

# Editorial

How has nature been put on display in different rooms and by different means – in museums, in private homes, by visual technologies or in textbooks? This was the point of departure for a seminar arranged by the project “Nature and the Natural” in Oslo 24. October 2008. This issue of *Tidsskrift for kulturforskning* presents three of the papers given at the seminar. These articles elucidate museum displays of nature and nature transferred to the private home. The other two discuss respectively the display of nature in zoos and the display of nature as a text.

In her article “Cultural performances of cod at Tromsø University Museum” Anita Maurstad lets the reader partake in the discussions and negotiations that took place during the production of the exhibition “Se torsken!” - “See the cod!” at Tromsø Museum. Cod has many faces, Maurstad claims. This species is not pure nature, its agency is at work in as different fields as coastal settling, in policy, in nutrition, in ways of living, as an environmental symbol, in marine farming, in the Norwegian national budget and in research. In other words, nature is socially and culturally made. But how can a pure academic statement like this be transformed in visual expressions? Read and learn!

Is the zoo an animals’ prison where the animals are suffering a life-long confinement from their natural habitat, or does the zoo rather offer them a safer and healthier existence than when living in harsh and remorseless nature? As Anne Katrine Gjerløff points out in her article “When Zoo became nature – Copenhagen Zoo and perceptions of animals and nature around 1900”, debates about the conditions offered the animals in Copenhagen Zoo were articulated around opposite views of nature: Nature as sublime grand drama with free actors sustained by animal protectionists, and nature as a cruel battlefield sustained by the Zoo’s directors. But when society in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century experienced the extinction of species as well as an increased exploitation of nature, the zoo could be presented as “an alternative nature”.

It is common knowledge that great parts of the collections in Florentine art galleries Gli Uffizi and Palazzo Pitti stem from the Medici family. It is less known that Museo di Storia Naturale dell’Università degli Studi di Firenze contains pieces from the Medici collections as well. In her article ““Exotism” on play at La Specola Museum”, Gianna Innocenti presents some of the oldest specimens in La Specola Museum’s collections and still at display in the museum, among these the skeleton of the Indian elephant that travelled all over Europe and was sketched by Rembrandt. She also shows how the natural history museum is both a function of as well as a vehicle in broader social and political processes, which in turn can be traced in its collections and displays.

To most of us the weather is something we experience and pay attention to outdoors. Scottish physicist and meteorologist John Aitken recreated nature in his domestic workshop laboratory. In his article “Counting dust and domesticating clouds: inside the ‘outdoor physics’ of John Aitken (1839-1919)” Ben Marsden discusses Aitken’s scientific prac-

tices by pointing at the striking contrast between Aitkens object of study, vast weather systems, and the place for his studies, his home; as well between his analytical practices and his scientific achievements.

Inoculation of smallpox was imported to Europe from the Middle East, by Lady Mary Wortley Montague in 1718, and a literature on the nature of the new medical technology and the meaning of the illness itself came into being. In her article “Speaking about disease. *Provincialläkare* Lars Montin and the inoculation of smallpox” Anne Eriksen examines the Swedish physician Lars Montin’s paper “Anmerkninger ved den nye Koppodnings Maade”. Eriksen argues that contemporaneous text on inoculation are historical realities that shaped this new treatment, just as much as the technology itself. Thus Eriksen demonstrates how the discourse of inoculation made the disease visible - as a medical practice, and which is the point in her discussion, as a culturally deeply embedded, cultural phenomena.

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