CHAPTER 3

Marketing Theory and Semiotics

Rather than unreflexively adopting a lifestyle, through tradition or habit, the new heroes of consumer culture make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle. The modern individual within consumer culture is made conscious that he speaks not only with his clothes, but with his home, furnishings, decoration, car and other activities which are to be read and classified in terms of the presence and absence of taste.

Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture & Postmodernism*

Today’s marketing isn’t simply a business function. It’s a philosophy, a way of thinking and a way of structuring your business and your mind. Marketing is more than a new ad campaign or this month’s promotion. Marketing is part of everyone’s job, from the receptionist to the board of directors. The task of marketing is never to fool the customer or endanger the company’s image. Marketing’s task is to design a product-service
combination that provides real value to targeted customers, motivates purchase, and fulfills genuine customer needs.


We have discussed semiotic theory in the first chapter and consumer cultures in the second chapter. In this chapter, we will turn our attention to marketing theory—the ideas, tactics, and strategies developed by marketers to be used to sell products and services and to meet the needs, desires, or wants people have.

**Ernest Dichter and Motivation Research**

Although each of us is different from everyone else, and we each have distinctive ideas, personalities, and systems of beliefs, for marketers, individuals aren’t important. Marketing professionals have developed a number of different typologies by which they classify people, based on the notion that people in any particular classification group have certain things in common as far as their consumption practices are concerned. The examples I will deal with range from human beings everywhere to nationalities and to microgroups within a country.

I will begin with the work of Ernest Dichter, the “father” of motivation research, who was interested in what motivated people in general, though much of his work applied to people in the United States. Dichter developed a research methodology known as nondirective depth interviews. Using this method of interviewing people—he avoided asking people direct and often superficial questions about their choice of products—he used psychoanalytic theory and depth interviewing to find out what people unconsciously felt about various products and services. That is, he made use of psychoanalytic theory not to deal with neuroses, personality