The theme of this special issue - “Picturebooks as meetingplaces: Text, image, ideology” – arose from the international symposium that took place 13th -15th September 2013 at Stockholm University. Forty-five delegates from 15 different countries around the world attended the symposium. The aim of this special issue is to further develop the conference theme, to present new theoretical ideas and concepts related to interplay between picturebooks and various media, and to offer critical perspectives on a variety of themes ranging from picturebook narratives to ideology and aesthetics.

In this special theme issue, five articles have been selected from the many interesting research presentations given at the symposium.

In their article “Maps in picturebooks” Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Jörg Meibauer study the relation between maps as visual elements in selected picturebooks and as mental representations, description, and narration in these works. The article shows that the relationship between picturebook narration and the map serves to highlight key elements in the overall story. The material discussed in this article – a fascinating selection from different times (1933, 1945 and 2008) – also demonstrates how views on children and children’s literature have changed historically.

This is something that is essential also in Cecilia Silva-Diaz’s article “Picturebooks, lies and mind-reading”. As in the Kümmerling-Meibauer and Meibauer article, cognitive criticism, narrative theory and picturebook theory are used to analyse the books. Silva-Diaz discusses the demands that the identification of lying and lies in postmodern picturebooks places on the implied readers and, consequently, the opportunities these stories provide for children to develop literary reading and intersubjective social skills.

In her article “The Constraints of Literary Paradigms”, Kristin Ørjasæter analyses the non-fiction picturebook Ida from 2011. This book not only tells an illustrative story about the life and death of the protagonist, but also includes scientific information about the primate and its environment. Ørjasæter argues that, despite the scientific aim, an ambiguity is created in the story through the use of different literary and visual traditions and the introduction of intertextual elements and traits such as Christian mythology and exotic jungle motifs.

The three articles illustrate how influences from different visual traditions constitute an essential part of the picturebook's artistic and narrative expression. The interplay between various media, as well as the influence the picturebook has on new media, was a topic that was discussed in many of the presentations at the symposium. In their article “Re-conceptualising picturebook theory in the digital age” Ghada Al-Yaqout and Maria Nikolajeva argue that the picturebook as a medium is entering the digital age, and that the multimodal nature of the medium, that has previously implied a combination of different verbal and visual modes, is expanding to include auditory, tactile and performative dimensions. Their article discusses the new approaches and terminology used to describe features characteristic of the picturebook app, but also points at conventional picturebook features that acquire different significance in the new, digital medium.

As several articles in this theme issue demonstrate, picturebooks are being shaped by changing ideas of children and childhood both with regard to motif and visual effects. The issue of how these kinds of ideas also influence children’s literature research is discussed by Clementine Beauvais in her article “What’s in ‘the gap’?”. Beauvais examines the concept of “readerly gaps” in picturebooks, as well as children’s ability to interpret them. The author argues that an optimistically child-centered epistemology exists in children’s literature research and problematizes the assumption that child readers...
are better “gap-fillers” than adult readers. Instead, she suggests that “the gap” exists outside the picturebook and beyond the exploring children’s reading experiences, and proposes that the readerly gap remains a space surrounded with and controlled by adults.

The selection of articles for inclusion in the special issue “Text, image, ideology” reflects the expansive and multifaceted nature of the contemporary research field of picturebook studies. The wide range of topics and theoretical approaches that is presented here echoes the overall theme of the symposium: picturebooks are meeting places for ideas, theoretical fields, and various media and aesthetics.