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A Historical-Critical Review Of Subliminal Communication And Its Relationship To The Field Of Speech-Communication

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A HISTORICAL-CRITICAL REVIEW OF SUBLIMINAL COMMUNICATION

AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE FIELD OF SPEECH-COMMUNICATION
(TITLE)

BY

MICHAEL LEE SHEHORN

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1976

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

6 January 1977
DATE

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ADVISER

6 January 1977
DATE

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DEPARTMENT HEAD

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Subliminal communication is a little known form of subconscious persuasion or influence. It is a prod at the subconscious mind of a receiver. It goes under many titles: subliminal perception, subthreshold, subception, and so forth. Wayne C. Minnick, in his book The Art of Persuasion, defines it as "The capacity of an organism to react in a discriminating way to stimuli below the level of conscious recognition ..."¹ Authorities seem to agree that it basically is a way of going directly to the brain while bypassing consciousness. Most of the presently studied forms of communication (dyadic, small group, mass, and so forth) must go through the four basic forms of selection: selective exposure, selective attention, selective perception, and selective retention,² consciously in the mind of the receiver before they can hope to become effective. But subliminal communication operates in the realm of the subconscious, thus after it gains attention, perception and retention are fairly automatic. The mind's camera clicks its shutter and communication has taken place. The receiver is now carrying the message in his brain, which, as Wilson Bryan Key notes, only a small part of which is used during a lifetime.³ When the brain is again stimulated on a subject, the receiver--subconsciously--draws on that subliminal message to help form his reaction to that subject.

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, it is to investigate that phenomenon of communication, using a historical survey of subliminal communication with a special emphasis on the period from 1957 to the present day. Secondly, it is a critical attempt either to support or refute some of the claims made by Wilson Bryan Key in his book Subliminal Seduction. Key's book, which appeared on the newstands in 1975, is an undocumented exploration of the field of subliminal communication. He talks at length about its present use in advertising in the print media, and of its past use both on television and in the movies to help sell products. In his book, Key also quotes clinical studies of subliminal communication, but rarely cites his sources. Key's claim is dramatic to say the least; for years the consumer had been assaulted by an undetected and undetectable barrage of advertising. But since it would appear that subliminal communication is an important facet of the field of speech-communication, it would seem that a more complete, documented study within the field would be appropriate. Such a study should answer these questions: Does subliminal communication work, and if so, how well? Is subliminal communication legal? How does subliminal communication stand at present, particularly in terms of advertising? And, finally, what is the future for subliminal communication?

But before one can begin to answer the previous questions, one must indicate why such a study is indeed valid for the field of speech-communication. J. Jeffrey Auer, a recognized expert in the field, states that the act of communication may range from the "show and tell" periods in the primary grades, through secondary school forensics, collegiate

dramatics, and the professional utilization of speech by businessmen, lawyers, teachers, politicians, readers, actors, commentators, and announcers.

In terms of the art or theory of communication its scope includes research and teaching in such seemingly diverse specialties as rhetoric and public address, speech pathology and audiology, phonetics and voice science, playwriting and dramatic production, general semantics and group dynamics, the mass media, and even some aspects of journalism and public relations.⁴

Auer also notes that these fields do not stand alone, either in research or in application, because many are allied with related fields such as literature, history, psychology, medicine, and the fine arts.⁵ Mr. Auer defines communication as including basic psychological and emotional processes and audible and visible codes; he also states that a fundamental of speech is thinking.⁶

Using Auer's definition, subliminal perception slides smoothly into the communication field. It uses both audible and visible codes in its transmission from sender to receiver. It then enters the "thinking" process for decoding, then moves on to the psychological and emotional areas of the receiver in order to take effect. It has been utilized in the mass media by businessmen and advertisers to persuade consumers to buy their products⁷ and it has been used in films to enhance their dramatic effects.⁸ Although most of the clinical work in the area has been done by psychologists such as R. Lazarus and R. McCleary,⁹ S. Bach and G. S. Klein,¹⁰ and D. Byrne,¹¹ it has not gone unnoticed in the field of speech-communication. Lew Sarett, as early as 1936, in his textbook,

Basic Principles of Speech, investigated subliminal communication and came to the conclusion that a receiver uses subliminal cues to affect his judgment of public speakers.¹² In his 1958 edition of the book, Sarett expanded on subliminal communication to include its use by advertisers "to slip into the margins of attention" with thoughts of want, authority, and conformity towards a particular product.¹³ In 1958 the subject of subliminal communication and its use in advertising was considered important enough by the Speech Association of America to have Dr. Louis Cheskin deliver a paper on it at the annual convention. Cheskin, in his paper, talks at length about subliminal advertising and its use, but he also makes a point of showing its relevance to communication. "Communication is not all on a conscious level. We have evidence that most perception is below the threshold of consciousness." He goes on to say that "research shows that most of the communication that reaches the consumer is subliminal."¹⁴ /Cheskin makes it clear that he believes that "the effectiveness of advertising is mostly subliminal. We are not consciously aware of most of the ads and commercials but unconsciously we are affected by them. Actually, all learning processes are mostly subliminal."¹⁵

Others besides Sarett and Minnick have felt that subliminal communication is worthy of inclusion in their speech texts. Raymond S. Ross, Ph.D. and professor of speech-communication at Wayne State University, talks about it not only in his basic textbook, Speech-Communication Fundamentals and Practice published in 1965,¹⁶ but he felt it important enough to include it also in his 1974 book, Persuasion: Communication and

Interpersonal Relations.¹⁷ Richard L. Johannesan, in his book Ethics and Persuasion,¹⁸ devotes a whole chapter to it. Thus, since subliminal communication has been a subject deemed worthy of inclusion in speech texts, and of being examined at speech conventions, this author feels that a historical-critical survey of it is most appropriate, particularly since no such study has been done before by either the communicator or the psychologist.

There is, of course, one study which includes both the advertising and clinical aspects of subliminal communication: Key's book. But it is suspect due to its lack of sources and documentation. A survey of the Bibliography of Speech Education by Lester Thonssen revealed no such study, nor did such sources as Speech Abstracts, the Bibliography of Speech and Allied Arts: 1950-1960, or the Bibliographic Annual in Speech Communication. However, a review of Dissertation Abstracts revealed a variety of material on the subject. In clinical psychology, many experimental works have used subliminal techniques as their base; "The Effects of Subliminal Stimuli of Symbolic Fantasies on Weight Loss in Obese Women Receiving Behavioral Treatment"¹⁹ is one, while "A Study of Certain Issues Concerning the Dynamics of Thinking and Behavioral Pathology in Schizophrenics through the Use of Subliminal Stimuli"²⁰ is another. These two studies are typical of the approach of the clinical psychologist. Other areas that have investigated the field of subliminal communication are Psychology, which has done the greatest amount of work in it, educational theory and practice, educational psychology, physiology, cinema, and even business administration. While all of these have used subliminal techniques as a means, none have studied it with an eye toward the field of speech-communication.

Other sources consulted in an effort to find out if such a study has ever been done before include Masters Abstracts, Propaganda and Promotional Activities by Harold Lasswell, Ralph D. Casey and Bruce Smith, Organizational Communication: A Bibliography compiled by Henry Voos, Index to Quarterly Journal of Speech Vol. I-XL, 1915-1954 by Giles Wilkenson Gray, Table of Contents of the Quarterly Journal of Speech 1915-1964, Speech Monographs 1934-1964 and the Speech Teacher 1952-1964 compiled by Franklin H. Knower. In addition, the following periodicals were consulted: Quarterly Journal of Speech 1965-1976, Speech Monographs 1965-1976, Speech Teacher 1965-1976, and Today's Speech 1953-1976. None of these sources revealed a study similar to the one proposed in this thesis.

Of course, as was stated before, Wilson Bryan Key's text claims to study this area, but its deficiencies have already been noted. In an effort to discover the facts about subliminal communication the following sources were consulted: Psychological Abstracts and Cumulated Subject Index to Psychological Abstracts 1-55 (1927-1976), American Psychologist, American Journal of Psychology, Journal of Experimental Psychology, Psychological Review, Journal of Applied Psychology, The Art Index Vols. 10-24 (1955-1976), Business Periodicals Index Vols. 1-17 (1958-1975), Public Relations Journal, Life, Newsweek, Consumer Reports, Advertising Age, Journal of Marketing, Broadcasting, Printer's Ink, Sight and Sound, Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Media/Scope, Harvard Business Review, Advertising and Sales Promotion Vols. 18-22 (1970-1974), Advertising Quarterly Vols. 22-48 (1970-1976), Advertising Technique Vols. 7-10 (1971-1976), Journal of Advertising Research Vols. 1-15 (1960-1975),

Journal of Advertising Vols. 1-3 (1972-1974), and Marketing Communications Vols. 3-6 (1970-1972).

In an effort to establish the legal aspects of subliminal communication, letters were sent to the Federal Communications Commission, Senator Charles H. Percy, Senator Adlai Stevenson, and Congressman George E. Shipley. A telephone inquiry was made to the Federal Trade Commission.

To ascertain the extent of self-regulation among advertisers, letters were posted to the National Association of Broadcasters, the National Advertising Review Board, the Council of Better Business Bureaus, the League of Advertising Agencies, the Magazine Advertising Bureau, The Magazine Publishers Association, the Periodical Publishers Association, and the Marketing Science Institute.

In an effort to find out the possible future of subliminal communication, letters were sent to Wilson Bryan Key and to the twenty-five largest advertising agencies as determined by Advertising Age.²¹

The thesis is divided into four chapters with an appendix. The first chapter is this Introduction, in which subliminal communication has been defined and placed in the field of speech-communication. It has shown the importance of such a study to the field of communication and has explicated how the study is to be done. The second chapter is the history of the research done in the field of subliminal communication with strong emphasis on the findings of the clinical psychologists, in an effort to determine the limits of the effects of subliminal communication. The third chapter concerns subliminal advertising; the Vicary

impact in 1957 and 1958; experimentation with subliminal in the field of advertising; the use of sub-audible commercials in radio; the legal as well as the moral standing of such advertising; an examination of Wilson Bryan Key's claims; and the results of the survey of advertising agencies. The fourth chapter will be the summation and conclusion. It will attempt to draw all the various threads of subliminal communication together to show how they can effect or be used by the field of speech-communication. The appendix is a summary of two experiments conducted by the author using subliminal techniques.

CHAPTER NOTES

¹Wayne C. Minnick, The Art of Persuasion, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1968), p. 74.

²Michael Burgoon, Approaching Speech/Communication (New York, Sidney: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974), pp. 152-162.

³Wilson Bryan Key, Subliminal Seduction (New York: New American Library, Signet Classics, 1974), p. 52.

⁴J. Jeffrey Auer, An Introduction to Research in Speech (New York, Evanston and London: Harper & Row Co., Inc., 1959), pp. 3-4.

⁵Ibid., p. 2.

⁶Ibid., pp. 3-4.

⁷Key, pp. 98-99.

⁸Herbert Brean, "New Subliminal Gimmicks Now Offer Blood, Skulls and Popcorn to Movie Fans," Life v. 44 (March, 1958), p. 104.

⁹Richard S. Lazarus and Robert A. McCleary, "Autonomic Discrimination without Awareness: A Study of Subception," Psychological Review LVIII (1951), p. 122.

¹⁰S. Bach and G. S. Klein, "Conscious Effects of Prolonged Subliminal Exposure of Words," American Psychologist XII (1957), p. 397.

¹¹D. Byrne, "The Effects of Subliminal Food Stimulus on Verbal Responses," Journal of Applied Psychology XLIII (1959), pp. 250-252.

¹²Lew Sarett and William Foster, Basic Principles of Speech (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1936), p. 23.

¹³Lew Sarett, William Foster and Alma Johnson Sarett, Basic Principles of Speech, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1958), p. 444.

¹⁴Louis Cheskin, "Subliminal Research-Implications for Persuasion," Today's Speech v. 7, no. 2 (April, 1959), p. 19.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁶Raymond S. Ross, Speech Communication Fundamentals and Practice (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 20.

¹⁷Raymond S. Ross, Persuasion: Communication and Interpersonal Relations (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), p. 61.

¹⁸Richard L. Johannesen, Ethics and Persuasion (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 59.

¹⁹April Martin, "The Effects of Subliminal Stimulation of Symbolic Fantasies on Weight Loss in Obese Women Receiving Behavioral Treatment," Dissertation Abstracts International v. 36 (December, 1975), p. 3054-B.

²⁰Robert Thomas Litwack, "A Study of Certain Issues Concerning the Dynamics of Thinking and Behavioral Pathology in Schizophrenics through the Use of Subliminal Stimuli," Dissertation Abstracts International v. 33 (1972-1973), p. 918-B.

²¹S. Watson Dunn, International Handbook of Advertising (New York, Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), pp. 698-699.

CHAPTER II

CLINICAL HISTORY

Perception as Marshall McLuhan has expressed it, is total. Everything happens and is perceived in totality. The editing process--the small portion that becomes consciousness--is somehow accomplished inside the brain, which retains the major portion of what is totally perceived in some kind of storage, over varying periods of time, completely unknown to the individual.¹

"Perception appears to be instantaneous and total, or very near total at the unconscious level"² (underlining mine). This means that subliminal communication tries to sneak by the conscious level of perception. It is too quick or too well hidden for a person to consciously "see" it, but he does perceive it, and it does go into storage with everything else.

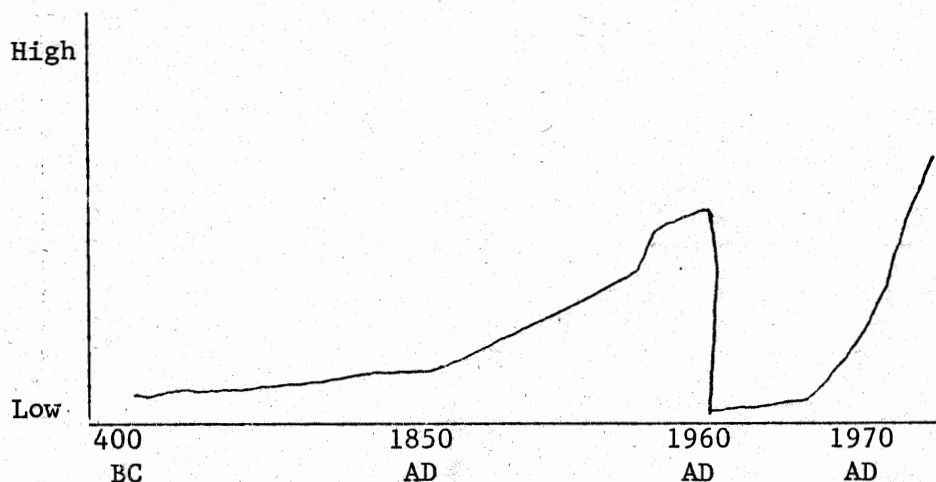
Sometimes, because of subliminal stimuli, reality can become distorted or manipulated.

Memory is great when strong personal need makes the observer want to see objects of given perceptual properties. A man waiting at a corner for his girl friend will see her in almost every approaching female. A psychoanalyst will discover genitals and wombs in every work of art.³

Wertheimer's experiments on illusory movement also support the idea that subliminal stimuli can manipulate reality. He found that an observer, seeing two light spots appear successfully in a dark room for a split second, does not report two independent experiences.

Instead of seeing one light and then, at some distance another, the observer sees only one light, which moves from one position to another. The illusion is so compelling that it cannot be distinguished from the actual displacement of one light dot.⁴

These two areas, perception and manipulation, are only two of those concerned with subliminal communication, but they help to point out why subliminal has been studied for ages. Man's perception of his environment has long been studied and tested, as has his ability to control his fellow man; subliminal is a key part of both of these interests. This chapter is a concise, but fairly complete, history of subliminal communication. Below is a chart showing the changes in credibility of subliminal communication between 400 B.C. and 1970 A.D. It is purely descriptive, the grossest approximation, a non-linear time scale to be used for overall projection. The cumulative curve is based upon a consideration of the literature of the period in question.



Changes in the Credibility of the Subliminal Perception Hypothesis⁵

As can be seen from the chart, subliminal stimulation seems to have had a long and illustrious history. It begins in 400 B.C. with Democritus, who maintained: "much is perceptible which is not perceived by us."⁶ Plato's Timaeus and, more specifically, Aristotle's Parva Naturalia discussed subliminal awareness thresholds. Indeed, Aristotle, over two thousand years ago, appears to have been the first to recognize the relationship between unconsciously perceived stimuli and dreams. Both Leibniz, in 1698, and Montaigne, in 1850, alluded to the phenomenon of subliminal perception. Sigmund Freud made large strides toward separating the conscious and unconscious minds, and one of his associates, Dr. O. Poetzle, made one of the first scientific proofs of the existence of subliminal perception.⁷

Though old and somewhat empirically based, the early subliminal studies opened the door to the more practical experimentalist. Suslowa's experiments concerning the effect of electrical stimulation upon subjects' ability to make two-point threshold discrimination (below the level of conscious awareness) in 1863 was one of the most important of the 19th century. "He found that, even when the intensity of the electrical stimulation was so low that the subjects were not aware of its presence, their ability to discriminate one from two-point was somewhat reduced."⁸ In 1884, Pierce and Jastrow were able to show that subjects could discriminate differences between weights significantly better than chance would allow, even though the differences were so small they had no confidence in their judgments.⁹ This lack of confidence was proven again in a different experiment.

B. Sidis in his book, The Psychology of Suggestion, showed that subjects could reliably distinguish letters from numbers, even when the stimuli were presented at such a distance from them that the subjects thought they were relying on pure guesswork for their judgments.¹⁰

Later, in what was essentially a replication of Sidis' research, Stroh, Shaw, and Washburn found evidence to support his conclusions. They found similar results when auditory stimuli (whispers) were presented at a distance such that the subjects were not consciously aware that they were hearing anything.¹¹

A sidelight of all the subliminal studies was on the world of dreams and fantasy. "The essential power stored in the subconscious language can be released at any time, it is very near to the manifest surface in infantile speech, it might break through to the surface in dreams, or at most any time."¹²

According to Freud, words like any other acts, can have a double meaning, the words may also be loaded with symbolic connotations, with emotional elements evoking unconscious fantasies that have been repressed and/or eliminated from the manifest surface of the language.¹³

Hence, it was speculated that one of the best ways to know what a dream means is to control it.

The usual procedure for assessing fantasy /is that/ we look for its influence on conscious thought. But if we can also implant the subliminal stimuli it may serve as a mediating instrument allowing us to assess the fantasy before it becomes distorted.¹⁴

Following these theories as guidelines, an experiment was tried. A female volunteer was given a post-hypnotic suggestion that she would dream about committing fellatio with her employer. Like post-hypnotic suggestions,

subliminal stimuli may cause a symbolic transformation or modification before the information emerges in a dream, but the dream is relatively easy to decode when the input or stimulus is known to the researcher. In the case of the female volunteer, she was told that she would not remember the "dream instruction" but that she would be sure to report her dreams to the researcher the following day. "The next day she reported a dream in which she bit off the end of a banana which had been offered to her by the employer."¹⁵

Baker's article in the thirties seemed to arouse a lot of curiosity, because there followed in Baker's wake a long stream of similar studies. For example, James Grier Miller quoted Baker's 1937 study. He used both auditory and visual modalities. In the auditory, he had the subjects discriminate between subliminal dots and dashes; in the visual, between subliminal perpendicularly crossed lines in the "plus" and "multiplication sign" positions. He summarized as follows: (1) conscious verbal behavior is influenced by stimuli below the conscious level; (2) a person has more perception than just that at the conscious level; and (3) subliminal influence is directly related to the intensity of the stimulus.¹⁶ Miller's own conclusions from his test of subliminal perception in 1938 were these: (1) subjects can "discriminate" intensities too low for them to be "aware" of; (2) there are at least three perceptual conditions: (a) when nothing can be received; (b) when subliminal only can be received; and (c) when the conscious can receive and be "aware" of information.¹⁷

After Miller's experiment, H. E. King, Carney Landis, and Joseph Zubin ran a similar study. They projected upon a ground glass screen an

illuminated area having the shape of a circle, a square, or a triangle, asking an observer to report what he saw. Then, they turned spotlights onto the same area so that the subject could no longer "see" the projection, even though it was still being projected. But when subjects were asked to guess at the form they saw, they were found to be more often correct than would be expected by chance (33 1/3%); their overall average was 43%, and with the use of red goggles, 50%.¹⁸

After King's study there followed a number of experiments. H. R. Blackwell demonstrated that subjects could actually tell during which of four time periods a subliminal spot of light was presented upon a homogeneous field. Coover showed results by asking subjects to pick a number at random while fixating on a letter in the upper right portion of a card. He found that subjects tended to pick the number printed in the lower left of the card, even though they did not know it was there. Newhall and Sears found it possible to establish a weak and unstable conditioned response to light presented subliminally, when the light had previously been paired with shock.¹⁹

Then in 1951, subliminal research was given an important push forward by the work of Richard S. Lazarus and Robert McCleary. An experiment of theirs

convinced them of the existence of subliminal discrimination between words. Lazarus and McCleary made up a group of nonsense words like "Hyvad" and "Nosub" (to eliminate the factor of individual reactions to real words); then they flashed the words on a screen slowly enough so that they could easily be seen, and conditioned their subjects (who were students) by giving them electrical shocks immediately after certain of the words appeared. The

final step was to flash words too fast for conscious vision, without electrical shocks; in a significant number of cases, the researchers found that the subjects reacted strongly to the words to which they had been conditioned in a way that could be measured with a galvanometer attached to the skin. These findings, although they have been modified by subsequent studies, have never been discredited.²⁰

The Lazarus-McCleary study seemed to answer the question of whether subliminal stimuli could really have an effect upon a subject. However, even though there was a reaction, through shock, to the subliminal words, Lazarus and McCleary said they found it did not result in a change in the frequency with which they are accurately identified at various exposure speeds.²¹

As with any important study, this one caused a great furor. The first to toss down the gauntlet was Charles W. Eriksen, who said that Lazarus' and McCleary's experiment was not sufficient to determine the subjects' verbal discrimination capacity.²² That gauntlet was thrown back at Eriksen by many, first and foremost of whom was Richard S. Lazarus himself, who said that Eriksen had not really disproved the experiment, and that, more importantly, Eriksen's expectations from the study were unrealistic, as information must be gained a little at a time.²³ Eriksen was also rebutted by Davis Howes who supported Lazarus' and McCleary's study through statistical analysis.²⁴ Finally, Deiter confirmed the findings by repeating the study, and by further showing that, when verbal instructions were substituted for the shock, no differences were produced, thus eliminating Eriksen's major argument.²⁵

Bach and Klein took the Lazarus-McCleary approach a step further. In their experiment test groups were shown a sketch of an expressionless

face. One group was subliminally exposed to the word angry, subliminally tachistoscoped (at 1/3000th of a second) over the expressionless face. Another group received the word happy over the same face at the subliminal level. Both groups overwhelmingly interpreted the emotional content of the blank face consistent with the subliminal stimuli.²⁶

This experiment demonstrated the principle of subliminal persuasion, i.e., it is easier and more effective to persuade by bypassing the conscious than by dealing with it.

There were others who were making use of different sorts of subliminal stimuli, as well. Several experimenters used subliminal or "unnoticed" reinforcement techniques to modify subjects' responses in a variety of situations including free associations or chained association talks. All such experiments, by researchers like Cohen, Kalish, Thurston and Cohan, Greenspoon and Sidowski, were successful.²⁷ However, despite the success of some of the experimenters, there were others in the field who raised important and pointed questions concerning the use of the subliminal method. McConnell pointed out that the statistical limen²⁸ might very well be consciously perceivable as much as 49% of the time. Then, too, thresholds might vary from moment to moment, as well as from day to day. He also pointed out that while it had been commonly assumed that the several methods of producing subliminal stimuli were logically and methodologically equivalent, it remained to be demonstrated conclusively.²⁹ Of course, criticism was really not new to the study of subliminal stimulation. According to Boring, in 1933, subliminal degrees of intensity must be judged by introspection, which is unreliable. This forced

researchers to an all-or-none position: either they observed a difference or not; introspection as to the amount of differences was not seen to be quantitatively reliable.

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In 1957 one American market researcher, James Vicary, demonstrated the tachistoscope, a machine for flashing invisible messages on a screen, potentially any movie or television screen; messages which could be perceived only by the subconscious. He claimed that these messages could influence and motivate people without their awareness (in his experiment, people were motivated to buy popcorn and Coca-Cola at a local movie theatre). As a result of this experiment, advertisers became interested in subliminal communication and began their own experiments and messages. The next chapter, "Subliminal Advertising," will cover this more thoroughly. For now, let it suffice to say that the American public was outraged by Mr. Vicary's claim; social pressure was exerted and clinical experimentation fell to a new low. However, the psychologist did gain from this experiment a useful tool for his own experimentation: the tachistoscope.

Using Vicary's method on the clinical level was D. Byrne, who tested to see if people who were hungry were more apt to perceive the subliminal stimulus than people who were not hungry. His method was to show a movie and flash the word "beef" on the screen for 1/200th of a second every seven seconds. His results were that drive arousal is easier to achieve than specific preferences, and, in general, can create a need where it is absent; people could be made to feel hungry, but it was more difficult to make them specifically desire beef.

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Other

studies pursuing the same lines fleshed out the idea of subliminal food stimulation. One of these found that subliminal stimuli will reinforce certain associated ideas. "Cheese" could help pick out "mouse" from a word list; "dress" could equal "cloth" or "girl," and so on.³² The subliminal stimulus "milk" was flashed five times at 1/150th of a second at low illumination, followed by a clearly visible list of thirty words. The object was to discover if a group who had just been rejected, would remember more regressive oral importations (e.g., "milk" equals "bottle," "mouth," "nipple," "smell," and "taste") as compared to other test groups not given either rejection and/or the subliminal treatment. The results were highly positive.³³

Studies by S. Bach in 1959; M. Eagle also in 1959; B. Lapkin and P. Lippman in 1959; I. H. Paul and C. Fisher in 1959; D. P. Spence and B. Holland in 1962; G. J. W. Smith and M. Henriksson in 1955; G. J. W. Smith, D. P. Spence and G. S. Klein in 1959; and M. F. Zwosta and R. Zenhausen in 1969 concerning subliminal communication were conducted; their general findings were that the subliminal effect increases as stimuli are presented further below the respondent's threshold.³⁴ Oswald, Taylor, and Treisman in 1960, and Berger in 1963, proved the ability of subliminal stimuli to act upon a sleeping subject.³⁵ But while there appears to have been great progress being made in the area of clinical research of subliminal stimulation, the public was still quite frightened by what they had heard concerning subliminal communication. Thus, in order to reassure the public, several clinical psychologists, notably Schwartz and Shagass in 1961, Moruzzi and Magoun also

in 1961, demonstrated the limitations of subliminal communication in actually "controlling" anyone.³⁶

A number of experiments (Allison, 1963; Fisher and Paul, 1959; Gordon, 1967; Murch, 1969) found that subliminal effects are maximized by having the subject in a state of relaxed passivity. By the same token, H. Fiss, F. Goldberg and G. S. Klein (1963) showed that visual stimuli which were far too faint for conscious discrimination could nevertheless affect subsequent free reverie-like imagery. When trying to discriminate (consciously) the subject was forced into reality contact, but when asked to freely image he was, to that extent, insulated from reality contact. The difference seemed to account for the subliminal effects in one case, but not in the other.³⁷ Thus, one experiment might succeed and the other fail due to a subject's thresholds.

In short, rather than thinking in terms of an "absolute recognition threshold," it is closer to the facts to posit a hierarchy of thresholds, each requiring a different quantity, and perhaps a different configuration of stimulation before a response is tripped off.³⁸

These recognition thresholds depend upon the emotional connotation of that which is recognized.³⁹ The response to the subliminal cue depends upon the meaning or significance that it has to the subject. It is on this premise that A. G. Worthington based his 1964 experiment using emotionally loaded words. He measured three classes of words: (a) taboo ("shit" and "cunt"), (b) neutral of similar structure ("shot" and "cult"), (c) neutral dissimilar ("book" and "test"). He found that awareness of the taboo words exceeded that of the neutral words. Worthington recon-

firmed his results in 1970 by repeating the study.⁴⁰ Others continued to prove the existence of subliminal stimulation and its importance. In 1965, 1967, and 1969, Murch bore out Beitel's 1934 work on retinal retention of subliminal words using tachistoscopes and supraliminal presentation, then subliminal stimuli.⁴¹

In 1970 N. F. Dixon, English psychologist and subliminal expert, surveyed the field of subliminal communication and expounded on those areas that it touches upon.

As a result of being tested in eight different contexts, subliminal stimulation has been shown to affect dreams, memory, adaption level, conscious perception, verbal behavior, emotional responses, drive related behavior, and perceptual thresholds.⁴²

Dixon's definition of this phenomenon is one of the best to be found in clinical literature, for which reason it is reproduced here in its entirety.

In its wildest sense, subliminal perception could mean any or all of the following states of affairs:

1. The subject responds to stimulation the energy or duration of which falls below that at which he ever reported awareness in some previous threshold determination.
2. He responds to a stimulus of which he pleads total unawareness.
3. He reports that he is being stimulated but denies any awareness (i.e., knowledge) of what the stimulus was.
4. The subject reports awareness of the stimulus, i.e., he could describe it if asked, but denies any awareness of the fact that he responded to it.
5. He reports the awareness of the stimulus, and of making a response, but professes complete ignorance of any contingency between the two.
6. In this, the final case, the subject is aware of responding to a stimulus, but unaware of that aspect of the stimulus which governs his response.⁴³

It was the clinical psychologist who proved that a subliminal stimulus could exist, that it could be effective in use, that it could be measured and examined, and that its effects could enter the realms of dreams and verbal consciousness. It took them a few hundred years. In only twenty years, from 1957 to 1977, the advertisers have taken subliminal communication and used it, molded it, and exploited it, solely for the purpose of making money. How and why this was accomplished will be studied in the next chapter.

CHAPTER NOTES

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³⁰ John Arthur Swets, Signal Detection and Recognition by Human Observers: Contemporary Reading (New York: Wiley and Co., 1964), p. 124.

³¹ D. Byrne, "The Effects of Subliminal Food Stimulus on Verbal Responses," Journal of Applied Psychology XLIII (1959), pp. 250-252.

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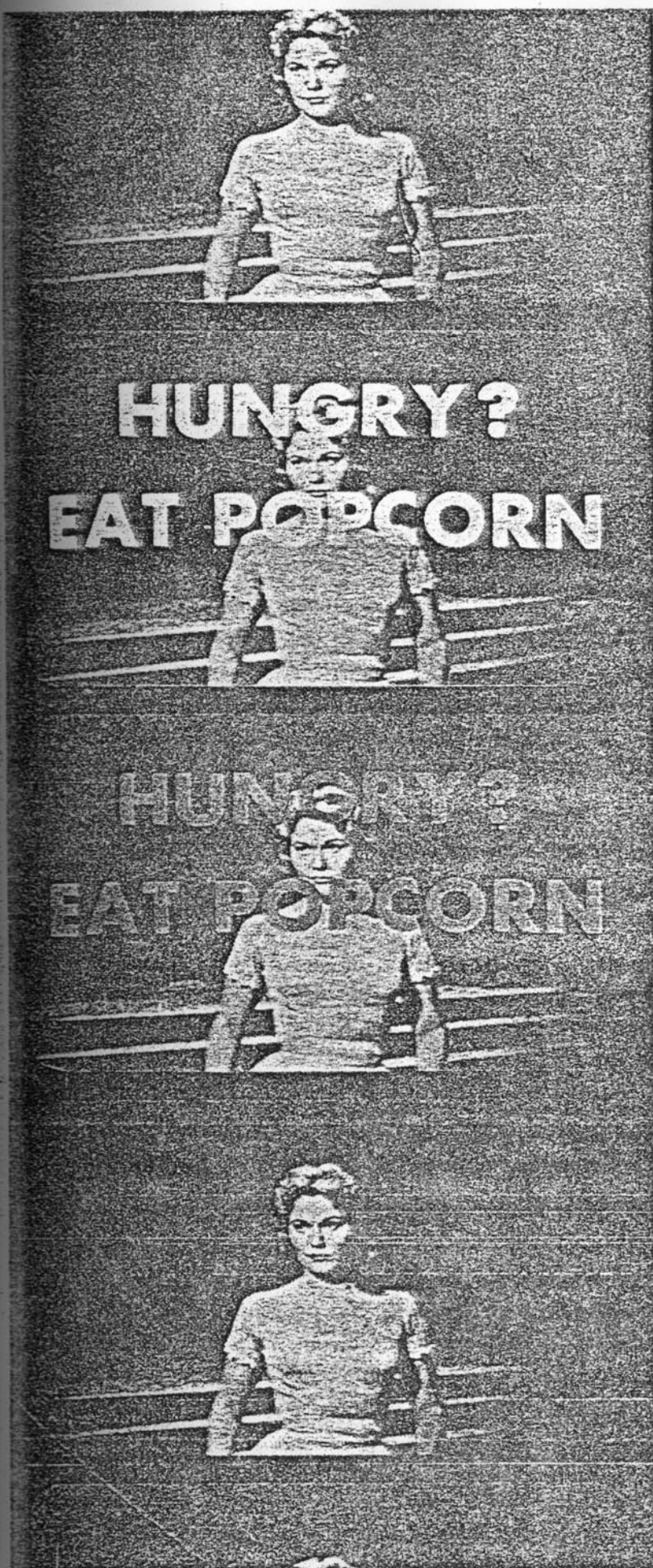
CHAPTER III

SUBLIMINAL ADVERTISING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Yesterday upon the screen,
They flashed some messages that were not seen
They were not seen again today--
Gee, I wish they'd go away.¹

This rhymed bit of doggerel is representative of the feeling of the general public in 1958, when it was discovered that someone had found a way to flash messages and advertisements faster than the eye could consciously perceive them; they realized that these messages were being sent directly to the subconscious. To put it mildly, there was a public uproar, and in the middle of it all was James Vicary and his tachistoscope. The tachistoscope is simply a film projector with a high-speed shutter, which flashes messages at 1/3000th of a second every five seconds. The speed of the message can be varied for different effects. The tachistoscope was patented through the United States Patent Office by Precon Process and Equipment Corporation of New Orleans, October 30, 1962; it carries patent #3,060,795.²

Using this device, Vicary went to Fort Lee, New Jersey³ and, during a six-week run of the movie "Picnic,"⁴ he transmitted subliminal messages to the 45,699 patrons who came to the theatre. The phrases, "Eat Popcorn" and "Drink Coca-Cola" were subliminally flashed at the unsuspecting audience. During that six-week experiment, popcorn sales increased 57.7% and Coke sales went up 18.1%.⁵ Figure 1 is a photograph of the film "Picnic" with its subliminal message superimposed over the figure in the film.



SECRET SALES MESSAGE shown with Kim Novak in *Picnic* reportedly increased popcorn sales. Darker letters indicate afterimage retained subconsciously.

Figure 16

Vicary was pleased by the results of his process, which was developed with the help of Rene Bras and Francis C. Thayer of United States Production Company, motion picture producers.⁷ He decided to form the Subliminal Projection Company, Inc., and market his services to various advertisers.⁸ Thus, he publicly disclosed the results of his experiment.

The public was swift in its judgment. "The Vanguard of the 'thought police' has now arrived. Either we rebel by not attending movies, by pulling out the wall plugs of our TV and radio receivers, or we enter into the introductory stage of a totalitarian rule in the U.S."⁹ Thus wrote Jeremy Howard of Cleveland, Ohio in a letter to Life. James Vanvliet of Huntington Woods, Michigan echoed this sentiment, "When this stuff is permitted on TV, I will sell my set for junk."¹⁰ A Stanford Research Institute official asserted that it was "a virtual H-bomb," while the president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union demanded to know what would become of the youth if brewers started using subliminal advertising.¹¹ Figure 2 indicates that even the popular press jumped on the anti-subliminal bandwagon. The New Yorker stated, "we had reached the sad age when minds and not just houses could be broken and entered." Phyllis Battelle of the New York Journal-American said, "Aside from my basic horror at the idea of being prodded into acting without all my wits about me...I picture the invisible commercial as the direct route to incontinence."¹² Senator Charles Potter (R), Michigan, who had a generous capacity for indignation, asked the FCC if it had enough powers to protect the public from this menace or whether it needed more.¹⁴ The

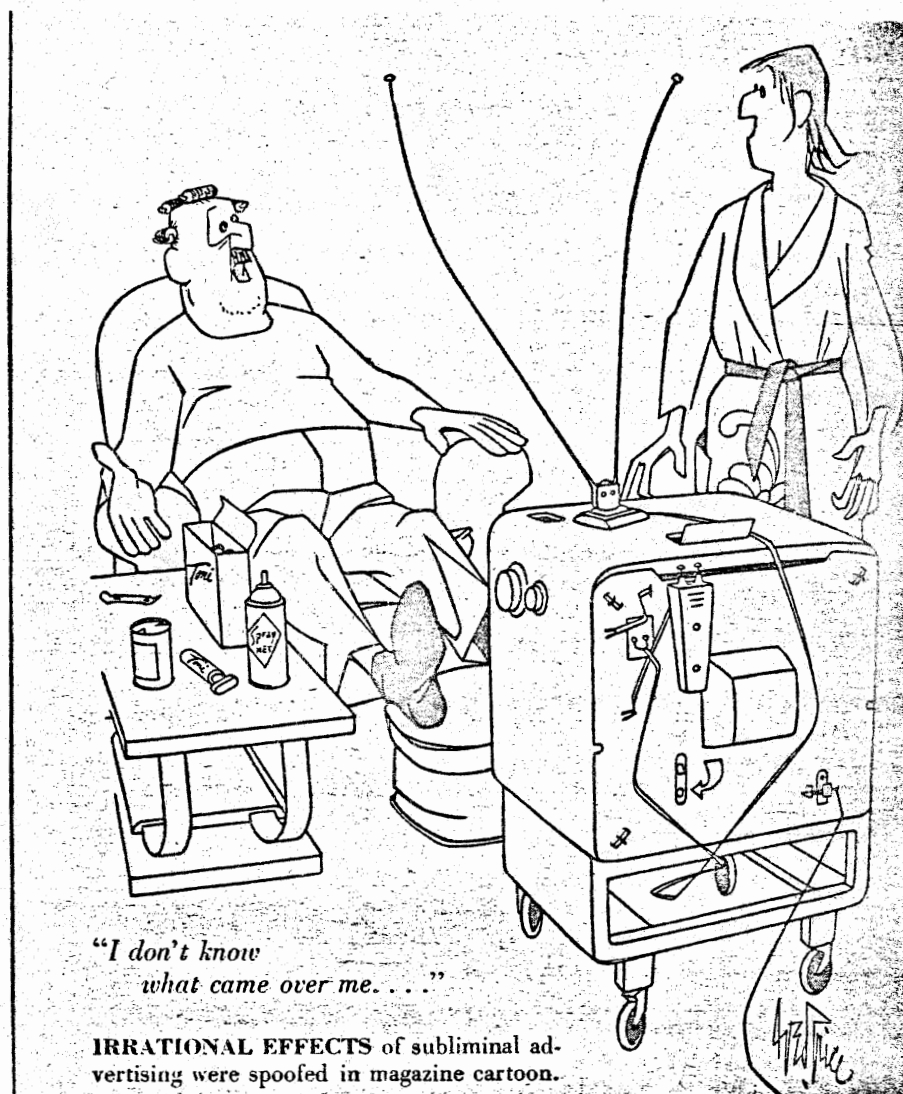


Figure 2¹³

Saturday Review was eloquent. In a full-page editorial they said:

The subconscious mind is the most delicate part of the most delicate apparatus in the entire universe. It is not to be smudged, sullied or twisted in order to boost the sales of popcorn or anything else. Nothing is more difficult in the modern world than to protect the privacy of the human soul.¹⁵

They went on to say: "There is only one kind of regulation that could possibly make any sense in this case: and that would be to take this

invention and everything connected with it and attach it to the center of the next nuclear explosive scheduled for testing."¹⁶ Experimental Films, Inc., a New Orleans company, also got into the subliminal act; they alleged that they had applied for patents a year before Vicary had. The company officials stated that their techniques would enhance sensory projection and dramatic values to make TV seem better than it was. This led Time to comment that this was "going from the subliminal to the ridiculous."¹⁷

Being attacked from all sides, Vicary tried to assuage the public wrath by toning down his claims as to the effectiveness of subliminal advertising.

It is weak. Because it has no effect on the person whose threshold is high at the time of transmission. If you aren't already thirsty, the message "DRINK COCA-COLA" will have no effect on you. It is, remember, advertising because, according to the present plans, it will always be used under circumstances in which the audience knows in advance not only that the technique is being practiced, but what the subliminal message is.¹⁸ It will merely be a way of jogging the memory.

He also said that he believed that television would be his biggest market, where the "reminder" advertising would be shown at 1/20 of a second, but that it would need to be "controlled" so as not to get out of hand.¹⁹

Responding to this statement, Dr. Jack A. Peterman, a twenty-year man for CBS, MBS, as well as for the Air Force, said that 1/3000 of a second was subliminal, but that 1/20 of a second for TV was not.²⁰ Hal Becker, one of the founders of the New Orleans company that was also trying to break into the subliminal field, tried to pacify a skittish public by reassuring them that subliminal advertising could not make anyone do

anything which was against his will, that it could only mildly influence and then only when the subject was relaxed and in a passive frame of mind, and that subliminal was no more "dangerous" than hypnosis,²¹ (which can be risky when used by a non-professional).

These various arguments, however, were not accepted; judgment had already been passed, despite the fact that both Vicary's and Becker's claims were supported by the clinical tests of psychological experts. Dr. Ernest Hilgard conducted some subliminal experiments and suggested its use in movies, despite the fact that, as he said, it only "can encourage but not convince, it can suggest an idea that the viewer may feel he thought of himself, but it cannot change his mind; it can create a mood, but not an attitude."²² It was also found that borderline subliminal [near consciousness] was more likely to elicit a response than deeply hidden subliminal, and that the more distinct the subliminal, the better its chances of being interpreted correctly. Advocates claimed that subliminal advertising was effective only to about the same extent as the general practice of stations turning up the volume during commercials.²³ Convincing as these arguments might seem to be, the anti-subliminal forces merely ignored them.

Of course, Vicary was not the first to use subliminal advertising, he was just the first one to become known to the general public. H. L. Hollingsworth recognized the possibility of subliminal advertising in 1913.²⁴ Even the term "subliminal stimulation" was used a generation before Freud by F. W. H. Myer, a magistral or ghost hunter, who used it to mean communication with the minds of the dead.²⁵

In 1956, the BBC (British Broadcasting Company) conducted a mass audience test of sub-threshold awareness during a ballet performance on the program, "Question of Science." The average audience was 4.5 million.²⁶ During the show a four-word message was flashed on the screen at 1/25 of a second. It read "Pirie Breaks World Record," referring to an airplane speed flight. At the end of the show, viewers were told that a news item had been projected subliminally and to write in if they knew what it was. Of 430 replies, 20 were exact and 130 were close.²⁷ One housewife said she had not consciously seen the message, but remembered it later doing dishes. Another viewer dreamed it that night.²⁸ Scientists discounted the experiment due to its lack of variable control.²⁹ This test is interesting in that out of 4.5 million people, only 20 knew exactly what had been flashed on the screen, and had, in all probability, been able to read the message consciously. There is, of course, no way of knowing how many saw it without bothering to respond, but it is logical to assume that most people simply did not see the message. This experiment would seem to question Dr. Peterman's claim that 1/20 of a second on TV would not be subliminal.³⁰ In addition, one must remember that the transmitted message was of an informative nature, unlike earlier subliminal messages which were suggestive. The "Pirie" message did not try to arouse any emotions or drives, which, according to the scientists, is what subliminal communication does best. Instead, it tried to act as a teacher, initiating a learning process. This experiment was one of the few that really tried to use subliminal communication in a positive and non-profit manner. It was a failure because of the few responses that were reported. This was possibly due to the audience

having to exert themselves significantly to respond. However, given the fact that it was a subliminal message, it is to be supposed that few would see the message consciously enough to be able to report it back. An interesting sidelight to this test was that some people "remembered it" later and that others dreamed it. This could be a more significant showing of its potential than the verbal feedback. The error would seem to have been the testing instrument itself. It is unlikely that a subject can be shown something which he is not supposed to be able to consciously perceive, or know that he is seeing, and then have him respond verbally about what he saw. Except for that small percentage of people who probably can see below the normal threshold, and out of 4.5 million there would be some, if the subject did see the object, then it is not subliminal and the test is a failure. If the subject did not see the object, then what actually does his failure to respond prove? The fact that the conscious eye has not seen the stimulus neither proves nor disproves that the subconscious eye has. This experiment was indicative of most public TV and radio tests of subliminal during the fifties and early sixties, wherein a subliminal message was broadcast and the testing instrument was audience call-in response. One has to wonder what the results of these tests might have been if questionnaires or surveys had been used instead.

In 1956, a year before Vicary's experiment, the London Sunday Times ran a front-page report that certain U.S. advertisers were experimenting with "subthreshold effects." It cited the case of a cinema in New Jersey that was flashing ice-cream ads onto a screen during regular showings of a film. The result, it reported, was a clear and otherwise

unaccountable boost in ice-cream sales.³¹ This was probably an early Vicary experiment. In November of 1957, TV station WTWO in Bangor, Maine tried flashing the words, "If you have seen this message write WTWO," for 1/60 of a second every 11 seconds on alternate days for two weeks. There was no increase in mail.³² They then tried some public service announcements, but these, too, proved negative.³³ But again, like the BBC, the testing instrument was verbal subject response to something which the subject was supposed to be unaware of. However, these failures did not dampen the advertisers' enthusiasm.

While Vicary was experimenting in New Jersey, his competitors for the subliminal advertising field were busy in New Orleans conducting their own experiments. The PRECON (from preconsciousness) Process and Equipment Corporation was headed by A. Brown Moore, president, and vice-presidents Dr. R. E. Corrigan and Hal C. Becker. Corrigan and Becker were the inventors of the PRECON system. Corrigan was at the time a psychologist for Douglas Aircraft Co. and Becker, an electronics engineer, was Assistant Professor of experimental neurology in the Tulane Medical School.³⁴ Unlike Vicary, Corrigan felt the field for PRECON would be "to increase the entertainment value of motion pictures and TV programs by providing subliminal information to enhance the psychological moods or trends of the material."³⁵ There were also many other uses for subliminal communication outside of TV and movies that Corrigan and Becker were interested in developing. They wanted to put up billboards and use ultra-violet light to flash their messages on them. A smaller model of this would be used on shop counters. Still another variation could be a plain screen in a market with a subliminal arrow flashing toward the products

that the store wanted to push. In a non-profit use, subliminal communication could be a useful tool for psychiatrists in dealing with rebellious patients by giving them tests without their knowledge.³⁶

One of the more novel experiments conducted by Corrigan and Becker was one using slides of pretty girls and a number that was subliminally hidden on the slide. People were asked to randomly choose a number from one to ten, after having been shown the treated slides. Men always had a high percentage of choosing the number. Women, in groups of only women, had a high percentage too, but women, when mixed with men, did poorly. This was attributed to jealousy and other insecurities.³⁷ The experiment supported the belief that a subliminal message must be positive to have a positive effect; if it is perceived negatively, it will have a negative effect. A sunny field filled with daisies might be a positive stimulus for most people, but pollen sufferers would tend to think negatively about the product.

Controversy raged around subliminal advertising, but some people were not bothered by it. WAAF, in Chicago, in 1957 and 58, started broadcasting "subaudible" commercials charging approximately \$1000 for each 500 messages. In February of 1958, Seattle's KOL began broadcasting hardly audible taped messages "below" the records played by its disc jockeys, "How about a cup of coffee?" was one, and "Someone's at the door" was another. The announcer urged listeners to hear "something else" on the record, but otherwise gave no hint. One listener reported he "thought about" having a cup of coffee, and two women admitted they went into the kitchen and had coffee immediately after hearing the broadcast. "That's odd too," said one of them, "I never drink coffee." Another housewife

who tuned in on the "door" message said although she didn't go to the door, she did go to the window and look out. A 10-year-old girl said she checked all four outside doors and was surprised to find no one there. Emboldened by these successes, KOL decided to use subaudible messages to attack TV and for a while broadcast the messages: "TV's a bore" and "Isn't TV dull?" But they decided against using "TV causes eye cancer."³⁸

Meanwhile on the West Coast, in Los Angeles, TV station KTLA announced that to "keep with the times" it had signed with PRECON to furnish it with public service messages like "Drive Safely" and "Don't Litter." For its efforts KTLA received such a torrent of adverse mail that it had to cancel out.³⁹ This is indicative of the normal response throughout the country; just when subliminal communication started rolling in some area or field, public outrage rose up to stop it.

Network TV in Canada broadcast the first subliminal test message nationwide on "Close-Up," a thirty-minute show. The audience was told about a test beforehand, but no one knew what kind of test. During the program, "Telephone Now" was flashed 352 times⁴⁰ over 27 stations at 1/5 and 1/2 second durations.⁴¹ The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation produced the test and Vicary's Subliminal Projection Company conducted it.⁴² There were no calls, but 500 letters came in. Analyzing the test, many people felt that "Telephone Now" was a bad choice; telephone who? what?⁴³ The main reaction of the public was, "now I know how to pronounce subliminal."⁴⁴ Here again was used that same bad testing instrument, and a good opportunity, which might have proved something significant about the effect of subliminal messages on TV, was wasted.

Back in the United States, Nucoa Margarine started using "subliminal sound" to sell its product over 75 radio and TV stations. The project was developed by Glen Hurburt, musical director of Guild, Bascom, and Bonfigli, an advertising agency, based on the belief that "ear frequency is quicker than the eyes."⁴⁵ The idea might have been successful if it had been given a chance to work, but on November 13, 1957 the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters (later known as simply National Association of Broadcasters, or NAB) sent out a memorandum to its membership, which comprises almost all radio and TV stations, telling them that broadcasting anything subliminal would "not be permitted."⁴⁶ This proved to be the beginning of the end for subliminal advertising in the electronic media. The next month, December, the Television Code Review Board requested that all subliminal telecasting be stopped until the board made its decision concerning the technique.⁴⁷ In January of 1958 the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (the British equivalent of the American Association of Advertising Agencies) set up a seven-man committee to investigate subliminal advertising. The British Broadcasting Company set up a similar committee, on which was Dr. N. F. Dixon of the psychology department of University College, London.⁴⁸ Dr. Dixon was, and still is, one of the major clinical psychologists in the field of subliminal communication, and has published numerous works on the subject. Following a detailed investigation over the next six months, the IPA instituted a "ban on the use of subliminal communication in any form for the purposes of advertising or sales promotion." They stated that its use was professionally unacceptable,⁴⁹ and that it was unfair to the consumer and his right of choice.⁵⁰

In the United States, political wheels were turning, grinding over subliminal advertising. The New York State Senate passed a bill-- with no discussion--to bar it and sent it on to the Assembly for final action.⁵¹ Albany Assemblyman Bentley Kassal of Manhattan introduced a bill making it compulsory for managers of movie theatres to announce to the public when they were going to show movies that used subliminal enhancements.⁵² On the other coast, California's State Senate unanimously voted to ask Congress to prohibit subliminal advertising on TV.⁵³

Attempting to stem the tide of anti-subliminal thinking, Vicary went to Washington to demonstrate his process to an audience of Congressmen, representatives of the FCC and the FTC (Federal Trade Commission), newsmen, and foreign observers. The TV western, "The Grey Ghosts," was shown on closed-circuit by WTOP-TV. Shown in two halves, each half contained a subliminal message.⁵⁴ Vicary preceded his showing by requiring that the audience should be shown the advertisement before it was projected at them subliminally.⁵⁵ The audience was then told that there would be two messages; the first message "Eat Popcorn" was shown on a split-screen to demonstrate the way it blended.⁵⁶ It was flashed at 1/20 of a second at five-second intervals.⁵⁷ "Fight Polio" was introduced in the second half without the audience's awareness. Only one newspaperwoman of the 300 people present got an impression from it. She thought of "The March of Dimes." At the end of the demonstration, Vicary pointed out that when used on TV, subliminal communication can make more than 10,000 impressions during a 15-hour broadcast day, based on a five-second interval method.⁵⁸ Reactions to the showing were decidedly apathetic. FCC representative Robert E. Lee said, "I refuse

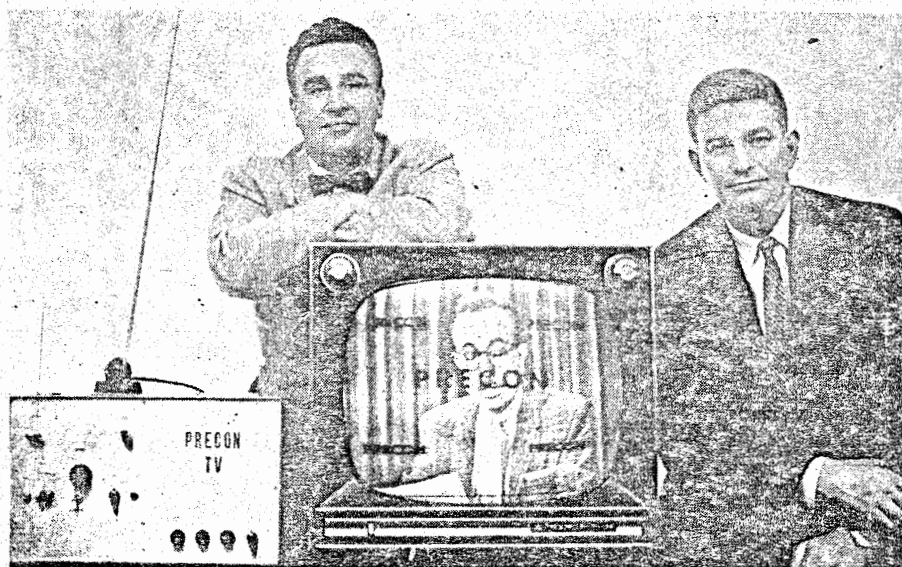
to get excited about it--I don't think it will work."⁵⁹ The Congressmen said positively that they were going to reserve their judgment;⁶⁰ all that is, except Senator Charles Potter, an early critic of the process, who, apparently oblivious to the subliminal message, "Eat Popcorn," remarked after the picture, "I think that I want a hot dog."⁶¹

While Vicary was showing his process in Washington in a desperate effort to keep subliminal advertising alive, the PRECON inventors, Corrigan and Becker, were a few thousand miles away giving a demonstration of their own to the Los Angeles Advertising Club, trying to make some money.

In the demonstration, the closed-circuit TV program was put into the PRECON unit, a box about a quarter the size of the TV receiver, before being fed to the receiver with the PRECON message added. A second message was similarly superimposed over a colored still picture in an internally illuminated display. In neither instance could the audience consciously decipher the messages ("PRECON" and "Drive Safely") until the dials on the PRECON device were turned so as to bring out the lettering as stationary words in front of the pictures.⁶²

The following photograph, Figure 3, shows the inventors of PRECON and their machine. (See Page 41.)

But unlike Vicary, Corrigan and Becker, there were many other people who did not like subliminal communication or anything about it; they worked very hard to get laws passed which would ban it. In 1958 they almost succeeded in getting such a law. On February 8, and March 12, 1958, during the second session of the 85th Congress, Representatives Wright and Hosner introduced bills HR 10802 and 11363 to make subliminal advertising on television unlawful. They were referred to the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, but no hearings were ever held.



PRE-CON subliminal tv apparatus makes its bow with its developers, Hal Becker (l) and Dr. R. E. Corrigan, at Los Angeles showing.

Figure 3⁶³

Mr. Wright reintroduced his bill in the next session of Congress, but it died in Committee again.⁶⁴ However, even though no specific laws were ever enacted against subliminal advertising, there were other controls. The NAB, after an important meeting in Phoenix, reaffirmed their 1957 decision against subliminal communication and ended its possible use on television. The official announcement was made March 26, 1958.⁶⁵ At their May convention the NAB amended their Television Code. Article 30 now says that "the process called subliminal perception...is not permitted."⁶⁶ The specific provision is IV-14.⁶⁷ The FCC also made known its anti-subliminal stand. They did not pass any specific amendments; they were quite satisfied to use the ones they already had, for example, Section 303, on the public interest and convenience; Section 326, which, although it prohibits censorship by the FCC, does not consider that

"regulation of subliminal perception" constitutes censorship; and, of course, Section 317, which says that whoever pays for an advertisement must be publicly announced as having done so,⁶⁸ including subliminal advertisements.

On its one-year anniversary, dating from the "Eat Popcorn" experiment in New Jersey, subliminal advertising was in rather a bad way. It had been banned in Australia, Britain, by the NAB and the FCC; in addition, it had been condemned by ministers, psychologists, and some advertising agency presidents. Even James Vicary was giving it up; he announced he was going to teach at a graduate level school in New Jersey.⁶⁹ By all rights, at this time, subliminal advertising, and even any practical application of subliminal communication, should have ended. It should have gone back into the laboratory to be played with by the clinical psychologist in his spare time. But it did not. People kept on trying to use it, either for profit or experimentation.

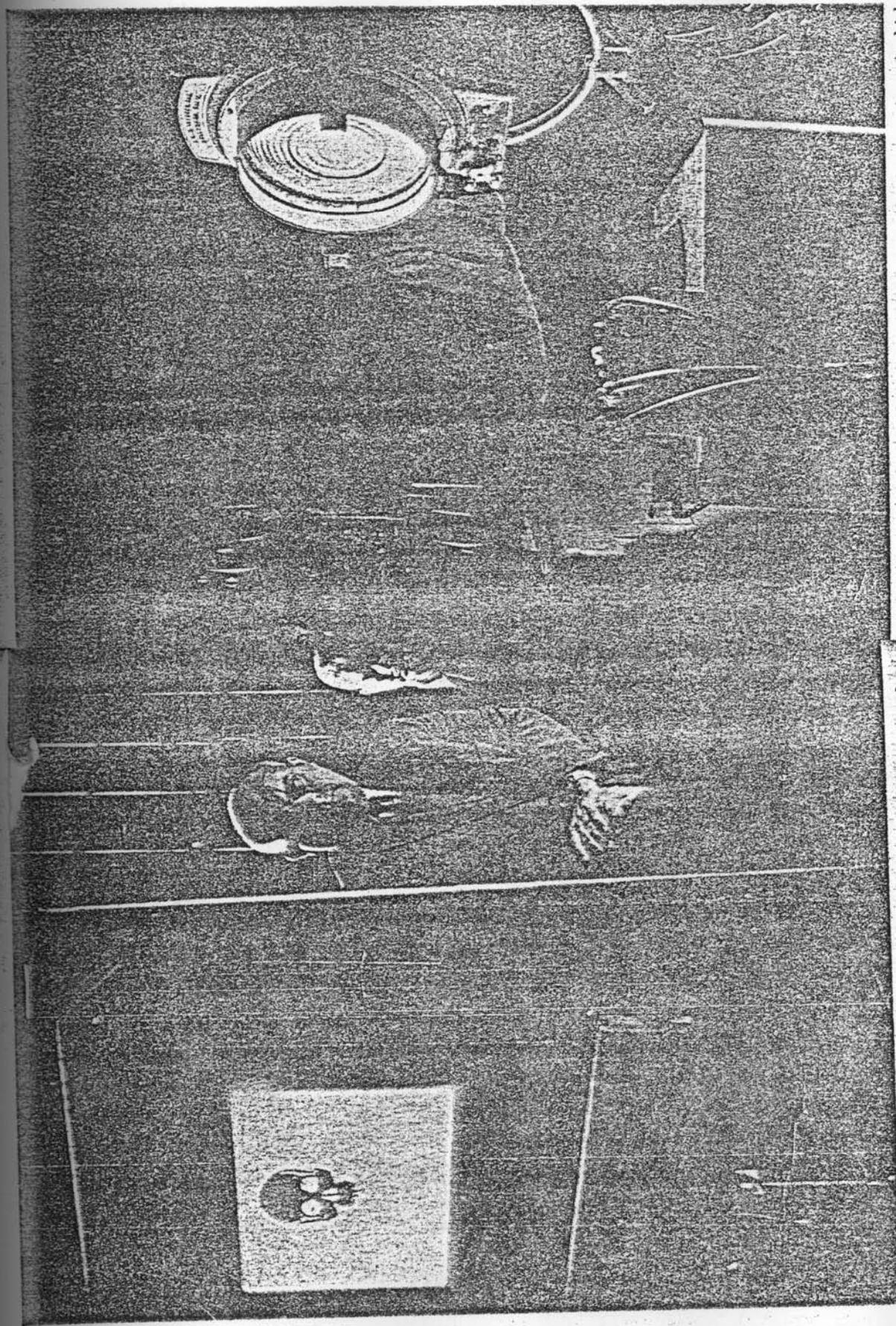
In England, where it had been banned by the IPA, which was supported in this move by the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers, TWW (Television Wales and West, Ltd.) was caught transmitting a shot of a twinkling eye with the message "Keep Watching" for 1/25 of a second. The Daily Herald said it was subliminal; the station said it was not, but they dropped the spot.⁷⁰ Numerous audio tests were run on "sub-audible" by various radio stations, WAAF Chicago, Illinois; WCCO Minneapolis, Minnesota; KLTJ Longview, Texas; KOL Seattle, Washington; and KYA San Francisco, California; but the FCC, for some reason, did not consider these cases as subliminal.⁷¹ Some subliminal uses, and users were quite odd. The Veteran's Administration Information Service in New York mailed

the first subliminal letter to radio programmers in New York and New Jersey. The letter urged stations to use VA scripts, which sold government life insurance. The slogan "Use VA Scripts" was slipped between words in a smaller type size.⁷²

In 1958, Robert Petranoff and Melvin DeFleur, both of Indiana University, conducted some subliminal experiments in conjunction with WTTV (TV) of Indianapolis and the FCC. Their conclusions were that subliminal devices possess the ability to communicate but not to persuade. They conducted a series of week-long tests on the general public, using the week-night 8-10 p.m. feature movie program and the 15-minute news program featuring Frank Edwards which followed. The first week the subliminal suggested a certain food product to buy. Sales increased by only one percent. Another experiment was of a very simple nature, to try to get movie watchers to stay tuned to the news which followed. However, after two weeks, the subliminal message "Watch Frank Edwards" failed to boost the size of the news audience. The program even suffered a slight decline.⁷³ This was a far better experiment than most of those which preceded it, but the choice of products to sell--a foodstuff and Frank Edwards--was not the best. Nevertheless, if more experiments of this caliber had been conducted, the knowledge of the art's potentials would far exceed its present state. The experiment was published in Public Opinion Quarterly in the summer of 1958 under the title "Televised Test of Subliminal Persuasion."⁷⁴

Subliminal effects and the movies merged quite naturally in the late fifties and early sixties to produce a few interesting highlights. Of course, others had already had the same idea. George Orwell's novel

1984 suggested that some form of subliminal technique would be used to control people's behavior, and his fellow author, Aldous Huxley, twenty-five years before "Eat Popcorn" hit the screen, conceived the idea of the "feelie" movie in Brave New World,⁷⁵ (subtactile). Hal Roach, Jr., head of a motion picture-TV film studio was one of the first to announce that he was going to adapt subliminal communication into a film. It would be used in a full-length picture called E.S.P. for "content and emotional impact."⁷⁶ Producer William S. Edwards took his already completed movie, My World Dies Screaming to Corrigan and Becker of PRECON and had them put some subliminal effects in. Figure 4 shows Mr. Edwards with the device. The picture begins with an optical effect called hypno-spiral, a kind of whirling vortex which seems to draw the viewer into it and hypnotize him. Subliminal words or symbols immediately begin to appear and the music builds to a fever pitch. During the more frightening portions of the film, words and images that normally trigger stronger responses in people are superimposed on single frames and appear on the screen for 1/50 of a second. It was hoped that viewers would react to words like "blood" and images such as skulls with more heightened emotions. Figure 5 depicts these uses. Corrigan was very satisfied with the outcome of the film, but he stated that he was interested in working with films outside of the horror genre. Motherly love, he suggested, could, for instance, be expressed by a subliminal baby or a pair of clasped hands.⁷⁷ But horror films got the most use from subliminal effects. Hal Roach, Jr. and Richard Rush used the technique in filming Henry James' famous ghost story, The Turn of the Screw, so that the audience would see the ghosts at a subconscious level.⁷⁸ Producer Harry Saltzman (better known for having produced most of the



45
spotlight. Image is being photographed by specially devised camera (center) which dubs it onto film for the movie, *My World Dies Screaming* (pictures at right).

USING NEW TECHNIQUE, Movie Producer William Edwards (left) and PRECON's Hal Becker and Robert Corrigan watch skull image illuminated by



SECRET HORROR IMAGES, skull and word "blood" are incorporated into new movie to heighten viewers' emotions when Cathy O'Donnell sees dead body.

Figure 580

James Bond movies) enlisted the aid of Dr. Dickson, a psychologist from University College, London, and Mr. Bob Casher, to help him develop subliminal effects for his movie, Jack the Ripper, which they labeled "Psychorama." They put it in an 1880's London street scene in which a woman is murdered. The subliminal cue is placed where the audience is most likely to look. In the foggy street the words "London 1888" are superimposed at the bottom of the screen at the conscious level, then skulls are subliminally placed in the open "eights." When the woman is first seen, the word "mother" is flashed on the ground near her. A cart goes away from the camera and the word "murder" is subliminally implanted on it. The images come faster during the killing itself; the audience has "death" flashed at its subconscious several times, and, having identified itself as the victim's son, is told to "kill her" both through hearing and sight.⁸¹ These movies, though fascinating in their usage of subliminal effects, did not convert the motion picture industry to it; the number of pictures actually using subliminal techniques remained very small. The public, however, does not forget, and recently the FCC was receiving calls complaining that the movie "The Exorcist" had made use of subliminal cuts.⁸² Mr. Keith C. Brown, a movie critic at the time, reviewed the effect of subliminal communication in the movies. Mr. Brown compared it to background music, most of which goes unnoticed but is very effective in creating a mood. He said that he found it neither a good nor a bad practice, and that if it were used in a movie, that movie should still be judged as a whole, rather than on the basis of one part. He did feel that it was unfair to the viewer in that its effect may be like music, but the music can be brought to the focus of attention if the viewer has

that desire; subliminal effects cannot be singled out during the viewing. As for avoiding subliminal effects in movies, his answer was either not to go to any movies at all, or not to worry about it.⁸³

A new and different money-making idea, using "semi-subliminal advertising," came to John Pearson, head of Audio Ad Company, Williams Bay, Wisconsin, in the early sixties. His premise was to take commercial theme songs that were already identifiable to the general public, so that when played without words, listeners would still recognize them and mentally add the name of the company or product. Therefore, broadcasting the musical themes would serve as a commercial reminder, even though not a word was spoken. Tested in Beaumont, Texas, the semi-subliminal approach increased the sale of Wrigley gum by 250%. Mr. Pearson said a theme can be repeated more frequently without irritating the listeners if the arrangement is varied. In Beaumont, the Wrigley theme was aired at 15-minute intervals as a waltz, samba, fox trot, and a march. Pepsi-Cola announced plans for a test in the Milwaukee area and Schiltz expressed interest in the idea also. Audio Ad franchised 13 communities in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin to start their new industry.⁸⁴ Media/Scope ran a study in 1968 on this process by which saturation of a commercial leads to its being recognized simply from its theme, and found that it did indeed happen. Their label for it was Imagery Transfer. They found that it could work using car ads, food, upset stomach remedy, shaving cream, and detergent; they also discovered that there was no difference between males and females in their ability to recognize the themes.⁸⁵ General Electric ran a few recognition studies of its own and found that while most people appear to forget everything

about commercials, their minds, when triggered, could obtain a 50% recognition response.⁸⁶ The question then was, was this subliminal, semi-subliminal, or not at all subliminal? Semi-subliminal is probably the best answer. The themes are a consciously observable part of a commercial, not hidden and undetectable as most subliminal communication; but since, for the most part, the themes are ignored and enter the subconscious where they act as "reminder advertising" like subliminal words and sounds do, theme songs could well be considered partially subliminal. Subaudible advertising, like the theme songs, is not meant to represent a product by itself, it is merely a complement to the conscious advertising. It is supposed to be the "trigger" that reminds the consumer of the conscious advertisement.

The whole key to subliminal advertising would seem to be that people remember almost everything without realizing it. Seven giant chemical producers in the U.S. had a research organization investigate their images in their own field. A survey was conducted and a sample of several hundred corporate presidents and executive vice-presidents was taken. They were asked to describe the companies as if they were people. One of the more interesting descriptions was of Olin Mathieson Corporation, a vast international complex of chemical companies. Most described "him" as an elderly, thin, wizened man with a sharp face and a balding head. He wore a stiff, heavy wool suit, and high-laced shoes. He was shrewd, untrustworthy, tight, feared and hated. A review of OM's advertising revealed a dignified campaign as well as generous support of Public Service Television. Then, by accident, it was discovered that 30 years earlier there had been a senior executive of the firm who fit the description perfectly.

The executive had been dead for over thirty years--dead but not forgotten in the unconscious memories of the executives, none of whom recalled the actual man even after being told about him.⁸⁷ Is the old executive in this case subliminal? Whether he is or not leads one to the most difficult questions in the study of subliminal advertising: what is symbolic and what is subliminal? Was the old executive simply an unconscious symbol of the company, or was he subliminally a symbol, in other words sharing elements of both levels? Very few things can be labeled either black or white, most have a gray area in which they blend; this is certainly true of symbolism and subliminal, and may account for this case.

An incident in 1962 was not gray, black, or white; it was funny, however, or at least the announcer of the CBS program "To Tell the Truth" thought so. During the credits, he stated that the audience was seeing a subliminal ad. The FCC did not think it was so funny; they investigated. The claim turned out to be false, and CBS "took steps" to see that it would not happen again.⁸⁸

As late as 1965, people were still condemning subliminal advertising. Dr. J. Gerald Callaman, in an article in the November issue of the Bulletin of the San Francisco Medical Society, called down the wrath of God on drug advertisements, particularly "subliminal ones," and compared them to Pavlov and his dogs for the harm they could do to people.⁸⁹ On the other hand, in 1966 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A. put out a TV commercial with subliminal flashbacks using a racecar premise (see Figure 6). The color spot opens on a housewife and children leaving home and entering a Toyota car; as the woman, Lee Breedlove, looks at the car's instrument panel, there is a quick cut and for 1/6 of a second the viewer sees Ms.



SUBLIMINAL FANTASIES—Lee Breedlove and her Toyota are shown in the visible commercial frames at the top; below are the subliminal (or just barely liminal) scenes carrying the "hot car" implication.

Figure 6⁹⁰

Breedlove in black-and-white in the cockpit of a racecar. Back then to the color and the Toyota as Ms. Breedlove adjusts her seat belt. Then follows another 1/6 of a second black-and-white flash of Ms. Breedlove adjusting her racing helmet. Returning in color to the Toyota, Ms. Breedlove drives off with her children. This followed by a cut to the Spirit of America (the fastest racing car in the world at that time) racing across the Bonneville Flats, with a quick cut back to the Toyota, zipping around curves, braking, etc. Narration establishes Ms. Breedlove as the holder of the Women's World Lane speed record of 308 mph. Dan White, producer, said the effect of the subliminal cuts was cumulative. The more times watched, the stronger the effect. Thus, ten years after "Eat Popcorn" some people were still practicing subliminal communication, and others were still complaining about it.

Some good things did come out of the subliminal process, and they were done by the NAB. In 1969, the NAB recommended to the FCC that remote controlled AM radio stations use subaudible tones for the transmission of telemetry signals. Tests run by the NAB in 1968 proved that this method would not interfere with listener reception and "will be instrumental in increasing the reliability of remote control systems."⁹² But, in 1970 some of the same old subliminal commercials, with new tricks, were still trying to sneak on the TV screen. An example of this was a 60-second spot for Labatt's beer--a best-selling Canadian brand--that had an eight-second sequence which was reshot at least a dozen times. It shows an attractive young model seated in the grass at a picnic.

Her companion, standing next to her, has been drinking from a bottle of Labatt's. The relationship between her head and his genital area was strongly established in only two, or three seconds. The young man, after finishing the beer bends over and places the bottle in the grass in front of the girl...recorded on video tape and played back a frame at a time...In the first still, the model's face is expectant, her mouth sensuous, half-open, her tongue is visible. ...In the second still, motion was stopped at the instant the beer bottle passed before the model's face in its downward movement...A fellatio scene was embedded subliminally into the Labatt's commercial to put it simply and directly.⁹³

One has to stop and wonder what the people who fought so hard against "Eat Popcorn" and "Drink Coca-Cola" would have had to say about this commercial.

In 1970, the tachistoscope was labeled "obsolete." There was invented a light intensity projector that worked beneath the level of consciousness more effectively, because the message was transmitted continuously rather than intermittently.⁹⁴ In July of 1971, telephone calls made to New York, Chicago, and Toronto located thirteen commercial research

firms which offered mechanically induced subliminal message service to advertisers or anyone, for that matter, who could pay their fee.⁹⁵ In 1973, Consumerist Robert Choate asked the FTC and the FCC to ban subliminal messages in a 60-second spot for Husker-Do, a game marketed by Pican, Los Angeles, and Premium Corporation of America, Minnesota. The commercial had the phrase "Get It" on a single frame in four places in the film. An FTC spokesman said that the commission had already contacted some TV stations to preserve copies of the commercial. Mr. Choate was particularly annoyed that the NAB, in a meeting with the FTC to discuss children's programs, had not disclosed that the subliminal commercial problem existed. Sam McLeod, general manager, telecast marketing, Premium Corporation, said the subliminal message was added to the spot by an "over-zealous young scriptwriter" at Lowe and Associates, a commercial production house that wrote the spot.⁹⁶ The only thing which Mr. McLeod did not satisfactorily explain, at least in this author's estimation, was how the young scriptwriter ever developed the artistic or engineering skills which were required to put "Get It" on those frames, or how he had the audacity to tamper with the advertising of a product, one which cost thousands of dollars to manufacture. Dr. Sarah Short, Associate Professor of Nutrition at Syracuse University again warned people, in a 1975 issue of Glamour magazine, against the use of subliminal advertising and about its detrimental effects.⁹⁷ This warning, which seems somewhat strange on the surface: a nutritional expert warning the world about the psychological province of subliminal communication from the pages of a young women's fashion magazine, was indicative of just how far the field of subliminal communication had come from the lab of the clinical psychologist.

From 1970 to 1976, the FCC and the IDC Services, Inc. worked on a process that would insert material in each corner of the television picture at the beginning and at the end of a program segment that would identify the program subliminally. But, even though the FCC adopted a special rule for it, the project fell through due to deadlines and unfilled promises.⁹⁸ Probably one of the most interesting of the subliminal ideas for use in television or radio was developed in this year, 1976. A company called "Alpha Sonics" advertised their new weight-reducing plan across the media. It was a diet plan whereby the radio would play an hour of special "Alpha Sonic" music, and the listener would lose weight. In fact, the taped program contained a subaudible message which told the listener not to eat, that food was bad, etc. The NAB stopped the radio programs of "Listen Thin/Alpha Sonics" before they got started.⁹⁹ What was unusual about the situation was that "Alpha Sonics" could have made their tapes directly available to the public, to anyone who would have wanted to buy them, in which case, neither the FCC nor the NAB would have been able to stop them. They could even have advertised their product on the electronic media, "Let Subliminal Sonics Take Away Fat," provided they had not used subliminal messages within the commercials themselves. It might even have worked for some people who have low thresholds towards subliminal messages.

In a recent survey 90% of the people who had heard of it believed that they were protected by statutes in both the United States and Canada. Most were revolted by the idea that American business would use such dirty tricks; 60% thought the whole idea was absurd science-fiction nonsense.¹⁰⁰

Those people are wrong, however, because, with the exception of the NAB and FCC codes, there is no protection against subliminal advertising! Thus, while the electronic media are regulated, the print media are not. Slick magazines, newspapers, books, comic books; they are all susceptible, and there have been strong claims made that some of these are using subliminal advertising.

On July 5, 1971, Gilbey's London Dry Gin ran its ad on the inside back cover of Time. Over one thousand adult males and females analyzed the ad; 38% saw nothing but gin; 62% expressed anxiety, arousal, etc. None saw any subliminal details. However, in the ice-cubes in the glass the letters S-E-X are hidden. Also there appear five "faces" which are suggestive of an orgy atmosphere. Finally, there is hidden on the table in the picture a man's legs and partially erect genitals; vaginal lips and clitoris.¹⁰¹

How is it possible to put all of those things into an advertisement so that its audience is unaware of them? The process is called embedding, and it is frequently used in advertising, according to some sources.

Embedding refers generally to the practice of hiding emotionally loaded words or pictures in the backgrounds of ads...most national advertising includes embedding...Every major advertising agency has at least one embedding technician in its art department. The technique is taught in most commercial art schools.¹⁰²

According to Wilson Bryan Key, in his book Subliminal Seduction, all major national publications with advertising use the technique of embedding, with Playboy magazine displaying some of the most skillful examples of subliminally embedded art. SEX, he claims, is the most frequently embedded word

in the American advertising industry, but other "taboo" words are used as well to trigger purchasing behavior. Words such as "fuck," "cunt," "ass," "whore," "prick," and "death" may be planted dozens of times in one layout. It can be done by an artist or by the photographer himself. He takes a picture of the model photographed at 1/150 of a second; a double exposure can then be made at 1/1000 of a second at which the word is seen as only a faint impression across some portion of the original picture.¹⁰³ Just as with Vicary's experiment, this sort of subliminal advertising is not something which occurred only recently. McGinnis, in one of his early experiments (pre-Lazarus), talked about the idea that a "taboo" word would be more likely to be perceived than a neutral word.¹⁰⁴

Subliminal advertising is often used in the advertising industry, as any means of stimulation that might work would be used. To cite just a few examples: Playboy ran a two-page ad which pictured a large wreath and a rather bosomy blonde. When tested, over 95% of a hundred or so young male test subjects remembered the ad. Over 70% specifically remembered the wreath, but could provide only vague descriptions of the blonde. Only 5% actually read the ad. When one looks more closely at the ad it becomes apparent why some information was suppressed and why the wreath was more memorable than the blonde. The wreath flowers, which at first appear to be nuts, are actually objects which resemble vaginas and the heads of erect penises.¹⁰⁵ The inside back cover of Time was purchased by Chivas Regal Scotch to display its massive bottle with the tissue torn away. A close look at the tissue paper, when it is turned 90 degrees to the right, shows that the paper is in the shape of a head of a Scottish Terrier, because, most probably, traditionally in our society the sym-

bolic archetype of the dog has meant affection, companionship, courage, devotion, and fidelity.¹⁰⁶

A typical example of the use of archetypal symbolism appeared in an Esquire advertisement for Seagram's Extra Dry Gin...the ad uses an orange being peeled as the object to be derived from the phallic bottle of Seagram's. For centuries the orange is symbolic woman--young, ripe, and sexually available. Peeling the orange is symbolic of undressing the woman. The rather simple subliminal message in the ad suggests that you undress the woman or seduce her through the use of Seagram's Gin. Remember the ad is designed to be read in a matter of one or two seconds. Few readers will read the copy. Even if they do it is most unlikely they will be able to consciously recall the ad even ten minutes after it was perceived.¹⁰⁷

Why use these ads? Because they sell the product. Playboy magazine's cover is, for the most part, always subliminal in some part of its appeal because Playboy depends on "pick-up" sales for most of its income. Thus, for a good cover shot they are willing to pay more.

The Playboy cover is probably the single most important page in any issue of the magazine, at least in terms of maintaining and increasing circulation. Photographers are reported to have achieved \$8,000 to \$10,000 for their camera click which winds up on a Playboy cover. In comparison, a centerfold photographer reportedly may receive only \$5,000 for his photograph.¹⁰⁸

Subliminal stimuli can be absorbed from a very deep level, which gives the advertisers a good deal of lee-way in the method of concealment in their ads, and some of the methods are fairly devious. Bacardi Rum ran a national advertisement using four bottles of their rum and four different types of glasses, indicating at least four types of fun. A

careful investigation of the shadows in the bottom of the brandy glass (one of the four) tells the real story. The shadows, of course, were painted by a re-touch artist. If a mirror is held above the shadows, the mirror image will read: U Buy. The unconscious mind, it has been well-established by research, is capable of reading mirror images, even upside down images.¹⁰⁹

One of the more fascinating subliminal uses was this one.

A new subliminal technique appeared in the February 1972 Playboy centerfold. The curvaceous photo-retouched blond model is in a kneeling position against a pink background of sheets and blanket. An interlaced mosaic of embedded SEXes covers the hair, body, and facial skin and the bedclothes....Hold the centerfold section up to a strong light and study the area along the satin border. This may well be one of the world's first examples of see-through pornography, communicated to over 22 million people fortunate enough to have thumbed through the Playboy...the readers ...see the large erect penis protruding into the model's vagina.¹¹⁰

In a Kent ad, appearing full page in four colors in Look Magazine, a blonde model relaxes in the hot sun. A lazy summer breeze moves wisps of hair across her tanned face. The model has apparently raised her sunglasses to let the warm afternoon rays reach her eyelids. She is, of course, holding a Kent in an upright position, symbolically ready for action. The subliminal trigger which will induce tens of thousands of people to switch to Kents, is a finger gently caressing a vagina--masturbating, if you will--in the sunglass lens. The subliminal promise of the Kent is therefore a good horny feeling.¹¹¹ Esquire published an ad for Sprite and a close look at the ice-cubes in the glass brings an interesting picture to mind. The right side of the ice-cube above the lime slice forms the back of an

animal--a large shaggy dog with a pointed nose, or quite possibly a polar bear. The animal's legs are extended outward to the left parallel with the top of the lime. The animal's arms (or legs as you will) appear to be holding another figure which is human with long feminine hair. Her face is located just above the animal's head. The two figures, animal and human, are in what can only be described as a sexual intercourse position. The polar bear, dog, or whatever, is in sexual embrace with a nude woman. Bestiality may be illegal throughout most of the world, but, at symbolic level, it appears to have sold a lot of Sprite.¹¹² In 1975, subliminal sex appeal was added to Dawn 120 advertisements (cigarettes) to help it compete with Virginia Slims.¹¹³

All of the above examples of embedding in magazines, with the exception of the last one, were found and exposed by Key. The last one was found in an issue of Advertising Techniques and, except for it, Mr. Key's book is conspicuously devoid of supporting evidence. In addition, his book is a work of "popular" non-fiction and has neither footnotes nor bibliography; thus, while some of his claims can be supported from outside sources, many cannot. Part of the purpose of this thesis, then, must be to investigate Key's claims and either support or refute them. Embedding is not a new art; Corrigan and Becker, in their experiment which showed a slide of a pretty girl to subjects, had embedded a specific number on that slide.¹¹⁴ Neither is it really surprising that magazines would use subliminal messages. Ross Wilhelm, marketing instructor at the University of Michigan, as far back as 1958, explained that subliminal stimuli were weak and that the larger a group to which one tried to appeal, the greater the ranges of thresholds one must deal with.¹¹⁵ With magazines, however, one

is dealing with a select audience, usually of the same sex, age, economic background, some common link with which to work.

Many of Key's claims link subliminal advertising with very blatant sexual connotation; when investigated, this is revealed to be a very logical connection. In 1964, A. G. Worthington measured the subliminal impact of taboo words like "shit" and "cunt" against non-taboo, but similarly structured, words like "shot" and "cult." His final test was of non-taboo words of a dissimilar structure like "book" and "test." Awareness of the taboo words far exceeded that of the neutral words; repeating the study in 1970, Worthington reconfirmed his results.¹¹⁶ Thus it would seem likely that advertisers would use the method which would be likely to command attention. Dixon, too, bore out the idea that recognition thresholds depend upon the emotional connotation of the stimuli used and its meaning and significance to the viewer.¹¹⁷ Few things carry the emotional impact of sex or sex-related words; impact is what the advertiser is after.

The most effective use of subliminal, as was discovered by the clinical psychologist, is drive arousal rather than the achievement of a specific preference.¹¹⁸ That is why the advertiser is more likely to use sex-related words at the subliminal level than he is to use the name of his company or product. Sexy words are designed to make the buyer "feel" better toward the product by relating it to something else which he finds enjoyable: sex. "Sex (in an ad) should give you a nice warm feeling toward the product and make you favorably disposed to it,"¹¹⁹ said Suzanne Grayson, president of the Englewood, New Jersey cosmetic-consultant firm of Grayson Associates which describes what tastefully executed sex in advertising should accomplish.

Suggestive sex is found on the conscious level in magazine advertising as a frequent format in which to sell a product. It creates a strong emotion, and emotion is the basis of most advertising. Advertisements try to create an emotional need for a product that has no logical need--products like soft drinks, cigarettes, cosmetics, hair coloring, beer, candy, toys, and products of a luxury or unnecessary nature. To do this, just about all emotional advertising uses what are called "buzz" words; words guaranteed to ring a bell in the subconscious and put the buyer on the right emotional wave-length; words like "mother," "your child," "our country," "love," "family," and so forth are in ads just for this purpose.¹²⁰ In addition, by using the subliminal level, the advertiser can broaden his ad's appeal. "The trouble with sexy ads is that sex is different things to different people," as an advertising researcher found when he conducted a survey on the subject. He asked 300 men and 300 women to rate magazine ads on the degrees of sexual arousal they inspired. With men nudity was a high scorer; its ability to inspire sexual arousal gave nudity 46 to 100 points, romantic content gained only 14 points and suggestiveness of copy, 2 points. For women, arousal was not limited to nudity, which got only 2 points, romantic content won with 33, suggestiveness of copy was second.¹²¹ What then, does the advertiser do? On the one hand he has a male audience that likes blatant nudity and sex, while on the other hand he has a female audience that prefers romance with a little suggestiveness. How can he appeal to both? By advertising his product on two levels; let the conscious level of the ad be suggestive and romantic for the women, but use blatantly sexual subliminal triggers for the men. "The average adult male under age 30 thinks about sex every

15 minutes; the man between 30 and 60 has a sex-related thought every half-hour; after age 60, sex comes to the mind only once an hour."¹²² These "statistics" come from Bruce J. Morrison, consumer research director of the Griswold Eshleman advertising agency. These figures, while debatable, are not as important as the fact that Mr. Morrison believes them to be accurate. Since he is one of the people who helps to determine what goes into an ad, his beliefs are important. If an advertisement is supposed to link a product to what is uppermost in the consumer's mind, is there any doubt as to what link Mr. Morrison would employ? If he wished to sell his product to both men and women, is it not likely that he would attempt to merchandise the product on two levels? And if this is so, is it not possible to see Mr. Morrison using consciously romantic appeals for the women, and subliminally sexual appeals for the men? The Kent cigarette ad, which was described before, would be a good example of this sort of dual appeal.

Key claims that one of the reasons advertisers use subliminal persuasion is the terrific amount of competition for the buyer's eye, as well as the fact that the consumer only looks at an ad for a few seconds.¹²³ Other, more reliable, sources support Key's contentions. A recent article by Pat Onley, television writer and researcher, estimates that the average adult is bombarded by at least 76 advertisements every day.¹²⁴ To investigate how many people notice and read an ad, Herbert E. Krugman, at that time manager of public opinion research at General Electric, conducted a survey on the matter. Before joining GE, he held positions with several ad companies; he was also the past president of the American Association for Public Opinion Research and of the Division of Consumer Psychology of

the American Psychological Association. Mr. Krugman chose the most common type of print advertising--the one-page, four-color ad. He totaled the Starch [pioneer psychologist Daniel Starch's method devised in 1922] results from all such ads (20,347) in all issues of 47 major magazines in 1970. He found that 44% of readers claim to have noticed a particular ad and 35% read enough to identify the brand, but only 9% say they read most of a particular ad. In other words, almost half of all ads are noticed--a third to the point of brand identification--but less than a tenth are of enough interest to be read. Naturally, the responses vary depending upon ad size, content, and position, upon the receptivity of the reader (sex, age, and income) and on whether the reader is in the market for the product advertised. At any rate, only a small portion of advertising is fully perceived at any time. This would seem to bear out Key's statement.¹²⁵

× Thus, most ads are seen for only a few seconds, glanced at by the potential buyer. For those few seconds though, advertising firms are willing to spend a great deal of time and money preparing the ad. Talon, a large zipper company, recently hired West Coast airbrush artist, Peter Lloyd, to illustrate their campaign. Surrealism marked the ad's style. "For the big zipper," said a company spokesman, "we could've done micro-photography by blowing it up and retouched it, but the fabric weave would have shown up and looked so ugly we decided we might as well draw it."¹²⁶ This is not an isolated case; most ads cost in the thousands of dollars to make and the amount of people who work on the ads can be numerous. On one ad the agency group included an account executive, an art director, an artist/stylist, a creative director, photographer and model.¹²⁷

One could easily add to these with grips, lighting technicians, transportation, processing, touch-up artist, special lab effects, etc. With that much money being spent, and the competition being as fierce as it is for the small amount of time the prospective buyer spends looking at an ad, is it really unlikely that the advertiser would pass up the opportunity to use anything that would help him to sell his product, particularly something like subliminal advertising which is known to enhance the consumer's response to that product?

In an effort to obtain the truth about subliminal advertising, correspondence was sent out to various people and agencies who have the capacity to know fact from fiction. The first group of letters was sent to the self-regulating agencies in advertising. An * marks the ones which replied:

- *The National Association of Broadcasters
- The National Advertising Review Board
- The Council of Better Business Bureaus
- The League of Advertising Agencies
- The Magazine Advertising Bureau
- *The Magazine Publishers Association
- *The Periodical Publishers Association
- The Marketing Science Institute

The position of the NAB, which was stated earlier in this chapter, was firm. Of the other two agencies that answered the query, the reply from the Magazine Publishers Association, Inc., dated September 14, 1976 from Katheryn Powers, was short and brusque:

We are sorry not to be able to help you...
Several years ago there was a great flurry
of discussion on the subject in the trade
press. However, we have not seen anything
recently...

There was a postscript which indicated that this was the reply from the Periodical Publishers Association also.¹²⁸ But a second letter, unsoli-

cited, from the MPA, dated September 20, 1976 from Marvin M. Gropp, Research Director, was completely different in tone. First, he explained what a terrible thing subliminal advertising was:

it is rather widely recognized that such a practice represents a potential danger to the preservation of a free marketplace and a free society. It is, therefore, a practice that is not only unnecessary, but is one to be avoided in expediting the consumer's exercise of "freedom of choice."

Mr. Gropp then explained why subliminal advertising is not a problem in magazines: because the reader can read and re-read the ad for as long as he wishes and scrutinize it as much as he wants. It is purely voluntary exposure limited only by the amount of exertion of mental energy on the part of the reader. "In such a permanent, open and thoughtful environment, it would be difficult to communicate on a level below the threshold of consciousness."¹²⁹ Mr. Gropp seemed to be unaware that the average magazine ad is looked at for only a few seconds,¹³⁰ nor did he seem to know about Coover's experiments back in 1917. People were asked to look at a letter on a card, and then asked to choose a number at random. The number they tended to pick was the number that was in one corner of the same card; the subjects had not seen it there because they were not looking for it.¹³¹ In the same way, a man looking at an advertisement for a certain whiskey is probably concentrating on the bottle, not on its environment in the ad. Thus, he very well may not see the word "buy" sketched on the model's lip. The author must admit that his curiosity was piqued, however. Why did the MPA send him the second letter? Why the more congenial tone? And why the defensive arguments?

Another series of queries were sent out to the twenty-five largest advertising agencies as determined by Advertising Age.¹³² An

* marks the ones which replied:

- *N. W. Ayer & Son, Inc.
- Ted Bates and Company, Inc.
- *Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn, Inc.
- Benton and Bowles, Inc.
- *Leo Burnett Company
- *Campbell-Ewald Company
- *Campbell-Mithun, Inc.
- Compton Advertising
- *Cunningham and Walsh, Inc.
- *Dancer-Fitzgerald-Sample, Inc.
- D'Arcy Advertising Company
- Doyle Dane Bernbach, Inc.
- Erwin Wasey, Ruthraff and Ryan, Inc.
- William Esty Company
- *Foote, Cone and Belding, Inc.
- Fuller & Smith & Ross, Inc.
- Grey Advertising Agency
- *Kenyon & Eckhardt, Inc.
- Lennea & Newell, Inc.
- *McCann-Erikson, Inc.
- Norman, Craig, and Kummel, Inc.
- *Ogilvy, Benson and Mather, Inc.
- Sullivan, Stauffer, Colwell and Bayles, Inc.
- J. Walter Thompson Company
- Young and Rubicam, Inc.

Out of the eleven replies, ten said no, they did not use subliminal techniques, and one had time to write and say that he did not have time to answer yes or no. John McAllister, Associate Research Director for N. W. Ayer International, agreed that "some effects of any communication may take place below the threshold of conscious recognition," but that they "make no attempt to use subliminal persuasion in any of the media. Even if we felt subliminal techniques 'worked' and our assessment of the research in this area is that they do not, a decision about whether to use them would be difficult and complex."¹³³ Lionel Wernick, Vice President of Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn quoted the television code of the NAB; said no,

they did not; and listed the NAB's address for further inquiry.¹³⁴ The NAB, however, does not regulate the print media, which Mr. Wernick should know, and the query was sent to Mr. Wernick asking specifically about print media. Mr. Wernick's reply was indicative of most in that it said "no," but then clouded that "no" with false leads to the FCC or FTC. Another example of this is the reply from Carlton Zucker, Administrative Vice President, Client Service Division of Leo Burnett Advertising. Mr. Zucker said "The answer...is no, we do not knowingly use subliminal techniques." Why qualify the no with "knowingly"? Does it imply that this practice could be taking place without Mr. Zucker's knowledge, or is the term merely window-dressing to impress the inquirer? Mr. Zucker spends the latter part of his letter putting subliminal techniques on the scale of trickery, and then condemning trickery. Earlier, though, Mr. Zucker stated "We [Leo Burnett Advertising] believe that advertising should communicate in an honest, straightforward, but interesting manner. No tricks. No disappointments."¹³⁵

J. T. Johnston, Senior Account Executive of Campbell-Ewald Company, gave a direct answer of "an unequivocal no" to the question of subliminal advertising. He said "our approach is open and direct, requiring nothing as sinister-sounding or esoteric as subliminal techniques."¹³⁶ The president of Campbell-Mithun, Inc., said no,¹³⁷ as did Herbert M. Kaplan, Director of Legal Services for Cunningham and Walsh, Inc., however, Mr. Kaplan cloaked his no in semantic subterfuge, claiming that the term "subliminal techniques" was too broad and possibly erroneous and "that deceptive advertising is counter-productive to say the least."¹³⁸ Babette Jackson, Senior Vice President, Director of Research for Dancer-Fitzgerald-

Sample, Inc., stated her answer boldly and completely. "This agency has never used subliminal techniques in its advertising to the best of my knowledge." Obviously, like Mr. Zucker, Ms. Jackson does not appear to know all that goes on in her organization; however, she does feel free to make generalizations for it. "The people who plan and write the advertising have no acquaintance with subliminal techniques and do not apply them."¹³⁹

Mr. John O'Toole, President of Foote, Cone and Belding, did not know what subliminal techniques were, even after hearing about them for years. "So, no we have never used subliminal techniques. And we never intend to even if we find out what they are."¹⁴⁰ But if Mr. O'Toole does not know what subliminal techniques are, how does he know that his firm is not using them? The firm of Kenyon & Eckhardt was well-represented by Ronald J. Moss, Chairman of the Board, General Counsel, who was not aware of any subliminal techniques being used in any advertising campaign. "Indeed, if I recall correctly, the last I heard of 'subliminal techniques' was in teaching while people were asleep. Kenyon & Eckhardt has never used 'subliminal techniques' in either electronic or print media. It has no intention of ever doing so, and considers the whole subject matter flaky at best."¹⁴¹ Peter R. Melonas, Personnel Manager of McCann-Erikson, answered the query with a nice little letter saying that he did not have time to answer the question.¹⁴² Finally, from Kathy Foley, Secretary to W. E. Phillips, President of Ogilvy and Mather, came a note saying "our agency does not use subliminal techniques."¹⁴³ They did, however, enclose a booklet entitled "How to Create Advertising that Sells," which they had put together concerning "good advertising;" it had nothing to do with the question.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this correspondence is that subliminal advertising is not only not used, but that it is deceptive, deceitful, trickery, ignored, and just unknown. There may, however, be another interpretation to be drawn from the responses. Public outrage almost twenty years ago nearly brought a number of very restrictive laws into existence, laws against these advertising agencies about this very subject. Thus, if subliminal advertising were proved to be taking place again, it would be these agencies who would stand to lose the most. Does it seem likely then, if they were using it, they would admit it to an outsider?

The third and final group of correspondence was sent out to various Federal Boards and members of the government:

The Federal Communications Commission
The Federal Trade Commission
Charles Percy, Senator from Illinois
Adlai Stevenson, Senator from Illinois
George Shipley, Representative from Illinois' 22nd Dist.

All responded. The FCC's stand on subliminal has already been discussed. The three elected officials were specifically asked about subliminal advertising in print.

Mr. George E. Shipley, Congressional Representative from this district, said

there is no doubt in my mind that we in this country are subjected to this type of advertising in television and magazines....I personally don't feel that there is anything that can be done about this type of advertising. Anytime the government tries to take a positive stand against a type of advertising or even outright pornography, the media starts screaming about infringement of the 1st amendment.

His suggestion was to refuse to buy the product so advertised, and to write letters complaining to the manufacturer and the advertising agency of the product.¹⁴⁴

Charles H. Percy, Senator from Illinois, referred the letter sent to him to the FCC; then the answer he received from the FCC was forwarded as his reply. The FCC, however, has no power over the print media and suggested that the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) might be a more profitable source for an answer.¹⁴⁵

Adlai Stevenson, Senator from Illinois, was concerned, but not hopeful, about curbing subliminal advertising, because of the government's (both Federal and State) restrictions concerning the censorship of content. If the subliminal words were obscene, there might be a possibility for censorship, he said, except that not even the Supreme Court has a workable definition for obscenity. "It would be extremely difficult to frame any statute directed toward symbolism, since the perception of symbols is highly subjective. If the Federal government or any State were to adopt such a law, I doubt that it would be upheld by the Court."¹⁴⁶

The FTC was contacted by telephone on November 22, 1976. The call was referred to Mr. Bruce Parker of the National Advertising Bureau (within the FTC), as he is their expert on subliminal advertising. Mr. Parker stated firmly that there is no legal stand against the practice and that the FTC had no control of it. Mr. Parker said that he had investigated the charge of subliminal advertising and, from talks with various advertising firms, he is sure that it is not done, due to a lack of practical application. There are too many variables, he said, too many thresholds, so that what is subliminal to one, may not be to another. Also, he felt

that it was difficult to draw the line between where emotions and/or symbolism ends and subliminal begins. Mr. Parker said also that, while he gets many calls about subliminal, most of them are of an academic nature and are inquisitive rather than complaining. When asked if he were familiar with Wilson Key's Subliminal Seduction, Mr. Parker said yes. He had found it interesting and fun, but not true, and personally thought much of it was hogwash.¹⁴⁷

The politicians, though literate, were not of much help in clearing up the question of subliminal advertising; Mr. Parker of the FTC was the most knowledgeable of those who said that it did not exist in print. The self-regulators were not talking, the politicians did not know, and the advertising agencies were a biased source. But Mr. Parker, as a government employee, was in a position to know, and he said no. By all rights, this answer should effectively nullify Key's claims, however, one must take into account the source of Mr. Parker's information: the advertising agencies. He did not say that there had been a complete investigation, rather he said that he had gone around and talked to them. How reliable a source, then, can Mr. Parker be? Key himself interviewed a large New York advertising research director, who

when confronted with the verbal embeds in a cigarette layout produced by his company, made a strong rationalization for the subliminal trigger words. He reported, with a straight face, that much of his agency's work was done by independent contract art producers. These are art production houses which service many of the nation's top ad agencies. The research director solemnly theorized that somewhere in New York, perhaps working obscurely in the basement of a production house, was a Commie-hippie revolutionist who was putting into American advertising all of these dirty things which, when

exposed to an outraged public, would destroy: 'the great institution of free enterprise marketing.' In other words, he considered the whole thing a communist plot engineered by secret agents working from within.¹⁴⁸

One may well wonder if Mr. Parker's investigations discovered any responses like that.

Summary

This chapter breaks down into six parts, the legality of subliminal communication, Vicary's experiment and its rise to prominence, subliminal uses in television, subaudible uses in radio, subliminal uses in movies, and subliminal advertising in the print media, particularly slick magazines. There are no laws against the use of subliminal advertising in this country, despite the efforts of some people to pass such laws in the late 50's and early 60's. The FCC has said that they don't consider it in the public interest and won't allow its use on TV or radio.¹⁴⁹ Neither does the NAB approve its use in these media,¹⁵⁰ and between these two forces they have effectively blocked most subliminal advertisements on television and radio. The FTC, on the other hand, does not have a specific policy concerning subliminal advertising in magazines,¹⁵¹ nor are there any self-regulating agencies, similar to the NAB, in magazine advertising that prohibit its use by their members. Therefore, there are no stops or controls of its use in magazines. Thus, it is not illegal and its use is at the discretion of the advertiser.

Subliminal communication came into prominence in 1957 when Vicary publicized his New Jersey experiment in which he subliminally stimulated

theater patrons to buy Coke and popcorn.¹⁵² Vicary then told the public that he planned to patent the technique and use it on television to sell products with subliminal commercials.¹⁵³ Public reaction to this idea was swift and negative; the New Yorker, the New York Journal-American, Saturday Review, and Senator Charles Potter were among those who immediately condemned it. The FCC and NAB investigated it and the top three TV networks spurned its use due to public outrage. Vicary found himself in a patent fight with PRECON, which he later lost, and while both Vicary and PRECON were lining up clientele the FCC formally said no to its use in the broadcast media. Vicary left the field and the public furor died out.

Before the Vicary experiment other investigators tested subliminal uses in the television medium. One of these was WTWO in Bangor, MAine, but their attempts proved negative.¹⁵⁴ During the controversial years many people tried to put the technique into use, such as KTLA-TV, Los Angeles,¹⁵⁵ and Network TV in Canada.¹⁵⁶ Even after the FCC banned subliminal use in television, enterprising people kept trying to sneak it on, such as Television Wales and West, Ltd., in 1958,¹⁵⁷ Toyota Motor Sales in 1966,¹⁵⁸ and the Premium Corporation of America in 1973.¹⁵⁹

Radio, inspired by the idea of subliminal commercials developed their own version called subaudible. Some stations like WAAF in Chicago immediately started selling their new product.¹⁶⁰ Others tested it for effect like KOL in Seattle, they found it had one, and then started broadcasting such messages as, "TV's a bore."¹⁶¹ After the FCC ruling other uses were found for subaudible selling. The Wrigley gum company found a way to use it in stores,¹⁶² while Alpha-Sonics developed it to help lose weight.¹⁶³

Subliminal enhancement for movies was another side-effect of Vicary's experiment. Producers like Hal Roach, Jr.,¹⁶⁴ William S. Edwards,¹⁶⁵ and Harry Saltzman¹⁶⁶ used the effects in their films but, unimpressed with the results, they abandoned it.

Subliminal advertising is a frequently used process in the print media according to Wilson Bryan Key.¹⁶⁷ This is done through embedding pictures and words inconspicuously in the background of the ad.¹⁶⁸ This practice is supposedly used in ads of such products as Kent cigarettes,¹⁶⁹ Seagram's Gin,¹⁷⁰ and Chivas Regal Scotch.¹⁷¹ In an effort to establish the validity of Key's claims, letters were sent to the top twenty-five ad agencies.¹⁷² Those that replied claimed no knowledge of the use of subliminal advertising.

This chapter has attempted to investigate the development of subliminal techniques with respect to persuasion in the mass media, a valid inquiry for speech-communication. What the future of subliminal communication may be is unpredictable; however, it is to be hoped that the speech-communicator will be in the forefront of its development.

CHAPTER NOTES

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CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The research has been conducted; the opinions, pro and con, are in. Now is the time to try and formulate some answers to the questions postulated in the first chapter.

* Does subliminal communication work, and if so, how well? The answer to this is, of course, yes, to a qualified degree. The clinical psychologist has proven this time and again. Dixon cites numerous examples of the findings of subliminal experimenters¹ as does McConnell.² It can communicate on the subconscious level. It cannot, when used by itself, persuade, but it is at its most effective when used in conjunction with conscious communication. It is a weak and supplemental type of communication, even in advertising, and does not really deserve the fear and distrust which it generates in some people.

* Is subliminal advertising legal? Technically speaking, yes, for as it has been shown in Chapter III, there are no laws against it in this country. It is not being used on television, due to the codes of the NAB and the FCC, but its use in magazines, if indeed such a use exists, is not controlled, and therefore would be legal.

How does subliminal communication stand at present, particularly in advertising? Subliminal communication is still under constant experimentation by the clinical psychologist, who approaches it as a curiosity. After a brief flirtation with it, the movie makers have forsaken it for

greener pastures. The politicians and the bureaucrats have pretty much written off subliminal from consideration. The only group which seems to be making a practical use of it are magazine advertisers and they say they never heard of it! Of course, there is that possibility. Perhaps Key is making his accusations on the basis of tricks which his eyes are playing on him. It could also be that the magazine advertisers tried the process and found it lacking in results, or, possibly, that they have only just started testing for its results within the last few years. However, the fact that this author has himself gone to the latest copy of a magazine, for example, Newsweek, has turned to the liquor ads and has found examples of words and pictures subliminally hidden within those ads, seems to support Key's claims. But while this empirical proof may be enough for him, it is hardly likely to convince anyone else. One of the purposes for this thesis was to try to document or disprove Key's claims, if possible. The best proof, of course, would be to have a renegade ad man or artist come forward and say, "Yes, I do this for my living," but no one has done this as yet. However, lacking such a statement, one must turn to other evidence. The advertiser, for all his claims to the contrary, must know what subliminal communication is. It would be unlikely for him to remain in his field if he consciously chose to remain unaware of the techniques within the field. Indeed, the letters from advertisers, which were discussed in Chapter III, indicated, with only one exception, that they did know what subliminal communication was. Granting this, one must begin to apply inductive reasoning. The advertiser has the knowledge and the motive to use subliminal techniques. His avowed purpose is to sell his clients' products. The psychologist has proven that subliminal

stimuli can provide the sort of enhancement which would lead a consumer to buy. Thus, there is motive. Secondly, he has the method--embedding--and the ability to apply it; witness the Dawn 120 campaign which used "subliminal sex appeal" in its ads.³ Then too, there is the fact that advertisers have been found to be using subliminal techniques in the electronic media--against the regulations of the FCC and the NAB--for example, the Lee Breedlove Toyota commercial⁴ and the "Husker-Do" game which had "Get It" embedded on some of the frames of its commercial.⁵ In order to reach their audience, advertisers would risk breaking the codes of the FCC and NAB. One is left with the conclusion that they would not be likely to ignore a medium which is relatively uncontrolled with regard to the use of subliminal techniques. Thus, it seems most probable that subliminal techniques are being used in the print media.

What is the future of subliminal communication? In advertising, subliminal communication will probably continue to be used (and then be denied) by the advertiser. It is easy to understand his viewpoint; people consider subliminal advertising to be deceitful and tricky. They would most probably protest its use if they knew about it, so the advertiser uses it to help him earn money and then tries to forget he ever heard of it. In the advertising field, subliminal communication is wasted because it benefits only the few. But the advertiser is, presently, the only one using subliminal communication at all; the psychologist works at it, not with it, and the speech-communicator is neither utilizing nor studying it as fully as it merits.

The uses of subliminal perception in the field of speech-communication are only limited by the imagination of the user. Lew

Sarett, as early as 1936, was expounding on its uses in public speaking. He talked of how the audience member picks up cues from the speaker, that he does not consciously note, they are at the "fringes of his attention."⁶ Consider the fact that the speaker also could be unaware of the unconscious cues he is sending out, and you have an audience using unknown variables to help decide their reaction to the speaker. This use definitely needs investigation. The speaker must learn what kind of subliminal cues he is sending out so he can either stop or control them, while the audience member should be made aware of what kind of subconscious things affect him and how to protect himself from being manipulated by the speaker through them.

Lawrence R. Wheelless, assistant professor at Illinois State University alludes to Lester Thonnsen, A. Craig Baird, and Wayne C. Minnick when he says that, "Traditional theories of public speaking suggest that there is a relationship between comprehension and persuasion."⁷ Subliminal communication may not be able to "persuade" by itself, but it certainly helps comprehension in that facts, attitudes and emotions can be lodged subconsciously in the mind of the receiver, which would then produce a much stronger and clearer reaction to the speaker's message. So it would seem to follow that subliminal communication would definitely be an additive to conscious communication.

Manipulation of an audience's subconscious is a real facet of subliminal communication, it is also a major part of propaganda. What if unscrupulous people start using subliminal stimuli in conjunction with conscious persuasion to try to effect an audience's emotions for their own gain? True, many people would be unaffected by the subliminal message

normally, but what if a relaxed mood was set up to lower their resistance, and one must remember that there are quite a few people with high thresholds to begin with. Shouldn't the speech-communicator examine this possible use of subliminal communication and define its limits and effects?

Sarett also talks in his book about the way subliminal stimuli are unconsciously noted by a receiver in average conversations, but that any conclusions that the receiver draws from these stimuli he will attribute to "intuition."⁸ Shouldn't this area of communication be investigated? It would seem that in a study of small group or interviewing subliminal cues should be discussed as to their effect on both the receiver and the sender, and the messages passed between them.

William J. Seiler, assistant professor at Purdue University stated that, "Research has generally shown that visual aids increase attention, add clarity and improve comprehension and retention of a message. Doesn't this mean that subliminal aids could be used in a teaching situation? Some experiments have already been conducted along these lines in the field of psychology. William S. Skinner, Jr., in his dissertation, tested subliminally presented words on the vocabulary development of ninth-grade students.¹⁰ Rona C. Fisher tested subliminal stimuli effects on verbal recall.¹¹ Recall has also been tested by Deanna Holtzman,¹² and Judith Ruzumna, in her dissertation tested responsiveness to subliminal stimuli in social situations.¹³

G. L. Post, a psychologist, conducted an experiment to test the effect of a subliminal stimulus upon attitudes developed toward a character portrayed in a film.¹⁴ Could it be possible that the right kind of

subliminal stimuli would "enhance" movies? Of course, the motion picture producers abandoned the subliminal technique in the fifties, but there was nothing written down which said that it did not work, merely that it was abandoned. If the media experts in communication were to experiment with it, they might possibly develop a technique far superior to the one used previously. Gerry Veeder, in cinema, followed these very lines of inquiry with her experiment, "The Influence of Subliminal Suggestion on the Response to Two Films."¹⁵

Films, verbal responses, social feedback, are a valuable adjunct to speech-communication. It is the contention of this author that when subliminal stimuli are used to help persuade people to buy specific products, are used to "enhance" the film media, or to affect a receiver's response to a sender, or are ever used, whether purposely or unwittingly, in a communication, then it becomes the duty of the speech-communicator to investigate it. He must find out why and how it does what it does, and then find the best way in which to use it. It has been the purpose of this survey to investigate by the historical-critical method the thing called subliminal communication; to find out what it is, how it works, and why it works. It is now hoped that others in the field of speech-communication will find the unique methods of examining and utilizing it.

CHAPTER NOTES

¹N. F. Dixon, Subliminal Perception: The Nature of a Controversy (London, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), p. 320.

²James V. McConnell, Richard L. Cutler and Elton B. McNeil, "Subliminal Stimulation: An Overview," American Psychologist XIII (1958), p. 232.

³Advertising Techniques v. 10 #7 (November, 1975), p. 11.

⁴Advertising Age v. 37 (September, 1966), p. 3.

⁵Advertising Age v. 44 (December, 1973), p. 21.

⁶Lew Sarett, William Foster and Alma Johnson Sarett, Basic Principles of Speech 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958), p. 444.

⁷Lawrence R. Wheelless, "The Effects of Comprehension Loss on Persuasion," Speech Monographs v. 38 #4 (November, 1971), p. 327.

⁸Sarett, p. 446.

⁹William J. Seiler, "The Effects of Visual Materials on Attitudes, Credibility and Retention," Speech Monographs v. 38 #4 (November, 1971), p. 331.

¹⁰William S. Skinner, Jr., "The Effect of Subliminal and Supraliminal Words Presented Via Videotaped Motion Pictures on Vocabulary Development of Month-Grade Students," Dissertation Abstracts International v. 30 (1970), p. 2430-A.

¹¹Rona C. Fisher, "The Effects of a Written and Pictorial Stimulus Presented Above and Below Threshold on the Pattern of Verbal Recall," Dissertation Abstracts International v. 28 (July, 1968), p. 357-B.

¹²Deanna Holtzman, "Recall and Importations on a Word Test Primed by a Subliminal Stimulus," Dissertation Abstracts International v. 35 (November, 1975), p. 2473-B.

¹³Judith Ruzumna, "The Effect of Cognitive Control on Responsiveness to Subliminal Stimuli in Social Situations," Dissertation Abstracts International v. 30 (1970), p. 373-B.

¹⁴G. L. Post, "A Study of the Effect of a Subliminal Stimulus upon Attitudes Developed Toward a Character Portrayed in a Motion Picture Film," Dissertation Abstracts International v. 27 (1967), p. 149-A.

¹⁵Gerry Elizabeth Kleindinst Veeder, "The Influence of Subliminal Suggestion on the Response to Two Films," Dissertation Abstracts International v. 36 (May, 1976), p. 7014-A.

APPENDIX

Two experiments were run by this author and Mr. Barry P. Johnson, in an effort to test the effects of embedded stimuli. The two tests were based on the S. Bach and G. S. Klein experiment where groups of people were shown a sketch of an expressionless face. One group was subliminally exposed to the word "angry," subliminally tachistoscoped over the face at 1/3000 of a second. Another group received the word "happy" over the same face at the same subliminal level. Both groups overwhelmingly interpreted the emotional content of the blank face consistent with the subliminal stimuli.¹ The objective in running this test was to use embedding in place of the tachistoscope to show that the kind of embedding which Key claimed was being used by the advertisers could actually work. In an effort to make the experiment even more like advertisements, we put together groups of slides subliminally treated, added background music, a commercial format, and a voice-over in an attempt to sell first guitars and then milk.

Both experiments were conducted using sections of the 1310 beginning Speech course at Eastern Illinois University, to achieve a random sample. Each test had a positive set of slides and a negative set of slides. Both sets were identical except for the subliminal stimuli used. Both tests post-tested only and used a semantic differential scale. Both experiments had negative results.

In the first experiment the words "sex," "love," and "happy" were used on the positive set of slides, while "hate," "fear," and "anger" were used on the negative set. The film for shots of the model with the guitar was Kodak Plus-X, E.I. 400, developed in Microdol-X at 68 degrees F. for 8 minutes, 5 seconds agitation per 30 seconds developing time. The drawing of the words onto the picture was done with an H-lead pencil. The words themselves were placed as inconspicuously as possible, such as in the flames of a fire near the subject, on the guitar, and on the subject himself. The intermediate prints were made on Kodak Medalist paper, grade G, using Kodak Dektol as the developer. The photographs were then reshot using Kodak Tri-X, E.I. 400, developed in Microdol-X at 68 degrees F. for 8 minutes, 5 seconds agitation per 30 seconds developing time. The film for the slides was Kodak Plus-X, E.I. 125. The process took six hours to complete at a cost of \$25.00.

Not satisfied with the quality of the slides in the first experiment, a different procedure was undertaken. In the second experiment, the initial film shot was Kodak Tri-X, E.I. 400 (35mm), developed the same as before. This time, however, the intermediate prints were made on 8 x 10 Agfa, Brovira grade 3 paper and the developer was GAF Ansco Ardol. The prints, having a glossy finish, negated the use of a pencil or pen in creating the subliminal stimuli. A bleach compound called "Spot Off," manufactured by Edwac Scientific Co., Inc., was used. Applied by artist brush, the words "warm" or "cold" were drawn in the folds of the subject's shirt. The copies were reproduced in slide (35mm) form on Kodak Ektachrome (High-Speed) Daylight type through .80 A filter with tungsten 3200 degree K lights. This second process produced a far

superior slide to the first, and it was hoped that by using a larger area for the stimuli, a better response would be achieved. Although this was not the case, in neither experiment was the subliminal stimuli detected, even though in the second experiment it was quite large.

In retrospect, it would seem that the failures were not due to the subliminal aspect of the experiment, but rather to the added variables: the music, the voice-over, the use of a series of slides rather than one, and the attempt to sell a product rather than to test a feeling, as well as contending with unstable equipment and variable lights and circumstances.

CHAPTER NOTES

¹S. Bach and G. S. Klein, "Conscious Effects of Prolonged Subliminal Exposure of Words," American Psychologist XII (1957), p. 397.

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