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## Letters

### Conquered consumers?

In "Civilization and Its Discontents" (SN: 3/3/90, p.136), German archaeologist Thomas von der Way states that because local methods of pottery at Buto were replaced by more advanced techniques originating in Upper Egypt, the Upper Egyptians had apparently conquered Buto.

I wonder if my Japanese piano, my husband's Japanese electronics, our Japanese car and our Japanese dishes would lead future archaeologists to conclude that Japan had, in fact, "conquered" our civilization.

And maybe they'd be right!

*Delana Ann Bunch  
Oakhurst, Tex.*

### Smart art — and beyond

Ivan Amato's article on intelligent materials ("Smart as a Brick," SN: 3/10/90, p.152) got me to wondering about the application of adaptive structures to art.

Interactive art is not new, but these new

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Cover: While ancient sailors sought weather portents in the clouds that filled the twilight sky, modern forecasters perform their task using computer models of the atmosphere. Through ongoing research, meteorologists hope to learn when their models will fall prey to mathematical chaos, a force that renders forecasts unreliable. (Photo: Lawrence Radke/University of Washington)

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materials could lead to some interesting creative applications. Imagine painting with chameleon-like colors, or sculptures that change positions, or even "intelligent ink" that could, at the touch of a finger, literally spell out the subtext of a novel or provide more details encoded in the pages of a technical article.

And who knows? Maybe even snake oil could be made useful as a programmable elastopolymer that would both lubricate and massage the body!

*Jon Alexandr  
San Francisco, Calif.*

### Mutated quote

Rick Weiss quotes me as saying that I and others had been unable to duplicate the experiments of Mittler and Lenski ("Do-it-yourself evolution," SN: 3/10/90, p.149). This gives the impression that I think them guilty of some experimental error. What I actually told Rick Weiss was that some people have obtained the same result as Mittler and Lenski and some have obtained my result. That was why I went on to say that this particular example of

spontaneous mutation seems to be "a bit of a mess."

*John Cairns  
Professor of Microbiology  
Harvard School of Public Health  
Boston, Mass.*

### Gravity's pull on imagination

In "Imagined pictures possess 3-D properties" (SN: 3/10/90, p.150), researchers assert that people construct an imaginary space around themselves based on three dimensions or axes, and that "this is a powerful [mental strategy] to organize space that we use whenever we can" — for instance, in painting a mental picture of a scene described in a book.

The implication is that this is based on some innate attribute of the reader. Perhaps, however, it is the result of the three-dimensional descriptions provided by the writers — i.e., by using words like "above," "below," "front," "behind" and "right," which force the reader to think in three dimensions.

*Letters continued on p.284*