

### Issue 47

## Heat, Light, and Sound

Is your home entirely your own?

Solar home heating and solar water heating have become economically practical in many parts of the country. Imagine that your house or apartment has been equipped with one or both of these. A tall apartment building is put up next door, blocking half the sunlight. Should you have any legal recourse? (For half the sunlight, substitute one-quarter—or all.)

The apartment building has tennis courts alongside. The courts are lit at night, lighting your bedroom brilliantly and making it hard for you to sleep. Should you have any legal recourse? (For tennis courts, substitute a shopping center or a mobile home park.) (See "Scattering of Light: Light Pollution," p. 89.)

The nearby airport adds a runway that leads planes directly over your house at take-off, making conversation and sleep difficult. The maximum loudness is 100 decibels, 10 times a day. (See "Loud Sounds," p. 87.) Should you have any legal recourse?

Finally, close to the other side of your house, oil (or other valuable mineral) is discovered on your neighbor's land. The deposit presumably extends underneath your home at a depth of 3 meters (30 meters, a kilometer), but you do not want it mined. How deep into the earth does your ownership extend?

If you argue that the homeowner has a right to stop each of the four threats to his or her comfort, consider each situation from the opposite point of view. Should your plans to build a big apartment house be blocked by the existence of one neighbor's modest solar panel? Or your plans to play tennis at night be blocked by someone else's desire to have a bedroom on the same side of the house? Should the airport of an entire town be thwarted by one family's dislike of noise?

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In resolving any of these questions, the measurement of heat, light, or sound is important.

Winston Churchill once said: We shape our buildings and then they shape us.

(See "High-Voltage Power Lines," p. 90.)

***Think about this . . .*** *If we establish radio communication with an extraterrestrial civilization, what do you think we should say to it?*

*Should developing nations that are overpopulated use compulsory sterilization to control their populations?*