

**Now ad men have a new way to persuade you. They can pop a suggestion into your mind, using TV or movies, without your knowing it**

## **TV's New Trick: Hidden Commercials**

**By Wesley S. Griswold**

**P**ROBABLY you've heard about—perhaps even worried about—a revolutionary new way to beam messages into the human mind. Especially suited to TV and movies, the new idea-injecting technique is said to work while you, all unawares, are innocently enjoying the program. The idea-words appear superimposed on the picture images too fast and too dimly to be seen in the normal way. Yet they register on your mind.

Despite rejection by the national networks, uneasy skepticism by the F.C.C. and alarm from people who fear that this strange development may bring wholesale invasion of privacy and risk of political tyranny, two means of reaching people's subconscious minds by television are currently being tested.

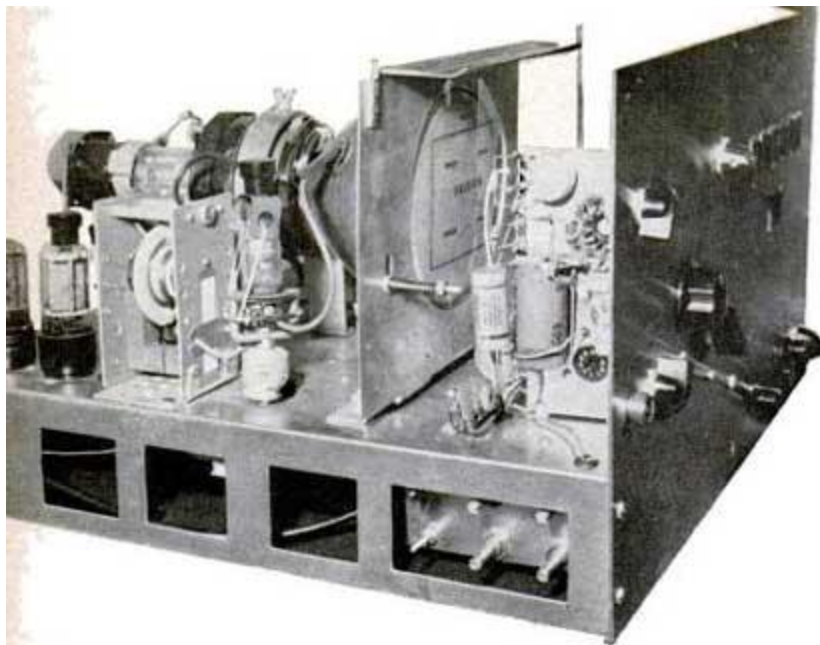
This month one of them, called Precon TV, was scheduled to be tried out on a large audience of TV watchers in and around Los Angeles. It was to have been Precon TV's first big showing. Its rival, Subliminal Projection, about which almost no technical details have been released, has already ventured on the air in Bangor, Me., and on a Canadian national hookup. Results for Subliminal Projection: inconclusive.

For its debut on independent Station KTLA, Precon TV did not plan to use advertising. Instead, public-service messages—like "Drive Safely," "Support Your Community Chest," or "Don't Be a Litterbug"—were to be tucked away into the telecast picture. But after this plan was announced, so much public criticism of the new technique boiled up that the trial was postponed. Controversy over these idea-injecting systems has swirled around three issues: (1) Are they legally proper? (2) Are they ethically acceptable? (3) And do they really work at all?

**P**RECON TV has a long history behind it. (The trade name comes from the word "preconscious," meaning "below the level of conscious awareness." "Subliminal"







**HOW IT WORKS:** The heart of Precon TV is a little flying-spot scanner and a frame holding a three-by-four-inch text. Pictures of the message are made with a rapidly pulsing light and intermixed with the regular video signals at a different rate per second. The aim: a message that the viewer doesn't realize he sees—he "feels" the message instead.

means the same thing.) Its inventors, Dr. Robert E. Corrigan of Los Angeles and Prof. Hal C. Becker of New Orleans, both men now in their mid-thirties, have been testing the theories and working parts of Precon for the past eight years. Patents were applied for early in 1955, but have not yet been issued. Consequently, the inventors decline to tell everything about their creation, though they have revealed the essentials.

The basic equipment, the means of sprinkling television programs with invisible but receivable messages, is contained in a rectangular metal box about half the size of a standard table-top TV set. Its power unit, in a separate, much smaller container, runs on house current.

This equipment is a kind of electronic mixing bowl, where printed information can be subtly stirred in with pictures. Inside the main Precon TV cabinet, along with 17 vacuum tubes and a photo multiplier, is a little flying-spot scanner and, in front of its round face, a small frame for holding the text to be scanned. The text is printed on a transparent plastic slide, on a three-by-four-inch space.

Picture signals from image-orthicon tubes in studio cameras focused on live performances, or from iconoscopes recording filmed scenes, are piped into the Precon TV apparatus on their way to the station's antenna. To understand what happens to them in the Precon blender, remember that it takes one-thirtieth of a second for a cathode-ray tube to project one complete picture image on a televi-

sion screen. In that time it has to scan the picture twice, each perusal taking one-sixtieth of a second.

**I**NSIDE the Precon TV cabinet, with the aid of the pulsed light emitted by the flying-spot scanner, the printed message is superimposed on the incoming picture signals *every other* one-sixtieth of a second. (The rate of mixture can be varied, as can the intensity of the pulsed light, which normally is less than one-third as bright as that of the picture signals.) The well-mixed video brew then flows on to the station's antenna, to which the program's sound signals, not involved in Precon TV, proceed independently.

Prof. Becker, an electronics engineer and physicist who teaches experimental neurology at Tulane University, points out a fascinating quirk: When you suspect you're watching a Precon program, you can find out what the hidden message is by spreading the fingers of one hand and moving them rapidly up and down in front of your eyes. By varying the rate of this movement, you'll soon find and match the rate at which the Precon message is being pulsed. Then you'll be able to read it.

**"T**HE two questions we are most often asked about Precon," said Dr. Corrigan, a former fighter pilot who is now a psychologist for the Douglas Aircraft Co., "are 'How do you know that it works?' and 'Is it dangerous?'"



"We have found ample proof that it works," he continued, "in exhaustive experiments at Tulane University that we have been conducting since 1950. In the course of finding that proof, we also became convinced that the Precon technique of communication can't be dangerous. There is no possibility of brainwashing by means of Precon, for each man is his own censor. His preconscious mind responds to Precon messages in complete accord with his likes and dislikes. There is no better chance of putting something over on his preconscious mind than there is of hoodwinking his conscious mind."

Corrigan and Becker discovered people's built-in censorship in tests in which three different types of words were very rapidly projected on a screen. Some of the words were neutral—like "stove," "table" and "rug." Some had emotional impact—"scream," "blood," "hate." Others were obscene words.

In repeated trials, the speed at which each word was flashed on the screen was slowed until the person being tested could say that he definitely had seen it. The researchers found that the emotional and obscene words had to be shown two or three times slower than the neutral words before people watching the screen could recognize them. Corrigan and Becker took this as firm evidence that the people were resisting and censoring upsetting words.

Next, in addition to calling out when they could identify a word, the subjects were asked to press a little lever as well. It was then discovered that not only did

they push the lever sooner than they reported seeing the word—thus proving preconscious perception—but they reacted preconsciously to emotional and obscene words precisely as they did when conscious of them. They were censoring them without being aware of it.

**FURTHER** tests showed, they contend, that people can be taught preconsciously. Corrigan and Becker arranged to give their subjects tiny electric shocks whenever certain neutral words were flashed on the screen. Then the shocks were stopped, but when the words that had been associated with them appeared again, the subjects reacted to them preconsciously as if they were words highly charged with emotion. They had learned, without realizing it, to attribute a new and painful meaning to harmless words.

The Precon developers gave groups of people jumbled letters to rearrange into actual words. Before the test began, they showed the answers on a screen, too fast for anyone in the room to see. Preconsciously they were seen, however, and comparative tests indicated that the subjects solved the puzzles 15 to 46 per cent faster when the answers had been slipped to their subconscious minds in advance.

Finally, Corrigan and Becker expanded their experiments to theater-size audiences. They showed movies—color cartoons—in which printed information was hidden from conscious view. In one case, geometric symbols—a triangle, a circle

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**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** An advertising slogan on a small strip of transparent plastic is being fed into the Precon picture scanner by Prof. Hal C. Becker as the co-inventor, Dr. Robert E. Corrigan, watches. Lighted at one-third normal, the words are "buried" in the regular TV picture.

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and a square—were used. In the other, gasoline trade names were used.

After the audiences had seen the films, they were asked to tell whether they liked, felt indifferent to, or disliked each movie. They were then shown the symbols and the trade names and asked to give their reactions to them. The results suggested that the way people had reacted to the symbols and trade names influenced the way they reacted to the movies. If they felt "positive" toward the preconscious information, they liked the movie; if they felt "negative" about the information, they objected to the movie.

The Precon inventors feel this point, then, is amply proved: Our preconscious likes and dislikes are the same as our conscious ones. Nobody, they contend, is going to convince us by Precon TV to buy something we don't want to buy, or do something we don't want to do.

Corrigan and Becker began their experiments with Precon apparatus with the thought that the technique would be wonderfully useful in education (training films) and psychotherapy (reaching the consciously withdrawn patient by tapping him on the subconscious). They still are ardently convinced of this.

The commercial possibilities occurred to them later. Already the inventors, through the newly created Precon Process & Equipment Corp. of New Orleans, have marketed a counter-top or window-display electrical device for flashing Precon advertising at passersby who think they are merely looking at an attractive illuminated color photograph. There is a strong likelihood that there'll be Precon movies, too.

Dr. Corrigan is convinced that if emotion-charged words suitable to the action of a movie are included in the film but are not consciously visible to its audience, the movie will gain in impact. Prof. Becker says the trick can be turned by superimposing the words on a master print of the film, but that a better way would be to synchronize a special Precon movie projector with each theater projector. A leading motion-picture studio has indicated seriously that it would like to be shown how a Precon movie could be made. And a wag has already suggested what to call it—a "feelie." END