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Dear Reader,

Lookouts contain multitudes. Rooted in the history of North American forests, they are commonly understood as small, rudimentary cabins perched on vantage points above ridgelines and tree canopies. Their height varies according to their siting—shorter atop mountains, taller at lower elevations—but in all cases, they offer expansive views over the surrounding landscape. Beyond their utilitarian function, lookouts also carry symbolic meaning. A rich phenomenology of lived experience has long cast these structures as beacons of the past.

Although inspired by fire lookouts, the explicit reference to fire has been deliberately removed from the title of this journal. This choice invites a broader inquiry into studies that place the act of observation from above at their center—not only as a technical theme, but also as a point of departure for reflection across the humanities. In this sense, we refer both to the construction and the deconstruction of a point of view, understood as a site where technical challenge converges with introspective inquiry and critical intellectual development. Thus, *Lookouts* is not intended to focus solely on fire lookouts (though these may be the first buildings that come to mind), but rather on the various types and attitudes of keeping watch.

This first issue seeks to gather essays that trace the historical emergence of lookouts as a proxy for forest management. Its close engagement with the American fire lookout tradition stems from the *1st National Interdisciplinary Lookout Conference*, held at the University of Idaho in April 2024. The contributors represent a wide range of perspectives on

the subject, including historians, enthusiasts, practitioners, organizers, and academics. Their essays address the past, present, and future of the fire lookout, and together they reflect the breadth of the lookout community.

In different ways, each contributor underscores the importance of recognizing the heritage value of lookouts, particularly in light of their gradual disappearance from forested landscapes due to deterioration, neglect, and vandalism. In doing so, they echo a warning often associated with Aldo Leopold: that it is only when a resource becomes scarce that humanity begins to appreciate its value. This observation is all the more relevant today, as screen-based technologies increasingly mediate our experience of reality—or, more precisely, our access to its depth—and reshape the very act of taking a long, attentive look.

We hope that this first issue will offer an opportunity to reflect on these themes while also marking the beginning of a long-term project.