

Lines of Sight, Lines of Site: Sverre Fehn, Arne Næss, and Joined Methods in Environmental Representations

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Introduction, With Short Remarks on Norwegian Architecture and the “Natural” Nordic Landscape

This essay is a personal reflection on the possible function and meaning of architectural drawings of buildings in their context – sketches and studies of built architecture in the larger landscape, portraying elements that fall outside of the architect’s design. While these elements can be human-made, or natural, in the context of this special issue of *sITA*, I focus on sketches and studies that show architecture meeting the “Nordic landscape,” or Nordic natural environment. The drawings of the Norwegian architect Sverre Fehn (and, relatedly, the environmental theory of Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss) are the core subject of this work.

Fehn, who is perhaps Norway’s most renowned architect, was born in 1924 in Kongsberg, a small town south-west of Oslo, and died in 2009. His architectural production, like that of many Norwegian architects, has been inexorably tied to landscapes and localisms, framed as the romantic wedlock of nature and the built form. Moreover, Fehn is taken to be the paradigmatic figure of a generation of Nordic architects who understood the natural outdoors scenery, at times overwhelming in its drama, as primarily expressed within and through buildings. First, we get nature expressed within, as in captured with raw, untreated construction materials that appear to be sourced out of the next forest or field. Second, we get nature expressed through the building, framed through its cleverly placed windows and other openings, in ways that immerse the users in deep fjords or somber greenery. These point to specific ideas about connections (or the lack thereof) between man’s architecture and nature – and about relations and representations of the world.

One feature that I would like to highlight is the object-oriented nature of the connection, and the way it is conceptualized. There remains something like an “object in the field,” or object-centeredness, conceptualization at play in an imagination of architecture that is rooted in the expression of nature *within* and *through* buildings. Throughout the last century, and, I would argue, still to this day, this object-oriented attitude was the accepted orthodoxy in the Norwegian architecture culture – solidity, shelter, rootedness, worlds of sublimely framed light, and wood and stone; these all suggest an aesthetic and an ontology of architecture that is also one of oppositions; of division and conservation and protection against the sublime, crushing natural elements of the North. This is something that Sverre Fehn seemed to comment on, in an end-of-career interview in 1997:

“Perhaps our [Norwegian] nature is so harsh that we do everything we can to make it seem romantic and pretty. [...] In some [architectural] projects this relationship [between architecture and the harsh, cruel nature] is a fundamental principle. You follow it to its logical conclusion and build something like the Glacier Museum, for example, which is a kind of altar to such nature. But this idea hasn’t been developed very far. [...] Nature is basically cruel. Human nature is also fairly ruthless, and when it breaks out it can have quite violent results.”¹

¹ Fehn adds: “Nature is basically cruel. Human nature is also fairly ruthless, and when it breaks out it can have quite violent results. We don’t really understand very much about this aspect of nature. Our present culture is taking us further and further away from for instance perceiving the horse as an animal that pulls

For the most part, to build adequately in a Nordic landscape is also to build in a way that brings some sort of separation, seclusion, exclusiveness, defense, and permanence. This, again, is a “romantic” narrative that we know well: the sublime, powerful, crushing, violent, savage nature of Norway is a total, hostile environment – architects must wall some space off of it, to enable us to live (or survive), and maybe flourish. In this context, good architectures are promises of shelter, stillness, sovereignty, and command, in a merciless world of ice, rain, wind, and eternal sun; they are objects oriented towards conservation aims.

To state the obvious, architects’ drawn depictions of their design in site – their situated design – shows these strong borders between the manmade and the natural world. The lines of sight are dividing lines. Materials used might be natural ones, a rough stone wall, a wood truss – but, as a general rule, the way they are formally depicted already works to emphasize the separateness of the architectural object from its natural territory. This is how we return to the article’s point of departure, and its point of interest: the architect Sverre Fehn, and his early drawings of buildings in the landscape. When reflecting back (his drawn and built) architecture towards the end of his life, Fehn has claimed that “in Norway we [architects] haven’t done too much work that meaningfully reflects the relationship between nature and architecture” – and that “[in Norway] we don’t have a philosophy on which to base our ideas [on nature, and our relationship to nature].”²

I believe Sverre Fehn’s affirmation can be challenged – this constitutes my main argument and following contribution. As I mentioned above, I am particularly interested in conceptualizing Fehn’s landscape studies as complementary companions to the insights of deep ecologist Arne Næss, the so-called “father” of environmental ethics. Næss was born in Oslo in 1912, and, like Sverre Fehn, died in the year 2009 – but, despite being contemporaries, the two Norwegians apparently never met, and had no dialogue.³ Of course, this article can’t fully bring them together, nor can it do justice to the full breadth of the deep ecological theory. Instead, it can hint at the idea of a sort of revisionist, conceptual conversation between Fehn and Arne Næss, where the building-in-site (or building-in-sight) drawings of the architect might express something of the normative and holistic approach to nature and the environment that Næss defended. I substantiate and examine this approach in the following section of the article.

Arne Næss and Deep Ecological Dispositions: Representing the (Natural) World, Relating to the (Natural) World

We therefore turn to Næss. The term “deep ecology” was first introduced by Næss in the early 1970s.⁴ Deep ecology is the name of a variety of perspectives on the relation between man and nature; generally, it refers to both a widespread international grassroots movement in environ-

the plough or works as a war machine. The horse is being reduced to the level of aesthetics; it flies around a race track, and it’s so beautiful you think you’ll faint. But it’s no longer anything more. Even though the horse is a fantastic thing that has shaped a lot of our technology. So in our culture we are moving further and further away from nature, and from nature as something that we use.” See Ingerid Helsing Almaas, “People have to be strong to cope with good architecture” An interview with Sverre Fehn,” <https://architecturenorway.no/stories/people-stories/fehn-97/>, accessed January 30, 2024.

- 2 In a nearby passage, Fehn interestingly compares Norwegian architects’ approach to nature and the natural landscape to that of Japanese architects, writing that “the Japanese [have] cultivated nature in relation to the home: sliding doors, a view you can look out on, the way you step down onto the ground, the stones placed before the threshold of a door, that kind of thing. Through their religious philosophy they’ve raised the use of nature to a philosophy, which has resulted in a very particular architecture.” See Almaas, “People have to be strong.” What is critical to the argument advanced in my article is the specific relation that Fehn identifies between *architecture, nature, and philosophy*.
- 3 Reinhard Kropf, “Norwegian Wood, Smart Deco and the Tree of Knowledge,” https://www.fourthdoor.co.uk/unstructured/unstructured_09/extra/helen_and_hard.php, accessed January 25, 2024.
- 4 Scholars situate the launch of deep ecology with the publication of Næss’s 1973 article “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary.” Key ideas were introduced in his 1972 Bucharest lecture.

mental ethics and its eight-point platform (broad socio-political meaning), and to Næss's own distinctive philosophy, "Ecosophy T" (narrow eco-philosophical meaning). The eight points, in brief, are; intrinsic value of the non-human world for human purposes; intrinsic value of richness and diversity of life; minimal human interference; desirable smaller human population; dire present human interference; needed policy changes; ideological change through life appreciation; and responsibility to implement change.⁵ Despite their idiosyncratic differences, perspectives of deep ecologists tend to agree on matters of general policy, which relate to the platform.⁶ It is generally accepted that what distinguishes and characterizes deep ecology as a movement is a commitment to notions, values and attitudes similar to Næss's personal beliefs.⁷ In other words, it is Næss's particular sense of deep ecology which is understood as a specific branch of environmental philosophy. Albeit at large, a notion central to ecocentric accounts is here indicated: that of the rejection of an anthropocentrism typical of mainstream environmentalism. Things and beings which used to be valued in measure of their utility to humans are to be respected for themselves.⁸

So, there exists a difference between non-anthropocentric movements in ethics and deep ecology. The latter goes beyond the recognition of the intrinsic value of non-human entities and systems to propose a methodical, all-encompassing view of man's relationship with the environment – it is a cosmology of sorts. As human perspectives and experiences lose their primacy, one seeks to achieve self-realization (or some kind of happiness) through a wider identification with nature.⁹ Næss isn't much interested in applied ethics; he wants to focus on how one represents and experiences the world.¹⁰

In *The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary*, the Norwegian philosopher begins to articulate a radical deep ecological worldview that he contrasts with commonplace "shallow" anthropocentric, resource-oriented positions on the environment. Deep ecology emphasizes that "all life forms are entitled (in principle) to have an equal right to live and blossom" – all entities should be able to grow and unfold in their own way, regardless of what they contribute to human welfare.¹¹ The richness and diversity of life are also valued independently of instrumental value.¹² This egalitarian approach, or biocentric equality, is indeed extended to

5 See Arne Næss, "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects," *Inquiry* 16 (1973): 95-100.

6 Christian Diehm, "Arne Næss, Val Plumwood and Deep Ecological Subjectivity: A contribution to the 'Deep Ecology-Ecofeminism Debate'," *Ethics and the Environment* vol. 7, 1 (2002): 24-38.

7 Næss's concept of deep ecology represents a unique perspective within ecophilosophy, and it is this commitment to its uniqueness that sets deep ecologists apart from other ecophilosophers. As Warwick Fox argues, his criterion of distinctiveness separates this specific interpretation of deep ecology from Næss's broader, ecocentric understanding, which has been expressed under various labels by numerous thinkers and encompasses all approaches to ecophilosophy that are, to a significant extent, non-anthropocentric. On the topic, see Warwick Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 145.

8 As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, Arne Næss's deep ecology, emphasizing the intrinsic value and interconnectedness of all life, interestingly aligns with what is known today as "spiritual ecology." As it explores the spiritual dimensions (broadly understood) of environmental ethics, Leslie Sponsel's *Spiritual Ecology: A Quiet Revolution* (Praeger, 2012) can be read in complementarity to Næss's ideas, offering a broader context for understanding deep ecological philosophy.

9 Næss breaks away from this traditional divide by arguing for a form of identification that dissolves all "boundaries" between self and nature – for a holism of sorts. Once the individual self attains Self-realization, it becomes so to speak indistinguishable from the rest of the world; "the individual is not, and will not be isolatable, whatever exists has a gestalt character". Arne Næss, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 195.

10 Warwick Fox, *Approaching Deep Ecology: a Response to Richard Sylvan's Critique* (Board of Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania, 1986), 86.

11 Næss, "The Shallow and the Deep," 95.

12 Næss writes clearly that "life on Earth has intrinsic value and that human behavior should and must change drastically – and soon," reminding his readers that to fully acknowledge that the non-human, natural world is intrinsically worthy already implies a radical change in human behaviors and practices, and that this change is urgently needed. Forty years after the writing of these lines, and in times of environmen-

all identifiable forms found within the ecosphere; *landscapes*, mountains, rivers, species.¹³ Human beings are here no longer subjects of special moral consideration, and shall not be valued over another individual, species, or ecosystem.¹⁴ We possess the ability to identify with other living entities' needs and interests – we ought to exercise this ability.

Such exercises in augmented empathy are essential to Næss's environmental theory, because they allow for a gradual expansion of the self. Identification leads to self-realization, as "the more we come to identify with other living beings, the more our self of sense grows, and subsequently the more we achieve self-realization."¹⁵ Or formulated inversely: maximum self-realization can only be achieved through a generous, widened – deepened – identification with non-human nature. We are to work to better develop – exercise – our sense of embeddedness in the natural environment. Plainly, our identity must be reconceived in less polarized and disembodied ways. We must reconnect, we must *re-relate*. "How do you *feel* yourself and the world?" asks Næss.¹⁶ The inquiry is, to some appreciable degree, phenomenological. A register of sensation, experience, and feeling develops: if we "concentrate more on feeling the world," if we engage emotionally, together with our (natural) surroundings, we progress towards self-realization – so does the Næssian thought go.¹⁷

Næss's understanding of the self relates, too, to subjects being constituted by their relations to larger wholes which shape and define them, as a text illuminated by its context, or a figure defined by its ground.¹⁸ The philosopher here borrows from gestalt principles, which emphasize continuity, interdependence, and connectedness.¹⁹ He puts it in plain, bold terms: "the individual is not, and will not be isolatable, whatever exists has a gestalt character."²⁰ In his mapping of man-nature relations, connected individuals (and not discrete entities per se) do make up a whole.

This is a challenging picture, not least because there seems to be a certain tension which arises in positing whole-bound "identification with nature" and a "relational understanding of the Self" – are identificatory and relational practices not contradictory?²¹ Well, not necessarily so. Let me briefly clarify the point. On one hand, as mentioned, Næssian identification does suggest that the self expands to encompass the natural world, transcending individual boundaries and emphasizing some sort of ontological whole.²² On the other hand, a relational understand-

tal crises, we cannot but appreciate the pressing emphasis of the call. See Arne Næss. "A Defence of the Deep Ecology Movement," *Environmental Ethics* 6, 3 (1984), 265, my italics.

13 In an important sense, egalitarian inclinations are here understood in the "equivalence" sense (different but equally worthy), not in the "strict equality" sense (equally worthy because of sameness). I will revisit this idea later.

14 Analyses of this logic of overvaluation (domination) can take this form: (1) humans do, and plants and rocks [or the landscape] do not, have the capacity to consciously and radically change the community in which they live; (2) whatever has the capacity to consciously and radically change the community in which it lives is morally superior to whatever lacks this capacity; (3) thus, humans are morally superior to plants and rocks [or the landscape]; (4) for any X and Y, if X is morally superior to Y, then X is morally justified in subordinating Y; (5) thus, humans are morally justified in subordinating plants and rocks [or the landscape]. Karen Warren, "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism," *Environmental Ethics* 12, 2 (1990): 125-46.

15 Espen Gamlund, "Will the defenders of deep ecology please rise," Bergen: University of Bergen, 6.

16 Arne Næss, *Life's Philosophy: Reason and Feeling in a Deeper World* (University of Georgia Press, 2002), 20, my italics.

17 Ibid.

18 Diehm, "Arne Næss, Val Plumwood," 27.

19 I spoke of Næss's inquiry as "phenomenological" above. Note the link between gestalt principles and phenomenology, which lies in their shared focus on human perception, experience, and the various structures through which we make sense of the world. Both frameworks explore how we experience reality as a whole rather than as disjointed parts, emphasizing the active role of consciousness in shaping (self) perception. I return to whole-or-related-parts distinctions below. On the topic, see Uljana Feest, "Gestalt Psychology, Frontloading Phenomenology, and Psychophysics," *Synthese* 198, Suppl. 9 (2019): 2153-73.

20 Næss, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 195.

21 I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this point.

22 Consider, relatedly, the following set of questions. Do the gestalt features of deep ecology push the dis-

ing of the self work to underscore the dynamic interactions between distinct entities (in the case that interests us, between the “self” and “nature”) that define and shape one another. A contradiction appears inasmuch as relationships imply separateness, while identification imply unity.²³

Yet I take it that this issue can be partially resolved by considering the levels at which these ideas operate. Identification with nature reflects a deeper ontological level, emphasizing the shared interconnectedness of all life and the ecosystem. When Næss refers to an unbroken “whole,” he is theorizing the underlying context within which relationships take place, rather than negating their existence.²⁴ Relationships themselves are dynamic and process-oriented, and, as such, they can coexist with a broader, profounder sense of unity.²⁵ We can say, using imagery favored by Næss, that humans and nature are simultaneously distinct and interconnected, much like a river and its banks are separate yet inseparably linked (dual perspective).²⁶ The point is that, through lived experience and sensory engagement, humans can connect with and into nature in ways that amount to identification, even as certain relational dynamics remain intact.

Apparent conflicts between identification and relationality are being worked out when we begin to see these concepts as complementary: again, identification provides the foundational unity, while relationality explains the lived, dynamic interactions within this unity.

Let us reframe these insights from an alternative, practical perspective. Imagine yourself profoundly identifying not only with your family and community, but also with your immediate milieu, built or natural – with your land, with your earth. The implication of this larger identification with both immediate and remote environments is drastic, as you are no longer, in essence, an ego, separated from the rest of nature.²⁷ If you “harm the landscape,” you harm yourself. “Ecosophy T” – named after Næss’s remote Hardangervidda hut Tvergastein, which sits cozily atop the Presthold mountain range, in the center-south of Norway – entails a radical representation and experience of the self and the world.²⁸ This seeks and suggests promising rectified environmental attitudes.²⁹

solution of individual differences too far? Does the total-field view promoted by Næss accommodate itself with the celebration of diverse species, of the variety of plants, rocks, landscapes, animals? Can entities be both distinct and relational?

23 Næss needs to be more precise when describing the operations of self-realization through identification – do these operations relate to more elastic boundaries of individuals’ conception of themselves? If so, it is difficult for deep ecologists to defeat critiques of “egoism”, since we still face an interested ego which “incorporates” other beings within its transforming limits. See, among other, Val Plumwood, “Nature, Self and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy and the Critique of Rationalism,” *Hypatia* 6, 1 (1991): 14-15.

24 Næss, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 57-61.

25 Relationality, by contrast, operates at the experiential and phenomenological level, focusing on how humans and nature engage and affect each other in their relative distinctness. Recall how humans exist both as part of (identification) and in relation (relational understanding of the self) to the natural world: phenomenologically, identification with nature arises through embodied experiences that reveal the interconnectedness of humans with nature.

26 On the “river” imagery, see, among other, Næss, *Life’s Philosophy*, 109-13.

27 Again, one must be cautious of forms of holism which deny difference and obliterate individuality. The uniqueness and importance of individual beings is indeed precious – Næss’s own “commitment to the extreme appreciation of diversity” is a proof of it. Roma Chakraborty, “The Deep Ecology/Ecofeminism Debate: an Enquiry into Environmental Ethics,” *Journal of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research* vol. 32, 1 (2015), 130.

28 The place is described evocatively as follows: “in central Norway there is a mountain, Hallingskarvet, a large, long ridge like a huge loaf of bread. Imagine that it rose too fast in the oven, making a sharp cliff on the southern side of the crust. Beneath this precipice stands a tiny hut, at the place called Tvergastein.” David Rothenberg, “Introduction: From Science To The Self,” in *Is It Painful to Think: Conversations with Arne Naess* (University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xiii.

29 Though, of course, numerous problems, or weaknesses, arise from the importance of identification, of interconnectedness, and of indistinguishability to a Næssian theory of the environment. As they go beyond the scope of my argument, I limit this critique to the following listing of potential problems: (1) the theory’s original assumption of egoism (see above), (2) the seemingly problematic extension of one’s interest to the rest of the natural world, (3) the conceptual erasure of the world’s manifold features and particularities, and

Given space limitations, it is hard to render justice to the fervor of Næss's deep ecological theorizing. To summarize its main philosophical insight, let us point to the Næssian insight that "we can make no firm ontological divide in the field of existence: that there is no bifurcation in reality between the human and the non-human realms... to the extent that we conceive [hard] boundaries, we fall short of deep ecological consciousness."³⁰ It is based on this ontological intuition (this intuition about what is real) that Næss establishes the two concepts alluded to above; biocentric equality and self-realization. Individual human selves are only "fully realized" when they become "organically whole" ecological selves.³¹ Biocentric equality and self-realization are tools that are thought to facilitate and bring about this transformation of the atomistic ego-self into the mature, all-encompassing Self. Næss seeks to "urge, incite, instigate, encourage, cheer" us to undergo a fundamental change in the way we understand ourselves as being; in the way we relate to nature, so we can meaningfully relate *into* it.³²

By doing so, one undermines and undoes dominant value-hierarchical rationales – a model of *disconnection* – which attribute "higher status" to what has been traditionally identified as "built" than to what has been traditionally as "natural." Næss is indeed eager to position himself against a prevalent western tradition of dualist metaphysics separating humans from nature. What is at play – and of interest to the present argument – is the operation of justification: via the justifiable domination assumption, architects construct their superiority, they confirm it by separating themselves from beings or systems that therefore become other, and lesser. They invoke duality and cast themselves in the superior role.³³ In other words, claims of superiority serve to justify the subordination of the alleged inferior category by the alleged superior category.

Næss's insight is telling. Through representation and language, we integrate morally-loaded (and possibly harmful) conceptual frameworks. These frameworks reinforce and authorize the exploitation of nature by conferring them to a background condition, a tabula rasa of sorts – aligning with and deepening current environmental wrongs. The ill-treatment of nature and the natural landscape must be thought of in both political and ethical terms – and, so, opposed and modified.

Deep ecology tenets have informed contemporary environmental philosophy; they have received a fair share of scholarly attention – and critiques – as they amount to ample, thought-provoking provisions in the face of the ecological crisis. Despite their in-depth analyses of humans' relationship to nature, Næss's works have known different degrees of success. As such, I think that *coupling* Næss's theory to the architectural works (relations and representations) of Sverre Fehn might lead to a renewed interest for the values that are discussed in this section.³⁴

(4) the great challenge of overcoming "identification through personal affinities." Objectors of Næss, like ecofeminists, have examined them comprehensively and lengthily.

30 Warwick Fox, "The Deep Ecology-Ecofeminist Debate and its Parallels," *Environmental Ethics* vol. 11, 1 (1989): 5-25.

31 Karen J. Warren, "Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective On What It Is And Why It Matters" (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 84.

32 Næss, "The Deep Ecological Movement," 264.

33 Put more in more specific terms, it is the logical structure of dualism that forms a major basis for the likeness between forms of oppression – think of pairs such as reason-nature, culture-nature, reason-emotion, mind-body, knowledge-intuition, city-countryside, and so on. Value dualisms have caused, among other, the oppression of nature; a first-hand rejection of the logic of domination which characterizes value dualisms brings us closer to the full recognition of the intrinsic value of other (natural) beings and spaces. Note that the existence of differentiated pairs in a conceptual framework is not bad in itself, and that environmental ethicists are not trying to deny those differences; the problem lies in seeing the difference between two elements set in opposition as morally relevant. Dualism is problematic in as much as it serves to sustain practices of dominance and abuse through moral assessments of value.

34 A short comment: I want to suggest that, regardless of deep ecology's limited contemporary popularity, it (indeed) still has insights to offer as to why humans brought about environmental problems of the magnitude we know today, and why they continue to engage in behaviors sustaining these very problems. In addition to Næss being an inspiring figure of remarkable civic engagement and moral convictions, he deserves praise for bringing the field of environmental ethics into salience, and giving it its due place among key areas of applied philosophy. The range of philosophers who address environmental issues today is

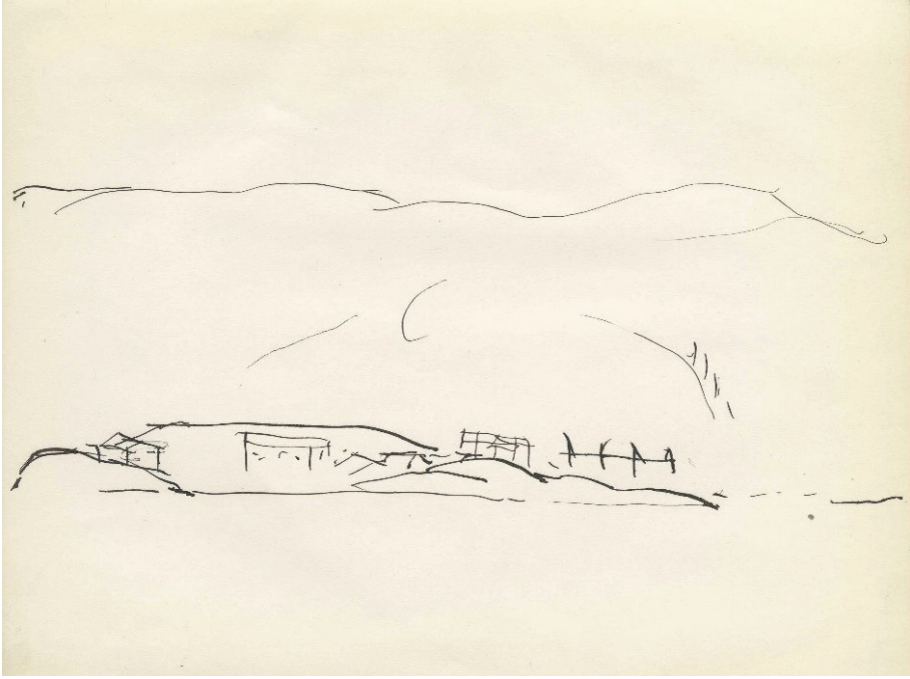


Fig. 1: Sverre Fehn, *Landscape study*, pen on paper (probably 1960s)

Fehn Meets Næss, or an Exercise in Hypothetical Architectural-Philosophical Dialogue About the Landscape

In effect, I intend to try out Næss's deep ecology as a conceptual lens for considering different implications about the relationship between men, architecture, and nature that we tend to associate with Norwegian architects like Fehn and other architects of his generation.³⁵ Correspondingly, my aim is to test Fehn's fast illustrations as evocative, possible illustrations of the desirable relationship of men – through architecture – with the natural landscape. Indeed, I believe that Fehn's drawings – the ink drafts and pencil studies, the fast, inspired mappings of houses and barns and shacks in the land, mostly drawn in the fifties and sixties – reveal a certain position of identification with nature that differs from the architectural tropes of sharp objects, lines, and borders (opposition) that I mentioned at the beginning of my article, and that is closer to Næssian insights on men's desirable relationship with the environment.

Of course, one should take note of the specific type of architectural drawings which I discuss:

significant: the topics are now explored through an appreciable spectrum of perspectives. So, I appreciate Næss's efforts to articulate nature-focused concepts and conceptual vocabulary, and for starting to reveal the great scope of the environment-related challenges that we ought to face as moral individuals.

³⁵ Contemporary Norwegian scholars Solveig Haukeland and Henrika Fredriksen interestingly suggest that some "ecophilosophical impulses from the Nordic countries [relate] to the important role nature has played in the lives of people. Life was harsh for those sharing the land, but it gave a connectedness to others in nature that we still find today. Many children still play outdoors, perhaps more so than in other parts of the world that have more crowded cities and less peaceful conditions. The outdoor life (*friluftsliv*) plays an important part of the Nordic model [...] and ecological awareness is probably already implemented in this model." Solveig Haukeland and Henrika Jormakka Fredriksen, "Crafting in a More-Than-Human World," in *Crafting Relationships with Nature through Creative Practices*, eds. Henrika Jormakka Fredriksen and Henrika Yri (Universitetsforlaget, 2023), 21.



Fig. 2-3: Sverre Fehn, *Landscape study*, pen on paper (probably 1960s)

they are not technical, nor are they elaborate – they are not meant to convey “final” information about an original design. They are sketches of existing objects and sceneries. As such, they convey the drawer’s on-sight insights, his sentiment of discovery – they capture the drawer’s process of getting to know the subject. Their making links to a logic of un-filtered, un-curated composition – of first-hand attitudes and reflexes; of processes. Studies, as such, are drawings “in-formation.”

Take Fehn’s *Landskapsstudie*, which is dated sometime in the sixties, and is reproduced above.³⁶ What does Fehn represent? How does he represent it? There are hills, big and small, a hamlet, or maybe a farm. The composition, overall, shows two dominant lines, or “horizontal axes.” The first one, the high mountain outline, hovers over the second one, the built-out area in its hilly niche.³⁷ The visual effect is one of embedding in the natural environment, though this effect is punctually broken by the placement of the architectural volumes. Like the small mounds’ profiles, which are at turns flattened and more heavily rounded, the buildings’ roofs make for a topography of sorts, with straight or sharp pitched edges. In the center part of the study, architectural objects blend with the face of the hill; close to the ground line, it becomes harder to differentiate between roofs and mounds. Towards the right side, architectural objects emerge from the hill. There, it appears that Fehn has drawn a traditional Norwegian *grindbygg* – a “bent,” or crossed-frame timber structure. If one lifts her gaze above the *grindbygg*, she will notice four lines; trees, perhaps? Or patterns in a rocky mountain face? These four lines link to the four structural lines of the building which sits below, without copying them per se. We are presented, ultimately, with a double effect of sorts – a mirroring one, where one substantiated subject (nature) “incorporates” other beings (the architectural objects) within its transforming limits; where one substantiated subject (architecture) “incorporates” other beings (the natural objects) within its transforming limits. (Fig. 2)

Again, consider another of Fehn’s *Landskapsstudier*, shown above. What does the architect represent this time? And how does he represent it? We encounter a multiform landscape that unfolds in one topographical gesture: broken lines, straight and curved, create a novel formal profile. Below what looks like a building’s partial façade, a vegetal patch – or is it moving water? – con-

36 The Norwegian word *Landskapsstudie* translates directly to the English “landscape study,” or “study of the landscape.”

37 Does this high mountain profile make for a “background condition”; does the natural landscape arise as a tabula rasa of sorts? I do not think so. Individuals who have lived in, say, Alpine areas, will be well aware of the visual specificity (and so, of the marked individuality) of a mountain range’s topographic profile – in his sketch, on the first horizontal axis, Fehn works to capture the specific mountainous profile of the site, thus conferring individuality and personality to the natural volumes which create this profile. A greater sense of place is achieved. As for the “tabula rasa” impression, it appears that Fehn’s decision to give similar line weight and similar details to both hills and buildings make it difficult to assess which of the natural or architectural objects really came first.

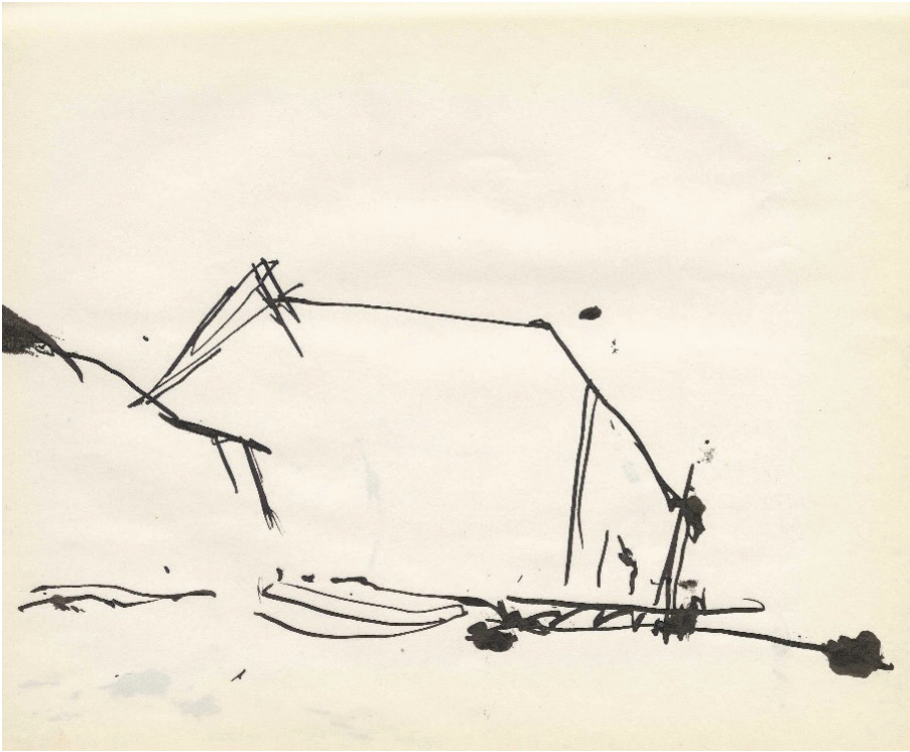


Fig. 4: Sverre Fehn, *Landscape study*, pen on paper (probably 1960s)

nects to a bay of sorts. Small marks at the bottom left of the study read like pebbles, or flowers. A heavier spot of ink indicates a window; a similarly heavy ink detail sits at the junction of two hills, on the sketch's right side. Architectural and natural elements blend evocatively; as was the case in Fehn's previous study, these elements are given equivalent weight, while retaining some identifying features. Similar characteristics are at play in the many *Landskapsstudier* which can be found below. (Fig. 3)

These drawings allow for movement, for change, in what is perceived as the dominant feature in the scene. Architecture does not need to frame its natural surroundings, nor does it need to mimic them; it does not need to be subdued, nor to demonstrate its sound, shelter-like qualities against the overwhelming, sublime natural world.

Under the quick, soft pen of Sverre Fehn, buildings and territory are depicted in a manner which can suggest something like the Næssian "ontological equivalence" which was discussed at length – one which allows for a beneficial continuity between human and non-human beings, spaces, and systems. The line width of the pen, the composition that gives a comparable weight and presence to buildings and landscape elements – there is something holistic in the way Fehn draws, but this holistic quality doesn't not demand that we lessen the architectural objects in the face of "Big Nature" (by, for example, excessively dwarfing their scale), nor that the shapes of architectural objects need to signify refuge, or raw materiality. (Fig. 4)

What "sight," really, does the Norwegian architect have on the depicted sites? As in the best tradition of site sketches, the sceneries represented – composed – by Fehn points to an operative complementarity, or what I, with Næss, recognize as a difference in resemblance, or a resemblance in difference, between architecture (situated man-made objects) and the landscape (situated natural



Fig. 5: Sverre Fehn, *Landscape study*, pen on paper (probably 1960s)

objects). These sceneries do depict something like a visual imagination of Næssian relational notions of kinship and solidarity; of soft, embracing, rippling identification, of beneficial equivalence; of possible mutuality of interests between the Self, the built form, and the environment.

Recalling what was posited in the first section, because one identifies with an open landscape (or with a lake, or with a forest), one's *interest* and *the interest* of that open landscape (or of that lake, or forest) are no longer relevantly distinct.³⁸ This is not to say that their given form, their selves or entities, need to "fully" collapse one into another.³⁹ In Fehn's studies, architecture objects and natural objects remain recognizable: we need, of course, *some* boundaries too. We need to see others as distinct and independent from ourselves at times, in order to care appropriately for them – because we need to have some sense of the local satisfiers of their own well-being.⁴⁰ Again, entities need not to fully collapse one into another.⁴¹ The theoretical insight is that the

38 Does it suppose that myself and the natural landscape self are, so to speak, fused? Or does it imply only the fusions of our interests? Diehm has argued that, here, Næss' thinking about constitutive reality appears to be situated somewhere in between self and interest merging. See Diehm, "Arne Næss, Val Plumwood," 37.

39 It's safe to assume that Næss's move of merging one's interest to other beings' interests is intended to be understood as giving (more) importance to the former. When, as a result of me identifying with the forest, our interests fuse, I should understand the interest of that forest as mine – I should so to speak absorb them. We become intertwined. To promote the forest's flourishing is to promote myself. The merger of self and other doesn't guarantee "responsible action," but it already works to enable it. See *ibid.*, 30.

40 Val Plumwood, "Feminism and the Mastery of Nature" (Routledge, 1994), 178.

41 Again, Næss's general point is that the perceived differences between humans and nature have led to deep, current environmental crises: the division of human and natural beings in two separate categories has led us to conceive of nature as the lesser other, therefore as being of less value. One could perhaps replace the deep ecological "indistinguishability of interests" by a "mutuality of interests" – this, indeed, is a possibly fruitful way of avoiding the objection where "the flourishing or the failure of the other, while not be-

character of their “separation” has changed, from one of kind to one of degree. Formal limits are maintained, but, critically, they do not amount to a division and distinction of value and interest.

“To be defined as ‘nature’ is [often] to be defined as passive, as non-agent and non-subject, as the ‘environment’ or invisible background conditions against which the ‘foreground’ achievements of reason or culture (provided typically by the white, western, male expert or entrepreneur) take place. It is to be defined as a *terra nullius*, a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings, and hence available to be annexed for the purposes of those supposedly identified with reason or intellect, and to be conceived and moulded in relation to these purposes.”⁴²

Animals, plants, forests, rivers; landscapes – these are entities that are too often disconnected, devalued, meaningless, manipulatable. They have value only as they serve their masters. One ought to reject such a position to favor, *inter alia*, situated practices and ethics of care, sharing, self-awareness, reverence, equivalence, plurality, mutual learning, love, and responsibility.⁴³ Let us, with Fehn and Næss, dare to “enter into community with [natural] others through an honest recognition of our commonalities and differences.”⁴⁴ (Fig. 5)

Framed along such concepts, Fehn’s drawn representations of buildings and territories indeed mark a possibly fruitful relational change in the (architectural) world – they help us to think in new, desirable ways about the natural environment, and the place of architecture within it. Næss did believe that a deep ecological strategy for self-identification and self-realization could, through exercises in recognition and holistic living, increase an individual’s preparedness to live meaningfully, ethically, with natural others. I think that Fehn shows us that these exercises need not be of practical or political essence, but that they can be reworked as simply aesthetic. (Fig. 6)

Again, in sketches by Fehn, the relation between architecture and nature that is represented can evoke another ontological category, one where hierarchies between systems – between natural, non-human systems and constructed, human systems – are softened, and dynamic. And, as such, these sketches capture something quite akin to the deep ecological dispositions advocated (and celebrated) by Næss.⁴⁵ (Fig. 7)

Reflecting back on his life’s works, Fehn said:

“In [architectural projects] you work closely with nature and try to find a cultural expression that will achieve a dialogue with the trees already growing there. This is what I tried to do, but I didn’t really manage it. But after all those [projects] are also in Europe, part of a tradition that includes Le Corbusier and his table structures, and his very different way of doing things... It was something like this I was thinking of when I created those [architectural projects]. But in Norway we haven’t done very much that reflects the relationship between nature and architecture.”⁴⁶

I think that, while he might not have managed to establish a fully desirable, deeply meaningful dialogue with nature in his built projects, he succeeded in doing so with the early career drawings we just saw.

ing identical to that of the self, is nonetheless experienced by the self as either enriching or as diminishing”. Diehm, “Arne Næss, Val Plumwood,” 32.

42 Plumwood, “Feminism,” 4.

43 To tie this argument with the observations of Jean-Louis Cohen, which fronted this issue of *sITA*, we can suppose that such practices do, in effect, “involve a more modest definition of architectural intervention”, one where a “detailed attention to [natural] sites” and “proper integration” are key. See Jean-Louis Cohen, *L’architecture au futur depuis 1889* (Phaidon Édition, 2012), <https://sita.uauim.ro/call-for-papers>, accessed January 10, 2024.

44 Warren, “Ecofeminist philosophy,” 204.

45 Here, we can imagine that Næss and Fehn’s dialogue is one where one suggests ideas with words, and the other replies with drawings, and vice versa. This makes for a multilingual, multiform (and so, interdisciplinary) conversation.

46 Almaas, “‘People have to be strong.’”

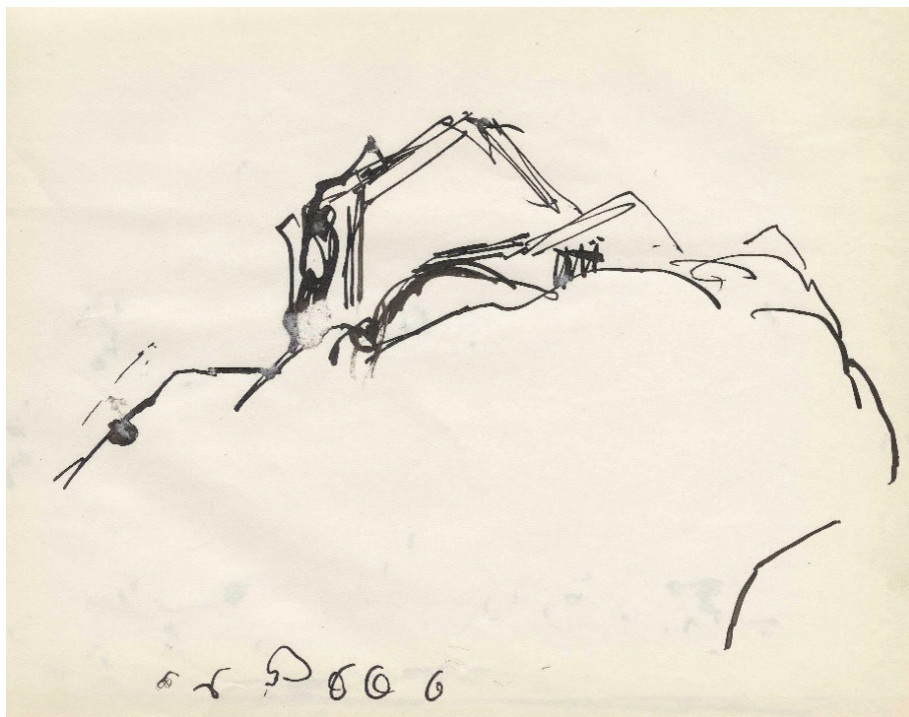


Fig. 6-7: Sverre Fehn, *Landscape study*, pen on paper (probably 1960s)



Conclusion, With Short Remarks on Commonalities and Future, Possible Dialogues

In this article, I have provided an overview of the main tenets of Næss's deep ecology, which I have linked to Fehn's studies of the architecture in the Norwegian (Nordic) landscape. Both works evoke the "depth" to which human realities are embedded in ecological realities, and the fact that we are all composed of physical and conceptual connections and relationships with the natural landscapes.⁴⁷ Both works can be read as anti-anthropocentric.⁴⁸ Both works recognize the moral, intrinsic value of nature and non-human beings, but they differ on the tools utilized to give salience to man-in-the-(natural)-world relations and representations: one mobilizes normative theorizing, the other *draws it*. As Fehn and Næss, we must always search for ways to rework our concepts and practices of "human occupation" and "in-nature, with-nature identity" as they have been conceived. I hope that, through the arguments developed in this article, I showed that both are suited – and, perhaps, both are necessary – to operating a much-needed change on people's positioning towards the natural environment.

In effect, I hope that this "joined dialogue" does make the case for a possible betterment of individuals' relations to and representation of the landscape – a betterment that might lead to new, more adequate environmental and architectural practices.

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47 Chris Cuomo, "On Ecofeminist Philosophy," *Ethics and the Environment* vol. 7, 2 (2002), 1.

48 Both works, in effect, inform in likeminded ways debates about man's place in the landscape – in the natural world. Rejecting anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism, they both expose how human entities (human beings, human structures) are deeply related to the non-human world, and there is great normative strength in finding ourselves in a position of equivalence and continuity among natural beings. Plainly, our identity must be reconceived in less polarized and separate ways. We must reconnect, we must re-relate. In this context, the works of representation and relations of Fehn and Næss provide us with much needed alternative models. Again, they bring essential features of life with the natural world into salience.

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