

**Author:** April Anson

**Affiliation:** University of Oregon, Department of English

1286 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-1286

**Email:** [apрила@uoregon.edu](mailto:apрила@uoregon.edu)

**Phone:** 503.936.7818

**Author Bio:** April Anson is a PhD student in Literature and Environment at the University of Oregon, where she studies biopolitics, resilience and de-growth in 19<sup>th</sup> century American literatures. Her work has appeared in *The Evil Body* and the *Journal for the Study of Religion*.

**Title:** “The World is My Backyard”: Critiquing Mobility from Inside The Rhetoric and Philosophies of the Tiny House Movement.

**Abstract (short):** The phenomenon of the recent tiny house movement offers a unique opportunity to expose the growing commodification of environmental sustainability in a market that continues to shelter economic and class privilege. Written from my subjective position as builder, owner and inhabitant of a tiny house, this paper examines the radical possibilities intrinsic to the mobility of the tiny house movement. This mobility highlights the movement’s privileged foundations but also reveals its potency for environmental and social justice issues.

**Abstract (long):** Across the United States the phenomenon of “tiny houses,” loosely defined as dwellings ranging between 65 and 875 square feet, is rapidly accumulating interest among economically and environmentally conscious individuals. While the small house movement includes site-built models, this paper focuses on the diminutive units that are transportable and suggest a more sustainable lifestyle. Mobilization complicates our understanding of a domestic realm by reversing the Global North’s *terra nullius* (vacant land)

rationale used to validate ecological and cultural colonization. Based on European ideologies, white settlers in North America justified their occupation of land inhabited by indigenous cultures by declaring nomadic lifestyles as antithetical to land ownership. Nomadism was defined as *occupying*, but not *owning*, a section of unclaimed land. Contemporary mobile tiny home dwellings offer a unique opportunity to expose neocolonial paradoxes imbedded in the architectural and social aesthetics of sustainability. While average commercially available tiny homes cost between \$20,000 and \$50,000, lower-income members of the small house movement are relying on community support, reclaimed materials, and mobilization onto communal property to drastically reduce both economic and environmental costs.

As a PhD student of ecocriticism and critical theory, I am motivated to incorporate eco-cosmopolitan practices into my everyday lifestyle. Thus, in the summer of 2012, I embarked on a journey with friends to handcraft a mobile tiny house for me to reside in while completing my studies. What initially seemed a straightforward project quickly became an entanglement with the rhetorical and philosophical underpinnings of the movement. My research revealed the growing commodification of environmental sustainability in a market that continues to shelter economic and class privilege, despite the fact that the movement itself was, and is, born out of desire to consume *less* and contribute to community *more*. Written from my subjective position as builder, owner and inhabitant of a tiny house, this paper examines the radical possibilities intrinsic to the mobility of the tiny house movement. This mobility highlights the movement's privileged foundations but also reveals its potency for environmental and social justice issues, urban sustainability studies and land ethics more broadly.