

the science of communication

Memo from To: Hon. Lee Aspin  
JOSHUA LEDERBERG

MAY 10 1976

.... photon pollution

Dear Dr. Aspin:

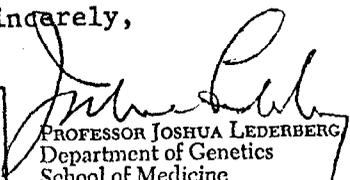
Until now, searchlights etc. have been only a minor nuisance [perhaps with the exception of interference with astronomical observation], but the attached cover picture gave a glimpse of an ugly future for the skies of our cities if this particular technology gets out of hand.

The picture is a demonstration of the projection of advertising information by laser; and it is obvious this will be a much greater incentive than the bare searchlight; a/c of the pictorial detail.

I don't know whether the FCC already has jurisdiction; as in principle the system does not necessarily differ from forward scatter radar; though for visible light the notion of broadcast is a bit different.

Anyhow, it should be much easier to protect the public resource of an unpainted sky if some action is taken now than if we wait till there has been a large entrepreneurial investment. The task of writing reasonable legislation will not be easy, since we hardly want to prohibit people from pointing a flashlight upwards; but I think that power-density thresholds could be devised coupled with an intent to communicate with numbers of people.

Sincerely,

  
PROFESSOR JOSHUA LEDERBERG  
Department of Genetics  
School of Medicine  
Stanford University  
Stanford, California 94305



INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH

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