to the special love and concern" of his mother. Dichter's relationship with his mother was particularly intense; as he noted in his autobiography, to her he was simultaneously "husband, lover, and son." His father often referred to his mother as a shickse. From the only Jewish family in a small village, his son recalled, "she neither looked nor acted Jewish and was unfamiliar with most Jewish rituals." She thus stood in contrast with a "father desperately attempting to act Jewish."

Many in Vienna, Jews among them, had felt the pre-1914 years were idyllic, but Dichter's immediate family had not experienced that world as particularly beneficent, filled as it was for them with economic uncertainty and social disruption and not with

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Ohio: Grid, 1976).## Jagdish N. Sheth, David M. Gardner, and Dennis E. Garrett, Marketing Theory: Evolution and Evaluation (N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons, 1988) provides a more recent and more theoretically-oriented treatment of American marketing thought in the twentieth century, one which locates Dichter, MR, and other approaches in several ways: [p. 26] within the "buyer behavior school" that focuses not on producer or seller but on buyer and [p. 22] among those who emphasize noneconomic factors. Harwell Wells is working on a Ph.D. dissertation, called "The Rise of Market Research, 1900-1940," at the University of Virginia. ## Richard S. Tedlow, New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1990), which does not mention Dichter, is a study organized around a series of case histories.  
add Strasser

experiences that revolved around the world of the Ringstrasse, Arnold Schoenberg, Sigmund Freud, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Oskar Kokoschka, and Gustav Klimt.<sup>2</sup> Though there was assimilation and wealth among his father's relatives and evidence of downward mobility in his immediate family, young Dichter faced poverty at least well into his teens. When his father was in the Austrian army in World War I, Dichter's mother fended off starvation by exchanging a treasured mirror or painting on the black market for flour, mixing it with straw to make a barely edible bread. To provide fuel, Dichter and his brothers stole coal and cut down trees in a park. Toward the end of World War I, his parents sent him off to Holland for a year where he became seriously ill with a kidney disease.

When he returned to Vienna in 1919, Dichter rejoined a family that continued to go from crisis to crisis. Because his father had difficulty providing, the family starved on occasion, with "nothing to eat for three days in a row." The family was always in debt. Things were especially rough during and after World War I, when his father, who earned money only from commissions, often had no income. Ernest Dichter left school at age 14 to help support his family, working first as a secretary and then, from 1924 to 1927, as a sales clerk, sign painter, and window decorator at his uncle's department store in Vienna, one with 40-50 employees. In his father's brother, Dichter found what his father did not offer: a man to look up to, someone who

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<sup>2</sup> ## For information on the situation of the Jews in Vienna, see Roberts S. Wistrich, The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz-Joseph (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

encouraged his ambition and his fascination with new ideas about merchandising, some of which his uncle brought back from a trip to the United States. Eager to experiment in developing a sound system for his uncle's store, Ernest Dichter drew on information in an American magazine and flooded the store with music, "bringing a new atmosphere into the cold commercial display of merchandise." Dichter was thus able to satisfy his father's insistence that his son earn money and contribute it to the household, turning himself into the provider that his father could not be. Both of his brothers, who were farther to the political Left than their elder brother, considered it "demeaning" for him to work within the capitalist system, even though he was the family's primary breadwinner. It was also in the department store that his uncle had unintentionally, Ernest Dichter later wrote, provided "objects" for his nephew's "sexual training course." On company time, he had sexual experiences with a female employee. "Since all this exploration had to be carried out somewhat hurriedly," Dichter recalled of a time when he was about 17, he and his partner had to be "very inventive" as they "stood up behind rows of kitchen utensils and sundry china ware, glasses, and, around Christmas time, behind dolls and electric trains, waiting to be given a place in the visible shelves at the front of the store."

Poverty and ethnicity shaped Dichter's identity. "I was an outcast" and "was always dissatisfied with myself," Dichter remarked retrospectively. He ascribed these feelings to a number of factors. Living around well-to-do, fashionable friends and

relatives, he had to wear second-hand clothes until well into his teens. He was a red head, something that marked him as different among Jews and but not an outcast among Gentiles. Indeed, when Austrian Brown Shirts sought out Jews, they usually left Dichter alone "after a searching look." However, as a young man he faced the ordeal of a weekly shower where he "tried to hide what I considered my deformity," his circumcised penis, as it involved "a public declaration of my ethnic ties."

All of these experiences of his youth shaped Dichter's career and ideas. Being poor and Jewish helped self-doubt turn into self-criticism. He "watched continuously to see whether people" around him would discover how insecure he was. For the rest of his life, he had nightmares of poverty and starvation. "Don't ever lose your insecurity," a friend told Dichter after World War II, "it is the secret of your success. Because you yourself are insecure, you can understand other people and discover what makes them tick." To Dichter, being different made him compensate "by becoming 'outstanding' in a positive way." His experiences helped shape the characteristic features of his ideology which emphasized creative discontent, the pleasure of goods, and the desire for security. From his father's failure as a salesman emerged his own success as one. In his uncle's department store Dichter first learned about selling, the presentation of merchandise, and the connection between sexuality and consumer goods. From the tragedies of World War I and the sweep of fascism across Europe, he molded a vision of an America where democracy and consumer culture were inseparable. His hunger

helped engender in him a drive for success and an insatiable love of consumer goods.<sup>3</sup>

By 1925, Dichter realized that, with his chances for rising in the world of department stores limited, he had to resume his formal education. Completion of a course of study and success on examinations earned him a scholarship to the University of Vienna where, beginning in 1927 he studied German literature and dreamed of becoming a literary critic.<sup>4</sup> Although his mother supported his efforts to "move out of the proletarian embrace," his father objected, feeling, Dichter later reported, "that a decent Jewish boy had no right to waste his time" with books that "obviously had no practical value." Protesting against his father's insistence that he earn a living, Dichter used money earned from nighttime jobs as a window decorator to strike out on his own, leaving Vienna for Paris in 1929.<sup>5</sup> He enrolled at the Sorbonne to study literature, lived in an unheated attic, and kept starvation at the door with odd jobs. A female student in Paris had a profound effect on him: Tassja, whose father had suffered at the hands of Communists in Russia and whom Dichter called "a mother,

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<sup>3</sup> ## This paragraph and the previous four rely on ## Dichter, Getting Motivated, p. xi, 1-5, 8, 48, 55-57, 91, 137-38, 145, 147-48, 162, and 168; Daniel Horowitz, interview with Ernest Dichter, 8 April 1986, Peekskill, N.Y.; Bill Miksch, "Inside Dr. Dichter," Sponsor, 3 August 1957, p. 36; "Ernest Dichter of Croton: `a doctor for ailing products," Printers' Ink 267 (26 June 1959): 76. For information on Vienna in these years, see Carl E. Schorske, Fin-du-Siecle Vienna: Poitics and Culture and ## Robert S. Wistrich, The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> "Ernest Dichter of Croton," 72; Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 8, 57, and 162-63; Miksch, "Inside Dr. Dichter" p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 1, 8 and 55.

a protector and an ideal," inspired Dichter's interest in both socialism and psychology. When that relationship ended and as Europe slipped further into a Depression, Dichter returned to Vienna in 1930.<sup>6</sup>

He resumed his studies at the University of Vienna, determined to get his doctorate in psychology. To support himself, he served as private tutor and worked as a free lance window decorator.<sup>7</sup> Karl Bühler (1879-1963) and, more importantly, Charlotte Bühler (1893-1974) were his principal mentors in psychology. They opposed the theories of Sigmund Freud and collaborated in the development of the field of child study, something they carried out through the Psychological Institute in Vienna from 1923 to 1938. Charlotte Bühler, whose work on childhood in the 1930s was non-Freudian, practically-oriented, and based on systematic observation, did pioneering work in humanistic psychology and life-span development. She emphasized self-realization, personal fulfillment, the process of continuous development, purposefulness, and a motivation-based theory of personality.<sup>8</sup> The Böhlers led Dichter to his statistics teacher, Paul Lazarsfeld, who would become crucial during his career in

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<sup>6</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 9-12. The Sorbonne awarded him a Licencié es lettres in 1931.

<sup>7</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, 11 and 136.

<sup>8</sup> 1986 interview; ## Eileen A. Gavin, "Charlotte M. Bühler (1893-1974)," Women in Psychology: A Bio-Bibliographic Sourcebook, ed. Agnes N. O'Connell and Nancy Felipe Russo (N.Y.: Greenwood Press, 1989), pp. 49-56; ## "Charlotte B. Bühler" and Karl Bühler," in Leonard Zusne, Biographical Dictionary of Psychology (Westport, : Greenwood Press, 1984), pp. 64-66; ## Charlotte Bühler, From Birth To Maturity: An Outline of the Psychological Development of the Child (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1935).

his first years in the U.S.<sup>9</sup> However, Dichter believed that the teacher who had the greatest influence on him was Professor Moritz Schlick (1882-1936). A founder of modern analytic philosophy and influential among Viennese logical positivists, Schlick instructed Dichter in courses on logic and epistemology. Schlick, he recalled, taught him "to think, ask questions."<sup>10</sup>

Major events filled Dichter's life from 1934, when he was awarded of his Ph.D. and his father died, and 1937, when he departed from Vienna for good.<sup>11</sup> In 1934, the Austrian Conservative Party dispensed with the constitution, outlawed the Socialist Party, and established a fascist government based on the Italian model. In 1935, Dichter married Hedy Langfelder, a concert pianist and piano teacher.<sup>12</sup> With his doctorate in hand, Dichter hustled to earn a living by the practical application of psychology. He worked in a hospital for a year, following the developmental patterns of babies. He also spent a year working with mentally ill children. He opened up a vocational guidance center. He wrote articles, including a syndicated column that popularized psychology. He developed an adult education course on how to observe people and another, in 1935-36, on advertising.<sup>13</sup> From 1934 to 1937, he had a private psychoanalytic practice at Bergasse 20, directly across the street from where the aging

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<sup>9</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 43-4; Bartos iv in 1977; 86 iv.

<sup>10</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 70 and 178; and 86 iv; for information on Sch, see ## Béla Juhos, "Moritz Schlick," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1967), vol 7: 319-24.

<sup>11</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Printers Ink 80 and Getting Motivated, p. 11 and 79

<sup>13</sup> various sources: 86 iv, Getting Motivated; Printers' Ink

Freud lived.<sup>14</sup> Dichter had been psychoanalyzed by an American studying in Vienna, whom he paid by teaching German. He also offered analyses under the supervision of an Austrian.<sup>15</sup> He studied with Wilhelm Stekel (1868-1940), a member of Freud's original circle who went off on his own after 1912 and who emphasized the clinical and empirical more than the theoretical. Dichter also learned about psychoanalysis from August Aichhorn (## 1878-1949), who carried out a famous 1918-19 experiment using therapy to educate male juvenile delinquents.<sup>16</sup> Stekel and Aichhorn were both psychoanalysts who inspired Dichter to develop an analytic practice that was "very practical," involving "a more immediate application of analytic principles" than orthodox Freudianism allowed.<sup>17</sup>

As much as any other experience, Dichter's work at the Psychoeconomic Institute in Vienna in 1936 shaped his future.<sup>18</sup> Lazarsfeld was at the Institute, where he did commercial market research on the milk drinking habits of the Viennese for which he used depth interviews.<sup>19</sup> Then something happened that turned

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<sup>14</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 11-12; Miksch, p. 36; "Ernest Dichter of Croton," pp. 76 and 80.

<sup>15</sup> 86 iv; GM 24

<sup>16</sup> On Stekel, ## "Wilhelm Stekel," in Zusne, Biographical Dictionary of Psychology, pp. 407-08; ## Henri F. Ellenberger, The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry (N.Y.; Basic Books, 1970), pp. 454, 456, 584-85, 596-99; ## Reuben Fine, A History of Psychoanalysis (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 73 and 87. On Aichhorn, see ## Ellenberger, Discovery of the Unconscious, pp. 619, 831-32, and 847; ## Fine, History of Psychoanalysis, pp. 107 and 409.

<sup>17</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> I wonder if this is Lazarsfeld's Research Center (Wirtschaftspsychologische Forschungsstelle). Memoir, p. 295, Laz speaking of possibility that it was subversive.

<sup>19</sup> Miksch, 36 and Getting Motivated, p. 17; 86 iv..

Dichter's attention to the necessity to leave a Europe in order to escape from Naziism. One day, while working at the Institute, Dichter was arrested. The police jailed and interrogated him for 4 weeks, because, unbeknownst to him, the Institute had been used during Fascist rule in Austria as a place for what the authorities considered illegal activities. Soon after his release, he found out that the official Nazi newspaper in Germany had included his name on a list of subversives. He quickly realized that as a Jew and as someone suspected of disloyalty, he would have difficulty securing decent employment in Vienna.<sup>20</sup>

#### **THE RECASTING OF SELF: FROM EUROPEAN EMIGRE TO AMERICAN CITIZEN**

With his departure from Vienna in early 1937, Dichter began the process of reinventing himself that would be so crucial to his success in America. He and his wife first went to Paris where, through the father of a patient, Dichter was hired as a commission salesman. Facing difficulty in making sales, Dichter realized that his success depended less on a product's quality and price and more on his ability to project the power and conviction of his own beliefs.<sup>21</sup> In the spring of 1938 came a critical turning point, a key moment in his reinvention. Fearing Hitler's expansion across Europe, Ernest and Hedy Dichter decided to leave. When the American Vice Consul in Paris pressed him about why the U.S. should permit his entry, Dichter, who until

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<sup>20</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 16-19.

<sup>21</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 18-20.

this point had not really done what would come to be known as Motivational Research, articulated the mission of his career.<sup>22</sup> Standing before the American official and fearing the denial of his petition for a visa, Dichter "made the best sales pitch of my whole life." He argued that what he could contribute to America was an ability to motivate people to solve problems by using depth psychology, based on psychoanalysis, to understand the real reasons people made the choices they did, especially as consumers. Dichter was so convincing that the Vice Consul signed an affidavit indicating that he would personally support him if he had difficulty making a go of it in the U.S.

"Had I formulated the next decades of my life in this one hour meeting?" Dichter asked retrospectively as he answered the rhetorical question in the affirmative. Their passage aided by a resettlement agency and with only \$100 to their name, the Dichters arrived in New York in September of 1938, just at the moment when Neville Chamberlain appeased Hitler in Munich and six months after the Germans annexed Austria. Members of his extended family, who perished in Nazi concentration camps, were not so lucky.<sup>23</sup> In a particularly revealing incident, Dichter completed his reshaping of his identity shortly after his arrival. An

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<sup>22</sup> Dichter is hardly the only claimant to the position as founder or leader in MR; on such a list would also be Pierre Martineau of the Chicago Tribune and Burleigh Gardner of Social Research Inc. On Martineau, see ## Dennis G. Martin, Origins of Motivation Research: The Advertising Legacy of Pierre Martineau (Washington, D.C.: American Advertising Federation, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 21-30; Miksch, 36; 86 iv. Louis Cheskin, contesting Dichter's claim to have founded MR, claimed he first used the approach in 1935: Packard, Hidden, pp. 25-26.

American professor of phonetics asked him if he wanted to learn how to drop his Viennese accent. "The best way to describe what he did with me," Dichter later wrote, "is to compare it to the kind of job that Prof. Higgins did with Liza in My Fair Lady." When given the choice of what kind of accent he wanted, Dichter decided on "'an all-American' one. That way," he asserted, "people would not be able to quite locate my origin, but would not be suspicious of my foreign background."<sup>24</sup>

Dichter's success in the U.S. came quickly and spectacularly, though not always smoothly. Lazarsfeld, who had arrived in the U.S. in 1933 and by 1938 was rapidly earning a reputation as America's most sophisticated market researcher, recommended Dichter for his first job, which Dichter obtained three days after his arrival with a firm called Market Analysts, Inc. at a salary of \$30 a week. Dichter's first assignment was a study of milk drinking habits, this time not of the Viennese but of Americans. A few weeks later, his boss raised his pay to \$50 a week. Hedy was able to give concerts and lessons and the Dichters moved to a neighborhood in New York filled with central European refugees. Soon after, business conditions forced his employer to lower his pay to \$25 a week. Tension intensified when Dichter raised questions about what he saw as the superficiality of the firm's research.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "Ernest Dichter of Croton: 'a doctor for ailing products,'" Printers' Ink 267 (26 June 1959): 72 dates the transformation within a few months of Dichter's arrival in the U.S.; Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 41-42.

<sup>25</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 32--; Miksch.

Though he did not always acknowledge the influence of his fellow Austrian and it is hard to trace his specific contributions, Dichter's debt to Lazarsfeld was probably considerable.<sup>26</sup> The organization of Lazarsfeld's applied contract work under the auspices of an interdisciplinary research center in Vienna may have served as a model for Dichter's work after 1946, building on Lazarsfeld's later description of himself as a "managerial scholar." Beginning in the late 1920s in Vienna, Lazarsfeld had done pioneering market research that focused on the understanding the hidden dimensions of motivation and decision making. He was influenced by the ideas and leadership of Karl Bühler and the ability of Charlotte Bühler to "organize the work activities of many people at many places." In an attempt to unite qualitative and quantitative approaches, Lazarsfeld called for research that relied on statistical information and direct observation, numbers as well as insight. Though Lazarsfeld would eventually earn a reputation for rigorous scientific research, in

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<sup>26</sup> For example, in his autobiography, Dichter minimizes Lazarsfeld's importance, something he on occasion acknowledged elsewhere. Without fully adequate justification, Lazarsfeld claimed that his contributions to the Committee on Marketing Research Technique, American Marketing Association, The Technique of Marketing Research (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1937) marked the beginning of motivation research: Paul F. Lazarsfeld, "An Episode in the History of Social Research: A Memoir," in The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930-1960, ed. Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 297. As early as 1934, Lazarsfeld had published a paper in the U.S. that could have laid the ground for some (but hardly all, for Lazarsfeld paid minimal attention to Freudian concepts) of Dichter's approach, especially the focus on motivation and interpretation, the centrality of subjective data gathered from interviews, and the importance of studying the process of decision making for purchases: Paul Lazarsfeld, "The Psychological Aspect of Market Research," Harvard Business Review 13 (October 1934): 54-71.

the late 1930s some of his most important work was largely qualitative. Indeed, in December of 1937, he convened a meeting with major American psychoanalysts to explore how Freudian notions of free association and formative childhood experiences might contribute to communications research.<sup>27</sup> Yet Dichter developed one side of Lazarsfeld's approach, neglecting this mentor's emphasis on the quantitative approach.

Determined to find a position that would enable him to try out the approach he had articulated to the Vice Consul in Paris, Dichter wrote six companies simple letters. "I am a young psychologist from Vienna," he noted, "and I have some interesting new ideas which can help you be more successful, sell more and communicate better with your potential clients." Aided by Lazarsfeld's recommendations, Dichter received four replies and took a position with Esquire, the men's magazine that was in some ways the precursor of Playboy. Using depth interviews, Dichter discovered what people at the magazine knew but would not admit-- that what attracted subscribers was Esquire's pictures of nude women. Dichter later claimed that he had turned this realization into a sales pitch that emphasized the connection between the impact of the pictures and the readers' receptivity to the visual appeal of advertising. This led him, he argued with some exaggeration, to be the first person to develop the concept of a product's image, or gestalt.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> ## Lazarsfeld, "Memoir," pp. 272, 279, 281-86, 295-98, 312, and 319.

<sup>28</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 33-35.

While at Esquire, Dichter did another study in which he further developed his methods. Carried out for the Compton Advertising Agency in 1939, a contact that Lazarsfeld also was instrumental in making, Dichter's study of Ivory soap relied on extensive, non-directive interviews where people talked about their experience of bathing. He focused less on the product itself than on people's relationship to it. This market research tactic stood in contrast with the more widely used one of tabulating why people did or did not buy an item. Dichter's extended conversations revealed the importance of a bath or shower as an event preceding a special occasion. Moreover, they demonstrated to Dichter an erotic element in bathing, "one of the few occasions when the puritanical American was allowed to caress himself or herself." In addition, Dichter explored the bath as a cultural anthropologist might, as a ritual that involved purification. Finally, the interviews strengthened Dichter's insight into the gestalt of a product: that aside from the specifics of price, smell, and convenience, a bar of soap had a personality that advertisements could elaborate upon. His insights contributed to a new approach in an Ivory ad campaign: "Be Smart and Get a Fresh Start with Ivory Soap."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Dichter, Strategy of Desire, pp. 33-34; Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 34-35. As with the job with Market Analyst, so with this one, GM, 32 or so he says Compton responded to his letter; Printers' Ink 80 and Bartos iv say PL; see also, Miksch, 1984 iv for adv age. could I find this ad? I have not seen his original report, which he says is the first in his papers. I have illustration of an appropriate Ivory ad, filed under Dichter-Ivory-1942.

Armed with the insights he was developing and again aided by a stroke of good luck, in 1939 Dichter began a study that brought him fame across the nation and beyond. His boss at Esquire invited Dichter to go with him to Detroit to help Chrysler with a marketing problem. As a relatively new line, Plymouth faced the resistance of people who were loyal to more established brands. Making his presentation to executives from Plymouth and its advertising agency, J. Stirling Getchell Co., Dichter promised to bring his skills to the situation. Chrysler hired Dichter (but not his boss from Esquire) and he quit his job at the magazine, going to work on Plymouth's marketing problem by interviewing one hundred consumers. In the process, he made two important discoveries. One concerned the importance of women in the decision to buy automobiles, something that knowledgeable people had not always understood and that led Chrysler to place ads in women's magazines for the first time, he claimed incorrectly, in the history of the automobile industry. In addition, Dichter's interviews revealed the importance of convertibles in the selling a wider range of cars. Though they accounted for only 2% of sales, convertibles had tremendous symbolic significance: their display in the showroom brought in customers who often leaned up against one as they discussed buying a less sporty vehicle. Dichter emphasized how frequently consumers connected a convertible with youth and freedom. This was especially true with middle-age men. Associating a convertible with the excitement they believed a mistress would bring them, once at the dealership

they nonetheless bought a more sedate and comfortable sedan, which they associated with their wives.<sup>30</sup>

The Plymouth study launched Dichter's career in the advertising business. Trade magazines picked up the story of the car as wife or mistress, and Time followed, complete with a picture of Dichter, who had been in the U.S. for only eighteen months. In March of 1940, the news magazine described him as "a small, neat, emphatic man who speaks almost perfect English" who claimed "that he is the first to apply to advertising the really scientific psychology," one that tapped "hidden desires and urges." The Getchell firm, Time predicted, would soon issue "its first completely Dichterized advertisements, for Plymouth cars. Probable motif: the subconscious lure of adventure on the open road, the deep passion to master a machine."<sup>31</sup>

Notoriety brought Dichter numerous offers and a well-rewarded job with Getchell, who more than anyone else shaped American advertising in the 1930s, as a director of psychological research.<sup>32</sup> The firm earned a \$1.5 million contract with Chrysler and Dichter used his \$600 bonus to buy his first car. By 1940, his salary was \$150 a week, equivalent to \$83,500 a year in 1994 dollars. Dichter had a secretary and a small staff, and with his

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<sup>30</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 35-38; see also 1984 ad age iv . An examination of the relevant data does not support Dichter's claim that automobile manufacturers had not previously advertised in women's magazines: see, for example, ## advertisements in Ladies' Home Journal: 55 (February 1938): 40 or 55 (January 1938): 48.

<sup>31</sup> Time 25 March 1940, pp. 46-47.

<sup>32</sup> Fox, Mirror Makers, pp. 162-68.

wife he bought a house in Forest Hills, Queens.<sup>33</sup> The Dichters were now also secure enough, financially and from Hitler's reach, to start a family. When Thomas William was born on June 21, 1941, on the day Hitler invaded Russia, Dichter announced to his wife "This is it. Hitler has lost the war!" a remark that meant that the invasion was a mistake and that the family was now safe. Susan Jane was born two years later. It was no accident that the Dichters gave both children what their father acknowledged as "unmistakeably American names."<sup>34</sup>

Shortly after Getchell died in December 1940 [check and then put in fn that ED got date wrong], Dichter left the agency and took up the offer of a job made earlier by Frank Stanton, the director of research at CBS. The experience at the network clarified Dichter's future, underscoring as it did his preference for a qualitative approach, as well as his discomfort with bureaucratic restraints. At CBS, Stanton and Lazarsfeld were doing path breaking research on audience response, with Lazarsfeld continuing to make major contributions to communications research. They tested reaction to radio shows by setting up audience panels in the studio and using a Program Analyzer to record what segments of a program people liked. If Lazarsfeld minimized the ability of mass communications to change people's minds, Dichter's emphasized the power of the media. Moreover, if Lazarsfeld was cautious and precise, Dichter was

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<sup>33</sup> Printers' Ink 80; Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 38-42; Miksch, 36.

<sup>34</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, p. 14. misspelling in original.

speculative.<sup>35</sup> For example, from a study he did for CBS on the reaction of women to radio soap operas, Dichter concluded that their appeal rested on the promise that their authoritarian heroines would relieve female listeners of weak character of their troubles, just as, he argued, Hitler promised to do for Nazis in Germany. Warning his former student that Americans worshipped numbers, Lazarsfeld criticized Dichter for the non-statistical nature of his approach. Moreover, Stanton worried about the offense to sponsors that would result from Dichter's suggestion of a parallel between soaps and fascism.<sup>36</sup> Ever restless, Dichter took on new tasks while working full time at CBS. He saw analytic patients in his CBS office and did market research on the outside. By 1946, Stanton and Dichter came to an amicable understanding, knowing that Dichter had "too much energy and self-direction to be contained by" being an employee. To tide him over as he developed a more entrepreneurial career, Stanton promised him work as a consultant.<sup>37</sup>

#### **SALESMAN OF MOTIVATIONAL RESEARCH**

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<sup>35</sup> "Report on Listener Reactions: Based on Lazarsfeld-Stanton Program analyzer," prepared by CBS research department, Program Analysis Division, April 1945, ED papers; ED, "Psychodramatic Research Project on Commodities as Intersocial Media," Sociometry, 7 (1944): 432; Tore Hollonquist and Edward A. Suchman, "Listening to the Listener: Experiences with the Lazarsfeld-Stanton Program Analyzer," 265-334; ED, "On the Psychology of Radio Commercials," Radio Research, 1942-1943, ed. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank N. Stanton (N.Y.: Essential Books [distributed by Duell, Sloane and Pearce] 1944), 461-81; For information in Lazarsfeld, see ## James Gilbert, A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 114-16.

<sup>36</sup> 86 iv; Getting Motivated, pp. ?

<sup>37</sup> 86 iv

On his own in 1946, Dichter established the Institute for Motivational Research, a company that on a contractual basis applied his own brand of market research. After he delivered a speech to the American Association of Advertising Agencies in 1946, several large corporations hired him, at three times his CBS salary, making it unnecessary for him to fall back on Stanton's offer.<sup>38</sup> Initially Dichter worked in New York and commuted to his home--first in Forest Hills, then in Larchmont, and later Ossining.<sup>39</sup> Eventually he moved the Institute to a small farm in Montrose in northern Westchester County. In 1953, he established his office in a building he bought that was equal to his boastfulness and aspirations: a 26-room, fieldstone mansion, complete with a pipe organ and a 65 foot living room, that sat atop a mountain in Croton-on-Hudson, one mile up a private road, 30 miles from Manhattan. It was large enough for the Dichter home, the company's offices, and room to spare.<sup>40</sup>

By 1955 the Institute reportedly grossed \$750,000, with Dichter charging \$500 a day for his advice. Among the clients were General Foods, General Mills, and American Airlines.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> 86 iv

<sup>39</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 60-64.

<sup>40</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 65-66, 68, and 74. By the late 1950s, the Dichters moved to a home in Ossining (Printers' Ink, p. 80). See Martin Mayer, Madison Avenue, U.S.A. (N.Y.: Harper and Brothers, 1958), pp. 233-34, who dates the move in 1953, offers an extended picture of the site.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Perrin Stryker, "Motivation Research," Fortune 53 (June 1956): 144-47, 222, 225, 226, 228, 230, 232; for the early development of M.R., see Packard, Hidden, pp. 25-32 and 268-71; "Inside the Consumer: The New Debate: Does He Know His Own Mind?" Newsweek 46 (10/10/55): 89-93.

Dichter brought energy, drive, willfulness, and a capacity to offer provocative insights. This "ruddy-complexioned, rusty haired" man, who stood at 5'8" and weighed 160 pounds, a close business associate remarked, never "could be involved in too many money making projects at once.'" His "peppery," "fast-rising, quick-cooling temper" was offset by a "lode vein of good humor and understanding reflected in an infectious grin and twinkling blue eyes behind horn-rimmed glasses." One of his clients described how he worked: "The doctor does more to stimulate your own thinking than anyone else you're ever likely to deal with. He can spout ideas faster than you can keep up with them and always comes up with a fresh approach."<sup>42</sup> As one astute observer of advertising noted in 1958, some of Dichter's most telling observations relied on neither M.R. nor research; rather, they were "just plain Ernest Dichter," the result of someone who combined the skills of a first rate copywriter, a large dose of common sense, and an ability to seeing the world through the eyes of the consumer. The result was that clients, though they were billed for elaborate studies, often just wanted to have the opportunity to talk directly with Dichter. Consequently, he was always selling himself even though he had to meet expenses for extensive staff, research, and facilities.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Miksch, pp. 33-35 and 58; for another description of him, see "The Talk of the Town: Meaningful Patterns" New Yorker 37 (1/3/59): 17-19; Robert H. Boyle, "Not-S0-Mad-Doctor and His Living Lab," Sports Illustrated, 15 (7/24/61); Austria Kultur article.

<sup>43</sup> ## Mayer, Madison Avenue, pp. 233-42.

Dichter's fortunes were inseparable from those of Motivational Research. Beginning in the late 1940s, M.R., as it was known, became well-known among people concerned with advertising. The Journal of Marketing featured M.R. in an April 1950 issue; Newsweek did the same in October, 1955; and Fortune devoted a cover story in June 1956 to the field. Although it is not easy to resolve the question of whether Dichter was the originator of M.R. or its most important practitioner, in some quarters he earned titles such as "the patron saint," the "Dean," "the world's leading proponent," and "unquestionably the high priest."<sup>44</sup> Dichter's advantage stemmed in part from his closeness to Manhattan, while his most important competitors were in Chicago. Moreover, he was an extraordinarily successful salesman of himself, capable of self-promotion in a field that thrived on such skills.<sup>45</sup> "No retiring academician," one observer noted in 1955, "he has a polished savoir faire to go with his scholarship and is the No. 1 salesman of his own services."<sup>46</sup> Called "one of the great mass psychoanalysts of our era," "the Freud of Madison Avenue," and "the most prominent retailer of Freud going today," Dichter was, one contemporary remarked, "probably the best salesman for his ideas."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Randall Rothenberg, quoted in obit; Leonard Russ, "Dean of the Motivational Researchers" NYT 9/18/77. sect. 22 p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Bill Miksch, "Inside Dr. Dichter" Sponsor 8/3/57, pp. 33-36, 57-9.

<sup>46</sup> "Inside the Consumer: The New Debate: Does He Know His Own Mind?" Newsweek 46 (10/10/55): 89-93.

<sup>47</sup> try these for sources: Miksch, pp. 33-35 and 58; for another description of him, see "The Talk of the Town: Meaningful Patterns" New Yorker 37 (1/3/59): 17-19; Robert H. Boyle, "Not-SO-Mad-Doctor and His Living Lab," Sports Illustrated, 15 (7/24/61); Austria Kultur article.

Practitioners of M.R., including Dichter, claimed that they were using qualitative, psychological techniques in a scientific way to enable the advertisers to understand their audience so they could increase their sales.<sup>48</sup> In some ways, what they were doing was hardly new. Throughout the twentieth century, but especially since the 1920s, market researchers and public relations experts, pointing to the gap between professed and real motivations, had emphasized the importance of the non-rational in human behavior.<sup>49</sup> From the 1930s to the early 1950s, however, quantitative and sociological approaches held sway among market researchers. Not until the early 1950s, when they began to ask not only what people bought but why they bought it did attention shift from what went on at the point of sale to what was happening in the consumer's mind over a longer period of time.

What made M.R.'s impact in the 1950s different from earlier appropriations of psychology was a combination of its claim to be scientific, its promise of revealing hidden well-springs of consumer behavior, its use of a wide range of techniques, and its ability to capture a significant if still limited share of

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<sup>48</sup> This discussion of Dichter's method relies on ## ED, "Toward an Understanding of Human Behavior," in Motivation and Market Behavior, ed. Robert Ferber and Hugh G. Wales (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Unwin, 1958), pp. 21-31; ## ED, The Strategy of Desire (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1960), pp. 61-84 and 283-88; XX [ED], "The Psychology of Bread: A Psychological Study of the Appeals and Motives at Work in Bread Advertising and Merchandising," memorandum prepared by Research Department at J. Stirling Getchell, Inc. [1940], EDP home; ## ED, "Psychology in Market Research," Harvard Business Review 25 (Summer 1947): 432-43.

<sup>49</sup> Tedlow says MR {?} goes back to 1920s--his DAB article on Henry C. Link. idea of non-rational technique is not new. Bernays also methods

expenditures on market research. Different versions of M.R. competed for attention but Dichter's style was distinctive. Much more so than his competitors, Dichter was capable of packaging himself by using controversial, speculative, and Freudian remarks to capture the attention of image-hungry audiences. For example, Dichter argued that what shaped people's charitable giving originated in the sense of power they had felt as children when they learned they could please or displease their mothers by holding in or giving up a bowel movement. It was observations like this, Fortune reported, that sounded like "tommyrot" to many business executives, though many of those who used his services "readily admit that his insights into marketing problems are frequently brilliant, and just one of his ideas (he tosses them off by the score) may make a client very happy."<sup>50</sup>

Although he used a number of methods, including psychodrama and anthropology, central to Dichter's deployment of M.R. was the reliance on intensive, open-ended, in-depth interviews that often lasted several hours and that relied on free association and projective techniques. With what he called depth psychology, he wrote in 1958, the interviewer developed "the closest kind of rapport" by "giving the respondent an opportunity to talk about himself, listening sympathetically, and encouraging further self-exploration." In addition, Dichter used projective techniques such as "a deliberately vague story," as a way, he wrote, of "inducing the respondent to talk about herself in a disguised form." Afterwards, staff members analyzed the material gathered

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<sup>50</sup> Stryker, "Motivation Research," p. 225.

with these techniques in order to determine "the meaning of the consumer's behavior." What such studies revealed was "the existence of unconscious motivations and their basically dynamic and complex nature."<sup>51</sup> In order to understand the underlying meaning consumer goods and experiences had for a person, Dichter kept on the look out for hidden, irrational, and often sexualized reasons for consumers' behavior, especially those that could be explained in terms of formative (but not necessarily childhood) experiences.<sup>52</sup>

A typical example of his use of depth psychology will illustrate the kind of work Dichter did. In The Psychology of Everyday Living (1947) Dichter set out to bring the observations he had made for corporate clients to the reading public, in the process transforming market research into a guide for practical living. Drawing on his early work, he explored what soap, "this insignificant bit of lye and potash," meant to people. Since the product's only real function was "to dissolve grime and thus help to wash dirt off our faces and bodies," it was clear to Dichter that "an apparently meaningless habit which we pursue day after day may express some vital submerged impulse that we thought we had suppressed or overcome." Dichter's interviews revealed that people cherished soap for a number of reasons. Watching

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<sup>51</sup> ## ED, "Toward an Understanding," pp. 28-29.

<sup>52</sup> For assessments of Dichter's work, and M.R. more generally, see ## William Leiss, Stephen Kline, and Sut Jhally, Social Communication in Advertising: Persons, Products and Images of Well-Being (2nd, revised and enlarged ed.; Nelson Canada: Scarborough, Ontario, 1990), pp. 143-44; ## Stephen Fox, The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators (N.Y.: William Morrow and Co., 1984), 183-87.

respondents handle soap, he noticed that the first thing they did was slide their fingers over its surface, something that convinced him that people used the product because it was pleasurable to touch, with its smoothness giving them a sense of intimacy or connectedness with the world. People liked other things about soap: its heaviness convinced them they were getting their money's worth; its whiteness reminded them of purity; and its elemental quality, like that of bread, recalled for them the fact that for their ancestors it was one of life's basic commodities. Dichter noticed another reason people liked soap. "Even people who are not wealthy," remarked one respondent, "have to get a feeling of luxury once in a while, even if it's only from a cake of soap."

Also central to soap's power were the feelings bathing evoked. One woman told Dichter that when she was in the tub she did not have to "buy a steak, or scrub the floor, or mind the children." Thus the bath released people from the cares of the day and gave permission to "take stock of ourselves, to examine our bodies in the strong light over the bathroom mirror, or just to daydream." One "dignified matron" gave ample testimony to how bathing enabled people to restore their sense of what it meant to be a child and to allow their imagination free rein. "I lie on my stomach," she reported, "and play like a child. I blow bubbles and I drape my knees over the side of the tub and I sing. I have a wonderful time and like to move up and down and make waves." Moreover, baths, which often marked the beginning or ending of a day, provided, according to Dichter, "the deep

gratification of figuratively getting rid of the past and being able to start again with renewed hope."

At the end of his long discussion of the benefits of soap, Dichter made clear that just as he helped the makers of Ivory increase its sales, so his insights could help consumers increase their pleasures. "There is really nothing wrong about pinning your hope of beauty and success on a bit of tallow and potash," he reminded his readers. But he also cautioned them not to chase after the false gods promised in "romantic advertisements or the glamorous radio programs." Only disappointment will come if you hanker after "promised miracles," Dichter warned, "but if you think of body care and cleanliness as important aspects of self-appreciation and security, some of your fond expectations may be fulfilled. Even a simple cake of soap may offer you unexpected satisfaction if you think of it not as a sober or boring necessity but rather as an opportunity for self-expression. Be a 'grown-up' child and get a thrill out of the little things of everyday living."<sup>53</sup>

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Dichter portrayed himself as a Freudian more for purposes of achieving "notoriety and success," as he later put it, than because he was in any strict sense a Freudian.<sup>54</sup> His reinvention of himself between 1938 and 1940 had earned Dichter a reputation as someone who used Freudian and sexual references in suggestive and dramatic ways. To be sure, central to his approach was the notion that

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<sup>53</sup> ## ED, Everyday Living, pp. 113-28.

<sup>54</sup> I believe this quote is from my interview

unstructured interviews would reveal the importance of the unconscious and the sexual. Moreover, he freely tossed around words that were familiar to, but not the exclusive possession of Freudians: neurosis, death wish, aggression, guilt, repression, subconscious, inhibitions, libido, and reality principle.<sup>55</sup> Yet central elements of Freudianism were often missing from his approach, especially the primacy of early childhood sexual experiences, the titanic conflict between parents and children, the tragic dimension of people's relation with their past, and the haunting sense of a culture's struggle between Eros and Thanatos. Indeed his work reminds us of how American interpreters of Freud turned a pessimistic vision that concentrated on the darker implications of sexuality into an optimistic ideology that equated sexuality with liberation.

Moreover, if ever there was an American who conflated consumption and therapy, it was Dichter. To complement and, more importantly, to compete with market researchers who relied on statistics and surveys, Dichter claimed that his approach was scientific by pointing to his use of hypotheses, diagnosis, and validation. Above all, his claims to be a scientist rested on his assertion that he was a therapist, a scientist who diagnosed problems and promoted health in individuals and society, to say nothing of what he did for the balance sheets of his clients.

In his mind, his interviews not only helped advertisers in their quest to sell merchandise but consumers in their search for

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<sup>55</sup> See, for example, 1947 book, pp. 35, 50, 83, 238; leather study, 1956; libido, 1957; strategy, 94, 128, 209.

self-understanding. The transcripts of early interviews carried out for corporate clients make it clear how easily Dichter shifted from therapist to market researcher.<sup>56</sup> Under ideal circumstances, he asserted, an advertisement based on M.R. would produce the "aha" experience, which Dichter described as "a realignment, a sudden clicking, of your emotional or thinking apparatus," not unlike the insight a patient might suddenly realize.<sup>57</sup> Often comparing his approach with that of a psychoanalyst, Dichter discussed how depth interviews "succeeded in bringing about an understanding in the respondent which permitted him, and us, to perceive the true reasons, the basic motivations for his actions."<sup>58</sup> It was easy to jump from this statement to the conclusion that consumer goods, properly marketed, could help people grow in self-awareness and self-esteem. Thus in 1947, Dichter spoke of how cosmetics helped women "get rid of an awareness of personal inferiority, real or imagined" by providing what he called "a form of psychological therapy." As people emerge from infancy, Dichter wrote, they may strive "to return, once again, to the infant's perfect satisfaction with himself." What the skillful advertiser did was help "people to build their own attainable ideal or wishful self-portrait," presenting, as Dichter saw it in a quote that elided a

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<sup>56</sup> See, for example, ## [ED] "The Car---`Seven League Boots'" c. 1942, EDPHome.

<sup>57</sup> ## ED, Getting Motivated, p. 179.

<sup>58</sup> ## ED, "Psychology in Market Research," p. 441. For examples of the therapeutic role, ## [ED], "The Psychology of Car Buying: A Psychological Study Undertaken to Answer Two Vital Questions About Car Buying," prepared by the Research Department, J. Stirling Getchell, January 1940, EDP home, p. 6A.

product with its therapeutic value, "step by step, the positive aid which his product can provide."<sup>59</sup>

Dichter's claims for the therapeutic power of mass communications and consumption went well beyond this emphasis on fostering self-understanding. Indeed, he also saw himself as a therapist helping a nation to come to terms with its fears. As early as 1946, reacting to what he saw as the sickness that produced Naziism and also fearing threats to American democracy, Dichter saw himself as someone who offered mass therapy to a sick nation.<sup>60</sup> Dichter pointed to two programs where he had tried to work his magic. One concerned American fears of the Atomic Bomb. Here he confronted, a reporter remarked in 1946, "a great need to sound out people's fears and misconceptions on the subject and then set them straight." The CBS show "Operations Crossroads," for which he did research, thus taught Americans to respond to the Bomb not by escaping but by looking for "logical explanations." Secondly, Dichter demonstrated that soap operas, by dramatizing "the original weakness in the marriage" rather than letting "a devastating blonde" break it up, would help a married couple work out their own problems and save their marriage."<sup>61</sup>

At the core of Dichter's 1947 The Psychology of Everyday Living lay this notion of the market researcher as therapist to a

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<sup>59</sup> ## ED, Everyday Living, 142-45.

<sup>60</sup> ED, "Radio and Television Audience Research," in Radio Research, ed. Paul Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton, 1946, p. 380.  
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<sup>61</sup> ## Saul Pett, "Radio Ringside," press release from International News Service, June 6, [1946], EDPhome.

troubled society. Shortly after the end of World War II, he spelled out the challenge. Too many people, he argued, were choosing "entertainment, escape, and diversions instead" of democratic citizenship. His interviews revealed that underneath patina of postwar confidence, Americans were frustrated, driven by feelings of "impotence, chaos, and futility." Shrinking from civic responsibility and envisioning the government in Washington as "an invisible, intangible, but immense power" encouraged "repressed feeling of guilt" that might in turn lead to aggression.

The studies of market researchers and social scientists pointed the way out of this impasse. Previous efforts had focused on appeals to "glorified ideals," not "the practical and intelligent application of psychological principles." So Dichter called for devising "'selling' techniques" as a part of a larger strategy of "social engineering" which would "impel people to live democratically." To foster democratic, cooperative, and tolerant behavior, specialists in mass communication could devise "very specific concrete tasks which each individual can accomplish" and that could enable them to overcome "illogical thought processes that cause group antagonisms" and "psychological effects of demagogic propaganda." The solution relied on a therapeutic model. Let the citizen know, Dichter proposed, "that we understand why he has not made full use of his opportunity to participate in democratic controls. We must explain how difficult the task really is, and how natural it is for him to be afraid." Use the methods of mass communication, he

advised, to "take our citizen by the hand and demonstrate to him, through experience, that the building of real democracy can be achieved, that we are on the march. Each citizen can express himself, help to guide community policies, and practice democracy in his own home and neighborhood." This use of mass culture for democratic purposes, far from undermining its profitability, will increase "the entertainment values of radio, moving pictures, and other means of communication." Dichter compared the challenge of healing a society to the situation the therapist faced when treating a child who feared the dark. By helping the child understand the beauty of dark and the citizen the beauty of democracy, professionals could aid them in mastering their fears.<sup>62</sup>

As he articulated a role for himself as social engineer cum therapist, Dichter demonstrated how easily he shifted from one task to another. He continually conflated consumer culture and therapeutic well-being, mass communications and democratic culture, market research and social criticism. He yearned for a role for himself as social philosopher, a goal that would elude him for the rest of his life, if audience interest is any indication. Yet in his emphasis on the importance of realism and achievable goals in a democracy, he connected with how other writers in the period, such as Reinhold Niebuhr, responded to the challenge European totalitarianism posed to American democracy. Having narrowly escaped Hitler's terror in 1938, within ten years Dichter feared the presence in America of frustration that might

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<sup>62</sup> ED, Everyday Living, pp. 233-39. check quotes

threaten his adopted nation. Like others who had witnessed Hitler's rise to power, Dichter worried that the worst of the mass media made a fearful people eager to surrender their freedom to an authoritarian leader. During the period of the early 1950s when McCarthyism held sway, perhaps sensing a similarity between hysterical anti-Communism and Naziism, Dichter considered returning to Europe to live.<sup>63</sup> Instead, he remained, and celebrated a democracy that was tough minded and realistic--more interested in reducing frustration by solving specific problems than in chasing after abstract and what he felt were unachievable goals.

Throughout the 1950s, Dichter's approach, and more generally M.R., had come under attack from within the market research, advertising, and business communities.<sup>64</sup> Those who favored relying on survey and statistical data attacked Dichter and M.R. for not being scientific, a line of questioning that persisted in irking him.<sup>65</sup> Dichter's approach was, his arch-rival remarked, "pseudoscience."<sup>66</sup> The disagreement was between statistically-oriented research that relied on data gathered from great numbers of consumers and studies like those Dichter carried out, which, though they often cost the same, relied on more intensive

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<sup>63</sup> this is in iv; view of Nazi lesson is in Getting Motivated, pp. 103 and 154.

<sup>64</sup> For a later appraisals, see ## Horace S. Schwerin and Henry S. Newell, Persuasion in Marketing: The Dynamics of Marketing's Great Untapped Resource. N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons, 1981, pp. 104-05; ## Leon G. Schiffman and Leslie Lazar Kanuk, Consumer Behavior, 3rd ed. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1987, get pages

<sup>65</sup> Hollander to DH, 6/23/94 in my letter file.

<sup>66</sup> ## Alfred Politz, quoted in Perrin Stryker, "'Motivation Research'" Fortune 53 (June 1956): 222.

information on markedly fewer people.<sup>67</sup> These fights represented the internecine disagreements between people competing for funding of their approaches to market research. As one competitor remarked, M.R. was "the tool of the young man of upward mobility--the guy who will cut my throat and have my job in ten years."<sup>68</sup> Skeptics raised questions about the reliability of the methods of M.R. and the exaggerated claims of its practitioners, the difficulty of ascertaining what people really felt, the problem of connecting findings drawn from interviews with what happened at the point of sale, and the trouble moving from the individual to the general.<sup>69</sup>

The arguments sometimes grew heated. At moments, the attack relied on an anti-Freudian and even nativist impetus, part of the larger story of a mostly white, Anglo-Saxon club of people in advertising who were resisting the entry of Jews and émigrés. An executive at BBDO cautioned his colleagues against relying on "outside witch doctors and head shrinkers."<sup>70</sup> Remarked another ad man, "all the Freud-happy figures assembled since Herr Doktor Dichter was knee-high to a couch cannot make the public's taste buds tingle nor its ego pant for a new car."<sup>71</sup> In the early 1950s, one critic privately articulated the grounds on which others often attacked Dichter. What Dichter discovered, wrote James V.

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<sup>67</sup> ## ED, "Psychology in Market Research," p. 443.

<sup>68</sup> ## Unidentified adman, 1953, quoted, in Fox, Mirror Makers, p. 194.

<sup>69</sup> ## See, for example, ## N.D. Rothwell, "Motivational Research Revisited," Journal of Marketing 20 (October 1955): 150-54; XX Fox, Mirror Makers, pp. 184-86.

<sup>70</sup> ## Charles Brower, quoted in Fox, Mirror Makers, p. 184.

<sup>71</sup> ## Charles Adams, quoted in Fox, Mirror Makers, p. 186.

McConnell, was often obvious. Its appeal lay in its "magic and slight of hand," something that enabled people like Dichter to appeal to top corporate managers over the heads of those really knowledgeable about advertising and sales. "Belief in magic dies slowly among the ignorant--and most of the believers in Dichter's magic are relatively ignorant in advertising" and appealed to "the dumb admiration of an audience in the face of things they do not understand." Moreover, Dichter's appeal, he argued, relied on his "tactic of being the hawker of the bathroom, bedroom, and barnyard story." He asserted that Dichter, "with the flamboyant air of science and good business," convinced executives to pay him a considerable fee "for the privilege of talking sex and bowel movements with no sense of shame -- something like an executive's lonely hearts' club."<sup>72</sup>

#### **DICHTER, SOCIAL CRITICISM, AND THE RECASTING OF AMERICAN SOCIETY**

In April of 1957, Vance Packard published Hidden Persuaders, a book that was more successful in bringing Dichter notoriety and business than it was catapulting him into the ranks of widely-read American social observers. Hidden Persuaders was an exposé of the way market researchers and advertisers used depth psychology, especially M.R., to probe the emotions of consumers so that appeals could play upon hidden and irrational desires. Acknowledging that some people called him "Mr. Mass Motivations

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<sup>72</sup> ## James V. McConnell, "A Report on Two Lectures on Motivation Research Given by Dr. Dichter--October 20-21," pp. 3, 4, 15, and 16, McConnell papers, Akron hist psych archives, box M974. Date is probably early 1950s.

Himself,'" Packard mentioned Dichter, "the most famed of these depth probers," much more frequently than his principal competitors, Louis Cheskin, Pierre Martineau, and Burleigh Gardner. Packard had two principal objections to Dichter's work. One was that his use of M.R. was undermining Americans' resistance to mass consumption, bringing in its wake commercialism, an empty abundance, and self-indulgence. Secondly, Packard worried that M.R. involved a gross invasion of privacy and provided a dangerous example of the way experts and capitalism were manipulating a largely innocent American public as they encouraged their irrational behavior. As Packard argued during a 1957 radio debate with Dichter, given his own commitment to "self-guidance and individuality," he had serious misgivings about the way "advertisers are learning to play upon these subconscious needs without our awareness."<sup>73</sup>

Although Packard's best-selling book offered a critique of M.R., it had an unintended effect. Once people involved in advertising read Hidden Persuaders, Dichter's phone rang from across the nation and some people assumed that he had paid Packard for the useful publicity.<sup>74</sup> For several years, Packard's criticism gave Dichter celebrity status, with radio, television, and speaking appearances in the U.S., as well as invitations from around the world. By the late 1950s, the Institute had 65 employees in Croton-on-Hudson. There were also small franchised offices in more than a dozen cities in the U.S. and abroad. The

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<sup>73</sup> ## VP, in transcript for NBC radio program, "Conversation," 6 May 1957, p. 13, PPPS.

<sup>74</sup> 86 iv; also in adv age, 1984.

increase in business made it possible and necessary for Dichter to move his family out of the mansion and into a home in nearby Ossining.<sup>75</sup> Two days a week, Dichter put on a business suit and travelled to Madison Avenue.<sup>76</sup>

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Dichter's operation had about \$1 million in revenues, equal to roughly \$5.2 million in 1994 dollars. He relied on a staff of about 65 (of whom 25 were social scientists), on 1500-2000 part time interviewers around the nation, and on a Consumer Panel with 1000 mostly middle and upper middle-class families who lived near Croton-on-Hudson. From the panel, he selected 12-16 people for a Living Laboratory, where they watched television in a living room setting and talked, cameras secretly recording their every response. In the late 1950s, Dichter charged his clients \$20,000-60,000 for a full-scale study. At his initial consultation, Dichter listened to the discussion of a marketing problem and then responded, speaking off top of head as he made provocative observations. If the client decided to proceed, the Institute would test his hunches by carrying out interviews with hundreds of consumers. The result was an extensive report that explored the psychological meanings people imputed to products. If the corporation wanted to go on to the next step, Dichter would work with its advertising agency to devise a campaign strategy.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> On impact of Packard's work, see Getting Motivated, pp. 82-85 and 105; for a description of his operation, Printers' Ink, 1959, p. 80; on the move to Ossing, Robert H. Boyle, "Not-S0-Mad-Doctor and His Living Lab," Sports Illustrated, 15 (7/24/61).

<sup>76</sup> Misch, 36 and 57; Printers' Ink 80.

<sup>77</sup> Printers' Ink, 1959, 80; Misch, 35; Robert H. Boyle, "Not-S0-Mad-Doctor and His Living Lab," Sports Illustrated, 15

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Hedy Dichter played a critical, supporting role. She gave up her career in music and served instead as the more active parent as well as her husband's travelling companion, sounding board, treasurer, property manager, and interior decorator.<sup>78</sup>

Shortly after Hidden Persuaders appeared, Dichter answered Packard's charges. At first, he did so in his Institute's monthly publication, responding that persuasion was a normal part of life, with the psychological seduction of children, which Packard had blamed on M.R., being "a natural process which starts on the very first day of the child's life" with the child's dependence on the mother.<sup>79</sup> However, Dichter was not satisfied with defending himself only to his clients. Yearning to realize his desire to become accepted as a social philosopher, and to defend M.R. from its detractors, he was soon at work on a more ambitious response geared to a larger audience, one that answered Packard's Hidden Persuaders and Galbraith's Affluent Society (1958). Already with the publication of The Psychology of Everyday Living ten years before the appearance of Packard's book in 1957, Dichter had begun to articulate his social ideology in broad terms. Now, in Strategy of Desire (1960), he brought together much of his previous work and provided the most ambitious, if still unsystematized, synthesis of his outlook. Here Dichter moved more

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(7/24/61); "Inside the Consumer: The New Debate: Does He Know His Own Mind?" Newsweek 46 (10/10/55): 89-93.

<sup>78</sup> "Encounter: Ernest Dichter," Austria Kultur 3 (March/April, 1993): 6; Miksch, pp. 36 and 57..

<sup>79</sup> ## ED, "Persuasion: To What End?" Motivations 2 (June 1957): 15-16.

fully than he had done before to translate the findings of market research into social philosophy. In the process he articulated how he hoped to recast of American society in postwar period.

Before proceeding with an analysis of Dichter's vision of postwar America, it is important to discuss some issues that use of the sources raises. Dichter's analysis drew on tens of thousands of interviews, some of them as long as three hours. At some point, probably around 1970, Dichter discarded what would have been an unparalleled trove of historical material on postwar America. As it is, what remains in the Institute's published and unpublished reports are some quotes from the interviews and the much more extensive interpretations by Dichter and his colleagues. It is certainly possible to mine the material as evidence of major changes in American social life in the postwar period. This approach would help us chart changes in the aspirations of American middle-class consumers, women especially. This current study, however, takes another tact, focusing as it does on Dichter's and the Institute's construction of reality and not on the social conditions and changes that undergirded that construction. It is possible to make such a distinction for several reasons but most importantly because there was often a gap between what the data Dichter collected said and what he said, making it clear that he was doing more interpretation than reporting.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> For just one example of the way Dichter drew highly charged conclusion from material that could be interpreted in other ways, see ## [ED], "Psychology of Car Buying," p. 82.

With Strategy of Desire, Dichter sought to prevent the U.S. from suffering the consequences of the Naziism that he had emigrated to escape, at the same time that he helped his adopted nation fight Soviet Communism. He located the origins of German National Socialism in the effort to provide security by creating "strict boundaries around one racial or national group."<sup>81</sup> In America's case, he worried that people achieved security through those mass media, such as soap operas, "TV fairy tales, and tabloid newspapers," that perpetuated "mental laziness, stereotyped reactions, and stock responses," something that might place the nation on the road to a "blind acceptance of Fascist or Communist ideology."<sup>82</sup> To social scientists, including motivational researchers, fell the task of devising the means to prevent public from oversimplifying issues "in a socially dangerous way," something that would foster individual independence and help people overcome their fear of reality.<sup>83</sup> What was involved in this process was an anti-utopian tendency that came from Dichter's assumption that totalitarian governments, to prevent people from coming to terms with reality, encouraged a search for unrealizable goals. To counter the possibility of the emergence in America of what he had witnessed in Austria and drawing on Freud's notion of the Reality Principle, Dichter reiterated his call for a focus on specific,

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<sup>81</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 201.

<sup>82</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 192.

<sup>83</sup> ED, Strategy, p.204.

achievable goals that would help people reduce the frustration they faced when encountering change.<sup>84</sup>

If Naziism was the threat of the past, Soviet Communism was that of the present. Like other Cold Warriors, Dichter wanted to shift the competition with the Soviet Union from the military to the battlefield of ideologies, values, and economics.<sup>85</sup> M.R., he asserted, would help in this critical struggle. "If modern democracy is based on the ability of its citizens to make intelligent decisions," he remarked, "then it is one of the basic dilemmas of modern democracy that so many of us still reject our own power and importance in changing the destiny of the world." And then he added in the next sentence, "among the declarations of faith in the future is the act of buying." Because "our economy would literally collapse overnight" without a continuing high level of consumption, the front line "defenders of a positive outlook on life, the real salesmen of prosperity, and therefore of democracy, are the individuals who defend the right to buy" a new possession. In selling us a new car, the salesperson was purveying "a positive philosophy of life."<sup>86</sup> Thus in Dichter's hands, the fight between free enterprise and communism was one in which Americans had to prove they controlled their destiny by consuming. Like George Katona, Dichter acknowledged that the American economy relied on what he called "psychological surplus." Consequently, making an purchase was proof "that we are not living in a world controlled by

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<sup>84</sup> ED, Strategy, pp. 207 and 209.

<sup>85</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 26.

<sup>86</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 169.

dialectical materialism but in a world built on individual initiative."<sup>87</sup>

In this epic struggle, what was needed was the social engineering he had envisioned earlier, a strategy that employed consumer goods as a therapeutic aid in producing a flourishing society. In his mind, the social scientist as social engineer carried out "all the therapeutic jobs which must be done to insure the smooth operation of the democratic structure."<sup>88</sup> They could best achieve this by devising marketing strategies which would "assure the development of a positive attitude on which prosperity is based."<sup>89</sup> At its core, this strategy involved getting people to associate buying with creativity and growth. To Dichter, consuming involved acceptance of what goods did for people psychologically, giving them "the power to express" their "innermost desires by a specific type of merchandise."<sup>90</sup> For example, he wrote that his interviewing revealed that when a man purchased life insurance, he was moving from childlike self-love to an adult love that involved giving. "By permitting the man to experience this growth," he wrote, "life insurance becomes a touchstone of emotional maturity and adult love."<sup>91</sup>

The market researcher served as a therapist who helped people get over their guilt, find pleasure in consumption, and resolve the tensions of their lives. Creative discontent stood in opposition to the status quo, which he identified with "wanting

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<sup>87</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 169.

<sup>88</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 59.

<sup>89</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 170.

<sup>90</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 170.

<sup>91</sup> ED, Strategy, pp. 216-17.

to return to the womb, to hide, to be fatalistic."<sup>92</sup> At moments, Dichter was positively lyrical about the way people grew psychologically as they gained an increasing intimacy with objects. "Every new acquisition represents an enrichment of our personality. . . . What takes place in a few minutes when the new purchase is unwrapped and put to use for the first time, has psychological consequences which last for the rest of our lives."<sup>93</sup> For him, personal growth involved, as he wrote about the pleasures of cigarette smoking, "an ever increasing variety of objects we come in contact with and an ever increasing intimacy with these objects."<sup>94</sup> Things that "surround us," he noted using the example of how boat ownership enhanced a man's sense of power, "permit us to discover more and more aspects of ourselves."<sup>95</sup> Consumption motivated people to achieve their goals, a process enhanced when an advertisement "established a bridge" between a product and the reader, coming "as close as possible to motivating the reader or listener to acquire this experience via the product."<sup>96</sup> Thus Dichter understood perfectly what Marxists called the fetishism of objects. "We want to know," he wrote, "how we can read into, understand, and interpret the human quality that exists in a piece of furniture. All objects which surround us have souls of their own."<sup>97</sup> Where Dichter differed from Marxists, however, was that for him the fetishism of an

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<sup>92</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 21.

<sup>93</sup> ED, Strategy, pp. 171-72.

<sup>94</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 90.

<sup>95</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 91.

<sup>96</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 92.

<sup>97</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 93.

object was laudable, something that the M.R. practitioner could encourage. Thus he fully celebrated the fact that the automobile was not only a means of transportation but also a symbol of prestige, prosperity, luxury and, for some, "part of one's woman-hunting equipment."<sup>98</sup> When buying a car, he wrote, people "actually buy an extension of their own personality."<sup>99</sup>

Central to Dichter's effort to promote the strategy of desire was the assertion of a link between the material and spiritual components of goods, something that enabled him to launch an attack on moralistic and puritanical skeptics of consumer culture such as Packard and Galbraith. As early as 1939, in a study of breakfast cereals when he was still with Getchell, Dichter lamented the hold of "the Puritan period on American life." People needed "moral permission," he wrote in a study of breakfast cereals, to take pleasure from consumer products.<sup>100</sup> As early as 1953, he attacked social scientists for despising "soap operas, comic strips and popular magazines without analyzing the reason for their success."<sup>101</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, Dichter continued to associate moralistic attacks on consumption with a puritanical Christianity. Like sex, consumption was seen, he wrote in Strategy of Desire, "as an animalistic, undesirable, dirty emotional business that one has to live with but that

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<sup>98</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 128.

<sup>99</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 86.

<sup>100</sup> ## [ED], "The Psychology of Breakfast Cereals," memorandum prepared by Research Department at J. Stirling Getchell, Inc. [1939 or 1940], EDP home, pp. 4-5.

<sup>101</sup> ## ED, quoted in James J. Nagel, "Social Scientists Hit on Aloofness," NYT 19 March 1953, p. 45.

should be controlled as much as possible."<sup>102</sup> Drawing on interviews the Institute conducted, he concluded that Americans worried too much about the burdens of the good life, in large measure because of the puritanical tradition that equated consumption with sin. Americans, he felt, believed that "we do not deserve the good life that we have."<sup>103</sup> He questioned the wisdom of social critics who thought America was losing to the Russians because "we were paying too much attention to the good life, to thick rugs and the new leisure, instead of attending to hard work and tough education."<sup>104</sup>

The solution, Dichter argued, was to become less guilty and therefore to enjoy life more. He called on Americans to develop a "morality concept," one based not on the defense of self-indulgence, but of the "idea that the basic goal of life is human dignity, the ability to achieve self-realization through leisure and control of technical difficulties of the world which surrounds us."<sup>105</sup> In the fight with the USSR, the "real test of the political and economic success of the American way of life is whether it does provide this feeling of growth, self-realization and achievement."<sup>106</sup> When recessions threatened American optimism and commitment to a growing GNP, Dichter called for persistence in the pursuit of an American dream defined by an overflowing cornucopia. In 1958, he told sales and advertising executives that recessions were largely psychological in origin, due in good

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<sup>102</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 122.

<sup>103</sup> I think p. 19

<sup>104</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 253.

<sup>105</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 255.

<sup>106</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 273.

measure to people who were "frightened by continued prosperity." So he offered the business community ways to give the consumer "moral permission" to purchase product that represented the "good life."<sup>107</sup>

In this and other contexts, the M.R. practitioner's role was to liberate people's desires and show them how to achieve spiritual ends through material means.<sup>108</sup> By attacking the old puritanism, Dichter hoped to provide a basis for what he called appreciatively the new hedonism, "the morality of the good life."<sup>109</sup> To overcome this sense of guilt and immorality, he argued, Americans had to accept pleasure as moral by seeing that objects led to idealistic ends, an understanding that M.R. people could foster. "If the desire for freedom and discovery can be expressed through the glamor of a new convertible," he remarked, "I willingly accept responsibility for combining two strong human desires for the benefit of the car advertiser--and ultimately for the benefit of both the national economy and the creative happiness of the individual."<sup>110</sup>

As had been true with Katona, Dichter placed great emphasis on new patterns of consumption among the middle class. It was these people whom the M.R. practitioner could help convince to associate self-realization with consumer goods and experiences. From the beginning of World War II, he argued, both the upper and lower classes had "become severely restricted in size." The

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<sup>107</sup> ## ED, quoted in Carl Spielvogel, "Advertising: Recession?" NYT 19 March 1958, sect. C, p. 43.

<sup>108</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 258.

<sup>109</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 263.

<sup>110</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 16.

middle class had grown with additions from above and below but especially from the inclusion of "craftsmen, skilled and even unskilled laborers." Consequently, Dichter believed "that the middle class in this country is taking over and engulfing all other classes."<sup>111</sup> Because those new to middle-class status had no prior experience with "traditions which are symbolized by such products as sterling silver, furs, good furniture," market researchers had to devise strategies to make clear to them the importance of middle-class patterns of consumption. While people who had middle-class affiliation before the war learned how to buy from relatives and friends, those newly arrived learned from advertisements.<sup>112</sup> Consequently, Dichter advised advertisers how to market "Haviland china, fine table linen, Georgian tea sets, crystal glassware, or products such as Chippendale furniture or home organs" to the wives of a plumbers whose fathers were day laborers and therefore lacked the "background which would enable them to judge style, quality or artistic work and buy with competence." The answer Dichter offered was to emphasize their functional qualities rather than their prestige, to stress the tradition their children would inherit rather than the tradition that their parents lacked, and to offer the product not as a symbol of "achievement and reward" rather than as "a static way of life."<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 179.

<sup>112</sup> ED, Strategy, pp. 179-82.

<sup>113</sup>## "Does Your Prestige Stop Sales?" Motivations 1 (February 1957), pp. 1-2.

With Strategy of Desire Dichter identified another change in patterns of middle-class consumption, one that would stand at the center of his work for more than a decade: the inconspicuous consumption of what he called the "inner Jones." These people, who wanted their neighbors to guess about their social status rather than displaying "it too openly," decided that the new way to buy status was "to resort to individuality and to be different."<sup>114</sup> The switch from the outer Jones to the inner one meant a change in emphasis from success to happiness.<sup>115</sup> The market researcher had a critical role to play in this shift. If people made purchases to impress others, then the objects possessed them. If, on the other hand, he wrote, "you, however, only choose those tangible things that permit you to express yourself, in a wider way, providing you with self-realization, then the object in being mastered by you." In the end, Dichter believed that M.R.'s true role "should be one where only those goals and objects are being praised that permit new discoveries, new experiences, self-realization."<sup>116</sup>

With Strategy of Desire, Dichter defended himself against his critics and defied his antipathy to lofty goals as he made extravagant claims for the power of his version of M.R. to reshape society. Though in Vienna Dichter had learned from Charlotte Bühler the importance of self-realization, not until he had to defend himself and M.R. against Packard, did Dichter begin

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<sup>114</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 88. You should see Elizabeth Long book on this change, was Dichter early or late?

<sup>115</sup> ED, Strategy, p. 178.

<sup>116</sup> ED, Strategy, pp. 109-10.

to link the spiritual and the material. In the process, from the early 1960s on he came increasingly to emphasize the importance of self-fulfillment, creative discontent, and self-discovery, almost always in connection with the consumption of new goods and services. Here he fully discharged the émigré's gratitude to his adopted land. Dichter was not just earning a living by promoting both his services and specific products. He was also participating in the reconstruction of American society in the postwar world. In the process of making specific recommendations, he was also celebrating the broadening of the middle class in a way that minimized the importance to America of those beyond the pale, defining the American dream in opposition to what he saw as the Soviet nightmare, and linking the consumption of goods with psychological well being.

#### **WOMEN AND THE CULTURE OF CONSUMPTION**

If Vance Packard in Hidden Persuaders had attacked Dichter for the way his work promoted commercialism and undermined autonomy, Betty Friedan in Feminine Mystique (1963) accused him of being "this most helpful of hidden persuaders" who played a key role in linking the purchase of things with the way the housewife achieved identity, creativity, and sexual pleasure.<sup>117</sup> In the chapter of her book called "The Sexual Sell," she began her discussion of Dichter's work with his 1945 study of the marketing of household appliances. With this study, Friedan

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<sup>117</sup> Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (N.Y.: W.W. Norton and Co., 1963), p. 208.

reported, Dichter advised manufactures that the most promising market they should exploit was not among career women or committed housewives but among what he called "The Balanced Homemaker," women who worked at home but maintained outside interests, including the memory or hope for a career. These women, Friedan reported Dichter as saying, could be convinced to treat homemaking as a career as advertisers persuaded them to gain a sense of achievement and creativity from cleaning, cooking, and child care. By the mid-1950s, Friedan argued, Dichter's surveys "reported with pleasure" the disappearance of the career woman. Market research could now concentrate, she reported, on encouraging the housewife to find "in housework a medium of expression for her femininity and individuality" by associating creativity with consumer products.<sup>118</sup> Friedan had most the basic elements of the story right but the chronology and some elements wrong. The pressure for women to associate consumption with creativity, which she tended to see as a postwar phenomenon, had been going on for a long time.

It is impossible to understand Dichter's vision of the role of women in a consumer society without recognizing the larger intellectual context in which he worked. If Dichter's relationship with those who hired him necessitated that he pay minimal attention to race and class, the opposite was the case with gender. With women as the purchasers of a very high percentage of the kinds of goods Dichter worked to promote, they comprised a similarly high proportion of the people he

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<sup>118</sup> Friedan, Feminine Mystique, pp. 209-10 and 213.

interviewed. Moreover, men in the advertising business had traditionally seen women consumers as easily swayed by emotional appeals, a tendency that Dichter's emphasis on the irrational reinforced. [insert Marchand and McGovern here] In addition, Dichter's discussion of the relationship between his work and women's roles was inseparable from his larger vision. Central to his response to women's situation was his emphasis on consumption as therapy, his insistence on the centrality of the creative discontent of the consumer, the stress on realistic solutions to relieve frustration, and his belief that his job was to show corporations how to link pleasure with purchases in order to overcome the heritage of puritanical self-restraint.

At least six years before 1945, the point when Friedan began her story, Dichter worked on two studies that lay the ground work for his attempt to delimit women's roles in the postwar world. Thus in his work on Plymouth automobiles, undertaken in 1939 Dichter identified women as "psychologically the representation of the MORAL CONSCIENCE" whose "INHIBITION to 'SINFUL EXTRAVAGANCE'" had to be removed by "MORAL PERMISSION."<sup>119</sup> An examination of Dichter's first study of women and housework, done in 1940, makes clear that before World War II he was already developing the ideas that dominated his work in the postwar period. In a report done for a household products company, Dichter argued that since housework was "filled with

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<sup>119</sup> ## [ED], "The Psychology of Car Buying: A Psychological Study Undertaken to Answer Two Vital Questions About Car Buying," prepared by the Research Department, J. Stirling Getchell, January 1940, EDP home, p. 82.

gratifications," women's dislike of it had to be due "to some outside influence because it cannot possibly be as unpleasant as most women claim." The answer, he found, was that such work lacked "social approval and appreciation," especially in contrast with professional work, which had a great degree of social approbation, even though housework "may actually have as many, or more gratifications as professional work in providing women with a feeling of responsibility, organization, and control." The solution to the problem he identified was obvious: use advertisements "to give housework Dignity and Social Approval" by emphasizing the efficiency, responsibility and creativity involved.<sup>120</sup>

If Friedan did not recognize the pre-1945 origins of Dichter's vision, she nonetheless correctly realized that it was Dichter's 1945 study of home appliances that set the stage for his postwar reconstruction of American womanhood. Here Dichter, relying on interviews, developed his classification of three types of women that would dominate his analysis of the female market for at least the next decade and one half. The first group were "Career Woman." Even though many of them never had careers, they believed "they would be happier if they were not 'imprisoned' in their homes." This group did their housework "only under protest and felt . . . they are wasting their energies." Consequently, their expectations for products were "usually unreasonable and unrealistic," in good measure because

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<sup>120</sup> ## [ED], "The Psychology of Household Tavern Products," report prepared by the Research Department of J. Stirling Getchell, Inc., August 1940, pp. 9 and 11.

they had "no vital, personal relationships" to what they purchased. Although Dichter did not wish to pursue "the neurotic basis" of their rejection of the role of homemaker, he made it clear that because their attitudes were not "very healthy," they were not "the ideal type of consumer."<sup>121</sup> The "Pure Housewife" was also apt to be too critical of products, but for a different reason. "Because her housewife role is her whole life," Dichter's report noted, "she has to prove to herself and others that she is absolutely indispensable and that nobody else could take over her job." As a consequence, she tended to be too fearful and critical in her response to appliances, nostalgically preferring the familiar ways.<sup>122</sup>

Finally, there was the "Balanced Woman," Dichter's favorite, whom he described as the most fulfilled emotionally and "a mature and responsible member of society." This type of woman, Dichter wrote, "combines the desire to compete with other women in jobs with a keen interest in an individual and well cared for home managed by herself." What made this type appealing to Dichter was her "feeling of confidence which comes with knowing that she is capable" of both housework and career. For some, career might be in the past or future; for others, the outside interest involved being a student or volunteer, activities that "broaden the basis of the woman's life and give her the feeling of satisfaction." Dichter predicted that over the coming years this group would

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<sup>121</sup> ## ED, "Electrical Appliances in the Postwar World: A Psychological Study of Women's Attitudes," report for Crowell Collier Publishing Corp., [1945], EDP home, pp. 4-5

<sup>122</sup> ## ED, "Electrical Appliances," pp. 6-7.

become more common, principally because two world wars and a depression had convinced Americans that women "are not economically safe if they are not able to perform some type of work in addition to being a housewife." Still, even though this balanced type derived pleasure from activities outside the home, she placed considerable emphasis on the home as "an end in itself . . . a center to which to return from the city's adventures and activities . . . a cozy shelter from an indifferent outside world."<sup>123</sup>

If Friedan did not realize that before 1940 Dichter had developed a framework that would help reshape women's lives in the post war world, she cogently told how Dichter worked to squelch women's independence, and how he set out to manipulate women's desires in order to increase sales. She also well understood how he used the language of science and professionalism to give women the illusion of achievement, how he promoted labor-saving methods that did little to relieve drudgery, and how he played on women's guilt over not being more perfect housekeepers.<sup>124</sup> She understood that by the mid-1950s Dichter had stopped interviewing the career woman in order to focus on the Balanced and Pure types and that she linked creativity with housework.<sup>125</sup> By 1956, Dichter had come to historicize the typology in a way that made the Pure and Career woman a relic of the past, people who had dominated,

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<sup>123</sup> ## ED, "Electrical Appliances," pp. 7-10 and 16.

<sup>124</sup> ## Friedan, Feminine Mystique, pp. 206-32.

<sup>125</sup> For some changes he made in his estimates and descriptions by 1947, see ## ED, Everyday Life, pp. 152-57.

respectively, before 1914 and in the 1920s and 1930s. Thus the Balanced, "the truly modern housewife," became someone who "balances within herself the positive qualities of both of her predecessors" who were in the process of "being supplanted." The feeling of creativity that he advised advertisers to inspire in the modern housewife to whom appeals could be made on basis of creativity would permit "her to use at home all the faculties that she would display in an outside career."<sup>126</sup>

Two years later, other shifts were apparent. Dichter no longer described the Pure housewife as unrealistic; rather, he emphasized her desire not to compete in world and rather to achieve gratifications from "creative outlets in domestic interests." Though Friedan asserted that Dichter made the career woman disappear,<sup>127</sup> in fact his description of the career woman was harsher, with him seeing her as often "absorbed" in "competing with and vanquishing men on their own battlefield." Other unhealthy impulses often drove these women -- feelings of "inferiority" that stemmed from their sense that they were "unable to fill the role of wife, mother, parent, housekeeper." Finally, what drove these women was a sense of "sexual inferiority in relation to men and a desire to imitate and emulate what they subconsciously consider the superior and more privileged sex."

In contrast, Dichter now pictured the Balanced type in even more favorable light. As Friedan well understood, he celebrated

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<sup>126</sup> ## "Today's Woman as a Consumer," Motivations, 1 (September 1956): 1-3.

<sup>127</sup> ## Friedan, Feminine Mystique, p. 213.

"a new glorification of intelligent motherhood, an increasing interest in child care, a renewed status for the culinary arts, a stress upon the importance of being a warm, stimulating, encouraging, reassuring mother and wife." This was convincing evidence of Friedan's accusation. Yet though Friedan believed Dichter had come to eliminate outside work from his vision of them, in fact he noted that women in this category often worked full or part time and yet ran the house efficiently, "gaining genuine gratification from both areas of expression." Part of "the continuing emancipation of women and acceptance of women in all areas of life," he mentioned their assumption of "formerly sacrosanct male roles" in industry and politics that had begun in World War II.<sup>128</sup> Here as elsewhere, Friedan failed to understand the extent to which key formulators of American middle-class culture in the 1950s did acknowledge how world War II had irreversibly increased the participation of women in the work force.<sup>129</sup>

It was this analysis of the types of housewives that provided the basis of Dichter's advice to corporations on how to take advantage of his findings. Because it was the wave of the future, manufacturers should target the balanced type, "educating women to have outside interests and better themselves intellectually," with the time for such interests made available

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<sup>128</sup> ## "Typology: The Classification Of Consumers By Psychological Types As A Tool For Advertising and Merchandising," Motivations, 3 (September 1958): 32-33. In this case and others, what appeared unsigned in Motivations was "Prepared by the staff of the Institute for Motivational Research Under the creative direction of Dr. Ernest Dichter": p. 1.

<sup>129</sup> Cite Joanne Meyerowitz.

by labor saving appliances. Secondly, products should be designed for this type of woman, so that a homemaker could lighten her household duties and, at the same time, "make her home more individual and more home-like." Women, he wrote, wanted "to have their cake and eat it too." On the one hand, they wanted to save time, eliminate dirt, and gain comfort. On the other hand, "they do not want to give up their feeling of personal achievement and pride in a well run household which 'doing it yourself' provides." This woman "finds beauty, sense and balance in housework," Dichter asserted, through "intelligent planning and organization."<sup>130</sup> Dichter thus told his clients "to make more and more women aware of the desirability of belonging to this group. Educate them through advertising that it is possible to have outside interests and become alert to wider intellectual influences (without becoming a Career Woman). The art of good homemaking should be the goal of every normal woman."<sup>131</sup>

Nonetheless, Friedan was correct when she argued that throughout the 1950s Dichter focused his attention on teaching American women, especially his cherished Balanced type, how to find creativity in housework. Again and again, he advised women to relieve their tensions by solving specific problems. Much of what he focused on was ways to make housework palatable to housewives. In a 1945 study of the new medium of television, he argued that to work against women's guilt for watching, it was necessary to provide programs that will help in housework and

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<sup>130</sup> ## ED, "Electrical Appliances," p. 10.

<sup>131</sup> These quotes from Dichter via Friedan; I assume you can find them in appliance study.

shopping, thus providing a "legitimate excuse for tuning in daytime programs" that did not require full concentration.<sup>132</sup> In The Psychology of Everyday Life (1947), he told women to make their housework interesting by introducing "numerous variations and surprises." He praised cooking at home as a job not to be scorned: on close examination, he argued, women "will discover that, compared with other fields requiring skill and years of training, the preparation of food is a highly respectable occupation." He advised women to use bulletin boards and filing cabinets to help make the kitchen "the center of household management." By organizing kitchen work, using modern recipes, and developing "a production plan," he told women, they would be on the road to acquiring "your kitchen degree."<sup>133</sup> As late as 1964, Dichter urged manufacturers of household products to "establish genuine communication with the housewife confronted by such genuine conflicts" as the tension between life and order by sympathizing "with her problems and feelings," emphasizing with "her kingpin role in the family," and helping "her be an expert," stressing the morality of "good family relations rather than the morality of cleanliness," and by identifying "the product as her ally, associating it with the physical and spiritual rewards she derives from the feeling of basic security provided by the home."<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> ## ED and Oscar Katz, "Studies in Teelvision," Tide 19 (1 April 1945): 110.

<sup>133</sup> ## ED, Everyday Life, pp. 18, 227, and 230-31. For later examples, see ## "The Psychology of House Cleaning Products," Motivations, 2 (May 1957): 10-13.

<sup>134</sup> ## ED, Handbook, pp. 126-27.

Nowhere was Dichter's strategy more revealing than in the study for which he became most famous, his advice that General Mills promote Bisquick as a product through which women could express their creativity. [develop this later, with more research, by getting a copy of his study; Friedan has some direct quotes]. After World War II, General Mills developed a version of Bisquick to which women had to add only water because powdered milk and eggs were included. In fact, women added eggs and milk because they could not believe a cake could be made without these ingredients. As Newsweek reported in 1955, Dichter convinced General Mills "that cooking was not just a chore to most housewives but an important symbol of their status in the family and an outlet for their creativeness."<sup>135</sup> Dichter recommended that in its advertisements General Mills emphasize that women and Bisquick would do the job together, leaving some room for the housewife's creativity.

In his efforts to shape women's identity, Dichter focused not only on housework but also on ways corporations could reshape women's images of their bodies. In this endeavor, his work on cosmetics played a central role. In 1947 he wrote that women use make-up as a "form of psychological therapy" in order "to get rid of an awareness of personal inferiority, real or imagined."<sup>136</sup> In 1949, he noted that advertisements for deodorants could help

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<sup>135</sup> ## Packard, Hidden, pp. 73-74 of pb edition; ## "Inside the Consumer: The New Debate: Does He Know his Own Mind?" Newsweek 10 October 1955, p. 92.

<sup>136</sup> ## ED, Everyday Life, p. 143.

women "consider themselves smart body technicians."<sup>137</sup> A 1956 study identified emerging notions of beauty but persisted in aiding corporations to take advantage of women's emotional insecurities. Here Dichter underscored the challenge cosmetic manufacturers faced because of the conflicts that resulted from the tension between old and new values. In place of an emphasis on "pure sex per se" was coming a stress on "fantasy, whimsy, or poetry" that involved "more subtle and passive sex symbols." Moreover, the vacuum created by the demise of "of sex as the chief meaning of beauty" meant that women wished "to gain attraction as a more complete human being." Rather than pitching cosmetics to women in "extreme emotional situations," the time when they usually purchased them, Dichter urged advertisers to play on their subconscious awareness of the "beneficent effects of cosmetics" by telling them that "taking care of their appearance will do marvels for them every day." In all these ways, it was possible to promote cosmetics as the woman's "intimate allies" in building a "favorable self-image."<sup>138</sup>

Eight years later, Dichter pursued the same line. Though acknowledging in 1964 that "the transference of a woman's vanity has been from her features to her mind," he spoke a few lines later of cosmetics as "the tangible, indispensable symbols of feminine hopes and expectations."<sup>139</sup> Given Dichter's skills and interests, it should hardly come as a surprise that he played a

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<sup>137</sup> ## ED, "A Psychological View of Advertising Effectiveness," Journal of Marketing, July 1949, p. 63.

<sup>138</sup> ## "The Five New Meanings of Beauty," Motivations, 1 (May 1956): 8-11.

<sup>139</sup> ## ED, Handbook, p. 156.

key role in the marketing of the Barbie Doll after the doll's manufacturer called on him in 1958. Dichter realized that his task was to suggest how marketing could overcome the objections mothers of pre-pubescent girls had to buying Barbie for their daughter. The solution was to counter parental resistance by demonstrating that the doll could awaken "in the child a concern with proper appearance." As Barbie's biographer has written, Dichter thus argued for a strategy to convince a mother that Barbie would make a lady "out of her raffish, unkempt, possibly boyish child." [additional material from Barbie study, I hope]<sup>140</sup>

At one moment, in a 1956 article called "Put the Libido Back into Advertising," Dichter fully demonstrated the contradictions in his view of women and sexuality. Here Dichter launched a full-scale attack on the way advertisements domesticated sexuality. He fully captured the explosive power of an unleashed instincts. "Libido is a basic life force," he remarked, "a pulsating, virulent, invisible power which is the very stuff of our inner lives." He also celebrated the force of a "healthy libidinal relationship between man and woman." At the same time, he attacked what he saw as the tendency of contemporary advertising to reflect and "grossly" exaggerate "our present national tendency to downgrade, simplify and water down the passionate, turbulent and electrifying aspects" of human experience. "We are

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<sup>140</sup> ## M. G. Lord, Forever Barbie: The Unauthorized Biography of a Real Doll (N.Y.: William Morrow and Co., 1994), p. 40-41, including quote from Ernest Dichter, ed., "A Motivational Research Study in the Field of Toys for Mattel Toys Inc.," unpublished study prepared by the Institute for Motivational Research, Inc., June 1959, p. 5.

fast becoming," Dichter wrote in words that could have come from Herbert Marcuse's Eros and Civilization (195x), "a society of sedate bourgeoisie where we make every possible effort to transform the fundamental biological urge, and its infinite dynamic ramifications in the human soul, into a mild, polite, 'civilized' force." What Americans did, he argued, was take sexuality and "sublimate it by insipid and meaningless substitutions." Too often, he argued, "the consumer loses his or her sex and has only one basic urge left to him: to buy a piece of merchandise. Democracy and the feminist movement have made man and woman equal. Advertising went one step further: it has made them identical."

As evidence for his assertions, Dichter pointed to ads that treated a married couple as co-workers rather than as lovers. He also lambasted the tendency of advertisers to use models whose figures were those of an "adolescent boy." Dichter found these women too narcissistic. "There is a world of coldness," he wrote of the depiction of a woman in an ad. Dichter found in her depiction "nothing pulsating, vibrating in this lady who is so self-sufficient that spatially speaking, she could be enclosed in a perfect parallelogram." He criticized "the enhanced pleasure" that professional models took "in their own bodies through the use" of products. "They commune only with their own selves; everything is reflected back to their own auto-erotic stimulation." Yet, Dichter, having launched such a full-scale attack on advertising as sexual repression, in the end was merely advising advertisers how to do a more effective job. "Put the

libido back into American advertising!" he wrote potential clients. "You will exhilarate the viewer and the reader and make them grateful--and you'll sell more."<sup>141</sup>

It is possible to read this piece in several ways. On one level, it is a statement by a Freudian who fully understood the power of sexuality. It is also the assertions of a European who found Americans too puritanical, even here criticizing the hands that fed him for the way they promoted sublimation through consumer culture. Moreover, it is a statement of man who could simultaneously write a radical critique and tell his audience how well he understood how to link sexuality and consumption. But there is also something autobiographical about what Dichter said here, the observations of a man who wanted women to satisfy him and not themselves and someone who had no difficulty exploiting women to whom he stood in a superior position. In his autobiography, with the revealing title Getting Motivated By Ernest Dichter: The Secret Behind Individual Motivations by the Man Who Was Not Afraid to Ask 'Why?' (1979), Dichter bragged that he and his wife had "a half-open marriage" and that his wife "at least pretended" that she did not mind his "middle-age escapades," incidents that, except that he was now married, were not like the situation he had described as taking place in the store room of his uncle's store. He told of his "very sexy secretary" who would get next to him behind his desk and "'play,' while being hidden from any sudden visitors." He went on to tell

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<sup>141</sup> ## "Put the Libido Back into Advertising," Motivations, 2 (July 1957): 13-18.

of a "technique" he and his secretary developed, one which he "highly recommended, of asking her to bend over the desk to hand him something. He noted that since "she wore very low-cut blouses, a very comfortable opportunity for a `reach-in,' if not for a full `love-in' was created. After a few days of these various `hors d'oeuvres,' we became interested in the main dish, the consummation which took place on top of a very uncomfortable desk." When his wife figured out what had happened because her husband "could not perform" with her, she pried as confession out of him then, Dichter reported, "true to form of a modern understanding wife asked, `Did you have fun?'"<sup>142</sup>

Given Dichter's analysis of the situation women faced, it should hardly be surprising that in the late 1960s and early 1970s he attacked the liberation of women. In the late 1940s and 1950s, he had argued for a cooperative marriage in which men took an active role in the household affairs, discussed how the blurring of sex roles was affecting the marketplace, and yet upheld a traditional division of separate spheres.<sup>143</sup> As he did on occasion, he combined a radical analysis of a social situation that could be solved by consumption. Thus in 1957, he attacked contemporary celebrations of the family, noting that "the family is not always the psychological pot of gold at the end of the rainbow" and then went on to tell advertisers how they could fill

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<sup>142</sup> ## ED, Getting Motivated, p. 89.

<sup>143</sup> ## ED, Everyday Living, pp. 229-30; ## "How To Perpetuate Prosperity," Motivations 1 (April 1956): p. 9; ## "Away From Momism . . ." Motivations 1 (October 1956): 3; ## "Today's Woman as a Consumer," Motivations 1 (September 1956): 1.

the gap between reality and illusion with "the acquisition of consumer goods."<sup>144</sup>

Having spent more than a decade emphasizing the distinctiveness of the women's approach to consumption, when women became uppity in the work place, he urged male and female managers "to forget about their sex role and concentrate on their individuality." Again and again, he wrote as if the central problem was helping women to see what problems men were having. Thus in 1974 he remarked that "the problems today's men have understanding women will not be the problems of tomorrow if today's women will understand the position men are in."<sup>145</sup> As usual, he was quick to take advantage of new trends, including the liberation of women. In 1970, he argued that women's liberation would liberate men as well, causing them to "`cook, wear fragrance, knit, cry and do other womanly things.'"<sup>146</sup> As usual, such changes, he hoped, would enhance demand for his services. In 1974 he told an audience that with women now interested in having their lives made easier, they no longer wanted to have to put the egg in the cake mix so she would have "the illusion of creativity." Now Dichter, with the signals shifted from his classic study, could tell manufacturers how to market convenience foods to a new generation.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> ## "Liabilities of the Family," Motivations 2 (July 1957): 7.

<sup>145</sup> ## ED, Naked Manager, pp. 90 and 95.

<sup>146</sup> ED, quoted in Don Daniels column, [Wheeling, West Virginia] News Register, 17 September 1970, p. 25.

<sup>147</sup> ## ED, "Consumer Goods--Boom or Doom?" published speech, source unknown, c. 1974, EDP home, p. [5].

When doing the research for Feminine Mystique, Friedan asked Dichter whether he would help develop advertisements that would enable them "to pursue truly creative goals in the outside world." His response made clear to what extent his work was market driven. As he did for corporate clients, off the top of his head he started to speculate on how he could develop an advertisement for a pie mix that would encourage a woman to use the time she saved to become an astronomer. "A few images--the astronomer gets her man," he said out loud, "the astronomer as heroine, make it glamorous for a woman to be an astronomer." Then Dichter paused, realizing that the manufacturer of the pie mix wanted women to stay in the kitchen. "If we tell her to be an astronomer," Friedan reported him as saying, "she might go too far from the kitchen." And then he told Friedan "Besides if you wanted to have a campaign to liberate women to be astronomers, you'd have to find somebody like the National Education Association to pay for it."<sup>148</sup>

As far as can be determined, unlike what happened with Packard's attack, Dichter never responded directly to Friedan's Feminine Mystique. Just as she had written her chapter on "The Sexual Sell" without mentioning her adversary by name in the text, referring to him only as "the manipulator," perhaps Dichter returned the favor when he attacked women's liberation without using the name of the person whose book and organizing revived

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<sup>148</sup> ## Friedan, Feminine Mystique, p. 226-27. You might make clear from my interview he he felt that he would not do work for Catholic Church because it was authoritarian.

the women's movement.<sup>149</sup> There were very important differences between Dichter and Friedan, most notably their attitudes to the conditions and aspirations of women. Yet historical hindsight enables us to see similarities as well. Though Dichter linked self-realization to consumption and Friedan to careers, they shared a belief in the centrality to self-realization and a tendency to psychologize social problems. They both absorbed these ideas from European psychologists who emigrated to the U.S., Charlotte Bühler in Dichter's case and Kurt Lewin and others with Friedan. Moreover, both of them focused almost exclusively on white, middle-class suburban women, an approach characteristic of much social observation and criticism of the 1950s.

Yet if Dichter had worked hard against the liberation of women from the late 1930s on, the liberation of his wife came only with his death. "When asked about her own career," a reporter noted in 1993, "Hedy Dichter laughs: 'Two careers in one marriage simply don't work.' After the death of her husband," the reporter noted, Mrs. Dichter, at age 82, returned to her first love, music."<sup>150</sup>

#### **WANING OF MOTIVATIONAL RESEARCH AND DEATH OF A SALESMAN**

Ironically, Betty Friedan discovered Dichter when M.R. was waning. By the early 1960s, M.R. and Dichter were past the heyday they had achieved in the late 1950s. By 1961, the Institute's

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<sup>149</sup> ## Friedan, p. 211.

<sup>150</sup> ## "Encounter: Ernest Dichter," Austria Kultur 3 (March/April 1993): 6.

gross had slipped to \$800,000, still a considerable amount but below the highs achieved a few years earlier.<sup>151</sup> In 1962, the advertising columnist of the New York Times reported that "`M.R.' Use Is Dwindling," with the technique, once the rage, now rarely discussed in trade meetings or among housewives.<sup>152</sup> The reasons were complicated. On Madison Avenue, new approaches often have a short life and M.R. was no exception. By the early 1960s, computers gave corporate research directors renewed confidence in statistical data and mathematical projections. At the same time, the academic study of consumers, increasingly located in business schools, came to rely on quantification and social science theory. Qualitative work persisted, especially in the use of focus groups, an approach Dichter had helped foster. Although Freudianism lost its appeal in market research circles, what persisted of Dichter's legacy, at least in some quarters, was the use of the depth interview and the notion of life-style segmentation based on psychological typologies.<sup>153</sup> After the early 1960s, Dichter, though he continued to practice M.R., shifted the emphasis of the services he offered. Over time, he changed his focus from advising corporations to helping non-profit organizations, from working in the U.S. to offering his services abroad, and from carrying out market research to focusing on the problems of management, packaging, and society.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Sports Illus article

<sup>152</sup> 12/18/62. NYT Peter Bart, "Advertising: `M.R.' Use Is Dwindling"

<sup>153</sup> For these shifts, see ## Eric Clark, The Want Makers. The World of Advertising: How They Make You Buy (N.Y.: Viking Penguin, 1989), pp. 78-79; Stern, "Literary Criticism," p. 331.

<sup>154</sup> Bart, 12/18/62; 11/5/63 NYT Peter Bart iv w/ ED.

Then, in 1970, Dichter suffered a heart attack in a setting fraught with significance about the meaning of race to him and to American society. He was appearing on a platform with a Black nationalist who called for \$150 billion in reparations to compensate for the oppression of slavery and racism. Throughout his career as a market researcher, Dichter had paid minimal attention to African Americans, focusing instead on the groups his clients targeted: white, mostly suburban, middle-class Americans. When in his writings he turned to the issue of race, he gave no special valence to the situation of African Americans in a white society. Instead, reacting against the notion of separatism that he associated with Naziism, he used a cosmopolitanism to minimize racial and ethnic differences. Two experiences in Vienna were crucial: the distinctiveness of his red hair and the fact that for Jews in Europe "the shape of their penis" was their passport "to freedom or the concentration camp." These two experiences made him realize, he wrote, "that if we could change people's stereotype concepts--if blacks could look white and whites darker--many of our silly and tragic conflicts might disappear."<sup>155</sup>

As he came to terms with America, Dichter emphasized the origins of intolerance in insecurity and fear of the unknown. To overcome intolerance, he focused on the importance of psychological types rather than racial identity. In 1947, as he urged Americans to focus on variations in "basic human values" and neglect external factors that divided people. "These factors

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<sup>155</sup> ## ED, Getting Motivated, p. 4.

of character," he believed, "matter much more in the realities of life than superficial variations in skin color or family origin."<sup>156</sup> Consequently, in the early 1960s, he remained wary of using Negro models in Negro markets.<sup>157</sup> Now in 1970, facing a Black Nationalist, Dichter responded that his request for compensation from the nation was not only unrealistic but also would solve nothing. In reply, his adversary called him a racist. Shortly thereafter, Dichter suffered a coronary.<sup>158</sup>

The combination of illness and opportunity prompted Dichter to cut down on his obligations. Twice he sold his business and, when the arrangements did not work out, twice he took back the company.<sup>159</sup> In the 1970s, he sold the Croton headquarters and moved his home and office to smaller quarters in Peekskill. Nonetheless, well into the 1980s he sustained a hectic round as a lecturer, consultant, and author. He taught courses at several universities.<sup>160</sup> He remained active until the end. In a 1989 article, he promoted M.R., as he continued to explore subconscious (and often sexual) meanings and the "soul" of products.<sup>161</sup> In 1989, he was hired to travel to the Soviet Union, to carry out what the advertising columnist of the New York Times described as "what may be the first study of what motivates

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<sup>156</sup> ## ED, Everyday Living, pp. 28-32.

<sup>157</sup> see Bart iv

<sup>158</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 118-19

<sup>159</sup> Dichter, Getting Motivated, pp. 139-41; see also 1984 adv age; 1/17/73. NYT; ## "Dichter leaves Institute, but takes jargon with him," Advertising Age 44 (29 January 1973): 60.

<sup>160</sup> mention teaching at Nova University in Florida and ? [84 of bio]

<sup>161</sup> ## ED, "Testing Nonverbal Communications," in Nonverbal Communication in Advertising, ed. Sidney Hecker and David W. Stewart (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1989), 29-42.

Soviet consumers."<sup>162</sup> Before his departure, Dichter remarked that "for 50 years, Soviet citizens have been told, `Don't buy from capitalist devils! They will tempt you with hidden persuaders!'" And then he added "I'm the hidden persuader!"<sup>163</sup> Dichter died of heart failure on Thursday, November 21, 1991 at a hospital outside Peekskill.<sup>164</sup>

### **THE HEDONISTIC CONSUMER IN AN ANTI-MATERIALIST AGE**

Although in many ways, Dichter's professional life peaked in the early 1960s, in the last 30 years of his life he dealt with two issues central to the way American writers have grappled with affluence: the critique of materialism beginning in the 1960s and the onset of the energy crisis in 1973. In the late 1950s, Dichter noticed among those he interviewed the emergence of the inner Joneses, people who turned away from status striving and desire to achieve greater individual self-expression. As a man who made his living by helping clients take advantage of social changes, Dichter demonstrated how corporations could benefit from the turn to what he called hedonism, the search for pleasure and the rejection of puritanism. Speaking the language the counter culture would increasingly discover in the 1960s but offering solutions different from theirs, by 1964 Dichter was talking

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<sup>162</sup> ## Randall Rothenberg, "Capitalist Eye On the Soviet Consumer," NYT, 15 February 1989, D19.

<sup>163</sup> ## ED, quoted in Rothenberg, "Capitalist Eye." When I look at the papers again, I will see whether I can find out anything of his response to changes in consumption in the 1980s, including his response to the Reagan revolution.

<sup>164</sup> NYT, 23 November 1991.

about how Americans could free themselves from the "tyranny of things," as he envisioned Americans forging "social links" by sending commercial greeting cards.<sup>165</sup> In the next years, what persisted was the tension between his critique of consumer culture and suggestions of ways that purchases in the marketplace enabled Americans to achieve self-realization. Though he had begun to talk favorably of a new hedonism in the mid-1950s, by a decade later this had emerged as a central element in his outlook. "We are still caught in the concept of original sin and the need to work by the sweat of our brow," he wrote in Handbook of Consumer Motivations (1964) as he amplified the line of argument developed in Strategy of Desire. He then went on to herald the imminent arrival of a four-day work week, "while technological reality brings us the tantalizing whiff of a hedonistic, pleasure-accentuated life."<sup>166</sup>

By 1965, Dichter was advising readers of the Harvard Business Review to take advantage of the new hedonism. Heralding the arrival of a new consumer who celebrated individualism and self-realization, Dichter warned corporations against searching for a mass market. Rather, marketing strategies would have to see consumers as parts of what he called divergent personality clubs whose members could be reached by campaigns that recognized the centrality of market segmentation based on psychological factors. As people increasingly rejected external status symbols, he argued, they came to seek "inner satisfaction" achieved by a

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<sup>165</sup> ED, Handbook, p. viii.

<sup>166</sup> ED, Handbook, p. 238.

series of dynamic goals that resembled Abraham Maslow's vision of people who sought to fulfill higher and higher needs.<sup>167</sup>

Unlike Maslow, however, Dichter had the task of linking a series of higher and higher desires with the consumption of goods and experiences. So he spoke of how people would satisfy their "aesthetic hunger" by consuming a "steady diet of poetry, art, travel, and other exquisite mind- and soul-satisfying hobbies." With the new hedonism replacing a puritanism that was "dying a rapid death," corporations, "even in selling an automatic washer or car, for example, were better off stressing the aesthetic value, the glow of happiness, the soul of our product, rather than only its performance." Consequently, advertising strategies had to link cars, appliances, and cigarettes with "the realization of self-potential." Similarly, he advised supermarkets to develop departments "corresponding to different consumer moods." For example, there might a section called "Feeling Depressed Today," which would offer products to counter people's unhappiness. In place of the "static security" achieved by material possessions would come "a dynamic form of security in which saying yes to life and accepting continuous change and growth becomes the important achievement."<sup>168</sup>

So by the mid-1960s, when the counter culture was just emerging and millions of Americans were questioning the benefits of materialism, Dichter had discovered among American consumers a desire for individualism, self-expression, and hedonism --

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<sup>167</sup> ED, "Inner Jones," HBR.

<sup>168</sup> ED, "Inner Jones," HBR.

impulses he felt consumer goods and experiences could satisfy. This dual approach continued throughout the 1970s, when Dichter adopted the language of the counter culture as he advised corporations how to reach customers and manage workers.<sup>169</sup> In a 1971 book he acknowledged that many young people were searching for new values as they rejected materialism and success. Consequently, "the modern communicator's job," Dichter argued in a typical statement of cooptation, was to "point out to them that you are in agreement with their philosophy--that material possessions are not the all-important factor and that it is the use to which you put material things that really matters. Too often, in our advertising approaches," he noted, "we still stress the old-fashioned pride in possession itself, rather than the pleasure and enrichment of experiences that our possessions can give us."<sup>170</sup>

At moments in the last two decades of his life, Dichter seemed to be moving to a position that broke the connection happiness from consumption. When he was serving up self-help knowledge to the general reading public, rather than marketing advice to corporations, he was able to offer a theory of self-realization that was not directly linked to the promotion of consumer culture. With Total Self-Knowledge (1976), he wrote a therapeutic book, one filled with simple tests the Dichter offered so people could discover more about themselves. In the last paragraph, he celebrated "continuous `creative

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<sup>169</sup> See, for example, ED, Naked Manager, pp. 15 and 40.

<sup>170</sup> ED, Motivating Human Behavior, p. 98.

dissatisfaction.'" This quest, he concluded, "in itself, is probably the best definition of the well-rounded and happy person."<sup>171</sup> Similarly, in his 1979 autobiography Dichter acknowledged that his childhood experiences meant that he had difficulty enjoying money. "I have not become any happier or more self assured through the fact that I can consider myself almost wealthy. As I look back, I realize that I had less anxiety when I had no money." Now, he reported, he has to spend a good deal of anxiety worrying about losing what he had accumulated, to say nothing of the time he had to spend with lawyers and accountants in order to figure out how to reduce his income tax.<sup>172</sup> A final piece of evidence that shows that at moments self-realization mattered more to him than achieving it through goods came in the quote Dichter selected to accompany his entry in Who's Who. "I believe," wrote this man who had spent a life time promoting happiness achieved through goods but whose teacher in Vienna, Charlotte Bühler had written of a less materialistic road to self-realization, "that the definition of happiness is constructive discontent. Getting there is all the fun; the goal itself is much less important than growth, striving, and self-fulfillment."<sup>173</sup> [if you move energy crisis section to chapter 8, then end with the above and a hint that energy crisis would block that route]

However, if his early experiences and his formal education taught Dichter that affluence did not inevitably bring happiness,

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<sup>171</sup> ED, Total Self-Knowledge, p. 266.

<sup>172</sup> ED, Getting Motivated, pp. 142 and 145.

<sup>173</sup> Who's Who.

the energy crisis of the 1970s caused him to reaffirm his commitment to an anti-puritanical vision of an affluent America. Though he could write in 1978 about people liberating themselves from their neurotic feelings about money, when push came to shove, he persisted in linking money with the pleasures it could buy.<sup>174</sup> Throughout the 1970s, he attacked the reemergence of "the old puritanical, calvanistic American philosophy" that was now causing what he called "an orgasm of masochism." Fortunately, he noted, "no orgasm, luckily or unluckily, lasts very long."<sup>175</sup>

Dichter saw the energy crisis within a Cold War framework. In the mid-1970s he rejected what he called "one of the basic tenets of communism and Marxism, and dialectical materialism" that economics governed human behavior. Rather, he argued, psychological forces counted for more than economic ones in influencing consumer behavior. Thus if experts persisted in "appealing too much to the consumer's masochistic instincts," they would help produce "a self-fulfilling prophesy" of doom.

What underlay Dichter's predictions was the confidence born of what his interviews revealed and of his experience as an émigré who rose from rags to riches in America. what his optimism underwrote. "The typical American," he concluded, will not want "to wallow too long in a passive role of a suffering victim." Once the average citizen gets mad, he argued, he will not expect help "forthcoming from an omniscient father figure" or from the

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<sup>174</sup> ED, "Let Your Money Liberate You," Vital, September-October 1978, pp. 90-92.

<sup>175</sup> ED, "Consumer Goods--Boom or Doom?" published article, c. 1974, source unknown, EDP home.

government; rather, "he will decide to solve some of the problems himself." Though he felt logic made clear that people should tighten their belts, he argued that as they responded to the threat of scarcity induced by the energy crisis, Americans would seek "solid, lasting values" in luxury goods such as diamonds, pursue additional enjoyments of gourmet foods, use color to cover up or escape from "the greyness of economic gloom," opt for natural materials as they rediscovered nature.<sup>176</sup> Once again, Dichter was doing what he did best: conflating marketing advice and social philosophy, as he argued that consumer goods and experiences, if "properly used," would "liberate us and permit us to devote more time to self-discovery, continuous education, culture in all its various forms."<sup>177</sup> Attacking environmentalists who falsely, he asserted, envisioned the past as wonderful, Dichter argued in the pages of Advertising Age that contemporary social problems were merely "the hunger pains of a society which is awakening to its real aspirations."<sup>178</sup>

To the end, Dichter remained optimistic. He believed that the energy crisis, and the inflation and drop in disposable incomes that accompanied it, "most likely will have the same effect on us as the discovery that the Russians had got ahead of us with Sputnik." Dichter hoped that the new crisis would not tempt Americans to "switch over to a rigid, timid, and planned

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<sup>176</sup> ED, "Energy Crisis -- Boom or Doom," unpublished speech, c. 1974, EDP home, pp.

<sup>177</sup> ED, "Conquering the Future Through New Thinking," unpublished speech, 1975, p. 10, EDP home.

<sup>178</sup> ED, "Belt-tightening Recession Attitude? Today, It Ain't Necessarily So," Advertising Age, 5 January 1976, p. 30.

economy, to such a degree that we shall lose what has always pulled America out of previous difficulties; our verve, ingenuity, and daredevil philosophy." And then Dichter ended his talk with a phrase that he wanted on his grave. It was a phrase that brought together his European education and the émigré's boundless faith in his adopted nation: "Why Not?"<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> ED, "Energy Crisis -- Boom or Doom," unpublished speech, c. 1974, EDPhome, pp. ; for Dichter's wish that it be on his grave, see Getting Motivated, I think it is 65. Dichter's "Why Not?" may have been a play upon, and an optimistic inversion of ## Paul Lazarsfeld, "The Art of Asking WHY in Market Research," National Marketing Review 1 (1935): 32-43. Lots of others writings on energy crisis that echo the same themes: conquering future speech, 1975;