

Technical lands: a critical primer

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In its purist form, capitalistic production has at its core a commodification of landscapes, with the sole function of profit-making. The editors Jeffrey S. Nesbit and Charles Waldheim, scholars in the field of landscape architecture at Temple and Harvard Universities, present a selection of essays focused on the conceptual exploration of these hyper-productive spaces. Twenty academic American authors, landscape architects, geographers and theoreticians tackle the complex task of pinpointing and theorizing on so-called 'technical lands'. This 251-page publication is a collection of 20 chapters dedicated to the research on technical lands worldwide.

S. Nesbit and Waldheim arranged the essays nonhierarchically, thus creating a conceptual and theoretical collage. Conceptually, "technical lands" prove to be hard to grasp, due to their secretive, restrained, and un-human nature. They are prison complexes, nuclear plants, or industrial slaughterhouses, to name a few. Core qualities of these lands are their remoteness, invisibility, and heightened surveillance, allowing them to maximise productivity. *Technical Lands* is not about design or landscape architecture; it is an assemblage of research on the governance, economic development, or the environmental and human consequences of technical lands with a notable ecological and social agenda. Chapters present few illustrations, which serve more aesthetical than content purposes.

The strength of the book lies in the selection and variety of topics and the quality of the conceptual and theoretical discourse presented. The authors succinctly summarize the writings of many disciplines to render strong conclusions on how technical lands operate and their impacts. For example, the chapter *Scents of Spatial Order* explores the olfactory dimension of industrial slaughterhouses. However, a few chapters show inconsistency in the quality of research and argumentation. For example, the chapter *Land Technician* fails to come to a clear conclusion on the premise of the necessity of sociological research on mining industry developers and technicians. Also, the editors miss the opportunity to create conceptual momentum with a sequenced organisation of chapters. Recurring topics like epistemologies, agribusiness or mining are randomly distributed, which prevents a cohesive sequence and lessens the impact of the conclusions. Knowledge in the fields of political science, sociology, geography and economics is a prerequisite to a good comprehension of *Technical lands*.

In short, the publication proves to be relevant and convincing and opens the path for further research on this obscure subject. Thorough and well-argued, it presents some facets of the colossal productive processes upon which our society rests. Although *Technical lands* is not specifically destined for landscape architecture students and professionals, the book touches on subjects that concern everyone and sheds light on industries that exist on account of their concealment.