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The Philosopher's Cabin and the Household of Nature

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ABSTRACT *The etymological origin of ecology in the human house is the point of departure of this article. It argues that* oikos *is not merely a vague metaphor for ecology, but that built households provide a key to understanding the household of nature. Three households support this claim: the cabins of Henry Thoreau, Aldo Leopold and Arne Næss. The article suggests that their views on the household of nature stand in direct relationship with their respective homes. They also have a distant epistemological bird's-eye view of nature seen from homes which were located—symbolically or in reality—on a mountain top.*

Ecology is widely hailed among environmental philosophers as the foundation for a view of the world which does not place humans at its centre, yet it has its etymological origin in the most anthropocentric object on earth, namely the human house, *oikos* (Latour, 1999). This paradox is the point of departure for this article, which argues that *oikos* is not merely a vague metaphor for ecology, but that built households provide a key to understanding the household of nature. Contrary to the view among environmental historians that nature somehow generates built structures and social behavior (Cronon, 1991; Davis, 1998), this article holds that the manner of thinking about the environment is best understood through the chief material manifestation of human agency: buildings.

Three households will support this admittedly broad claim: the cabins of the US philosopher Henry David Thoreau (1817–62), the US ecologist Aldo Leopold (1886–1948) and the Norwegian deep ecologist Arne Næss (1912–). Many regard the reasoning of these three celebrated philosophers as cornerstones for environmental ethics and history. This article suggests that their views on the household of nature stand in direct relationship with their respective homes. The language they used to describe nature is thus understood in the context of the architectural language of their respective cabins. They had a distant epistemological bird's-eye view of nature seen from homes which were located—symbolically or in reality—on mountain tops. This positioning suggests seeing nature and society from above with a panoramic perspective (Mitman, 1996). In all three cases, the philosopher's cabin acts as a material representation of the respective

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resident's views on the household of nature. By focusing on these cabins one may expose the human agency in environmental studies and thus the anthropocentric outlook on the environment of their dwellers.

Henry David Thoreau's Cabin and his *Beaux-arts* Household of Nature

One might expect the jacket design of Thoreau's (1854) famous *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* to be adorned with a scenic image of nature. Some woodland, flowers, birds or a pond would perhaps be deemed appropriate natural images to adorn his text. Yet, the cover of the first edition published in 1854 is not of such images, but instead the very origin of culture, namely a shelter.

That a drawing of Thoreau's cabin dominates the first page of his book is a clear indication of its importance: it serves as a visual representation of his thinking. Thoreau is well known for his voluntary retreat from society and urban culture to the simple life in the woods where he tried to understand his own human condition through close observation and interaction with nature. In *Walden* he describes in minute detail his experience with the landscape and meetings with fellow species in the immediate surroundings of his simple home. This led him to a better understanding of his own life and where he belonged. The drawing of his shanty on the book cover serves as a symbol of this solitary life and contemplations on interacting with the environment.

The cabin was newly reconstructed at Walden Pond in an effort to boost interest in Thoreau. Upon visiting, one is struck at once by its simplicity and lack of elegance. The locals around Walden Pond did not think much of it either. Upon Thoreau's departure they bought it for grain storage, and eventually used it to build a pigsty (Harding, 1962, pp. 222–224). This recycling of Thoreau's home can surely be described as ecofriendly. Yet, there is more to be said about the aesthetic language of this example of ecological architecture than the virtue of it being recyclable. Thoreau's understanding of the household of nature was the very inversion of his architectural ideas about his own household.

The design and aesthetic language of the shanty were the result of careful deliberations. Thoreau's initial idea was to live in a six-foot-long by three-foot-wide box with 'a few auger holes in it' to admit fresh air, but he seems to have abandoned the idea as being too impractical (Thoreau, 1894, p. 48). Initially, this wish for a simple home was not driven by an aesthetic or philosophical motivation. He simply wanted an inexpensive place to live where he could avoid having to pay rent. As a 27-year-old man with little money, he wanted to move away from home to live a bachelor life of leisure and writing in the woods.

The first part of *Walden* does not deal with nature or his life in the woods. It deals only with economy and is filled with complaints about the expenses of entering adult social life. It is hard not to read this chapter as anything but a sign of frustration. He noticed with disgust, for example, how fellow citizens in his community were 'needlessly poor all their lives because they think that they must have such a [house] as their neighbors have' (Thoreau, 1894, p. 58). To say that his alternative economic vision was that of economic pietism would be an understatement. Thoreau was downright stingy. That he constantly showed up uninvited at his neighbors' dinner tables to save money, and that his mother fed him with lunches and pies, is well recognized in the literature about his life at Walden Pond (Harding, 1962, pp. 181, 184). One should also add that he kept a close budget on every single expense, including his daily consumption of commodities such as rice and flour. He even writes about having a sense of 'guilt' for

money spent on one pumpkin and one watermelon during his entire two-year stay (Thoreau, 1894, pp. 94–95).

Thoreau showed vanity in his poverty. Measuring 10 feet wide by 15 feet long, his home almost matched the size of the box he first envisioned. He built it himself in the summer of 1845 using a borrowed axe and free timber. His tidy, ordered budget for his home included nails and secondhand windows and planking (Thoreau, 1894, pp. 78–79). The fact that he published these detailed budgets indicates that he took great pride in his unassuming frugality: it was a way of displaying pietism, honesty and sincerity. He fashioned himself as a man with ethical integrity by translating his dearth into a social virtue with the help of a material object like his hut.

His shanty also embodied a rejection of certain social values. First of all, it served as a statement against design, architecture and urbanism. Some of the most antagonistic pages in *Walden* deal with design. Here he argues that life would be better without architecture in general and ornaments in particular: 'A great proportion of architectural ornaments are literally hollow, and a September gale would strip them off, like borrowed plumes, without injury to the substantials' (Thoreau, 1894, pp. 76–77). In Boston real-estate developers were busy building new *beaux-arts* architecture, and in nearby Cambridge and Concord homes emerged in the Imperial style with Greek columns and rich ornamentation (Southworth and Southworth, 1992; Andros, 2001). On the luxurious West Cedar Street on Beacon Hill, the wealthy displayed their fortunes in the form of richly ornamented cast-iron balcony railings among other expensive details, and new *beaux-arts* facades shot up along the fashionable Commonwealth Avenue. Thoreau reacted against these buildings. He could not afford them anyway, so advocating pure and simple design was a way out of his economic condition.

He designed his hut to be as simple as possible, absolutely stripped of anything that could even hint at ornamentation. It consisted of one door, two windows, four walls and a fireplace. He found his aesthetic inspiration in unpretentious huts and cottages in the countryside, and envisioned a time when citizens could live a more simple life free from the burden of ornaments. The very idea of professional design was foreign to his philosophy, which sought to avoid the artificial world of architecture altogether.

If Thoreau was merciless towards architects, he was even more ruthless with respect to inherited furniture. 'The evil that men do lives after them' in their bereaved furniture, he noted in his six-page-long rampage against beds, chairs, tables and carpets (Thoreau, 1894, pp. 104–110, quotation p. 107). It was the burden of accumulated wealth he was after (he had little himself), and he consequently furnished his cottage in the most Spartan way: he had no knick-knacks or pieces of bric-à-brac. The furniture decided on consisted of hasty home-made necessities such as a bed, a table, a desk, three chairs and some kitchenware. 'None is so poor that he need sit on a pumpkin', he reasoned (Thoreau, 1894, p. 104). He was pretty close.

The rejection of urbanism followed from his criticism of architecture and furniture. He did not desire to live in a community. The idea of leaving the city also meant leaving a body of social and political institutions. Although Thoreau moved much of his social activity out in the woods, the shanty nevertheless set physical restrictions on his social and political life. Materially modest himself, he was generous to the indigent and a devoted abolitionist, smuggling former slaves through on their way up to Canada. He is also known for his civil disobedience against taxes, among other things. This political activity was in the long run incompatible with living a solitary life in a shanty out in the woods. The more nature Thoreau enjoyed, the less contact he had with the political realm and after two years he felt 'a little stagnation' and returned to his community (Thoreau, 1906, volume 3, p. 214).

Yet, while at Walden he fashioned himself as a philosopher whom the members of the urban community could seek out for advice. It was in these conversations that Thoreau worked out his own idealist philosophical views. His shanty served him well in this respect. It was small enough to avoid people staying over (when it once happened the guest had to sleep on the floor), while large enough to room guests in front of the fire for an evening talk. There were plenty of guests seeking out the 'solitary' philosopher who luckily lived only a short walk away from the Fitchburg Railroad and the well-traveled Concord–Lincoln road. On one occasion as many as 25 guests packed his cabin to listen to the emerging philosopher (Harding, 1962, pp. 195–196). The wisdom he offered was to leave the city to enjoy solitary life in nature (something the visitors had to endure in order to get to his cabin).

His whole life revolved around his home. *Life in the Woods*, the subtitle of his book, really describes his life in a shanty surrounded by woods. His saccharine nature writings represent the very opposite of his architectural ideals. His windows were without ornaments, but when he looked out of his window he suddenly allowed himself to describe nature with that ornamental style he so carefully rejected in architecture: 'As I sit at my window this summer afternoon, hawks are circling about my clearing; the tantivy of wild pigeons, flying by twos and threes athwart my view, or perching restless on the white-pine boughs behind my house, gives a voice to the air; a fishhawk dimples the glassy surface of the pond and brings up fish; a mink steals out of the marsh before my door and seizes a frog by the shore; the sedge is bending under the weight of the reed-birds flitting hither and thither' (Thoreau, 1894, pp. 179–180).

Thoreau's florid language is similar in style to those ornamented balconies and fashionable facades in central Boston. The household of nature became the realm where he could freely use all those ornaments he would not allow in his hut. In *Walden*, for example, he used no fewer than four pages to describe various types of air bubbles inside the ice on the pond (Thoreau, 1894, pp. 382–395). The contrast between his florid language and the aesthetic of his home could not be starker. At the end of the book it looks like he is running out of ornamental adjectives and sprays his text instead with a shower of exclamation marks: 'The first sparrow of the spring! The year beginning with younger hope than ever! Partially bare and moist fields from the blue bird, the song-sparrow, and the read wing, as if the last flakes of winter tinkled as they fell!' (Thoreau, 1894, pp. 478–479).

The architectural language of Greek ornaments popular in villas in nearby Concord also relates to Thoreau's description of the household of nature. In his journal he would reflect on his own nature:

> I am glad to remember to-night, as I sit by my door, that I too am at least a remote descendant of that heroic race of men of whom there is tradition. I too sit here on the shore of my Ithaca, a fellow-wanderer and survivor of Ulysses. How symbolical, significant of I know not what, the pitch pine stands here before my door! Unlike any glyph I have seen sculptured or painted yet, one of Nature's later designs, yet perfect as her Grecian art (Thoreau, 1906, volume 1, p. 363).

Thoreau frequently borrowed terminology from architecture and design to portray nature. Nature is 'sculptured', 'painted' and 'designed' as perfect Grecian art in the heroic tradition back to his hero Ulysses. The language he uses to describe wilderness contrasts with the austere design of his hut.

Seeing nature from the top of a mountain is a common theme among ecological writers, since this view provides the necessary overview required in order to be able to think in terms of ecological relations (Anker, 2001). Thoreau envisioned his shack as a

mountain house from where he—as a manly Greek god—could look out on a panoramic nature: 'My house makes me think of some mountain houses I have seen, which seemed to have a fresher auroral atmosphere about them, as I fancy of the halls of Olympus' (Thoreau, 1906, volume 1, p. 361). His cabin became the material object from which his idealist Self could look out on the world.

Thoreau dreamt about that huge house he could not afford. On a cold autumn day, when he was insulating his cabin with plaster to stay warm, he would 'dream of a larger and more populous house' than his shanty, built with 'only one room, a vast, rude, substantial, primitive hall' complete with all the essentials of a house, including furniture, a fireplace, a cook and even a mistress (Thoreau, 1894, p. 377). Lacking both the hall and the mistress, he projected instead his desire into a love for the household of nature complete with a *beaux-arts* ornamental facade.

Aldo Leopold's Shack and the Health of Nature's Household

Aldo Leopold is another widely praised nature writer whose 'land ethic' is often hailed as the foundation of the environmental ethics for a future ecofriendly society (Leopold, 1949; Callicott, 1989). He discussed his views on architecture and ecology only in his last years, often described as his most productive in terms of thinking about nature preservation.

In 1933, Leopold moved into a suburban house in Madison upon joining the faculty of the University of Wisconsin as a professor of wildlife management. The image of his house is scarcely found among the Leopold literature (only in Meine, 1988, p. 334), although he wrote his famous 'sketches' there and published them in his widely read *A Sand County Almanac* of 1949. The architectural design of his social home is rather ordinary, although Leopold needed a professor's salary to afford it. He lived in a home with the aesthetic aspiration of blending in with the neighborhood.

One therefore has to focus on Leopold's beloved weekend cottage to understand his architectural vision for humans and nature. His shanty farm later served his admirers as a visual representation of his philosophy: it adorns covers of biographies about his life, and pictures of his farm prevail in the literature about him. He bought his old, run-down farm, or 'shack' as he preferred to call it, in 1935 as a place of enjoyment for himself and his family. Unlike Thoreau, who built his shack, Leopold restored an old farmhouse. In order to uphold the virtue and importance of maintaining old buildings, the whole family engaged in rehabilitating the shack. It was to be a 'week-end refuge from too much modernity' (Leopold, 1949, p. viii).

In terms of architectural aesthetics, Leopold had much in common with Thoreau. The farm served Leopold as a material representation of the value of a simple life in a rich natural setting. Its lack of elegance signals a message of resistance to fancy design, social life and urbanism. Judging from the style of his cabin, one may conclude that Leopold did not care much about architecture. While avant-garde designers were exploring the new media of film, and architects pursued the International Style, Leopold stressed that 'the opportunity to see geese is more important than television' and started to promote a return to the wisdom of nature and simple life on a simple farm (Leopold, 1949, p. vii). Intimate knowledge of the relations between the farm and the ecology of the landscape were a necessary condition for the health of his spiritual life.

In an image drawn by Leopold, he placed his farm at the center of the eco-system (Leopold, 1942, p. 304). The diagram indicates lines of dependency or food chains between and within different biotic communities. There are lines of 'exploit-ations' from rock to soil, alfalfa and cows, and to his farm, which

lies in the center of the drawing. The farmer—that is, Leopold himself—alters these exploitations into services through the grocer for the local human community. This unveils a human ecological understanding of food chains with respect to who is feeding on whom.

This image of the farm accompanied an article Leopold wrote in 1942 to promote wildlife education in US schools, colleges and universities. Teaching evolutionary biology was as controversial then as it is today. Leopold's famous *A Sand County Almanac* has an explicit praise of God (Leopold, 1949, p. viii), and he took a stand against teaching evolutionary biology, arguing that 'ecology is superior to evolution as a window from which to view the world' (Leopold, 1942, p. 305). Leopold here joined hands with the conservatives concerning the important issue of educational policy in the field of science.

At the center of it all was his farm, which is the focus of his argumentation. The farm is the point of departure of his later writings. He wrote that to the extent that humans had a place in nature, it was usually as farmers. He would indeed point to the 'spiritual dangers in not owning a farm', as if non-farmers would become morally corrupt by 'supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery'. (Leopold, 1949, p. 6). In order to counter this alienation he started to experiment with alternative farming. Just as he finished restoring his farm he advocated restoring the landscape into a healthier ecosystem (Meine, 1988, pp. 362–396). While living on his farm he wrote numerous essays about the virtue of conserving rural life through ecological farming for the sake of 'the health of the land' (Leopold, 1999). In these writings the farmer takes on the role of healer, the farm becomes a health center and nature is framed in terms of farming activity. The ecological 'health of the land', according to Leopold, is understood in terms of what is healthy for his farm. His advocacy for a restoration of a wholesome environment reflects his personal experience of restoring his farmhouse. The ecologist is indifferent to the design of both the shack and the grocery store. Leopold believed as a biologist that humans were first of all animals. Since design itself represented an anthropocentric departure from closeness to nature, it follows that architecture and architects have no place in his view of the world.

The phrase 'thinking like a mountain' is undoubtedly one of Leopold's most famous expressions, and it summarizes his land ethic (Leopold, 1949, p. 129). It was meant to capture the way in which environmental impact should be seen from the long-range view of the mountain. Thinking like a mountain was in fact, however, an exercise in thinking like an ecologist or, more specifically, in thinking like Aldo Leopold. Much like Thoreau's dream of his shanty being a mountain home of Olympic gods, Leopold envisioned his farm as holding the ancient wisdom of a mountain. The illustration of the ecosystems surrounding his farm captures this perspective from above: Leopold had to imagine himself on the top of a mountain in order to draw out the chart of his property. His shack and himself as a farmer were at the center of this chart, while his thinking about the health of nature's household builds on his vision of restoration of the farm. The human agency in the diagram demonstrates how anthropocentrism refuses to subside, even in the notebook of the most devoted advocate of an ecocentric land ethic. His farm was always a weekend refuge, it is worth recalling, and his land ethic was likewise a weekend leisure philosophy based on a steady professorial income from his university.

Arne Næss's Cabin and the Deep Ecological *Weltanschauung*

The cabin of the Norwegian philosopher of deep ecology Arne Næss may serve as a final example of the relation between households and the household of nature. He was born

into a wealthy and well-known shipping family who provided him with a modest personal trust fund so that he could pursue his interests without economic worries. His early life can be understood as an attempt to run away from this background, fulfilling his escape at the age of 25, when, in 1937, he built his home on the top of the remote Hallingskarvet peak (Rothenberg, 1993; Næss and Bostad, 2002).

He lived in this mountain home for 10 years (and still spends much of his time at the place). It consists of one larger cabin for living and writing located on a ledge in the proximity of the peak, and a tiny shed for reflection and meditation on top of the very peak itself, which is one of the highest peaks in Norway. It is from these elevated, cold and windy dwelling places that he thought out the main principles of his deep ecological philosophy.

The tiny, box-like shed at the very top of Hallingskarvet was hard to build, and he mobilized his mountaineer friends to perform the job. Næss was already a legend among technical climbers in the early 1930s, having ascended 106 of the highest mountains in Norway before his 18th birthday. Conquering mountain tops has been a major passion in his life, and the decision to live on a summit therefore came as a natural extension of his interests. The first attempt to build the shed failed. He envisioned a shed hanging over the very cliff of the peak with an entrance from below through a hatch in the floor, but this entailed a complicated and dangerous construction process. One climber died in the first attempt, and Næss thus decided to withdraw the shed backwards a bit in order to make it safer (Næss, 1995, pp. 67–69).

When it was finished he named it Skarveredet ('the cormorant's nest') as a secure place for climbers of what locals call 'Skarven' (short for the mountain Hallingskarvet). It soon became a hub for members of the Norwegian Alpine Club, who still regard Næss as one of their chief patrons. To them he is chiefly known as a participator in climbing expeditions around the world, including the holy mountains of the Himalaya (Næss, 1964; Kvaløy, 2002). Their *bon mot* 'climbing to other sports is like champagne to bock beer', flaunted by Næss's philosophy colleague Peter Wessel Zapffe, captures well the spirit of this upper-crust fraternity. They were his closest friends in the 1930s. Much of Næss's thinking around the 'balance of nature' comes out of his experience of climbing, a sport where balance is everything.

The only possible access to Skarveredet is by technical climbing. Known to locals as 'the coffin' due to its shape, it offers protection from wind, rain and snow. From a chair in front of the window the philosopher sat looking out on the world and truly thought like a mountain. In his own words: 'The only dignified way of life would be to remain on the mountain, not to descend … from here you have the proper perspective on the human being. The mountain is a symbol of the wide and deep perspective' (Næss, quoted in Rothenberg, 1993, p. 60).

Indeed, this location offers an extraordinarily deep panoramic *Weltanschauung*. He felt small looking out on an overwhelming scenery, an experience which can be found when Næss discusses the central distinction in his deep ecology between the Self (with an upper-case 'S') for all beings in the world and the biotic self (with a lower-case 's') for the individual (Næss, 1976, pp. 264–322; 1982, pp. 281–286). True Self-realization, he argues, presupposes the unfolding of the true biotic self in harmony with the selfhood of other living beings. This philosophy of a proper ethical relation between the individual and the environment is based on Næss's experience of looking out on the scenery from his tiny shed.

From his shelter he climbs down to his somewhat larger cottage called Tvergastein. He has named his contribution to the deep ecology movement 'ecosophy T' as an abbreviation for the name of his hut (Næss, 1976, 1989). At this cottage, Næss explains,

'I did all I could to educate myself to love everything here, to achieve the most love: the storms, the tiny flowers, the strong winds, and gray days' (Næss, quoted in Rothenberg, 1993, p. 61). His argument in environmental ethics about the importance of place, belonging and identification with all species derives from this personal experience.

Tvergastein was, along with Skarveredet, built to fulfill his desire to escape from society into nature. Næss hired some local mountain farmers to build the cottage based on his own drawings. They worked extremely hard to carry no fewer than 62 loads of material to this remote location, way above tree level. They nearly wore out two horses, before a third horse managed to finish the job so that the deep ecologist's desire to think like a mountain could be satisfied. Today he relies on scooters to do the lifting when new material is needed to maintain his cottage. Modern technology is also handy for the deep ecologist, who, besides scooters, also uses space-research-generated hardware like the solar panel to produce reading light.

Næss lived at Tvergastein on a regular basis while working as a philosopher for the University of Oslo. He explains in his own words: 'I was made a full professor [in the autumn of 1939], with tremendous responsibilities. I managed to place all my responsibilities, including lectures, from Tuesday evening to before dinner Wednesday. So I could go by train to the mountains Wednesday and come back to the city [Oslo] on Tuesday the following week' (Næss, quoted in Rothenberg, 1993, p. 62). In this way he made himself a sanctuary for serious thinking to evade the stress of administrative duties, teaching, debates and polemics at the university. Consequently, the cottage soon attained a mythic status among Norwegian philosophers, since this is where they all had to travel to receive serious attention from their colleague or advisor. His cottage was a crucial tool in his self-fashioning as a sage, and as a result countless famous and not-so-famous celebrities, students, intellectuals, writers and philosophers went on pilgrimage to the mountain guru. They came home from the philosopher's cabin with an almost endless stream of stories and anecdotes about the eccentric professor (for example, Zapffe, 1969).

As part of Næss's engagement with logical positivism and empirical philosophy in the Vienna Circle (Næss and Bostad, 2002), he gathered his own natural historical collection of stones in order to emphasize the importance of science to himself and his visitors. His first guest was his first wife Else. They went to the cabin on their honeymoon in the winter of 1937. Næss recalls:

> We stayed for more than three months, and had storms we had never imagined were possible! … the walls were just standing up into the air, and when we had the northern wind, the walls would bend so that when we had ink bottles, they would then rush all over the table. The wall was pushing the ink, the table, and the bottles all over. This was February, or March. And it looked as if—yes—the roof separated from the walls here, so you could look out onto the landscape. Hastily, I gathered all heavy things, and loaded down the roof so that it wouldn't collapse. If the roof had lifted just a little more, the wind would have taken all of it. We kept a heap of stones in the middle of the room here, so that if the roof went away, it wouldn't also take away the floor. We would hold onto all those stones, and try to somehow manage to live (Næss, quoted in Rothenberg, 1993, p. 63).

Else would soon divorce Næss, though he claims that his mountaineer life was not the reason.

To live simply was and still is crucial to the philosopher's aesthetic and moral image. His cabin served him, much like Thoreau, as a material representation and manifestation of a rich life with simple means, and like Leopold he had a professor's salary to sponsor

the project. Næss's university earnings and trust fund enabled him to reconcile humans with the environment and oppose notions of stewardship of the planet. He had no financial need to regard nature as a collection of natural resources (White, 1995). He could enjoy the luxury of promoting the primacy of wilderness and the importance of identification with all species.

From his cabin on top of the mountain he looked out of his window and postulated a symbiosis of humans, animals and plants, all of them with guaranteed rights to self-realization within the Self. In the imagined community of deep ecologists the interests of the majority are constituted by non-human populations, which reflects the fact that Næss spent much of his time alone in his cabin. His withdrawal from society was only a temporary preparation for attacking human exploitation of the environment.

One chief problem with this philosophy is how to enter democratic society thinking like a mountain (Anker and Witoszek, 1998). It is an ideology developed outside the political sphere, and its problems emerge as soon as one brings it down from the mountain into the human community below. The distinction between deep and shallow ecology draws on the local dwelling places that surrounded Næss. In the valley below his cabins one finds a tourist resort called Ustaoset. Here the well-heeled families of Norway enjoy a vacation spot with hundreds of weekend cottages, electric wiring, roads, cars and a monstrous hotel. The hotel was originally built in 1909 and with its numerous additions has evolved into a colossal ski-resort abode for the wealthy (including shipping magnates). Among those enjoying the hotel's amenities were Næss's close family, who had their own vacation cottage in the Ustaoset resort. On his way down from the mountain Næss walked by all these dwellings, which represent shallow environmental ecotourism, but also the social milieu he sought to escape from in his youth.

The deep view from Hallingskarvet differs from the shallow vision acquired by his family and their wealthy friends down in the valley bellow. Indeed, his deep ecological critique of modernity centers around the troubling advancement of civilization, which in this local context means more disturbing weekend cottages and oncoming roads. In front of the hotel, for example, one finds a kitsch architectural attempt to make an ecofriendly filling station with grass on its roof in order to make the driver feel more environmentally responsible. How shallow all of this is compared to deep ecological thinking like a mountain! Yet, the irony is that even the deep ecologist depends on the icon of modernity, the train, the very symbol of an advancing civilization, to get back to his job in Oslo.

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That thinkers frequently have sought out far-away places to gain perspective on current affairs is nothing new or even original. The stoic historian Diogenes, for example, lived in a barrel arguing that his only material need in life was a cup. Ever since him, thinkers and religious ascetics have chosen primitive lives in order to enrich their perspectives on the world and beyond. Their humble dwelling places have been the material proofs of their sincerity. Ludwig Wittgenstein, for example, lived not far from Næss in a tiny cottage meditating on linguistic structures and logic (Johannessen *et al.*, 1994).

The primitive hut has its own tradition as source of inspiration among romantic nature writers (Frampton, 1995, pp. 29–32). Foremost was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who was a keen admirer of the primitive hut along with the Arcadian UK nature writer Gilbert White (Mabey, 1986; Cranston, 1991). Similarly, John Muir, during his Yosemite years, fashioned himself as a bird by living in a 'hang-nest' overlooking the environment as far away as possible (Sargent, 1971, p. 18). More recently, the US nature guardian Edward

Abbey chose to retreat from the human realm to live parts of his life in a 50-foot-high fire watchtower at the Aztec Peak in Arizona overlooking the household of nature (Loeffler, 2002, pp. 151–154). Clearly, the urge for a solitary life in a philosopher's cabin has a tradition beyond the nature writings of Thoreau, Leopold and Næss discussed in this article. Given the influence of these thinkers, it is not surprising to find favorable histories of primitive huts and lives in cottages among environmentalists (for example, Björn, 2000).

These thinkers' views of human activity from the point of view of the solitary cabin have influenced environmental ethics and history. This mountain top view of nature suggests seeing nature and society from above. The cabins discussed in this article were located as far as possible from the social realm, yet close enough to suggest various household schemes for management of the household of nature and society. The philosopher's cabins have a non-aesthetic language, since the very idea of returning to nature implies a rejection of artificial fine design. The way the philosophers describe nature is also strongly linked with their respective cabins. The manner of thinking about the household of nature reflects the house in which the philosopher of nature lived.

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