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Letters

Flatland fans

Ivars Peterson's article about the 100th anniversary celebration of the publication of Edwin A. Abbott's *Flatland* ("Shadows from a Higher Dimension," SN: 11/3/84, p. 284) struck a responsive chord here. I had known that mathematicians and science fiction fans continued to read *Flatland*, but it was interesting to learn of Abbott's influence on artists and that he had stimulated other authors to describe other "flatlands."

Just as Thomas Banchoff and his fellow mathematicians use *Flatland* to aid in "visualizing higher dimensions," we in optometry have been using *Flatland* to enhance visual behavior. We use it as one of a number of aids to help our patients improve their visualization as part of improving their visual function.

Walter J. Kaplan
Gaithersburg, Md.

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I violently disagree with the statement that "there is wide interest in the consequences of relativity, electromagnetism, gravitation and quantum theory in two dimensions because this simpler, special case may lead to a better way of looking at and understanding these phenomena in higher dimensions." As a graduate student working in the field of two-dimensional physics I find that this statement misconstrues the intention of the great majority of two-dimensional research.

Two-dimensional research is of interest primarily for its own sake, as very different phenomena appear in 2D (or 1D), as opposed to 3D. Striking examples of this difference include the recently discovered quantum Hall effect (and heterostructure physics in general), plus the bizarre features of 2D electrostatics. In addition, the whole field of microelectronics is based on 2D research, the technological applications of which continually become more important.

At any rate, thanks for the interesting article.
Alison Chaiken
Boston, Mass.

Survival in the streets?

"Redesigning mental health care" (SN: 10/6/84, p. 216) underscores the plight of the hundreds of thousands of institutionalizable mentally ill who have been cruelly dumped into the "community." These *miserables mentales* wander the streets or languish in exploitive "care facilities," suffering and dying with their rights on.

A "revamping" of mental health delivery? Nonsense! Our neglected, underfunded and understaffed state mental hospitals need to be restrengthened and resupported to admit and care for those unable to survive anywhere else.
Donald B. Rinsley
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