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About the Hearth: Perspectives on the Home, Hearth and Household in the Circumpolar North. Edited by David G. Anderson, Robert P. Wishart, and Virginie Vaté. New York: Berghahn Books, 2013. 336 pp. ISBN 978-0-85745-980-0.

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In the ethnographic literature on the indigenous peoples of the North, the dwelling has always occupied a prominent position. *About the Hearth* is a continuation of this long-standing academic interest. The theme of the three Hs—home, hearth, and household—frames a project bringing together scholars from different disciplines: mostly anthropology but also archaeology, museum studies, and historical demography.

In the introductory chapter, Robert P. Wishart situates the project intellectually and elaborates on the structure of the book. The conical lodge is presented as the first level of inquiry, guiding scholarly attention to relationships that animate, and are sustained by, this vernacular architectural form. Multidisciplinary thinking is then harnessed to discuss various types of northern dwellings, past and present. The editors suggest the home as a metaphor for the book as a whole, with the lodge representing its “hearth.” This juxtaposing of metaphors is not an idle exercise in literary style, but serves the purpose of ordering individual contributions geographically according to their position in the circumpolar North, like the walls of a lodge. This format is explained as a solution to the problem of how to group the different chapters (rather than by, say, discipline or theme).

The circular structure of the volume may explain why the last chapter in the volume by David G. Anderson could also be read as an introduction. Both the introduction by Wishart and the conclusion by Anderson show how the individual contributions speak to each other or to other issues related to the “house.” Wishart does this by providing summaries of some key points from all thirteen chapters. Anderson, in turn, embeds selected themes from individual contributions within a range of arguments advanced elsewhere by scholars of the circumpolar North. He also acknowledges the project’s intellectual debt to the anthropological collection *About the House* edited by Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones and inspired by Lévi-Strauss’s lectures on house societies and the idea of the house as a moral person. Whereas Carsten and Hugh-Jones’s task was to recenter “descent theories about the house,” the contributors to *About the Hearth* emphasize “a need to re-centre descriptions of northern societies ‘about the hearth’” (272).

The volume illustrates that there are diverse ways to interpret this need for re-centering. In chapter 2 Tim Ingold challenges familiar perspectives on the conical lodge as an instance of vernacular architecture—a projection of form into matter. Drawing on his earlier work, Ingold suggests that we think of the lodge as a “binding

together of materials in movement” (15) that can be captured by the idea of the earth-sky. The smoke of the fire binds the earth and the sky, unfolding the generative forces of the hearth. Ingold takes us through Heidegger’s “the worlding world,” Deleuze and Guattari’s “smooth” spaces, and Fussel’s idea of the screen wall to make his point. His text raises a number of interesting, and at times controversial, points “about the hearth,” especially when theoretical standpoints are conflated with postulated experiences of the lodge’s inhabitants. It is regrettable that none of the contributors to the volume have attempted to properly engage with Ingold’s arguments or his theoretical premises. In the remaining chapters, discussions of the three Hs are largely rooted in the understandings of built structures and vernacular architecture that Ingold wants us to rethink.

Chapter 3 by Thomas D. Andrews describes the projects of revitalization of a Tłjcho lodge undertaken jointly by indigenous people and staff at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, Canada. It enlists four core values of the indigenous society and explains the role of storytelling in conveying these values to young people. Whilst the practice of making a lodge has become more significant than the actual lodge, the museum setting provides a meaningful context for elders to interact with youth.

A focus on the production of vernacular architecture—this time Gwich’in cabins in the Canadian subarctic—is taken up in chapter 4 by Robert P. Wishart and Jan Loovers. Historically, log cabins became widespread as a result of the Gwich’in’s increasing involvement with European traders, but the authors argue against visions of the log cabin as a token of culture change. The improvised nature of the cabin comes into sharp relief when it is contrasted with prefabricated houses. Today, log cabins function as hunting camps, emergency shelters, and educational camps, signaling the ongoing presence of the Gwich’in on the land and, as the authors claim but do not elaborate upon, also implying resistance to imposed landscapes and government housing schemes.

Moving to Norway in chapter 5, Ivar Bjørklund traces the trajectory of the Sámi mobile tent, *lavvu*, from its role in reindeer herding to its status as a symbol of Sámi ethnicity. He attributes the transformation of the *lavvu* into a key symbol, despite the fact that less than 10 percent of Sámi are engaged in herding, to the absence of alternatives among the remaining Sámi population. The tent has also been turned into an industrial high-tech product and has inspired architects of public buildings. In this way, the *lavvu* has largely left the tundra.

Dealing with Swedish Sámi in chapter 6, Hugh Beach tells us about the processes of de- and revitalization of Sámi dwellings—the shift to Swedish-style cabins at the expense of Sámi turf dwellings and mobile herding tents. This shift has been conditioned by new technology (such as snowmobiles) and increasing density of roads that, together, have eliminated the need for residential proximity to reindeer, as well as legislation allowing herders’ offspring to inherit dwellings on Crown land. As a result, the revitalization of Sámi tents takes place mainly in museum settings.

Still in Sweden in chapter 7, Isabelle Brännlund and Per Axelsson reexamine data from the 1900 census regarding Sámi households. Merging qualitative and quantitative sources, the authors attribute the skewed nature of the census’s representations

to the concept of household as a bounded unit. As their qualitative data show, the household in pastoral societies was not detached from wider social organization. Nonetheless, they argue, demographic data can be useful as it provides information that is not available in qualitative sources.

Back to Arctic Norway, chapter 8 by Hilde Jåstad surveys historical records of, and census (1865, 1875, 1990) data on, rural households in districts with mixed Sámi, Norwegian, and Kven populations. Her point is that the continuity of “homes” (farms) across generations did not always imply coresidence with kin, while changes in household structure reflected people’s choices associated with new market opportunities and risks.

The contribution by archaeologists Petri Halinen, Sven-Donald Hedman, and Bjørnar Olsen in chapter 9 investigates the organization of domestic space among Sámi in 800–1300 AD in Finland and Norway. Their argument that Sámi culture of the period was neither static nor spatially disorganized fits well with contemporary anthropological understandings of how culture works. This chapter brings to an end the Scandinavian leg of the journey—the next stop is Russia. Drawing on Chukchi ritual practices and narrative reconstructions of rituals that are no longer practiced, Virginie Vaté in chapter 10 shows how ritual sequences connect the home (the tent), the hearth, and the family to the animals and the land. She concludes her rich ethnography of reindeer-herding rituals with the somewhat anthropologically trivial point that “home is not only a place where people live” (198).

Chapter 11 by Maria Nakhshina takes a Russian wooden house on the Kola Peninsula as its object of analysis. Adopting an “experiential approach to houses,” the author points out that houses mean different things to locals, newcomers, permanent residents, and summer visitors. Nakhshina differentiates between people’s diachronic and synchronic attitudes to houses: the deeper the connection, the more synchronic people’s attitudes are; it is mainly newcomers and summer visitors who are interested in reifying houses as tokens of history and culture.

Chapter 12 is a comparative endeavor by Gerald Oetelaar, David G. Anderson, and Peter Dawson looking at reflections of cosmology and social organization in the design of traditional dwellings among Canadian Inuit and Siberian Evenki. Relying on folklore collections and deploying “mnemonic pegs”—narrative motifs—the chapter describes how homes reflect cosmological principles at varying scales and as ways of seeing the land. The aim of comparison is to show that despite differences in Evenki and Inuit lifestyle, their lifestyles are similarly reflected in their dwellings.

Finally, John Ziker in chapter 13 sets out to examine the role of narratives using metaphors of the hearth and homeland in maintaining or modifying “virtuous practices” among indigenous groups on Taimyr Peninsula, Russia. The open-endedness of narratives produced by the logic of abduction (the non-consequential type of reasoning) is shown to facilitate people’s interpretations of virtuous or “unvirtuous” practices. To give Ziker’s own example: if people claim that “fire is our grandfather,” the virtuous practice of feeding the fire is a basis from which kinship, as a form of positive sociality, can be abducted.

Looking back at the end of this circular journey, a comment about the analytical recentering on the hearth is in order. The collection brings “under one roof” many analyses and descriptions, but, with few exceptions, the anthropological contributions have not offered novel theoretical frameworks or new analytic propositions for understanding the three Hs. That said, *About the Hearth* may speak to different audiences, and, being packed with ethnographic, historical, and archaeological data, it can serve as an introduction to regional circumpolar studies as well as to Northern communities, past and present, indigenous or simply local.