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Discussion comes to life

The last two paragraphs of the article "When stones come to life" (SN: 6/5/99, p. 360) suggest that those who battle forest fires might be perceiving life in the fires when they use terms like "devious" and "cunning." I would suggest that perhaps the author has lost sight of the fact that metaphor is an integral part of everyday life.

*Bob Mauritsen
Seattle, Wash.*

The suggestion is that firefighters think of some fires as being alive, a process that certainly may in as yet unspecified ways relate to metaphor use. For more on this, see Philosophy in the Flesh, by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999, Basic Books). —B. Bower

I was intrigued by your article on animism, in particular this provocative and tantalizing incomplete statement: "Even scientists find it difficult not to assume that non-human animals, natural phenomena, and

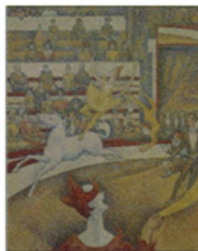
theoretical entities operate on the basis of intentions and beliefs." As a linguist who has worked for 33 years with Native American languages, I have developed great respect for the diversity of expression of humans. I have also come to recognize that maligning the beliefs of the vast majority of the human race is tantamount to judging one's own forebears as ignorant and unworthy of respect. Given our vastly limited perspective, who are we to judge?

*Jeff Leer
Fairbanks, Alaska*

In our Western culture, we seem to practice animism in several ways. We name ships, especially in the female gender. And we name hurricanes. I think most people in coastal areas assign a great many human qualities to named tropical storms, especially their unpredictability. These storms seem to come to life with their motion, power, shape, and "eye." Ships, like storms, can have the power of life and death over those who are closely involved with them.

*Eric Adams
Delray Beach, Fla.*

Cover: Personality can resemble a painting in the pointillist style. Look too closely and the image crumbles into unintelligible fragments. Two psychotherapists now have developed a controversial quantitative technique that they say can provide a clinically useful, detailed assessment of a person's character and behavior. **Page 88** (Painting: Georges Pierre Seurat, "The Circus")



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