William J. Mitchell. *E-Topia: "Urban Life, Jim–But Not As We Know It!".* Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999. 184 pp. $22.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-262-13355-5.

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A Dean's Memo

Bill Mitchell is Dean of the MIT School of Architecture and Planning. In 1995 the MIT Press published his lively account of the *City of Bits: Space, Place and the Infobahn* and (in 1999) the current volume with the charming Star Trek sub-title. In between those two volumes, Mitchell has served as co-editor of a collection of conference papers on *High Technology and Low-Income Communities: Prospects for the Positive Use of Advanced Information Technology* (Schon, Sanyal, and Mitchell, eds. 1998) and an intriguing 1997 report on the uses of educational technologies at MIT. Taken together, the four texts may be read as a (quite extraordinary) memorandum to the members of Mitchell's faculty and to the professions they serve. The straightforward message of the memorandum is to attend with care and imagination to both the promises and the dangers of an emergent digital revolution superimposing a "global construction of high-speed telecommunications links, smart places, and increasingly indispensable software" upon the local fabric of buildings, neighborhoods, towns and cities. (p.7) The less straightforward (and only implicitly argued) message is that the design professions matter greatly in the creation of "lean, green cities that are smarter, not harder"

(p. 147).

Conceptions of time and history play an important role in each of the four texts and are particularly striking in the complex theme announced on the book jacket of *E-topia*. A space vehicle approaches the western hemisphere at night. Just as they appear in satellite photographs, urban regions are marked by clusters of light. The voice of the sub-title – presumably that of the irreverent Dr.McCoy – announces: "URBAN LIFE, JIM - BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT!"

The jacket describes an artificial present within which the book struggles to link past and future; knowledge and value. The clusters of light on a dark landscape are, of course, the way we "know" cities now from satellite or space shuttle photographs. Dr. McCoy is not, however, taken in by the appearance of stability. Mitchell – thanking Harvey Perloff and Charles Moore – has learned "what cities are really for" (p.181). It is that abiding knowledge of "urban life" that allows the voyagers on the Enterprise – and the author – to see change in an overtly stable city facade; to contrast what they see with what they "know" rather than with what they "knew."