
Dr. Dichter asserts, and we grant, that this age of ours is a chaos of things, which each human mind must strain to make compatible with its own psychology. Dichter, whose distinctively Viennese mind skips easily along, hopes to enable experts on communication, especially advertising men, to govern the placement of objects in their mental order. The classes of objects are food, clothing, shelter, cosmetics, drugs, toys, transportation, printed things, liquor and tobacco. Other categories deal with colors and sounds and a glossary of Dichter's terms for describing his world is presented—projection, assimilation, abstraction, reaction, symbol, and so forth.

An example of the tone and method may have some representative value:

The hat is nothing but a portable roof. The lifting of the hat means you open a door to your privacy. It is a symbolic act, saying, “Look here, I don’t have any secrets, I invite you to make friends with me.” You are coming out of your own house. In addition to the greeting act, lifting the hat has a special psychological significance. Whenever you are in a cheerful mood, happy and full of energy, you tear the hat from your forehead. When we are depressed, we pull the hat almost over our ears.

Almost everybody has a warm emotional feeling about red cedar shingles...

...The need for certainty that a cigarette lighter will work matters as much as it does because it is also bound up with the idea of sexual potency. The working of the lighter becomes a kind of symbol of the flame which must be lit in consummating sexual union.

Dr. Dichter, who made the phrase “motivational research” famous, is unpopular among social scientists. To explain why, would require not only that we psychoanalyze Dr. Dichter but also his enemies. As his picture on the jacket of this handbook for advertising men reveals, he is an affable, unthreatening person. In real life he bounces about venting casual hypotheses by the hundreds on every type of human interaction. You may have spent your life studying voting behavior in New York City or Polynesian’s marriage rites, but Ernest Dichter will stand up and trade blow for blow with you on the subject. In his ineffable, jolly, busy way he is quite disrespectful of authority: yet he gets along well with many powerful and wealthy businessmen who find his fee of several hundred dollars a day not at all excessive.

If we were in another age, Dr. Dichter would probably not have an organization, even of the small size of the Institute of Motivational Research which sits atop a mountain overlooking the Hudson River in a bargain nineteenth century castle. A staff the size of Drew Pearson’s would suffice. However, there is a constant stream of professional abuse directed his way from the macro-organizations of social research and now and again he bows to the conventions of validity and reliability in opinion research.

He is still against the spirit of science as we know it, the spirit that seeks to advise only what can be read off the tape, and will only further free-associate on a client’s problems. Not so Dr. Dichter. He is ready to address himself freely to any subject and carries along an apparatus whose principal uses are to impress, to justify, and to plant impressions in the fertile mind of Dichter. We would not venture to compare these functions with the ordinary uses of research apparatus elsewhere, some of which are even less relevant to the goals of helping the client. But the prime benefit of the Dichter form of scientific counselling lies in discussions with the good Doctor himself or in the play of advice that almost invariably, no matter how it is communicated, originates with him personally.

The same flow of impression and truth is frozen into imperishable prose in the present Handbook. Vulgar, goodhumoured, inquisitive, outrageous, implausible, however true time and time again—why does the image of Groucho Marx keep occurring? The work cannot be taken for a treatise or an encyclopedia. It is a Dream Book, a compendium of observations as to the meaning of all the weird things that transpire in the night, related chattily and assuredly to an audience that cannot read too heavily and finds clinical texts on dreams too limited to help one through one’s day. If we were advertising men, minds stale from repetition and account management, and perhaps owning too little of imagination, we would be grateful for Dichter’s Dream Book, and keep it by our deskside.

Where else can one go to find what associations the common physical objects of life bring to people’s minds? We can apply to a dictionary for definitions, a thesaurus for synonyms, an encyclopedia for physical specific...
Columbia University. The establishment of Centers should require the group’s approval. It does not seem to me, however, that the group should be charged with the approval of smaller projects to be funded externally.

I would not advance any claim that a Federated Social Science Institute could solve very many of the above problems. I am convinced that something like it is called for, that neither the undisciplined dominated Institute nor the multiplication of Institutes can do nearly as well to accelerate the dramatic achievements in the social sciences which we have such good reasons to anticipate during the next few years.

IN PASSING . . .

On the cover is an illustration of an old-time American campaign speech. We are reminded of a thought by Abraham Lincoln relevant to this political season.

“The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present . . . as our case is now, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenchant ourselves, and then we shall save our country.”

We also wish to bring to your attention a comment by Eli Ginzb erg of Columbia University:

“Many years ago, Wesley Clair Mitchell, great empir icist that he was, took out his appointment book to review what had happened to him during the preceding ten months. He calculated that he had been able to devote only about 30 percent of his total time to his research. And Mitchell was a most disciplined scholar.

We chew up the best people in this country. We do it for good and bad reasons, but we do it. The most important lesson that we have to learn is the importance of one word—no. For creative work requires time and repose. The nation is not suffering from a shortage of talent. It is suffering from a shortage of talented people who know how to preserve and protect their time.”

Indeed in a profound sense, Dichter’s Dream Book represents a scientific and philosophical advance, an independent tour de force in regard to conventional marketing psychology. The origins of Dichter’s book are in the dream symbolism of psychoanalysis. He had, in a sense, to ask merely the bread and butter question: what fantasies are associated with behavior in the market-place? (He has been working on this book for some years so one should not believe that the concept came without difficulty. And it is still unclear. We would guess that the brief preface, which is theoretically acceptable and mature was written after all the book was done and that the book would be much different if it had begun with the preface.)

From dream symbolism we move into the field of folklore. There the ethnologists have long understood to varying degrees that objects in some eyes are different objects in other eyes.

Relative vision, differential perception, diverse cognitive structures—all which is suggested by these terms is involved in Dichter’s vision of a psychological world of objects. Dichter’s Dream Book is a set of brief essays, crude smatterings of generalities for the most part, on the physical world of everyday life as passed through the social mind. One day encyclopedias, those most pompous and authoritative documents, will be rewritten to describe objects as objects operate in people’s lives, classifying the objects according to what has been discovered, through systematic sample surveys, to be the varieties of the objects as perceptually stratified in the population.

Perceptual stratification of the population is coming to be the most important social fact about the population in place of classical material stratification. What few people are able to accept now will be a commonplace then; that the so-called objective scientific world of objects is a special form of perception known as scientific perception; habits of observing and defining the world are tied to certain mental capacities as opposed to other sets of perceptual capacities. Long after Dr. Dichter’s little essays are revised, his words about the psychological existence of objects will be carried forward:

“As I was writing this book, the inanimate objects that I began to discuss became strangely alive. Objects and purposes, magic meanings and mysterious origins of some of the most ordinary products began to present a fascinating panorama of an aspect of life which has seldom been considered worthy of thought.”

From the incentive to make people spend money on certain things comes ultimately a redescription of the world as surrealistic. The foundations of the science of perceptual description are known; they are in classical epistemology, in psychology, in phenomenology, and finally in ethnology and psychoanalysis. Now can be seen the enormity of practicality of old scholarly riddles and lore. Practicality will forward research and knowledge. People may be made to be basically happier with the objects around them. That is why Dichter’s bad book is a good book.

REFERENCE