

... letters

Radio astronomy in orbit

Alan C. Nixon's letter (SN: 6/16/73, p. 383) commenting that he was reminded (by the radio telescope article in SN: 4/14/73, p. 239) of a proposal he had made some years ago to place one of a pair of radio telescopes on the moon to greatly increase the baseline reminded me in turn of a somewhat similar idea I had intended to send SCIENCE NEWS (but hadn't).

This was to put a pair of radio telescopes into widely spaced stationary orbits.

Our minds ran in the same paths (but Nixon's ran some years sooner and about four times farther than mine).

William P. Lawson
Hammond, Ind.

Screening sharks' sensors

The "Sharks' electric sensory detectors" described in your magazine (SN: 6/9/73, p. 370) seems to explain why the only effective shark repelling method to date is the Johnson Screen. The screen consists of a large bag formed of opaque black plastic being closed at one end and having an inflatable flotation collar at the other end which is always open for entry. The potential prey (downed pilot, or whatever) inflates the collar and then by reverse-bailing proceeds to fill the bag with seawater. The bag is entered after

partial preliminary filling and the reverse-bailing is continued until the bag, hanging from the collar, attains full shape. Since the bag is black the shark doesn't see the actual prey. The plastic film prevents attraction by smell. After checking out the strange object by finally brushing against it once or twice the sharks always leave the scene. We find now, by apparent coincidence, that the plastic film also provides an electrical insulating barrier between the shark and the prey. This could be verified by baiting a Johnson Screen containing a suitable quantity of tiny holes, thus permitting an escape route or extension of the bioelectric fields originating within the bag.

Thank you for your continuing efforts and a fine publication.

Werner Raap
Rockford, Ill.

Ego, prisons and POW's

I was quite pleased by your published summary of my article on the deleterious effects of confinement upon a prisoner's ego-function (SN: 6/16/73, p. 390).

One small correction is in order. Ego is not synonymous with self, or identity, but as I used it I referred to a cluster of executive functions that this agency of the mind, which Freud called the Ego, ordinarily performed to maintain the vital balance between the individual's inner drives and the demands of reality.

What I said in the article was that under confinement these functions become impaired and suffer a regression to more primitive or infantile levels of functioning. Thus a previously self-sufficient person may become demanding, whiningly dependent, when his freedom of movement is restricted. When this restriction is imposed by imprisonment, then we see the kind of behavior displayed by some prisoners-of-war who seemed to collaborate with their captors.

Failure to appreciate the need for appropriate transitional preparations has resulted, in my opinion, in some tragic misunderstandings and even, perhaps, some suicides among returning prisoners-of-war. These steps which you called "ego-training," are required for the successful convalescence and rehabilitation of all "returnees," whether they are returning from surgery, Sing-Sing or the armed services. It's too bad that POW's are greeted by brass bands, overwhelmed by adulation and then dropped.

Douglas A. Sargent, M.D.
Grosse Pointe Farms, Mich.

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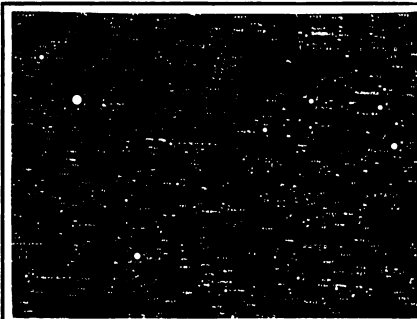
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