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Incorporating Science News Letter

Of the Week

Working artificial gene in sight	180
Freon threat to ozone	180
Solar heating and cooling act	181
Research by manned balloon	182
Probes for X-ray astronomy	182
NAS blasts EPA research setup	183
Colonizing Lagrangia	183

Research Notes

Chemistry	184
Environment	185

Articles

New data on Jupiter	186
Wind engineering research	188

Departments

Books	178
Letters	179

COVER: Wind engineer Jack E. Cermak with model of part of downtown Denver in meteorological wind tunnel at Colorado State University during a simulated atmospheric inversion. Cermak is a leader in wind engineering research, which studies the interactions of wind with structures and natural features. See p. 188. (Photo: J. E. Cermak)

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September 21, 1974

To the Editor

What's happening to inventions?

Referring to the article, "What's Happening in Inventions" (SN: 8/3/74, p. 70), I am able to answer that question.

The incentive of money has been wiped out for most corporation-employed workers. All rights to any and all inventions made by the employee are assigned to the company for \$1.00 and other valuable considerations, namely his job. The inventor receives no royalties, no pension benefits and seldom a sizeable raise in salary.

The second deterrent to invention is the profit-sales projection made before any research project is approved. Unless there is an expected number of buyers of the proposed invention, with an expected return on the research, no project will be underwritten. No approval, no budget, no facilities, and the average inventor is stuck.

In addition, the costs and complexities of obtaining a patent today are so great that the average individual cannot undertake getting a patent. Even if he does, the patent laws are so diffuse that he will need a fortune to defend himself after it has been granted and published.

John B. Lewis
Plainfield, N.J.

Parapsychology fraud

Dr. Jay Levy's findings in the field of parapsychology research were accepted as one of the most exciting in the field so far. But now that his experiments have been discredited, his unscientific and deceptive practices revealed (SN: 8/17/74, p. 100), one wonders whether the tide will turn for parapsychology. Furthermore, could this change affect the public's view on science affairs?

This would be, indeed, a pity, for parapsychology is already a very controversial issue as it is with many associating it with the "occult explosion." It is unfortunate that the distinction between the two is often not recognized. The latter involves nonscientific endeavors (such as communication with plants and the deceased) of which most is widely refuted. Even Uri Geller, a principal constituent of the occult explosion, has been denounced by many magicians who claim his "powers" are simple magic tricks (SN: 8/3/74, p. 78).

Parapsychology, on the other hand, is an organized, scientific approach into the truth behind such phenomena as telepathy,

precognition and clairvoyance. Its demonstrations are done in laboratories across the world in respectable scientific institutions, not circus sideshows.

I have found the developments in psychic research extremely fascinating, but there still lies a small doubt in my mind and in the minds of many others as to the truth of the whole thing. The problem is that this doubt is being reinforced by scientists like Dr. Levy who employ Machiavellian principles in their work. Only through continued research will we be able to finally decide the truth. In the days ahead that research will undoubtedly be more closely monitored than before, but progress will be made. We must not let this incident with Dr. Levy erode financial support for parapsychology research. The reputation of immunology research was left unscathed by Dr. Summerlin. Let's hope that parapsychology will come through with no ill effects after Dr. Levy.

Jerome Liebelson
Spring Valley, N.Y.

Radiation and the law

Ms. Arehart-Treichel failed to mention Public Law 90-602 in her article "Electromagnetic Pollution: Is it hurting our health?" (SN: 6/29/74, p. 418). This is the Radiation Control for Health and Safety Act of 1968, drafted "to protect the public from unnecessary exposure to radiation from all types of electronic products." It is undoubtedly the most widely violated Federal statute in existence today. This is unfortunate, for the balance of scientific research on physical effects of electromagnetic radiation, which has extended over many years, seems wisely summed up in the following statement from a 1970 HEW pamphlet: "It is prudent . . . to assume that there is no threshold below which radiation does not adversely affect human health. Under the circumstances scientists agree that exposure to even small amounts of man-made radiation should be avoided when there is no associated health benefit." (I assume as in necessary X-rays.) I may be driving the only Beetle in the country bearing the sticker "Enforce Public Law 90-602." Until it is enforced, we are 200 million guinea pigs.

Lillian L. Hubbell
St. Louis, Mo.

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179