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This catalog elucidates the ideas that inspired the exhibition, and also provides a room-by-room commentary. It was written by the philosopher and media consultant, Henrik Juel, who worked out the intellectual basis of the exhibition together with the historian and museum curator, Esben Hedegaard. The exhibition has been mounted with the cooperation of Man and Nature -- Humanities Research Center, at Odense University, and the Municipal Museums of Odense. It will run at Hollufgård, in Odense, from May 11 to October 31, 1995, and at the Brede Museum from March 30 to October 20, 1996.

Editing and layout:
Thomas Møller Kristensen and Svend Erik Larsen
Translation: Brian Hall
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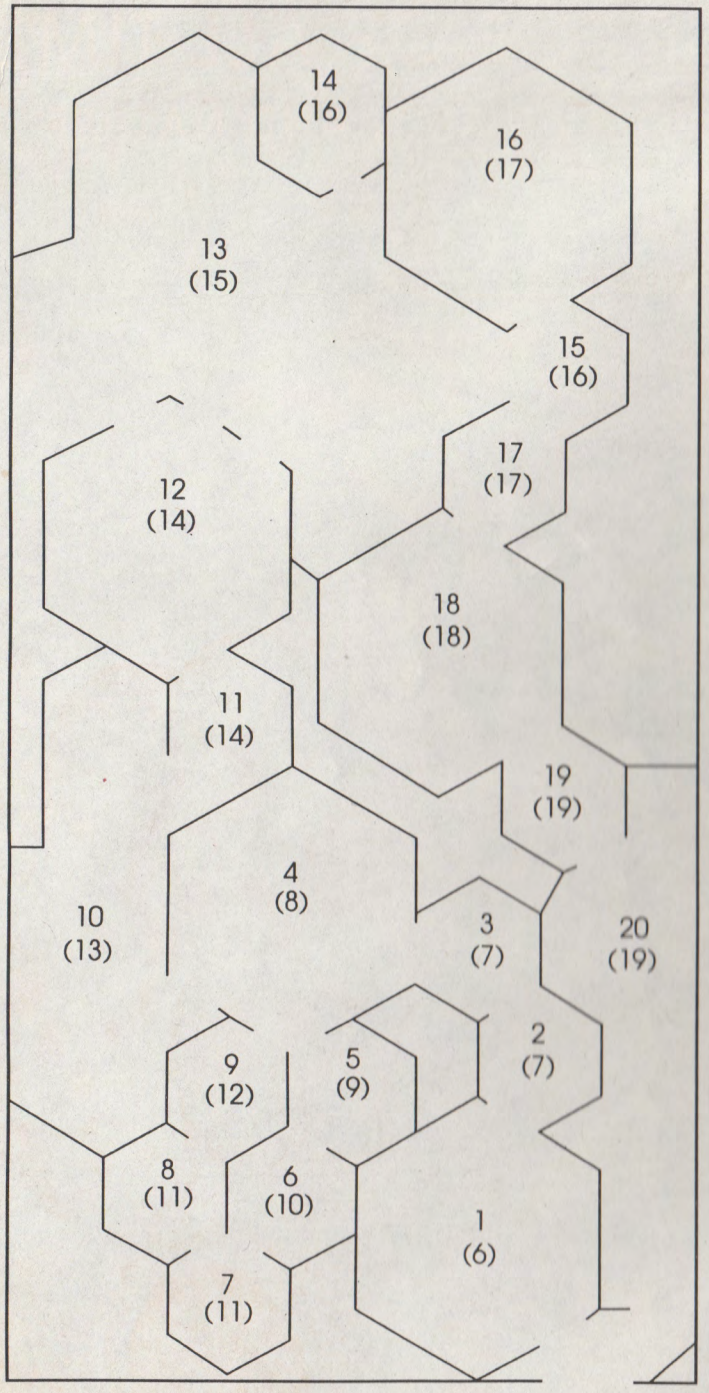
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# THE EMBRACE OF ALL TIME

## AN EXHIBITION ON MAN AND NATURE



Catalog




Floor plan of the exhibition. Numbers in parentheses refer to catalog page.

Room 1:
Artificial Nature

Room 2-9:
Nature of the Body

Room 10-14:
Local Nature

Room 15-19:
Global Nature

Room 20:
Exit to Nature

# THE IDEAS BEHIND THE EXHIBITION

The embrace of nature can be viewed from many angles - so many that, despite twenty exhibition rooms, with six walls in each, plus floor and ceiling, we haven't managed to fit them all in. When faced with so extensive a task one can only be humble. We have not set out to speak The Final Truth about nature. Rather, we have assembled pictures and objects, and set them against one another as a means of provoking ourselves - and maybe others as well - to experience, fantasize, discuss and meditate on nature, and on contemporary attitudes toward it.

Relations to nature are changing, both locally and globally. A host of viewpoints on nature are in conflict and in development. Therefore this exhibit tries to intervene with contrasts and distortions, with new angles and humor and with invalidations of the familiar. We invite visitors to join us in thinking about and experiencing nature's embrace, an embrace in which we all have a share. Our ambition has been to mount an exhibition which does have a strong intellectual basis, but which also has the visitor's own insights and active reconsiderations as its proudest principle.

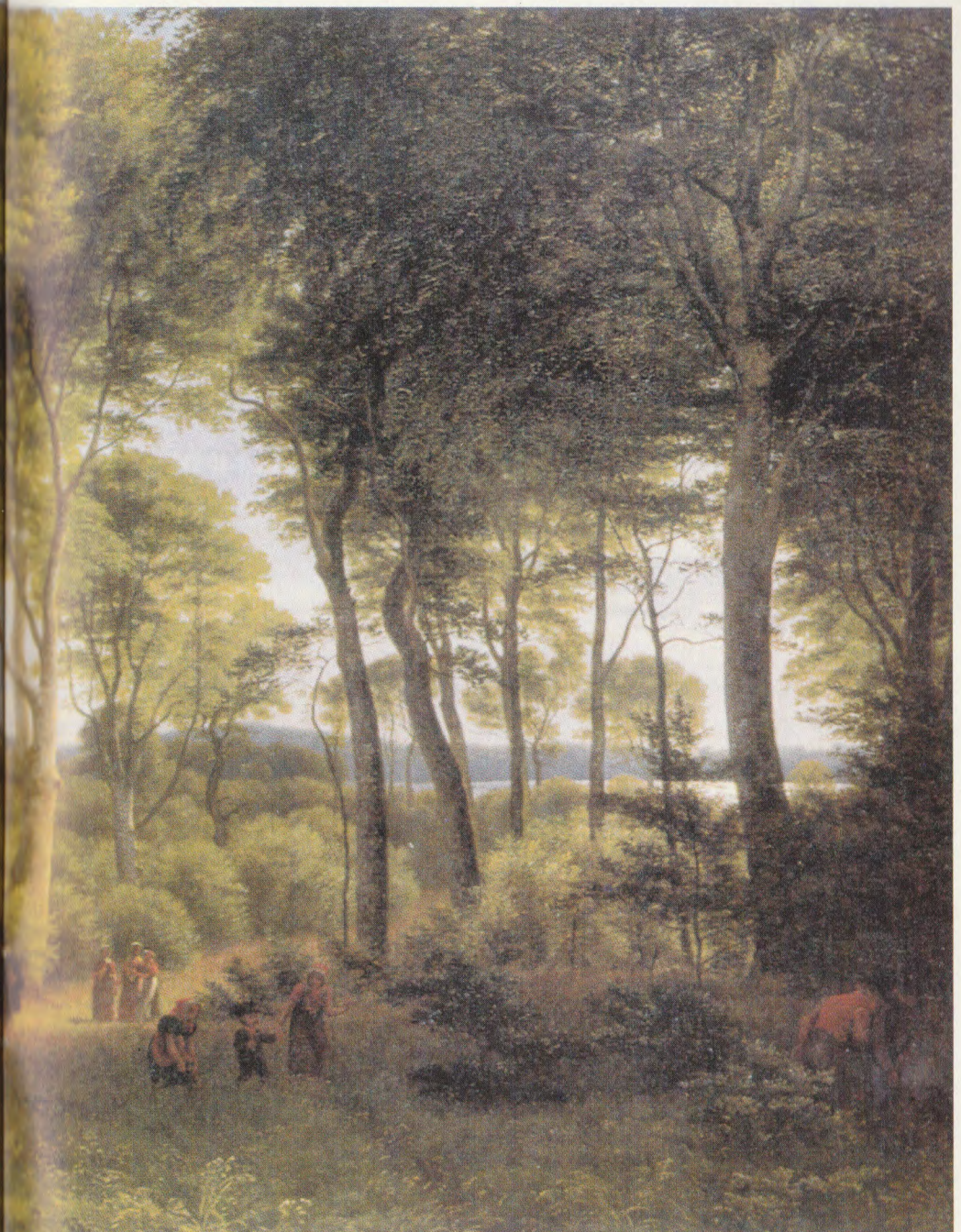
## The Title

We have entitled the exhibition, "The Embrace of All Time" as a way of noting that man's relationship in nature and to nature is a history by which we are surrounded, and from which we can never completely tear ourselves free — but that we ourselves are also continually cooperating in the renewal of that relationship.

From head to toe - and in several other ways - man is a part of nature. As individuals we are born, in a certain sense, out of nature (the word "nature" has its root in the latin verb "nascor": I am born). We strut awhile as living beings, and then we are folded again into nature's cycle, as earth and ashes and other natural materials.

But in between we also try to be something other than nature, something more than merely animal beings. We try to educate our children and ourselves, and we try to raise ourselves above nature and above the purely biological life. We put great store in being social, ethical, and spiritual. Philosophers have said that, as rational beings, we have a special freedom, and a special responsibility both for ourselves and for everything else, and that it is precisely in taking on this freedom and responsibility that we raise ourselves above nature. We hold high the banner of culture and civilization, but we are not always successful at becoming something higher than nature. Sometimes we manage only to become unnatural.





Da bøgeskoven blev dansk idyl og forbillede for senere naturgenopretninger. P.C. Skovgaard: Delhoved Skov ved Skarre Sø, 1847. Statens Museum for Kunst.

## The Message

One should not look for a message about the completely correct view of nature in this exhibit. There is no such simple truth about the relationship between man and nature, and hardly any proposition so clever that it could not be picked apart by critical objections or worn down by the test of time. Yet we, as the authors of this exhibition, won't be so cowardly as to claim that we haven't had a working hypothesis, or rather a fundamental question, which for much of our task has served, so to speak, as our mental can-opener. We have asked: Is nature something that we produce ourselves?

If you watch the Danish landscape from the window of a kitchen, or a car, or a train, you see a nature that in many ways has been transformed by people. The landscape is penetrated by cultural influences, agricultural land and plantations, ditches and lanes. Cities are a sort of new nature, jungles or wastelands of stone and steel and glass and asphalt.

We haven't created the air, sea and weather around us, but also here traces of human activity are becoming clearer and clearer. The same holds true for the global ecosystem. Our enterprising spirit hasn't made the planet Earth, or determined its place in the solar system, and we have only partly mapped the constellations, much less travelled among them, but effects of our activity do show up in the biosphere: the climate and biodiversity are the results of more than nature's whims.

We transform and co-create our environment, our living conditions, and in that way, we co-create ourselves. We carry the stamp of what we eat, whether it is healthy or unhealthy, too little or too much. We literally incorporate our life-style: the body records everything from footwear to repressions, solariums and office chairs. Our lungs take in air whose quality we ourselves regulate, to a certain extent. So the nature of the body also is something we produce ourselves.

But obviously one can't generalize from this and bluntly assert that nature is something we produce ourselves. We haven't produced all of nature; equally important is the fact that nature has produced us. But when you don't take nature as a given, when you go beyond a simple yearning after a lost nature and try to think ahead, new critical perspectives open up because nature also has to be planned and manufactured in this ever-changing embrace.

So perhaps there is a message in the exhibit, but it isn't spelled out anywhere, and it could hardly be expressed in a single proposition. Instead, a series of questions are posed between the lines, between the pictures and the objects, and between us and our visitors. The first question might run: if nature is partly something we produce ourselves, what kind of nature should we make?

## The Arrangement of the Rooms

To impose some order on the many possible themes arising out of the idea of nature's embrace, we have divided the exhibit into three main sections according to natures spatial proximity to ourselves: the nature of the body, the nature of the local community, and global nature.

The first main section, and therefore the first group of rooms in the exhibition hall, deals with the most intimate nature of all, that aspect of nature which we are sometimes proud of and at other times would rather avoid noticing, namely, the nature of the body. The second section consists of a series of rooms in which we look thematically at local nature, that is, the nature we have around us daily, such as animals, landscape and the local community. The third section is concerned with a nature that is spatially the most distant, yet nonetheless at times very near to us: the global and cosmic perspective. Within each section, each room examines a particular theme, and sometimes the division goes farther, so that each wall deals with its own sub-theme.

The six-sided rooms found throughout the exhibition are a design developed specially for "The Embrace of All Time" by Ove Bechsgaard, the head of the workshop of the Odense City Museums. From the beginning, we had envisioned a physical form of the rooms signaling something both organic and geometric. This design, which simultaneously calls to mind bee cells, quartz crystals, and abstract geometry, satisfies our vision. The forms of nature and of man meet in this shape.

Moreover, the six-sided rooms have provided an excellent opportunity to let different walls play off each other. At the same time the background colors coordinate the appearance from room to room. For us, too, it has been exciting to see this bee-hive or quartz cavity grow during the construction of the exhibit.

## The Dynamic Structure

The various feelings, attitudes and strategies we direct toward nature - our view of nature - are stages in a historical and social dynamic, and in a way the whole complex can be called a historical or temporally delimited mode of perception. But the dynamic of this view of nature is also recapitulated in every modern person as a set of shifting and perhaps conflicting or confusing tendencies.

We have chosen to employ this tension, or dynamic, in the vision of nature as an ordering principle for the exhibit. This dynamic can be formulated briefly as: wild nature - controlled nature - grotesque nature.

It may be described in more detail as follows: "after" some initial spontaneous and unreflected life within nature, there arises an apprehension of nature as something raw and wild, which must be dominated and controlled. Thereafter comes a phase marked by excessive control, leading to an artificial and grotesque nature, and this phase in turn gives rise to conceptions of a harmonious, ideal and "original" nature.

This "dialectic of the view of nature,"

if you will, has application to all three areas under study: the corporeal, the local and the global nature. It is a dynamic probing deeply into the concepts with which we try to categorize nature and think about history. It is a philosophical dynamic.

Consequently, one can't speak unambiguously about three definite historical epochs, that is, that there was once in prehistory an original nature, or ur-nature, after which came a certain historical epoch marked by the conquest of nature, after which we now find ourselves in a time with an excessively controlled, artificial and grotesque nature that provokes dreams in us about that lost, original nature. There are, to be sure, many phenomena that could be inserted into this schema, but it's only half of the story.

On closer inspection, one realizes that there probably hasn't ever been a particular time during which an "original" nature, or a natural and stable balance between man and nature, existed. And it may be claimed that our most modern formulations of principles about ecological respect and sustainable development are nothing more than new and refined methods for continuing the raw domination of nature. Finally, there are areas of study that are only just now entering the first phase of the control of nature, for example, the far side of the moon and the genetic code. Yet conversely, they could also be considered the latest manifestations of the grotesque phase.

The dynamic structure that we are examining here is more than a model of the history. A series of simultaneous modern phenomena also follow the dynamic of: wild nature - controlled nature - grotesque and newly-wild nature.

For example, if you take a walk along a reedy shore, where nightingales sing and ducks dive, you might want to view this as an example of unspoiled nature. But perhaps this is an artificial, stocked lake, constructed quite recently, where fish are dumped in to lure moneyed tourists to the local area. This, then, is an example of controlled nature, which some people will view as perfectly reasonable and others as too artificial.

Is it too commercial and unnatural to have fish in a lake where they have never been before? Perhaps the lake is there only because the place is an abandoned gravel pit. One could look on the abandoned pit as a scar on the landscape, a trace left by human intervention - in this case, the extraction of gravel, with which, in the most literal sense, we smoothed the way for progress, or in any case built a road, so that sport-fishermen now can come in their cars. One could also look at it a different way: the abandoned gravel pit is a piece of new nature, which, despite being something of a barren little desert, does have its own ecosystem of small animals, insects and hardy plants.

Thus, the temporal aspect of the three-phase scheme is not crucial. Entirely according to our point of view, we can choose to call an area wild or artificial, first nature or second nature and perhaps third nature. Our "wild-controlled-grotesque and idyll" model is simply a general conceptual dynamic, an intellectual schema, which we have found useful in organizing the exhibit.



## The Presentation

Essential things can not always be expressed clearly and simply, and if they could be, they would surely sound or look boring. For an exhibit on our relation to nature - of which we all are part of, and about which everyone has already done a lot of thinking - it is necessary to say things in a new way. Or rather, it is necessary to reveal new facets, to make the familiar seem new, and the overlooked seem remarkable.

To this end we have utilized several techniques. We've moved around the normal sites of things. Everyone knows what a chicken yard looks like, and everyone knows what a modern suburb looks like, but perhaps we will see both of these "natural" milieus clearly only when chickens and people change places.

Likewise, we all know that children today, as in earlier times, sit in the back seat of the car, and that it is often from there that they experience the landscape, whether it be here at home or on the annual vacation abroad. But perhaps adults can only begin to understand what it actually means to become familiar with nature from the back seat of a car, by sitting down in the children's place, in the exhibit's bisected car.

In other words, we've cut things out in a new way. We've twisted and contorted things. We won't try to claim that we are guiltless of employing a certain irony and baroque humor. But our intention is not to offend or shock. We don't want to impose on anyone an unpleasant experience, but we do want to provoke a thoughtful smile, or for that matter, a smirk. If along the way we try to surprise and disconcert you, and create paradoxes, that is because we ourselves are lost in wonder, and find strange contradictions in our attitudes toward nature, be it corporeal, local or global.

In the exhibit we bring together opposing statements, we contrast pictures, we let each tableau and object point in its own direction. This is not in order to avoid taking a position, but because we find that new insights spring from the collisions of familiar perceptions.

Many of the walls in the exhibit don't relate to each other in a supplementary or additive way, but in a colliding and multiplicative way. In this, we are borrowing a familiar film montage principle of Eisenstein, in which the individual parts don't simply obediently follow one after the other, but multiply each other's meaning.

Even with all the foregoing, we haven't said all there is to say. The most important things are said between the lines, between the pictures, between the objects, between the walls: in short, just where the observer finds himself or herself.

# THE EXHIBITION, ROOM BY ROOM

Section numbers refer to the floor-plan on the inside cover.

## 1. Artificial Nature

The first room in the exhibit deals with the very concept of nature, in order to show that it has always been a matter of debate. The word "nature" has many meanings, and even a brief glance into the dictionary reveals several common ways to use the word, not all of which seem compatible: nature can be something connected with birth, or with landscape, or with the essential, or it can mean the whole world as such.

But the fact that nature can mean "the whole world" in some circumstances doesn't mean that one can always call everything "nature" or natural. A concept like nature loses its meaning if it has no limits, so there must also be something that is not "nature." The concept of nature acquires meaning, as a rule, when it rubs up against other concepts, such as, for example, culture, or spirit, or the unnatural. When one speaks of nature as "the whole world," then, it can still be opposed to "the supernatural," say, or to "the Creator."

One of the most common oppositions created is that between the natural and the artificial. We try to shine a light on this combination in order to see how far the opposition holds. We investigate three different "places," where paradoxes or discordances arise between genuine and artificial nature: indoors at home, outside in the garden, and in the public space (whether it be physical space, as in a city, or publicity in the media).

To provide one answer to the conundrum of why so many paradoxes about nature have arisen, we have written a little story - a tale about the control of nature, which simultaneously functions as a sort of key to the rest of the exhibit. The inspiration for this tale comes from a book some fifty years old, *Dialetic of the Enlightenment*, written by the two German sociologists and philosophers, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, during the Second World War while they were exiles from Nazi Germany living in the United States. When we have chosen to recast what we believe is the essence of their reflections about the natural history of human reason as a little story, it is not to strip it of its seriousness, but to underline that this is a question of more than an idea of history. It's a question of a continuous dynamic in the great embrace between man and nature:

*The Tale of the Control of Nature*

*Once upon a time, there was nature. Then a man came, who thought that the nature was wild, and therefore the man wanted to tame it and dominate it and make an ordered society. To do that, the man also had to tame other people, and he had to control his own nature. That took a long time. It was not easy. Then one day the self-controlled man found himself walking around in the half-tamed city jungle, and he dreamed about being wild again, in a wild nature, which he believed he had tamed and lost. But all that is long ago now.*

## 2. The Nature of Childhood

There is a difference between the nature of the child and the nature of childhood. The former belongs to children, and the latter to adults. That is to say, it is the adults who formulate images and concepts about childhood as a special period with a special character, where special considerations, rules and formative principles must apply. And it is adults who for good or ill remember their own childhoods.

It is a commonplace to regard children as beings who stand closer to nature than adults do. But in this connection, the concepts of "nature" and "the natural" usually turn out to be heavily qualified. That is, they are full of adults' stipulations, prejudices, and socially-conditioned assumptions. It is extremely difficult to obtain real insight into whether or not it is more natural for girls to play with dolls than it is for boys. Or whether it's more natural for little boys to play with toy guns than it is for little girls. The whole question of the "nature" of gender can lead to great confusion - especially for adults.

## 3. The History of the Body

The body has a history, or rather, it has several associated histories. You have only to look at your own hand. It doesn't take much detective work to find evidence of the day's work: perhaps you haven't done something as obvious as change the oil in your car, but maybe you've recently washed your hands in warm soapy water, or weeded the garden, or peeled an orange. You constantly have the traces of that kind of short-term history in the creases of your hands, or under your nails. In fact, it is considerably easier to read in the lines of your palm something about your immediate past than anything about your future.

But there are also traces of a somewhat larger history: perhaps you bite your nails, or perhaps you paint them, or you wash your hands conscientiously, or put hand lotion on them, or wear a ring. All of these things say something about your life-style, and hands often also tell stories about your work and recreation. Hands can reveal things reaching all the way back to your childhood - scars you've acquired, and the fact that you stick out your little finger when you eat ice cream. Every scar is deeply personal, but also a mark from a certain situation and a certain time, a historical mark. In innumerable ways, the body incorporates an enormous historical memory.

And the history goes still farther back, much farther. The shape and proficiency of the hand are the results of tens of thousands of years of evolu-

tion. Our colleagues, the monkeys, who stayed in the trees, thus have two pairs of hands, while we, who ventured out on the steppes, acquired feet.

Hands and feet are not the only things marked by their own history, and by the process of civilization. The same is true of our whole body. In a way, the body is our natural part (and it can be described in biological, physical, physiological terms, etc), but it can also be considered a part of history (and it can be described with sociocultural, psychological, and theological terms, etc). The body is formed and transformed. One's attitude toward one's body is clearly reflected in one's posture and body language - most clearly perhaps in the cases of bodily inhibited persons. A knowledge is hidden here. Perhaps we are not conscious of it, but it is in no way less imprinted on us because of that. The body is the tablet that time writes on.

The body's external posture has often been conceived of as a completely concrete parallel to its inner attitude. To "stiffen your spine" and "hold your head up" are old slogans about changing your attitude. Newer sayings suggest a demand for more suppleness and flexibility. It has never been good to have a slack stance, but for a while it was better to be gentle than stiff and unbending. Today, one is supposed to be both open and enterprising, and at the same time steady enough to keep slogging through the daily grind.

## 4. Bodybuilding

What kind of body do you want? That is a provocative question for the person who is accustomed to thinking of the body as something given, which cannot fundamentally be changed, and which perhaps should not really be changed, either because the body really is given to us - by nature or by God or by Fate - and thus it would perhaps be presumptuous to try to change it, or because the body lives its own life, at the intersection of the biological, the psychological, and the sociological, and therefore develops according to certain principles which in all essentials are not susceptible to change for the individual. But such a static and non-individualistic notion is not in style. There are appeals all around us to take responsibility for our own bodies. You should decide not to be fat, you should keep yourself in shape, be good to your body, express yourself with your body, nurse and develop your personality by developing your body.

Although manual labor is unmodern, the body has received more and more attention in the postmodern world as a part of the personality that one can and should maintain - or rather, as something one can and should form and develop: "kropsopbyggelse" could be the Danish translation of the term in English, 'bodybuilding'. Another word currently in vogue is "fitness," which implies that one should not be fat and flabby, that one should be conditioned and ready for this or that, perhaps "fit for a fight." The fitness wave rolls on, continually assuming new forms: from popular gymnastics and exercise festivals to the deadly serious media-conscious extreme sports.



## 5. Bodily Taboos

In many subtle ways the body and its functions have been and continue to be repressed. This is the subject of the next five small rooms (rooms 5-9).

The things the body most wants to be provided with, that is, whatever kinds of food and drink we find delicious and pleasurable to taste and smell, have always been a good conversational subject. You can talk about them with perfect propriety at the table, while you eat and drink. On the contrary, you can't talk nearly so easily about how the body gets rid of the exact same stuff, after digestion. That kind of talk, especially at the table, is considered inappropriate and disgusting. And should you think of talking about it during the excretion process itself, it's hardly likely there would be anyone to hear it. In our culture you go somewhere private and you don't talk about what you do there. The closest you can get is to hint around at it, with apologetic or indirect phrases: you're going to relieve yourself, you're answering the call of nature, you have a little errand, or you're going off to wash your hands.

The taboos among natural bodily processes cover much more than the direct waste products of food and drink. In a curious way it seems that most of the body's secretions - which surely in themselves are among the most natural things, the nearest to us, the most completely our own - have been made taboo in our culture. Sweat, ear-wax, snot, spit, menstrual blood, sperm: more than anything else, it sounds like a string of dirty words. And the taboos seem to stretch all the way out to the clipped nails, the clipped hair, the beard-stubble in the razor, and on and on. We won't even mention here the more special items, such as sloughed-off scabs, coughed-up phlegm, or the pus-spots you leave on the mirror when you pop pimples.

The point, then, is clear enough: whatever our body disposes of, seems in that exact instant to undergo a violent change in value. It becomes disgusting, repulsive, nothing one talks about. One instant it is something that belongs to me, is a part of me, and in the next instant it is certainly not me anymore, I don't want to see it, I don't want to know about it, I don't talk about it, I deny it. The body's excretions undergo a change that is almost metaphysical. It is mystical, a transsubstantiation, or, as it is called in vulgar latin, hocus-pocus (hoc est corpus, that is, "this is my body"), and immediately afterward it is no longer me, and must be cast away.

The attempt has been made to explain our abhorrence of the body's excretions as a reasonable reaction to unhygienic material, which by virtue of bacterial accumulations can be threatening to health. However, some historical research indicates that invocations of hygiene more probably came in as a sort of post hoc rationalization. Hygienic measures - from

handkerchiefs to the flush toilet - seem first and foremost to have spread among populations as socially prestigious phenomena embodying a certain style. One made the hygienic advance only because the finer social layer did it: in old times, that layer was the Court, and more recently it has been trend-setters in the media. And the fear of bacteria, which in the last few generations has been so natural that only very recently has it become challengeable as a doubtful taboo, seems first and most importantly to be a fear that struck the general populace during one stage in the professionalization of the medical industry and the other health agencies.

The definitions of disease and health, hygiene and the taboo, have been and continue to be only skirmishes in an ongoing fight for prestige and power between various professional groups. The words "nature" and "natural" are important ammunition in this fight. Entirely according to one's profession, the words "natural medicine" can be pronounced either with contempt or with enthusiasm.

## 6. The Natural Lifestyle

Will we destroy ourselves? Does there exist - over and above the usual will to survive and the sex-drive and whatever else one can name of natural drives - a profound urge in the modern person to destroy himself? Would we in reality rather be sick, unhealthy, overweight, stressed-out, and in all ways out-of-balance? One might get that idea, when one sees the many ads and products from the pharmaceutical industry, or from the alternative health companies, which offer help and various short-cuts to the attainment of health, the relief of stress, and the natural life. There must indeed be something or other drawing us powerfully in the direction of the unhealthy, if there has to be such an extensive industry just to get us back on an even keel.

Generally we say that it's the social conditions - work, responsibility for a family, economy - that force us to sit still, crammed into car seats and office chairs, physically inactive and psychically overheated. We would so like to be able to dispense with work-time, appointment calenders, and car-phones. Or would we?

Do the busy business people perhaps sit and grumble into their car phones, because the phones, like security blankets, give a sense of safety in the face of the alternative: empty time, unemployment, the loss of prestige, anonymity? Nearly everyone complains about being busy, too busy - that it is hard, pure suicide - but isn't it exactly because we like to have it that way? Don't we get a certain masochistic satisfaction out of pushing ourselves? We choke a whiskey down, but when we do it don't we look as though we have as much trouble overcoming our natural dislike of the stuff as Humphrey Bogart always did? Some people like to constantly light fires in certain herbs and inhale the smoke - and if it's not in order to bother non-smokers, is it then to bother themselves, and by doing so show how much they dare to destroy themselves?

How much of our life-style are we ourselves masters and mistresses over? Precisely if one has a prestigious social position, with responsibility, power and means, then one ought to be the best at exemplifying a healthy, harmonious and free life.

One can amass health products in such large quantities, and of so many different types, that it seems difficult to choose. There seem to be so many short-cuts to a better life that one could not possibly manage to buy them all. Consumption is a life-style that currently seems natural, but which in itself has begun to turn unhealthy. The advertisements' sweeping assurances about natural, healthy and green products are symptoms that say something about an artificial, unhealthy and gray industry.

## 7. Death

One can try all sorts of things to lengthen life and stave off death. Exercise, and health products, and a shot of schnapps every morning. Or chemical solutions, perhaps genetic ones, perhaps freezing the brain and firing it into orbit around the earth, to await later re-entry and thawing. Or devout reading of holy scriptures, observance of ritual precepts, expectations of rebirth, or a life beyond.

Of all things natural, death is still the most unnatural.

But death is also a cultural phenomenon, perceived in a special way that we have developed for dealing with the unavoidable. In a Danish hospital, one should carry on calmly, and only in the company of a bouqet of flowers and a single mourner, when one passes quietly away. Several taboos would be broken if there were partying and noise, and clinking of glasses in the hospital corridor, while friends and relatives shouted out their grief or celebrated former shared happiness and the continuation of life. But such things can be the tradition elsewhere.

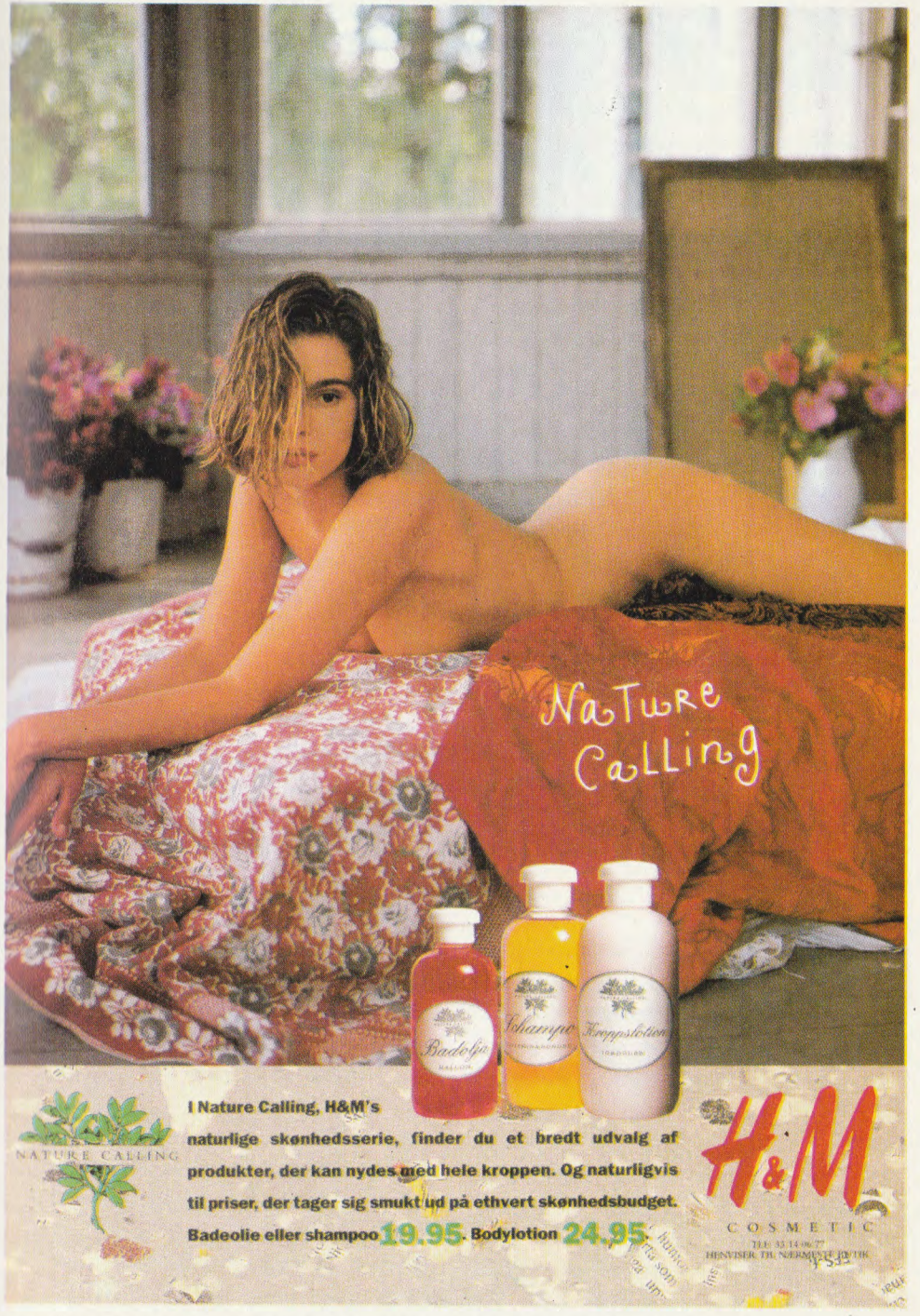
Churchyards, also, are much different from country to country. To have a churchyard at all is a cultural phenomenon, but it also has something to do with purely practical conditions: if the earth isn't suitable for digging because of frost, or because it's more rock than soil, then one adopts other rituals surrounding death. In Denmark, growth and the demand for building lots has meant that in many towns the churchyards have become among the only - and also some of the best - natural oases. In the churchyard the nature-lover can find many rare plants, a rich bird-life, foxes and squirrels, and first and foremost: peace.

## 8. Natural Sex

Sexuality vis à vis nature is an extensive subject. We have chosen a special viewpoint: we peek backward, so to speak, through the key hole. Our starting point is the common, the ordinary, the perhaps slightly dull and habitual sexuality in the double bed, the sexuality in which there isn't much life or pep, the co-habiting life that



Tilbage til naturen. Foto Niels Plenge 1994.




Naturen som argument. McCann-Erickson reklamebureau 1994.

seems trapped in routine and fatigue. Perhaps work takes too much of the energy away from love, or perhaps there are problems with not being able to find work. Perhaps it is the children, and the thousand errands of family life, or perhaps frustrated ambitions, or the economy, or perhaps it's just not fun anymore. The double bed still remains as a place one sleeps, and where one just manages to read a little, or dream a little about a more exotic and erotic life. The double bed remains as a house-altar for the couple's orthodox faith, and the night tables are like side-niches for sexual frustrations.

We know the ads for all kinds of products that don't really have much to do with sexuality or the erotic, but for which the marketers nonetheless pull one worn-out sex-cliché after another out of the sack. While we were researching this issue, however, we had a bit of difficulty finding an ad agency that would admit they themselves produced this kind of thing. . . But there was naturally a certain segment of their competition, which insisted on being so vulgar. And naturally one could certainly not prevent people from seeing erotic themes in the good ads, and therefore in the refined sort of ads which decent bureaus put on the market.

Sexuality is as culturally formed as anything else, but it is considered, all the same, to belong to man's natural side. In Danish, one used to say, "Nature overpowered discipline" (e.g., if someone succumbed to temptation), and hoped thus that ethics, intellect, faith or social inventions such as discipline, cold showers and the inviolability of marriage would put a damper on the natural temptations. Today come warnings of dangers of infection and one tries to turn thin rubber membranes into a natural part of sex life. Sex is indeed natural . . . but watch out! And there are still some forms of sexuality that are stamped as unnatural, because they are different from the ordinary sexual practices, and therefore arouse fear, envy and disgust - in people with petty natures, anyway.

## 9. The Treatment of the Body

Modern medical technology could be considered one of the most advanced forms of the domination of nature, and it is thus an expression of human triumph. But it is also, at present, one of the most problematic and abused forms of applied technology. The human, who is otherwise so happy to control, feels a tremor in his hand when he is supposed to apply the knife, the pipette, or the electrode, and seems to wonder whether there might not be a limit on how much should, in fact, be controlled.

Ethical discussions are an indication that behavioral norms have not changed as fast as technical possibilities, or economic and political priorities. To the servants of technology, it seems completely irrational to assert that pain and old age might be considered natural, or at least as aspects of life to which one should not apply all conceivable technical and chemical



resources in an attempt to stave them off. Lost in the midst of tubes and drips and electronic monitors, the poor human being stirs restlessly, because there is no one's hand to hold - and this is one case, anyway, where it does not suffice to provide a robot's hand. The relentless technical landscape of hospitals, and their jungle of specialists, are examples of the control of nature in its grotesque phase, in which people, who are supposed to take pleasure in technology, intermittently sense instead that it has become a new, frightening and incomprehensible nature. The crux of the issue is that we would like technology to be available to us when we need it, but the situation often seems reversed - as though it were we who must be available for technology, whenever it needed us.

## 10. The Nature of Animals

A certain parallel can be found between the ethical dilemmas of the health industry and the agricultural industry. In both cases, the customers - patients and consumers, respectively - have begun to involve themselves in an evaluation process that earlier would be handled entirely by the specialists' own standards. The doctor's and the farmer's practices seem to have become so technically developed and industrially complicated that common standards and a common sense about life can follow along only with difficulty.

For years we have been accustomed to thinking of animals in four categories. There were the animals we felt strong affection for, such as horses, dogs, and cats, which were an intimate part of our lives, which we talked to, and carressed, and took with us to the veterinarian regardless of the expense, which we missed when they were away, and which we couldn't dream of eating. Surely only savages would eat a dog.

Then there were farmyard animals, familiar to us from small subsistence farms. Perhaps we imagined they still roamed the fields out in the country. These were cows, pigs, sheep, and hens, which one wouldn't caress (unless one was an urban kid on an outing to the countryside), but which the vet attended, as long as it wasn't too uneconomical, and which we didn't find unnatural to eat.

In the third category were the wild animals, which we neither petted nor called the vet for. One could go hunting for some of them, and perhaps eat them. One could have them stuffed, and might set them out as ornaments - and that you certainly couldn't do with pets or farm animals.

The fourth category was the taboo. It was the industrialized animal, which we would rather not see at all, nor smell, nor think about, but which ironically has been the most eaten. Factory-produced chickens and calves, pigs crammed together on a huge floor-grate. We would rather not see or smell the tied-up sow, which does not even have a tail to curl. We would rather not hear, or hear about, the transportation of these animals.

As long as these categories and their associated norms functioned properly,





Halvtamt eller helt vildt? Foto Odense Universitet 1995.

it was only the borderline cases that caused provocation, as when, say, a non-farmer calling himself an artist had a horse or dog slaughtered, thereby confusing the norms applying to pets with the unmentionable industry standards. But technically and economically motivated developments seem to have multiplied these border crossings, and that is problematic for both producers and consumers. Perhaps we can accept the wild deer being turned into a farm animal in an enclosure, but to put a deer indoors onto a floor grate, where it can't leap around, is not acceptable. Everyone gets a too-tame taste in the mouth. The industrialization and the mechanization of animals has reached a threshold of pain. No one knows exactly where that threshold lies, but it is now being quarrelled over fairly openly.

In our behavior toward animals, we show our true humanity. It has been said that we are what we eat, but in this decade we have been forced to look at just what it is we eat. Consequently, we have also begun to define ourselves on the basis of what we don't eat.

## 11. Nature as Mental Construct

In the little connecting room, we try to show that a strictly quantitative view of nature and a strictly qualitative one are two sides of the same coin. First we illustrate, in a measured fashion, how the quantification of nature looks. In this case, it is the familiar application of geometry to the measurement of nature, mathematics for the calculation of mechanical physics, the setting of prices on all sorts of objects, the familiar categorization and hierarchization of animals and plants in genera and species, and the biological mapping of nature and life. Even chaos theory can be seen as a certain attempt to impose a system on nature. It is in this way spiritually related to the more ancient cosmos-theories.

When one tries to grasp nature in this quantitative way, something immediately slips through the fingers: a qualitative conception. But our point is that the quantitative and the qualitative methods applied to nature happen at one and the same time: a romantic or baroque taste for curves and traceries accompanies the measurement of nature along straight lines, just as city-dwellers' dreams of nature incorporate gentle, organic forms. In recent times it might even happen that the same stream first gets straightened out and subsequently is redesigned so that it meanders again.

The split between the urge to control nature and the sentimental aesthetic of nature is thus not so much a division between various historical epochs or between different populations, but rather a duality which competes in the breast of every modern individual.

## 12. Nature's Supermarket

We are accustomed to orienting ourselves in a supermarket, and we are, on the whole, used to orienting ourselves in the surrounding industrialized urban society. We look on things and relationships as commodities, on which a price can be put. We intuitively feel that there are still certain items it would be offensive to put a price on, for example, fresh air. But even in this case, the application of a price tag is a future possibility. After all, drinking water already stands on the shelf among the other products. And when it costs money to get toddlers into day-care, or to remedy childlessness, where then are the limits: will it soon become normal to pay for a pregnancy of guaranteed quality? Will there remain any relationships that do not carry a price?

However, both the local supermarket and the consumer society as a whole have an underside, which used to be quite invisible, but in recent years it has come more and more to the fore: trash. We used to repress it. It was something you took out in the dead of night and threw away. But now "away" itself has gone away. Automobile graveyards behind high wooden fences were not the solution. The walls were not high enough, the dumps were not big enough, the covering of refuse and poison was not fast enough. For a while we tried to compact our trash, but that was not enough, either. Now we recycle, and the underside of industrial production has come out into the open. Soon perhaps it will be impossible to find a product ad which does not refer to recycling and ecological correctness.

A thorough-going change in attitude seems to be on the way. One soon will no longer acquire status by virtue of how much one buys, but instead by virtue of how one deals with one's trash. The slapping of a taboo on waste-products, the conspiracy of silence of earlier times, can no longer be sustained. The end-products are also a new beginning. Post-modernism is succeeded by compost-modernism.

## 13. To the Market

In the largest open place in the exhibit, we have set up a sort of "marketplace of ideas," or meeting-hall. Here we show how different special interests quarrel over the utilization and transformation of local nature. Issues of development and use in urban environments have always been debated, and the EC's new compulsory regulations on the fallowing of land have recently sparked a rise in discussions about the utilization of rural areas, too. There are narrow economic interests, broader political interests, recreational interests, aesthetic interests, and so on. Dominating the room, in the middle, is that democratic instrument, the negotiating table, a successor to the village meeting place of earlier times. Here one can listen to the contributions of various special interests, all of which more or less camouflage their self-interested advocation of some special use of the local area as a common interest that will benefit everyone.

We're not entirely sure that all interests have been represented at the negotiating table, or that all the actual motive forces behind the development of the local area have been laid out for open discussion and democratic in-

spection. In a way, there is a connection between the players at the negotiating table and the players of video games. In both cases, at least for some people, the goal is to make over and control an area - and also, so to speak, to amass more points than the other players.

Our marketplace also touches on the generational differences in how we view nature. Children, young people, adults, and senior citizens tend to have different interests in nature, different conceptions of the thing itself, and different views about its proper use. Nature looks different from the front and back seats of the car.

## 14. Prospects

Any good vantage point should combine a masterly view with magnificent sublimity. We love to climb or drive high up in the mountains in order to be able to look down at the surrounding land and imagine that we control it, but at the same time the great height and distance unlock other feelings: perhaps we dwell on the wide-open land's limitless possibilites and beauty, or perhaps we feel a quiet thrill simply at the thought that we could fall into infinity.

Caspar David Friedrich's ca. 1818 painting of the wanderer looking out over a sea of clouds from a mountain peak, contains exactly the duality of triumph and fear that makes a magnificent view so fascinating. The wanderer has achieved a temporary goal, and now, his climb successfully concluded, he has the clouds beneath him and he can gaze freely all around: he is a symbol of man's control of nature. But at the same time there is something demonic, or perhaps slightly deranged about that averted figure. Something ominous is suggested by the fluttering hair and the wind blowing through the clothes. Is he perhaps about to throw himself over the edge of the abyss? What does he want up on the mountain? What does he see in the distance? A little tower in an exhibition hall could hardly recreate such an atmosphere, but we will be satisfied if all we have done is to provoke a few thoughts about the nature of prospects, and about the resurfacing of indomitable nature in defiance of all human projects and structures.

## 15. The Nature of Perspective

The Renaissance discovery of perspective in painting (or rather, its rediscovery, after a prefiguration in Antiquity), is characterized in more superficial accounts as an absolute advance in the awareness of the natures of space, viewpoint, and reproduction. One hears of a systematic progression of pictorial method, where things and persons come to be depicted more according to their physical placement than their spiritual, social, or symbolic placement. More important people were no longer painted large, if they happened to be in the backgound, and the Biblical heaven over the landscape was replaced by a more "natural" sky with clouds. Yet there's more to this picture: this way of seeing is only natural for those who have become accustomed to conceiving of their surroundings in the context of questions of control, manipulation, and domination. The reproduction of objects' placement in space, and in relation to a central eye, is motivated by an interest in being able to maneuvre and handle objects rationally. And the central eye of perspective is no longer the divine all-seeing eye, but the individual viewer's eye. All things are seen now, so to speak, from the individual's perspective, and not from a collective or divine perspective. What the pictorial perspective gains in potential for the domination of the environment, it thus loses in any sense of belonging to a collective or divine order. A painting's perspective points back to the solitary subject, who has had to objectify his world.

## 16. Meditations on Nature

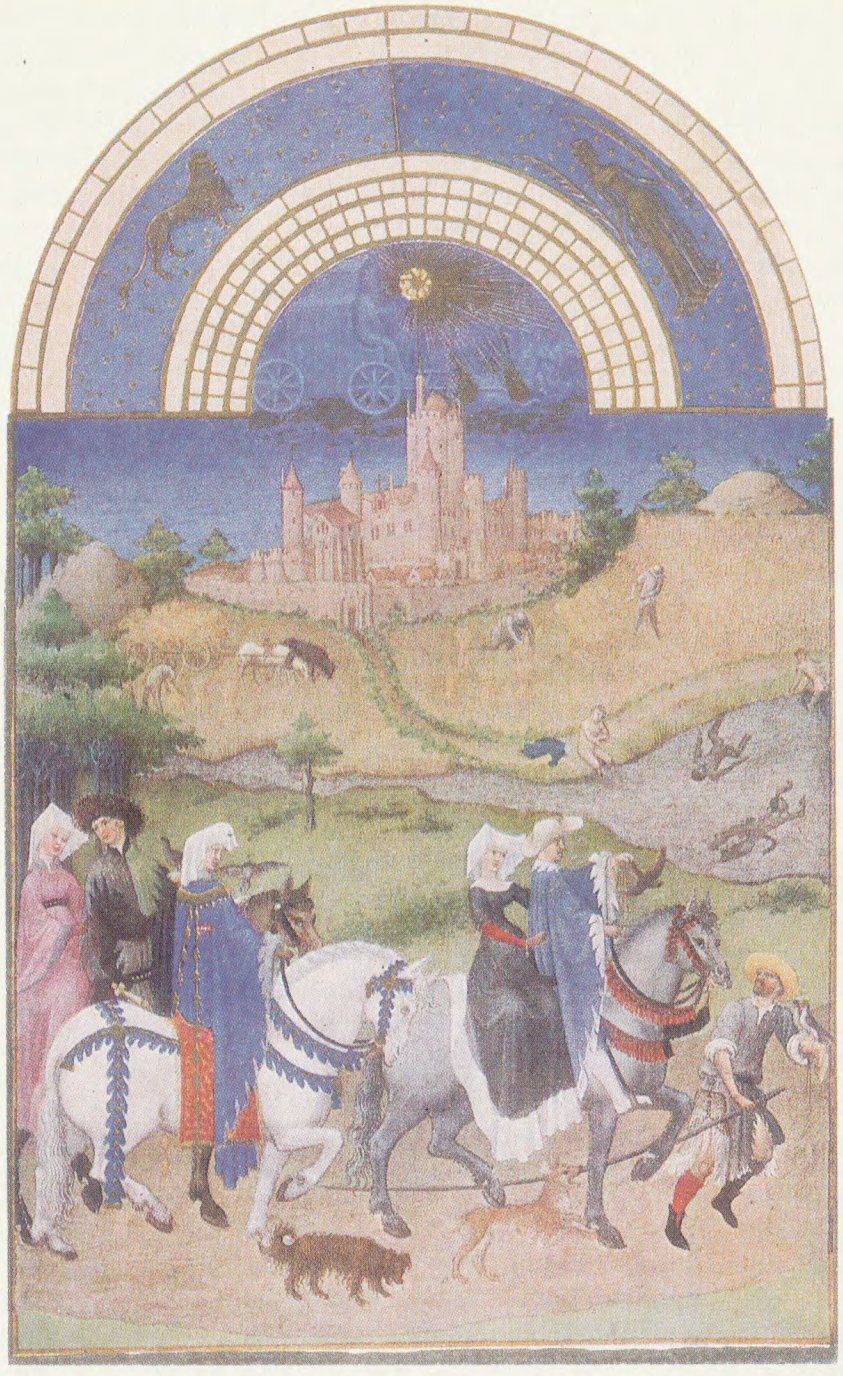
Here is our own little movie den, which we have called "Meditations on Nature." It's different from the other rooms in the exhibit. It provides a break, a place where you can sit quietly and let your imagination be inspired by the pictures of nature projected on the wall. The pictures and natural sounds are not presented as some definite story, or even as a sequence of events. Rather they merely create a lingering mood, a lull based on the meditative rhythms in nature. In this way, our idea was to create a bit of breathing space, a place which isn't loaded up with our own intentions, texts and structures, but which lies as much as possible at the disposal of the visitor's own sensation and imagination. It's an attempt to recreate those moments when you seem to see or hear something in nature, which your mind cannot quite grasp, but which for lack of a precise word perhaps you can call natural beauty, or to raise it to the platonic level of aesthetic philosophy, simply Beauty. The Beautiful speaks to us, but not in words. Some sort of epiphany is whispering to us, but we can't hear what kind.

## 17. Guild-edged Nature

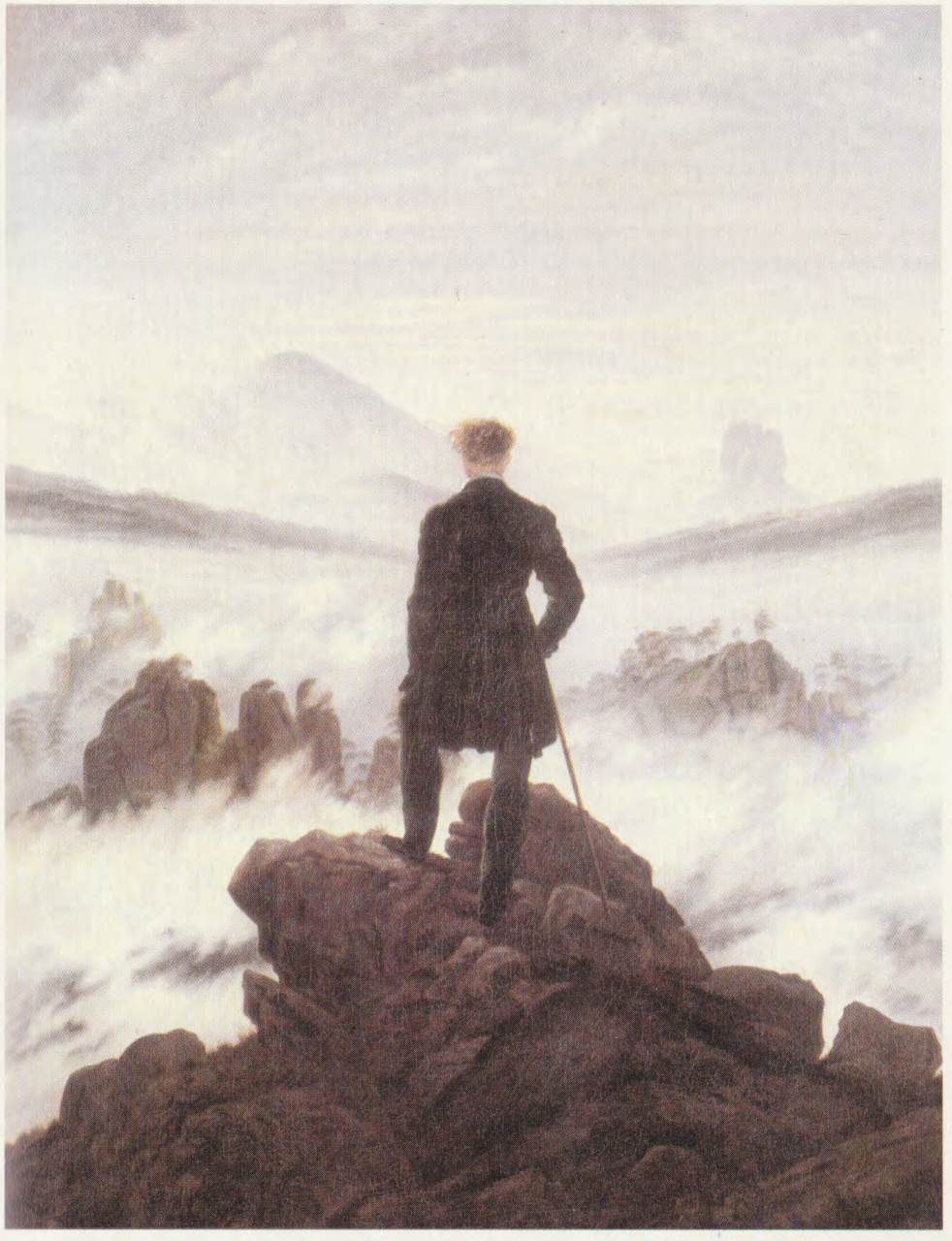
In this century, and especially during the last few decades, a somewhat strained relationship has developed between people and nature paintings. This is true not only of artists, but also of people who have no particular interest in art. It has become a cliché to talk condescendingly about the bellowing stag by the forest pond, a picture that ostensibly still hangs over the livingroom sofa set.

At one time, the point of nature painting was to gain insight into nature, and it approached a scientific appropriation of the surroundings. Today, nature painting is looked on as a pseudo-art, or perhaps as some form of ironic caricature. The history of nature- and landscape-painting is a history of drastic changes in the public's taste. These changes hint at general historical changes in people's conception of nature.

In the first half of the 19th century, the so-called golden age of Danish landscape painting, the object of fas-



Naturen og menneskets orden under Guds himmel. Illustration til august i fransk kalender fra ca. 1416, Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry. Musée Condé.



Mennesket hævet over naturen. Caspar David Friedrich: Vandreren over tågehavet, ca. 1818. Hamburger Kunsthalle.

cination was not so much wild or unspoiled nature, but rather cultivated nature, nature that was clearly marked by human activity - what might be called the cultivated landscape. These paintings, with their vision of man's relationship to the earth and the cultivated land, should be understood in the context of their time. What to us looks like a romantic and static farmer's idyll might very well have been considered a representation of what was then most advanced and dynamic in the cultivation of the earth.

## 18. Global Nature

We once again take up the discussions and conflicts of interests that we already know from debates over the utilization of local nature, but this time on the global level. Perhaps especially on this level, these conflicts seem to take place far away from the democratic control of round-table discussions. For the individual, it is hard not to feel powerless when faced with media depictions of one global catastrophe after another, and with report after report on the threatened condition of the world.

Doomsday has become a natural matter, a matter of crises in the ecological balance, rather than one involving the intervention of supernatural powers. Even war, perhaps the most prosaic of Doomsday threats, is changing its character from one of common violence and destruction to a struggle over resources, waste-disposal, and ecology. There is no shortage of frightful visions, or of pictures of need and misery, and perhaps they are intended to arouse abhorrence and action - but they are so widely distributed that they have been enlisted into our routine, and so generally they end up accomplishing little else than adding to our feelings of impotence and apathy.

Our task in this exhibit, as we have envisioned it, is not to try to outdo others with horrific visions and pictures of suffering - that, in any case, would be difficult. Instead, we wanted to put a big question mark next to the whole idea that there is a well-planned and predictable future for us and nature. Consequently, side by side with the far-reaching technological possibilities for control and monitoring of global nature, we have set out a crude wheel of fortune. The wheel lands completely randomly on some vision of the future. The only thing the individual can do is spin the wheel again.

On the philosophical level, too, one finds widely different current notions about man's place in nature. It has become a contentious issue whether or not one can accord the same rights to animals, trees, stones or other parts of nature that one accords to people.

This attempt to propound an ethic, to formulate ethical rules, and draw up rights and responsibilities regarding our interaction with nature, is met with suspicion. For an ethic is something that people can display - or display a distinct lack of - toward each other. Nature, on the other hand, is not a partner, or an opponent, or an agent of the same type at all.

One must therefore be wary of hauling ambiguous terms like "nature," or even worse, "nature herself," or worst of all, "primeval nature" into a discussion, as though this were an issue of real partners or opponents in a legal dispute. It isn't fruitful to frame discussions about the man-nature relationship in terms of concepts and relationships taken from the courtroom, the law, the bureaucracy or the organizational culture. And to talk about allotting man a special freedom in relation to nature can, in this connection, be just as seductive as to accord rights to stones or trees.

To construct a nature-ethic is not only difficult, it often takes on the character more of an attempt to obscure than to clarify. As long as the smokescreen of disagreement rules, one can comfortably continue the prevailing practice. Perhaps all those eloquent arguments citing the difficulty of formulating ethical rules are really half-hearted attempts to legitimize the dark lines of development already laid down. What one hears in many debates about ethics is not so much enthusiasm, as fear of a radical new insight.

## 19. The Cosmos

To the philosopher, Immanuel Kant, contemplation of the limitless extent of space and the infinite multitude of stars represented an encounter with the unknowable, with the immeasurable vastness of nature, in comparison to which all things human seemed small. Something similar was intimated when storms, volcanic eruptions and other powers of nature raged. Yet for Kant there was also always a clear afterthought: although we were small and weak beings physically, we were also humans, who possessed reason and a soul. We had freedom and the moral law inscribed in our beings.

It's perhaps more difficult today to feel ourselves in certain possession of a crystal clear morality derived from reason, but we still experience these dual feelings of powerlessness and joy - in brief, this fascination with nature's powers, with the cosmic quarrel. We still understand what Kant called "the experience of the sublime."

## 20. Exit Into Nature

After so many exhibition rooms, with so many different kinds of texts, pictures, objects and other symbols of human intention, it is probably a great relief to see the exit, the way out to "open-air" nature and the weather. Even though the natural areas that surround this building are mostly a cultivated landscape, where traffic noise mixes in with the bird song, the weather is still a reminder of an aspect of nature over which we don't exercise complete control. But perhaps it is exactly these caprices of nature that please us more than anything else.

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## Captions in the Danish catalog

Page 2 - 3: Nature restored at Hollufgård: Lindved Stream in a channel laid by the Odense Commune, Funen District, and the Forest and Nature Board, 1990-91. Photo from the Municipal Museums of Odense.

Page 10 - 11: Photo by Bill Binzen, USA. UNICEF calender, 1985.

Page 14: The missing link. 1994 advertisement from the Spanish health magazine, Integral.

Page 15: Roman female athlete, with hand-weights, 4th century. Piazza Armerina, Sicily.

Page 18: Back to nature. Photo by Niels Plenge, 1994.

Page 19: Nature as argument. H&M advertisement, 1994.

Page 22 - 23: Half-tame or all wild? Photo copyright, Odense Universi-ty, 1995.

Page 26: Nature and human order, under God's heaven. August illustration from the French calender, Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry, circa 1416. Musée Condé.

Page 27: Man raised above nature. Caspar David Friedrich: The Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog, circa 1818. Hamburg Gallery.

Page 30 - 31: When the beech forest became the Danish idyll, and the ideal for later natural restorations. P.C. Skovgaard: Delhoved Skov on Skarre Lake, 1847. State Art Museum.

Back cover: The control of nature in Europe, 1995. Polfoto.

# ALLE TIDERS FAVNTAG

## EN UDSTILLING OM MENNESKET OG NATUREN



Katalog



Naturbeherskelse i Europa 1995. Polfoto.