The theme of this issue of *JAE*, technology and place, supposes a reconceptualization of technology with regards to architecture and architectural education. The rising importance of technology within the theoretical discourse is reflected in a significant body of new literature. Among these I can recommend four that, taken together, articulate this shift and some seminal issues behind it. David Harvey’s *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Blackwell, 1996) provided us with an important critical discussion of the constitution and representation of space, time, place, and nature and how they frame daily life. Tom Peters’s *Building the Nineteenth Century* (MIT Press, 1996) is a seminal text in the study of historical innovations in building “technology” and the various cultures of technology-design thinking. The most recent of David Leatherbarrow’s books, *Uncommon Ground: Architecture, Technology, and Topography* (MIT Press, 2000), continues his investigation of architectural intentions and questions the common assumption that modern, international architecture negates “place” through technologies of production. Finally, Lucy Lippard’s *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New Press, 1997) presents a vast and heartening array of contemporary artwork responding to the particularities of “place.” Each of these books negotiates a range of relationships between technology and place that resonate between theory and practice. Each provides an authoritative, resilient mix of theory and (historical) practice easily mined for situations and experiences related to technology and place. Only Leatherbarrow’s book is uniquely architectural; Peters, an architect, writes for a somewhat larger audience; and Lippard and Harvey offer some important architectural commentary from books based in the visual arts and geography respectively. Yet together these four works describe “technology and place” as a complex, multifaceted, contested field and move us along towards a pluralistic conception of architecture and architectural education.

A newly defined consideration of technology in architectural education might well begin with Harvey and Peters. These two books suggest a critical framework in which first place and then technology can be considered and discussed. These understandings are then applied to Leatherbarrow’s interpretation of technology and place as realized in twentieth-century architecture. Finally, Lippard elaborates various contemporary contexts that politicizes place in a way that demands critical position and architectural action.

For David Harvey, place is the “geography of difference,” a concept important enough to form part of his title. In the first half of the book, he discusses cultural theory, dialectic reasoning, and social change, and he considers nature, our dominance and valuation of it. Throughout, he lists, catalogues, and analyzes diverse political and ecological positions regarding space, place, and nature. This provides us an important example in the diversity of possible postures that are suggestive for architecture as well.

In the second half of the book, Harvey addresses the theme of technology and place. Place is obviously crucial to the field of geography, and Harvey takes time to clarify some of its qualities. Principally, it is socially constructed (embedded and dissolved) around local community values such as social and environmental justice. These social processes include definition, location, exclusion, capital accumulation, and militant particularism. Harvey also offers critical commentary on place as theorized by architectural writers such as Aldo Rossi, Kenneth Frampton, and Christian Norberg-Schulz and concepts discussed by these and other authors such as place as the locus of “collective memory,” the “imagined community,” and “the search for genius loci.”

In essence, Harvey’s book argues for communal, ethical, and moral qualities of life. To this end he makes a major contribution in his attempt to bridge a conceptual polarity often made between the social and political aspects of community, by Marx, for example, and the phenomenological center and willed intent of the individual, as in Heidegger. In his worst-case scenario, postmodern propositions of “representation” and “communities of discourse” become empty and merely symbolic and places become sites of incommunicable otherness. The discussion might extend to the immediate, and often facile, associations of community with production (as universals) and the individual with dwelling (as particulars). Harvey suggests practice can be constituted otherwise. He points out a significant commonality, that both Marx and Heidegger were committed to the value of authenticity, be it in terms of production or of dwelling. He thus initiates an argument against the conceptual polarity of community and individual.

In something closer to the traditional discourse of architectural technology, Tom Peters in *Building the Nineteenth Century* analyzes historical examples of improved building practice. The progress of technology in building and architecture is not simply historical, but an everyday occurrence benefiting architecture at a practical and even theoretical level, and Peters is one of the few architects offering explanations in this area. His book illustrates a wide range of innovative technological concepts that have become accepted in contemporary practice: the notion that buildings can be assembled not just constructed, the concept of a building as a facility, of building as system, a reconceptualization of scale (there are no
small technological problems), the introduction of critical path construction, the invention of words such as connector, and cross-cultural mutations of building elements, processes, and theories. In his delineation of these concepts, Peters generates an enriched and broader definition of technology, as Harvey does for place, a definition that points to further questions: Are we conditioned by technology? Do we live inside it, like fish in water? Is the very line we sketch a constituent part in the process of technological production? Believing thought can migrate, indeed mutate, across cultural and spatial boundaries, Peters studies the cultural construction of technological thought. Often, technology appears flowing against the values of contemporary pluralism and poststructuralism. In our context, the analytical task here is to differentiate between the conflation of space, time, and awareness created by technology and those aspects that support place-based local circumstance. Recently, authors like the engineer Antoine Picon and the computer scientist Subrata Dasgupta have advanced their fields (against architecture) using similar historical case studies. Picon argues for a Foucauldian retheorizing of engineering around principles of ecological and reflexive design and Dasgupta tests expert design algorithms (storing design histories somewhat like computers remember the strategies of chess masters). As an architect studying the process of innovation in building technology, Peters deserves our attention in raising similarly fundamental issues. Perhaps, it is not that resistance to technology is futile, instead the very act of resistance becomes knowledge. For Peters, architects working within technology use architectural ways of thinking as a natural and creative resistance to the normative in order to add to and potentially redirect, technology.

Whereas Peters expands our definition of building technology, David Leatherbarrow provides us with ways of understanding, interpreting, and manipulating the products of technology to architectural advantage. Leatherbarrow’s writing has always impressed me with its clarity and its striking practicality for studio instruction. Somehow he is able to take studio insights and anecdotes and organize them into coherent arguments with the deeper references of concentrated scholarship. Things that many of us have said, in his hands, take on a critical clarity made evident in his prose.

His Uncommon Ground marries the architectural concerns of the everyday with the philosophical essences of Heidegger in a kind of Graphic Standards of phenomenology. He describes the architect’s use of technology between the years 1930 and 1960 as an effort in place making based on particular ideas about concepts of topography. Throughout the book “horizon” is used as a constant metaphor, something that is always present as a reference, yet always receding as experience. More specifically, he articulates a variety of horizon-generated themes: floor and ceiling levels, four-sided extension into the surroundings, flowing space, autonomous technical objects and systems, and arrangements of predestined universal elements. In individual studies, he demonstrates how these ideas are designed in a topography of site such that they are “carefully attuned to their locations but not in traditional ways, nor without consequences for the building itself” (page viii).

Does global technology destroy topographical coherence and cultural continuity? For Leatherbarrow “contemporary criticism proposes resistance to the agencies of technological progress for the sake of the individual’s and society’s self-understanding and preservation. . . . this book, and its reason for attention for very specific situations, is that this sharp alternative exists primarily in theoretical thought, not in the knotted decision making that occurs in architectural production, which is more everyday life than theory: tangles of constraints and opportunities” (page ix). Thus, design appears as a contingent, incommensurable activity, and the very act of placing technology consists of place making by arranging the global within the specific. In this way it can safeguard the potential of place for its own redefinition and rearticulation within each individual project. He, alongside the modernists, argues against the necessity of origins and natural conditions (genius loci) and argues for constant becoming. This reflects a tenet of phenomenological thought, as does the way he combines the sense of placing (thesis in Greek) with a meaning derived from the value of this location through time or intention (tithemi or place in Greek). While Peters clarifies the potential for design and knowledge within building technology—originality as innovation of technical process—Leatherbarrow adds the more everyday originality of design as ingenuity of placement and place making.

Lucy Lippard’s The Lure of the Local presents an idea of multcenteredness that raises an essential dilemma about the creative center of place-based action. Through parallel narratives she attempts a resolution to this creative dilemma. At times, the book is a series of paragraphs reporting on artworks much like an exhibition catalogue, alternatively, the text describes the political situation of various places and peoples, but always, on each page, there is a continuous narrative in the page header about her place in Maine. In addition, the photographs are evidence of hundreds of artworks created to reveal, comment, and initiate aspects of place and community. Throughout, Lippard is cautious of theory and abstraction, since she proposes they are often manipulative tools of power and elitism. Nevertheless, she does elaborate on a “place ethic” by defining a minimum threshold for work that would be: specific; collaborative; generous and open-ended; appealing, simple and
familiar; layered, complex, and unfamiliar; evocative, provocative, and critical—tough criteria for creative individuals.

An important, politically radical art critic, Lippard returns to issues of political and socially conscious content based on militant particularism (see Raymond Williams in Harvey). She highlights a fundamental conflict in the role of an architect: the creative, identifiable individual versus that which is communal in terms of both place and technology. “The popularity of ‘place’ even in academia is suspect on some levels (academia being given to fads, like the art world), but it indicates that a portion of the multi-centered population is longing to belong and is looking for ways to do so without becoming reactionary [nostalgic, retrograde]” (page 292). She expands on this in a critical way: “Position isn’t place, however subtly it may determine the ways a place are perceived. . . We need some artists to draw back from abstractions and consider shared experiences. A ‘place ethic’ demands a respect for a place that is rooted more deeply than an aesthetic version of the ‘tourist gaze’ provided by imported artists whose real concerns lie elsewhere or back in their studios” (page 278).

As a set, these four books describe a wide, clear, and challenging field of practice. In a wider context, technology and place might be imagined as epistemes operating in relation to each other and manifested in a number of recently distinct fields of academic discourse such as the history of technology; science, technology, and society; material culture; vernacular architecture; cultural geography; and environmental history. See the journals Technology and Culture, the Winterthur Portfolio, and Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture for instances of contributions in this area. Issues of technology and place, long an integral part of architectural discourse, are seminal to the literature in each of these newer fields. As architects, we can learn from these fields and continue to maintain and improve the varied and important ways architects relate theory and practice. Clearly, the issues of technology and place are a significant part of the construction of a creative center as individual architects. To borrow from Susan Leigh Starr, the task is to offer our students courses that are ontologically and epistemologically pluralist as a means of encouraging their construction of varied sovereign viewpoints.

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**The Land That Could Be: Environmentalism and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century**  
**William A. Shutkin**  
MIT Press, 2000  
340 pages  
$27.95 (hardcover)

This book is not directly about architecture, yet it offers an important challenge to architectural practice. Moreover, while it addresses environmental issues it will not contribute directly to the technological discourse of architects concerned with ecology, energy-efficiency, or sustainability. Instead, William Shutkin’s *The Land that Could Be: Environmentalism and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century* presents an emerging vision of environmentalism in which people in everyday places come together to effect environmental change in their communities; how unifying ecological and aesthetic concerns can engender democratic action and care, and possibly result in better places. It is a readable and hopeful text, admirable for broadening environmentalism to include the quality of the surrounding everyday landscape. In this simple redefinition, Shutkin, an environmental lawyer and academic, effectively includes architectural production as a specific variety of environmental action: posing a serious ethical and practical challenge to the profession of architecture. With regard to our private lives it calls us to be responsible citizens and care for the environmental quality in our own communities. Professionally, rather than act as soloists in an aesthetic private enterprise, it calls us to participate as stewards and advisors in a more broadly conceived social and physical environment.

Shutkin’s chief purpose is to challenge the effectiveness and policies of mainstream professional environmentalism with the concept of “civic environmentalism”—the idea that members (stakeholders) of a particular geographic and political community—residents, businesses, government agencies, and non-profits—should engage in planning and organizing activities to ensure a future that is environmentally healthy and economically and socially vibrant at the local and regional levels” (page 14). It is a concept of situated ethical environmental action that can result only from a balance between development, design, democratic participation, economics, and social justice. The forces that “civic environmentalism” are meant to counter should be of no surprise to those familiar with the critiques of Jane Jacobs, James Kunstler, and Richard Sennett on the reciprocity between social health and quality of place, or of David Harvey on the link of place to postmodern economies. In chapter 2, Shutkin points to the ascendancy of liberal democracy and the globalization of local economies as factors that promote private interest over the
common good, factors that damage general environmental quality by driving a wedge between any inhabitants and their commitment to place. Moreover, he connects this loss of social capital to shifts in governmental and environmental policy towards privatization, professionalization, and a dependence on legalistic procedures for change. Shutkin’s proposal is unique in that he centers his solution on the reciprocity between civic commitment and environmental quality. It is a refreshing change from deterministic writers such as James Kunstler, or neotraditionalists such as Andreas Duany, who fail to acknowledge that problems of environmental quality are ultimately social and thus not primarily solved through denser, better-looking architecture or properly proportioned streets alone. Praise is likewise due for his acknowledgment of professionalization as a divisive force in civic engagement: distanced and privileged knowledge of the professional is often too easily valued over situated, local knowledge in today’s society.

Whether or not the professionalization of mainstream American environmentalism has been all bad is debatable, although Shutkin is right to assert that it has been an elitist and technocratic project, progressively out of touch with local constituencies. Where he falters, in an otherwise valuable chapter on environmental history, is in his silence about social ecology and his neglect of past and present grassroots efforts similar to his own. Both lapses are egregious precisely because the positions of these disciplines are closely aligned with his civic environmentalism. So why leave them out? With social ecology, it may be an unfortunate reluctance to promote a philosophy that has roots in Marxist thinking, while his omission of alternative grassroots efforts is hopefully only a misguided desire not to blunt his own presentation.

What follows these first three chapters are four excellent case studies exemplifying variations of civic environmentalism across the U.S.: revitalization of contaminated urban land for agriculture in Boston, mass-transit-based development and restoration in Oakland, open space protection and development of “working landscapes” in rural Colorado, and smart-growth strategies in New Jersey, all projects of a familiar type for most architects and planners. Each occupies a chapter and contains a rich cultural geography, a detailed history, and hopeful conclusions about the future. They are valuable accounts that provide detailed documentation but are flawed as examples of nonprofessionalized community action. Each case, while having rallied the support of many concerned citizens, ultimately came to rely on professionals, grant agencies, and the justice system at crucial junctures for continued success. Further, despite the good intentions of these communities, professionals, agencies, and Shutkin himself, this reviewer can’t help feeling a sense of remorse that each case was primarily motivated by something negative requiring revitalization, recovery, or the prevention of unwanted or irresponsible development. As Shutkin himself states, “As is often the case, the impetus for action came as a result of crisis rather than from a desire to do good or plan for the future” (page 196).

Despite its shortcomings, Shutkin’s work presents two unique opportunities for architects. First, by establishing a dialectic between environmental quality and social health, it suggests that architecture must go beyond the production of material objects to engage social processes: a challenge being taken by Rob Quigley, Michael Pyatok, and Sam Mockbee, among others. Second, by expanding the definition of environmentalism and demonstrating the key role of professionals in environmental change, Shutkin lends architects the opportunity to consider architecture as a material, social, and ecological practice, in sympathy with the position of Steven Moore and Kenneth Frampton’s “the civic responsibility of the architect” presented in this issue of JAE. Thus, while this book may not be exclusively about architecture, it does have something vital to say to our profession about the architectural and environmental landscape that could be.

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