



### ***William T. Powers 1926 -2013***

photograph by Mary A. Powers

***William Treval Powers, Inventor, Scientist, Psychologist, Originator of Perceptual Control Theory (PCT)*** died at his home in Lafayette, Colorado. He grew up in Hinsdale, Illinois, and served in the United States Navy in World War II, after which he earned his Physics degree from Northwestern University on the GI Bill.

His interest in control theory as a model of behavior began while he was a medical physicist at the Veteran's Administration Research Hospital in Chicago, where he designed many devices for medical research; notably, a curve-tracer for plotting isodose contours in the beam of radiation from a Cobalt-60 therapy machine.

While attending the Graduate School of Psychology at Northwestern University in 1960, he worked part-time as a technician in the Department of Astronomy where later he became chief systems engineer. In that capacity, Powers designed and built low-light-level television systems for astronomy. He was involved in the design of the Lindheimer Astronomical Research Center, and was responsible for the design and building of the Corralitos Observatory. He created the automatic all-sky photometer for use on the moon for Apollo 18.

Throughout these early years, he was lecturing and publishing regularly on the subject of control theory. The culmination of the first 20 years of research was published as *Behavior: the Control of Perception* by Aldine DeGruyter, Chicago.1973).

Thomas S. Kuhn, then Professor of the History of Science at Princeton University, wrote:

*Powers' manuscript is among the most exciting I have read in some time...I shall be watching with interest to what happens to research in the directions in which he points"*

Bill Powers and Mary Andrews were married in 1955 at Chicago City Hall. Later, as their family increased, Bill took a job at The Chicago Sun Times where he spent over a decade as a technician in the technical services group. **Among other special projects, he developed a system for receiving newsprint manifests by wire, and won the Marshall Field Award for his microcomputer system for receiving, formatting, and typesetting satellite-broadcast stock tables in real time.**

Powers left the Sun Times in 1990, and spent the remainder of his life studying and testing his theory, and

challenging others to do the same; writing, lecturing, presenting papers at scientific meetings, building testable computer models of the theory. PCT has now gained acceptance in graduate schools throughout the US, in China, Australia, the UK and more.

As one educator writes:

*“Powers is one of the clearest and most original thinkers in the history of psychology. He has explored with persistence and ingenuity the profound implications of the simple idea that biological organisms are control systems. His background in engineering allowed him to avoid... the traps that have victimized even the best psychologists...His contributions will stand the test of time.”*

— Professor Henry H. Yin, Ph.D,  
Psychology/Neuroscience, Duke University, NC, USA.

PCT is now taught in many cross-discipline graduate schools, including Duke, UCLA, University of Colorado, Grinnell College, East Anglia and Manchester Universities in the UK, Charles Darwin University in Australia, South China Normal University and Zhongshan University also in China and more. **His most recent book, Living Control Systems III, offers tangible proof of PCT, with 13 computer models available for downloading free of charge at BILLPCT.ORG**

In his last communiqué to his colleagues, dated May 23, 2013, Bill reminded them: *“[PCT] is the simplest theory that we know of that explains behavior. It is easy to understand. It is correct... and we can prove it.”*

Bill’s wife Mary preceded him in death. He is survived by his three children, Alison Powers, Barbara Powers, Denison Powers; four grandchildren, and his sister, Alice Powers McElhone.

A Memorial service was held in Boulder, Colorado on June 8, 2013.