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## Briefly Speaking

**Cognitive Misers, Cognitive Spendthrifts**

We talk to the cognitive psychologist Prof. Edward Nęcka about mental laziness, the pitfalls of memory, and confusing technologies. **58**

COVER PHOTO: JAKUB OSTAŁOWSKI  
PAGE 2: JAKUB OSTAŁOWSKI (1, 3)  
ARTUR KAMCZYCKI (2)

FROM THE EDITORS

# PECULIARITIES, BIG AND SMALL

**F**eatured on this issue's cover is Brutus, a human-created animal – a hybrid cross between a cow, American bison, and European bison (*żubr*). The breeders were curious about what the biology and behavior of such a three-way hybrid would be like, and also hoped it would supply large quantities of meat, combining the tastes of domesticated beef and wild game and offering a healthy, low-cholesterol option. However, Mother Nature did not indulge such a far-reaching intervention into her affairs: all the male hybrids proved to be infertile. Brutus is therefore the very last, singular animal of his type in the world.

Nature likes to thumb its nose at mankind, in various ways, often by sending one-of-a-kind phenomena our way. It tests us by creating things that can spread virtually uncontrollably, given a lapse of responsibility and common sense (like African swine fever). Or it sets unique challenges for us to solve: for instance by historically shaping a river valley in a complex way that makes it particularly tricky to identify how to protect against flooding.

We are even surprised by unique phenomena in our very own human nature. Our memory, for instance, seemingly so dependable and immutable, does indeed play trick on us. Researchers are exploring how the brain is capable of deleting, selecting, or transforming information from the past so as to fit current narratives – as Prof. Edward Nęcka tells us in an interview. And depending on context, we often judge other people all-too-quickly by invoking positive or negative stereotypes about those who differ, for instance, in terms of culture or origins.

The world of nature has many singular idiosyncrasies whose mechanisms are still being discovered by scientists. Some of them are truly the stuff of dreams.



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MARCIN KONIAK/DESA UNICUM

#### Untitled (1971),

Zdzisław Beksiński  
(1929 Sanok – 2005  
Warsaw). Illustrator,  
printmaker,  
painter and  
photographer. His  
work has a surrealist,  
expressionistic  
character, and in  
the 1980s especially  
appealed to the  
fantastic method  
of "photographing  
dreams." In his  
latter life he also  
created collages  
using computer  
techniques. The  
largest collection of  
his work is held  
by the Historical  
Museum of the town  
of Sanok.