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Letters

Scientific suppression?

I am outraged to read that the editors of NATURE saw fit to characterize the work of six laboratories as "[a]n experiment whose conclusions have no physical basis" ("Dilutions or delusions?" SN: 7/2/88, p.6).

Reduced to its essentials, what the editors of NATURE have said is this: These results are not explainable in the context of our present theories of antigen/membrane interaction. Therefore these results *do not exist*.

To their credit, they did at least publish the accounts of the experiments. But it leads one to wonder whether other research is being suppressed by journal editorial boards because the results do not fit in with current theories. How frightening! How can science progress if the censors only allow publication of results that fit in with the currently ac-

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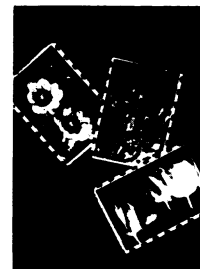
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Cover: Color negatives suggest the type of visual confusion that might result if the brain didn't correctly pair up perceived objects with perceived colors. A hypothesis to explain how the brain manages to get such signals straight is one product of a surprising new theory about vision. (Photos by Wendy McCarren)

cepted theories?

Caroline V. Rider
Red Hook, N.Y.

In puzzling over the dilution mystery, have the researchers forgotten about molecular movement across the liquid-gas interface at the exposed liquid surface of the laboratory containers being used?

I submit that molecular transport is occurring between liquid surfaces in containers sharing the same gaseous (air?) ambient environment to an extent that far exceeds the dilution in experiments described. The gas-phase transport will surely exceed by many orders of magnitude dilution attempts of 10 factor only 26 times. This degree of dilution would theoretically leave only one or two molecules of the drug in a 100-milliliter container of solvent.

Laboratory equipment capable of avoiding container-to-container molecular contamination would be very expensive, and

would resemble facilities in the very best semiconductor-fabrication clean rooms.

John C. Huffman
Winston-Salem, N.C.

Labeling birth control

As an English teacher married to a scientist, I have a layman's interest in science and a professional interest in accurate labeling. In "Birth-control vaccine safe in early tests" (SN: 6/25/88, p.407), L. Beil reports on clinical trials of an experimental "birth-control vaccine." Since the article makes it clear that the vaccine has its ultimate effect on a fertilized rather than an unfertilized egg, should not it be labeled instead as an abortifacient? Correct labeling both by eventual marketers and by your own writers would make potential users aware that they are not simply preventing pregnancy from occurring but terminating a pregnancy already begun.

Richard E. Johnson
Houston, Texas

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