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Cover: A team of researchers and educators from Columbia University aims to turn Biosphere 2 from a scientific flop into a center for studying the effects of greenhouse gases on the atmosphere. (Photo: T. Lamb)

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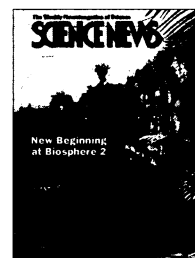
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Letters

Optical confusion

In "Contacts for aging baby boomers' eyes?" (SN: 9/7/96, p. 159), you've confused two distinctly different optical conditions, presbyopia (the loss of near focusing ability) and hyperopia (far-sightedness). Contact lenses are indeed currently available for both of these refractive conditions, and, contrary to your report, they are not "impractically thick."

Larry Bickford
Santa Barbara, Calif.

Early learning?

Regarding "Infants tune up to music's core qualities" (SN: 9/7/96, p. 151): In light of the fact that an infant has the neurological mechanism of aural perception, exposure to sound, and direct experience of its mother's emotional response to sounds during the weeks prior to birth, there is no more reason

to interpret a 4-month-old's mirroring the musical tastes of his or her elders as indicative of "biological preparedness" than as indicative of learning in utero.

Kathleen Piper
Chico, Calif.

Overpowered plants

Hill's analysis of nuclear power is incomplete (Letters, SN: 9/7/96, p. 147). There are undoubtedly many needs for generating plants with outputs of 60 million kilowatt-hours per year or less. For many of these needs, solar power may be less expensive to build and operate and have less overall adverse ecological impact.

A comparable comparison would be a 5-ton truck with a capacity equal to that of 100 100-pound grocery shopping carts: Such a vehicle is neither usable nor useful in a supermarket.

Paul Purser
Humble, Texas

Soggy toast? Read on

The excellent article about Z-Trim ("No-Cal Powder May Sub for Food's Fat," (SN: 8/31/96, p. 132) concludes with a quote in which George Inglett says you can't sell water as a replacement for fat.

Actually, the dairy industry has been doing it for years in the form of soft-spread margarines. The average water content in most soft spreads is over 30 percent by weight—which is why they make hot toast soggy.

People also buy a lot of air in their products, but that's a topic for another letter.

T. Main
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