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PSYCHICAL DESIGN - A NEW PROFESSION

By: Morton Heilig

The United States has reached a very critical stage in its development. Having satisfied the physical requirements of the majority of its people it is now faced with the problem of deciding to what new goals it shall point its great productive energies. The answer it gives to this question has great meaning for the world's population, for within 50 years they will be faced with the same problem.

A nation, just like an individual, must have a goal to strive for. Without it, it is incapable of organizing its energies intelligently. If, having achieved one goal (in our case the satisfaction of material needs) it fails to pass on to a goal of a higher order, it inevitably passes through the same process of degeneration that characterizes rich people who are incapable of using their wealth constructively; namely, Impotence, Gluttony, Auto-intoxication, Disease and Death.

Which choice America will make is still ^{open to} ~~questionable~~.

On the one hand she is beginning to gorge herself on mountains of unneeded material goods. Each year Detroit jams 6,000,000 more cars into our already choking traffic arteries. Farmers produce billions of tons of excess food only to have them rot in Government storage bins. Industry happily pours out stacks of military hardware that quickly finds their way to military graveyards.

USC School
of Cinematic Arts
Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive

On the other hand, there are stirrings in other fields which indicate that America may still be able to divert her massive productive power into newer and more constructive channels.

These are the calls for better education, higher culture and a more meaningful use of our increasing leisure time. It is possible that we as a nation are beginning to realize what wise men have been preaching since the beginning of civilization; namely, that since man can directly consume only small amounts of material things and he can never really own more than he consumes, material goods can never be satisfactory ends in themselves. Their greatest value lies in providing the foundation upon which a spiritual life can be built. Only spiritual values are worthy goals of great civilizations, for man's ability to grow spiritually is endless. Spiritual experiences are his only true possessions, and in spiritual richness he at last finds peace and contentment.

If America takes as her new national goal the development and nourishment of the mind of her people she will make a dramatic break-through into a vast new terrain capable of absorbing her creative energies for centuries.

Men from every walk of life will contribute to this vast conversion, but the most direct contribution, the spearhead of the movement, will be a man who, in a professional sense, does not yet exist.

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This is the Psychological Designer.

The Psychological Designer is a man whose unique talents and extensive professional training will enable him to create desirable states of mind in people.

His primary concern will be to create and control man's psychological energy in such a way that he will be healthier and happier, and will evolve as rapidly as possible to higher levels of consciousness.

The last object becomes especially imperative today not only ~~in~~ ^{for} America's national development ^{but} if mankind in general wishes to dominate Atomic Energy and Electronic Brains rather than become slaves to them.

Looking at the problem broadly, there are three basic ways of developing ^{Human} Consciousness.

The first is physiological improvement of the human nervous system through Eugenics.

The second, which has until recently been the primary Oriental approach of Yoga, strives for the elevation of human consciousness through the rigorous self-manipulation of internal forces.

The third, which has been the Western approach, is to influence the development of the mind by controlling the information fed to it from its environment.

The first, Genetical development, holds out great promise but it must await more knowledge about the hereditary process and a more homogeneous Social philosophy.

The second, Yoga, is effective for an elite few, but it is an impractical approach to the problem of developing the mental level of an entire population.

The third, the Western Environmental approach, has been the most effective so far and holds the greatest promise for the future.

This approach has been practiced throughout western civilization by a wide variety of people concerned with the content and behaviour of the human mind--educators, artists, propagandists and clergymen. But their methods were, and still are, based purely on personal insight and experience. They were, as the saying goes, "flying by the seat of their pants." As each practiced his own profession, he felt he had little to learn from the other. And as they watched science and technology revolutionize man's material world they were convinced that the world of the mind was inherently impervious to such an invasion.

But today the purely empirical method of operation and the assumptions upon which it is based are no longer valid or adequate to the problem.

A wide spectrum of new sciences has developed which are successfully exploring the world of the mind--Neurophysiology, Psychology, Social Psychology, and lately Cultureology.

Other sciences dealing with creation and the control of external processes, such as Electronics, Information Theory and Cybernetics, are not only throwing great light on man's internal thought processes, but are creating vastly more subtle and powerful tools for the psychic manipulator to work with.

The dual development of a body of accurate scientific knowledge ^{about the mind} and powerful technological tools has ~~laid the founda-~~ ^{made} ~~tion for the creation of a new kind of professional~~ ^{type} ~~--a man who~~ ^{possible} is master of both the knowledge and the tools for applying it--¹² the Psychological Designer.

This does not mean that the specialties of education, public persuasion or communication will be eliminated. What it does mean, however, is that they will be first and foremost Psychological Designers who later ^{specialize} ~~apply their skills~~ in one field or another, just as Doctors, Lawyers or Mechanical Engineers first obtain a generalized education and later specialize.

In order to better understand the function of the Psychological Designer it may help to describe the particular spot he fills in the overall productive picture. Production can be broken down into two main categories; the production of material goods (automobiles, houses, refrigerators, etc.) which interact primarily with man's body or other material objects, and the production of control systems which primarily control other machines or interact with man's nervous system. Initially, a material good, such as a chair, was produced by one artisan. Intuitively he made his wares beautiful as well as functional. It never occurred to him that the two could be separated. Then came the Industrial Revolution and Specialization. Mechanical engineers dominated the production process. They were capable of producing chairs 100 times faster and cheaper than the artisan. Consequently he was swept from the field. But the chairs the engineers produced were ugly and uncomfortable.

In their natural devotion to machine efficiency they had forgotten man. Inevitably a new specialist, the Industrial Designer, arose who could bridge the gap between mechanical engineering and man; thus returning considerations of convenience and beauty back to their rightful place in the productive process.

The historical background of Psychological Design is very similar. In all primitive societies every activity was accompanied by rich sensory symbolism that satisfied the mind's natural appetite for ideological orientation and emotional expression. Hunting, fishing, fighting and harvesting were always accompanied by emblems, songs and dance, which dramatized their inner meaning ~~of the activity~~. Anyone who travels through Europe is quickly impressed with the great expense and artistry each city lavishes on the festivals it has inherited from medieval times--Venice's Gondola Race, "La Regatta," Florence's great horse race, "The Palio," Pamplona's "Running of the Bulls" and Monte Carlo's "Mardi Gras." The Industrial Revolution has run roughshod over these traditions, creating a world peculiarly barren of emotional color and spiritual content. Everyday life in the United States is particularly bleak because ~~she~~ ^{it} grew out of a wilderness, with no roots, reached maturity simultaneously with the machine, and hence embraced ~~it~~ more fully than any other nation, and because the predominant ideology is Protestant-Puritanical which equates emotion and sensorial excitement with sin.

Now science and technology have created sophisticated electronic control systems which make the cheap mass-production of psychological value possible. Until now mostly noise and confusion

has been created. As a result of both the great need to reinvest our daily lives with the physical harmony and emotional color man needs to be happy, and the great new potential for doing so created ~~by control technologies~~, it is inevitable that specialists capable of closing the gap between these two will arise. This is the place the Psychological Designer occupies in our overall economy.

The Psychological Designer, then, is a man capable of bridging the gap between man's psychological needs and the means available to satisfy them.

Inevitably, he will establish, with the Electrical Engineer, the same type of creative alliance that the Industrial Designer has with the Mechanical Engineer and the Architect has with the Construction Engineer.

Though they touch at many points there are important distinctions between the Industrial and Architectural Designers ^{on the one hand} and the Psychological Designer. ^{on the other} Both the Industrial Designer and the Architect can make drawings or photographs of their designs because they are dealing primarily in statics. They spatially relate the structure of a building, or a machine, to the body of man. But the Psychological Designer cannot make a two-dimensional drawing of his concepts because he is dealing in dynamics. He is relating the operation of the environment to the operation of the mind, and this is a relationship that flows through time rather than space. Thus, one could never touch what a Psychological Designer fashions, for he designs experiences rather than things.

Perhaps several examples of what the Psychological Designer can contribute to various fields will help clarify his unique role, particularly as it is distinguished from that of the Industrial Designer, Architect or City Planner.

Let's take a look at the automobile. The ambition of the Industrial Designer is to make its body aerodynamic and attractive, its interior comfortable to sit in, etc. The Psychological Designer, however, will strive to add a whole new mental dimension to the car that will make it much more exciting, pleasant, and safe for the mind of the driver. He will do this by designing changes into the total driving situation rather than the structure of the car. For example, an electronic voice will warn the driver every time he exceeds 40 miles per hour. If he drives more than 100 miles without a rest, the voice will ask him if he is tired and advise him to stop and rest. The Psychological Designer would extend the driver's senses. He would put microphones in each of the car fenders that would give the driver amplified aural orientation in traffic; warn him of cars creeping up from behind, etc. Small rear and side view television screens could be placed beneath the windshield and snapped on at will, letting the driver see what is around him without taking his eyes off the road in front. The Psychological Designer would advise that the road's center stripe be the same color as the color of the road on the map. The map itself would be a small film projected onto a small screen in time with the progress of the car. All the lighting, directions and signals of the road will be radically changed to clear up the visual chaos that confronts every driver. The Psychological Designer would place short range radio antennas along the road at various intervals that would inform the driver of his location, the time, driving conditions ahead and, above all, enrich his experience of driving through the area by revealing its history, economy, unique features, etc.

The contributions the Psychical Designer could make to air travel are equally important.

After the aeronautical engineer has designed a machine that will fly, and the Industrial Designer has made it comfortable for the passenger's body--comfortable seats, handy lap tables, reading lights, air vents, etc.--there still remains much for the Psychical Designer to do in order to make the passenger's mind as comfortable as his body.

It is common knowledge that no matter how comfortable the seats and restful the decor, most passengers become very tense the moment they step inside a plane. The bit of music, the few announcements, and the small brochure, only scratch the surface of what Psychical Design can do to relieve this tension and heighten the passenger's enjoyment of the flight. To begin with, a Psychical Designer would keep the passenger's mind informed at all times. A speaker would anticipate and answer all fears. It would explain motor warm-up and flight take-off, course changes, etc. It would tell him that the red and blue exhaust flames are normal and that changes in ^{engine} motor pitch result from perfectly normal ^{sych}ro-phasing of the propellers, and that the apparent fading of motor power is due primarily to changes of pressure in the passenger's ears. So much for dissipating the passenger's un-called-for tensions. The Psychical Designer can do much more. He can either distract from or intensify the the passenger's experience of the flight. Each seat will be provided with a television screen and a set of private ear-phones. The passenger could select a Hollywood film or an

illustrated lecture about the flight. How the plane is built and tested, how the navigator operates, who the pilot is and how he flies the plane. An important feature of this program would be a colorful profile of the city or country to which the plane is flying. External TV eyes could explore the ground below. The lecturer could explain the cloud formations outside. At night the plane could play giant colored lights on the clouds to create beautiful patterns keyed to music. The Psychological Designer would recommend a transparent polarized cabin roof so the passengers could enjoy the great ocean of stars above. When and if planes become larger, the Psychological Designer will arrange for discussions, dancing, singing and live entertainment.

In the hands of Psychological Designers, our cities, instead of being merely dreary sites of commerce, could be transformed into a magnificent expression of our spiritual vitality. They will bathe the entire city--streets, skyscrapers and bridges--in beautiful light with music synchronized to the time of day and season to create varying emotional effects. The French development "Son & Lumiere," where sound and light are used to evoke the story of Europe's great Castles, Forums and Coliseums, is only a beginning. Nonetheless, it dramatically illustrates how much the Psychological Designer can add to a ^{static} mute architectural setting.

His training in the art of public drama will enable the Psychological Designer to enrich and heighten all public spectacles, such as Parades, Rallies, Conventions, and Sporting Events, and to create others that are entirely new.

Baseball, in particular, could use a lift from the Psychological Designer. Each year it degenerates more and more into a tedious pitching battle, clouded in a maze of meaningless statistics. And the yawning spectators stay away in droves. The last man the baseball purists will turn to for help is the Psychological Designer, but only he can help them. For he sees baseball for what it really is; a public display of power, accuracy, and coordination expressed through action. Obviously this message will never come through as long as seven superb athletes spend nine-tenths of the afternoon watching two others having a catch. While baseball dies, football, basketball and hockey have soared in attendance because they are packed with action. The Psychological Designer would take baseball away from the pitchers and turn it into a hitting and fielding game loaded with action. Baseball scores should read 20 to 19, not 1 to 0. To make the game more exciting the Psychological Designer would put a net around the entire field so that even long balls would bounce back and remain in play. The ball that sails completely out of the park instead of being a home run would be as dead and meaningless as it is in tennis. He'd move the pitcher back so the batter would have a better chance to hit, make the bat square instead of round, and then add two more men to the busy outfield. He would cover the field with Television cameras equipped with parabolic microphones. The big Picture and Sound Close-ups would not only go to home viewers but to large Television monitors hanging from the top of the stands so that even the spectators present could see and hear dramatic close-ups of all the action. If these changes were made, baseball would be revitalized and attendance would soar.

Another area where the skills of the Psychological Designer are and will be applied in full is in the new crop of Disneyland. Disneyland is one of the most significant developments of the 1950's. It is a great supermarket of experience. After spending several hours and bundles of money, the consumer exits with a mind full of sensations rather than an armful of groceries.

By drawing on the skills of his writers, animators and sound men (psychical designers all) Disney has created Tomorrowland, Frontierland, Fantasyland--the submarine ride, the trip to the moon, and many other exciting experiences. The phenomenal public enthusiasm for Disneyland on the part of an experience-starved public has triggered a wave of imitations. These, plus the boom in Industrial, Agricultural, Scientific, and Worlds Fairs are creating an ever greater demand for talented, well trained Psychological Designers.

The influence of the Psychological Designer will be felt throughout the land as he radically transforms our schools, theaters, churches and homes. He will also insist that every mine, factory, steel mill, and communication center open its doors and make full provision to give a constant stream of visitors an exciting inside view of their operation. This will help to penetrate the ignorance barrier that stands between most of the population and the workings of their own society.

~~Our portrait of the Psychological Designer may become still clearer if we point out that just as he is not an engineer he is not an artist in the traditional sense of the word. If he can compose music, write or paint, so much the better, but these~~

specific talents are not required. What is required, however, is a sensitive appreciation of each art form so that he can use them to the fullest of their potential. The specific artistic talent the Psychological Designer must have is the ability to coordinate all the arts and technologies to create the specific psychological effect he desires. The professionals who stand closest to this today are the producer-directors of motion pictures and television. They are not engineers, writers, actors, musicians or set designers, but they are specialists in coordinating all these skills to express their own vision (the program or film) that will have the desired effect upon an audience.

Where do specialists of this kind come from? How do they learn their craft?

To begin with they are generally people who have a strong affinity for ideas, feelings and emotions, rather than things. As they mature and meander through the potpourri called "liberal education" they discover that they have no desire or inclination to be "businessmen." They enjoy the ideas of science and engineering, but want no part of the severe discipline necessary to practice them. They are attracted to the humanities. They enjoy good music, painting and literature and yet do not necessarily have any specific talent in these directions. They have vivid imaginations and relish heated, all night debates about religion, politics and art. They sense that there is little place for them in our highly specialized materialistic society. Since Psychological Designing does not yet exist as a recognized profession, they

intuitively select occupations that are closest to it. They decide they'd like to "go into television, the theater, advertising, etc." But when they graduate they quickly discover they lack the type of education, discipline and experience necessary to work in these fields. They get caught in the idiotic vicious circle of "No Experience-No Job - No Job-No Experience," etc. Finally, after many wasted years of frustration and despair, some manage to get a foot in the door as tenth assistants, office boys, etc. Willy-nilly they absorb a few tricks and by a sheer accumulation of years learn to perform some function in our sprawling yet shapeless idea and communications industries. They become the "seat of the pants" Psychological Designers who create our radio, television and movies.

If the general taste levels of these media is downright atrocious, it is because the great majority of people who create them are poor souls of no talent and no training ^{and} who have spent the major part of their energies fighting for jobs rather than maturing their skills. Since there are no schools and no standards of professionalism, the industry has attracted every know-nothing who is dazzled by the idea of fabulous salaries, gorgeous blondes and kidney shaped swimming pools. As a result the handful of really talented men that do exist find their paths blocked by hordes of mediocrities.

The obvious way to overcome this tragic situation is first to recognize Psychological Design as a specialized profession in its own right, comparable to Law, Medicine or Engineering, and

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Second, to create special professional schools to teach it and establish standards, and-third, to require that all those who wish to practice Psychical Design meet minimum standards established by the schools and industry.

Efforts to establish schools teaching mental "arts" of one kind or another have always been thwarted by an outmoded dualism that insists that the material world is objective and real, and therefore it can be analyzed and taught, whereas the world of the mind is a subjective ghostlike abstraction too mercurial to analyze and impossible to teach. This has never been the case, and the recent development of the mind sciences and control technology make it even less so today. There now exists a large and rapidly growing body of scientific knowledge which provides a solid foundation for a School of Psychical Design. Certainly our educational and cultural development cries out for people well trained in the art of nourishing the mind.

There is no need for a school of this type to defend itself against the lame-brains who carp "You can't teach talent! There's no school like the School of Hard Knocks!" etc. The obvious answer to this is that neither can the medical school create the sensitive doctor, or the science school the scientific genius. What they and a school of Psychical Design can do, however, is develop the talent that does exist to its maximum potential by giving it knowledge and training.

In short, I am suggesting the creation of Schools of Psychical Design in which students would learn the basic principles of sound Psychical Design before moving on to specialized training in films,

television, theater, festivals, schools, etc., when and if they decide to specialize.

Then at least all professionals dealing with the shaping of the human mind--Showmen, Educators, Artists, Communications, etc. --will be able to understand and exploit each other's skills.

Several schools which attempt to fill this vital role are already in existence or on their way: The University of Southern California's School of Motion Picture and Theatrical Arts; the University of Pennsylvania's newly formed Annenberg School of Mass Communications; Brandeis University's ~~School of Communications~~, and Columbia University's forthcoming Arts Center.

These schools hold out great promise, but I believe they will miss some of the great opportunities that lay before them by concentrating on only one phase or another of the Psychological Design field--either Motion Pictures, or Mass Communications, or Art, etc. Instead they should hit the problem squarely in the center by first giving their students a broad scientifically based program in Psychological Design before letting them specialize.

Of what would a course in Psychological Design consist? There are many different approaches, but here are the thoughts of one writer on the matter.

There would be four basic courses:

- (1) The History of Mental Life
- (2) The History of Communicative Forms
- (3) The History of Technological Means
- (4) The History of Content

These four, if put in the terms of Information Theory would read:

- (1) Sender and ^{Receiver} ~~Destination~~, (2) Coding, (3) Channel, and (4) Message.

The first course, "The History of Mental Life," would deal with the evolution of mental life in nature from the amoeba to man. It would study the various neural systems nature has devised to handle information, control action, as well as send and receive messages. The Psychological Designer can learn a great deal by studying the behavior patterns of animals and plants just as the Architect and Industrial Designer can learn by observing their structures. For if form follows function, function follows life, and this is the Psychological Designer's main concern. Since man is almost always the origin and end of the Psychological Designer's work, he must have a thorough understanding of him. For a systematic approach to this material the student would study relevant phases of Biology, Neurophysiology and Psychology.

The second course, "The History of Communicative Forms," would cover all the sensory systems man has used to convey ideas and emotions: painting, sculpture, music, poetry, drama, festivals, religious rituals, and motion pictures. This course would call upon the knowledge of Art Historians, Philologists, and Critics, as well as practicing artists.

The third course, "The History of Technological Means," would cover all the artifacts man has invented to aid him in the creation and distribution of the sensory forms mentioned above. This would start with simple tools like paint, brushes, and drums, and evolve through movable type and the printing press to the motion picture camera, electronic radio, the phonograph, television, and videotape. This would require a study of tools, mechanics, electronics, ~~and~~ optical and acoustical engineering, and architecture.

The fourth course, dealing with "The History of Content," or the message, would study how message content is related to the problem of orientation, and survival in animals and man. It will show how human messages have been shaped by the science, religion and social order of their times. This would entail a study of the History of Science, Philosophy, Religion and Society.

These four courses should begin at the freshman level of college and last two years. At all times the interrelation of one course with the other should be kept in mind. These two years should be followed by two years of practical workshop problems that would allow the student to cover the whole field of Psychical Design or specialize in one area.

The Ideal Graduate of a School of Psychical Design should have several qualities. He should share the Architect's and the Industrial Designer's zeal for rescuing us from the world of ugliness and spiritual misery ^{information pollution} we have made for ourselves. He should share with the Doctor a serious respect for the powers he has learned to command, and feel that it is just as unethical for him to poison the mind of a man as it is for a doctor to poison his body. (In the face of a plague of television violence, Rock and Roll suggestiveness, and Motivational Research, an ethical standard of this kind is long overdue.) He should be so well trained in all phases of Psychical Design that he could move easily from one kind of design problem to another, just as Industrial Designers and Architects do. He should be able to produce a television program one month, design a festival the

next month, and create a Psychological Program to relieve the boredom of a long rocket flight the month after that. Above all he should be capable of operating at all levels of psychological involvement from ~~any~~ entertainment through education, and art-up to the heights of religious experience. A man who is sensitive, imaginative, and well trained shouldn't be limited to only one phase of the psychological design field for his entire life. The overspecialization (as reinforced by medieval guild unions) that plagues the idea industries today is having a drastic effect. It is robbing the creative people of the opportunities to grow by exploring different worlds, and consequently is robbing the industries of the vitality that flows from cross-fertilization.

Another advantage of field-wide mobility is economic. It would remove once and for all the axe of feast or famine that is forever hovering over the communicator's head. Like Architects do today, the Psychological Designer could survive, function and continue learning on small commissions until riper plums come along. Once he ~~breaks~~ breaks out of the artificial confines of the motion picture and television ~~industries~~, the Psychological Designer will generate new ideas that will invigorate every sector of our economy. He will motivate the engineers into building things they never thought ~~was~~ possible only because they never tried.

Since he can contribute so much to the future vitality of America, I am thoroughly convinced that the Psychological Designer will eventually come into his own as a fully recognized professional. But eventually is not soon enough. America needs

talented, well trained Psychological Designers NOW. She needs them, and the things they can create, more than she needs missilemen and missiles.

The reasoning behind this statement is very simple. Both Russia and the United States are recoiling from the insanity of resolving their differences in a nuclear holocaust that would be as suicidal to victor as to the vanquished. Inevitably the struggle is shifting to a battle of ideas. And in a battle of ideas one good Psychological Designer is worth more than a whole battalion of missile experts or H-Bomb specialists.

The Russians, who have always been as strong in psychological design (May Day Parades, Youth Festivals, etc.) as they have been weak in Industrial Design, have taken full note of this type of shift, and spent lavishly on sending Performing Artists and Industrial Fairs around the world.

In the last analysis the Bolshoi Ballet must be a more satisfying sight to a starving Indian peasant than a nuclear tipped missile, which only scares ~~him out of his wits.~~ ^{threw it out of him.}

With the same single-minded coordination that achieved startling results in rocketry, the Russians have created several large well-financed Research and Development Laboratories to pioneer advanced motion picture and television techniques as well as large schools to supply them with talented experimentors.

To date, the United States still has the technology and skills to take a lead in the field of Psychological Design (just as she was in the position to take the lead in Rocketry in 1945), but she will inevitably lose her vital lead if she fails to wake

up to the importance of this field and support it generously with money, organization and prestige.

If she doesn't, ^{it is very likely} ~~one fine day~~ the Psychological Designers of Russia will launch a Psychological Sputnik (possibly a form of Television that fills the sky) that will ^{amaze the world} ~~astound the world on its~~ ~~ear~~, and it will be too late for frantic Congressional investigations and public hair pulling. If we are to meet this new Russian challenge in time we must do five basic things now. ~~we~~

~~must:~~

- (1) Recognize Psychological Design as a Field.
- (2) Create well equipped, well staffed schools for the training of professional Psychological Designers.
- (3) Create and support research institutes where Psychological Designers will work hand in hand with Engineers to create advanced Psychological Techniques (at the moment none exists).
- (4) Minimize wasteful and time-consuming duplication through efficient organization geared to make significant forward steps, rather than fifty variations of the same thing.

(Note the profusion of identical wide screen techniques but no important advance in film or television form since 1952.)
- (5) As a nation we must give Psychological Design the same support, status and sense of urgency we have reserved for H-Bombs and Missiles.

If we do these things, we not only will hold our own as a nation but will for the first time create for ourselves a life of rich emotional color and profound spiritual excitement.