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Letters

Deciphering the noncode

Perhaps the "language" of the "noncoded" DNA ("Does nonsense DNA speak its own dialect?" SN:12/10/94, p.391) is understood by a special class of proteins whose job is to suppress and express genes in a sequence written in that language. That would explain the existence of this DNA and why it is sometimes positioned in the middle of a gene. It has to occupy that position to do its job properly.

*Theodore J. Blinder
Havertown, Pa.*

I have been a computer operating-systems programmer for almost 20 years. Needless to say, I've pored over many a memory dump of computer programs in machine code in order to debug them.

I noticed a similarity between executable programs and your description of coding and noncoding DNA. DNA seems to have the same

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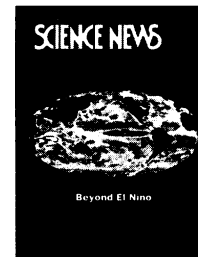
Cover: Measurements of ocean height by the TOPEX/Poseidon satellite from November 1994 reveal a red band of elevated water along the equator in the Pacific. The bulge reflects excessive warmth in the area, caused by this winter's El Niño. New studies suggest that a general warming of the tropical Pacific in recent decades explains the global warming trend during the same period. (Image: Jet Propulsion Laboratory)

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Mind the music and the step

The idea that a different part of the mind handles small numbers is no new idea to musicians ("Small amounts go down for the count," SN: 11/5/94, p.293). Each bar of music is broken into two or more groups of two or three beats.

For instance, the marching meter 6/8 is broken into two groups of three, each group counted as one beat. Thus while the musician "counts" 1..2., the "subitizing" part of the mind effortlessly counts 1..2..3..1..2..3.. Indeed, counting would get in the way in such strange meters as 10/4 and 13/4, which are "counted" as 3-2-2-3 and 3-3-2-2-3.

*Bradley Fermanich
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*Mary Kay Padilla
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