A review of ‘Environmental Justice’ research in the UK

By Rebecca Nada-Rajah

November 2010

Funded by

APE
Artists Project Earth
**What is Environmental Justice?**

Environmental Justice is a concept and social movement that seeks to address the reality that environmental burdens (e.g., intrusive mining and extraction, dumping of toxic & contaminated materials, high-polluting industry *etc.*) are inequitably distributed and often concentrated in areas of socio-economically marginalized people (Agyeman *et al.* 2003). The basic premise of environmental justice is the notion that all people have an equal right to live in a healthy environment and, correspondingly, that environmental harms should be equitably distributed amongst all social groups (McLaren 2003).

The concept of environmental justice was borne out of the movement against environmental racism in America in the 1980s and 1990s. The notion of ‘environmental racism’ emerged from the American Civil Rights movement and attempted to address the injustice of toxic industry being predominantly concentrated in areas of African-American, indigenous and Hispanic residents (Agyeman *et al.* 2003). The term environmental justice gained momentum, broadening the scope of the movement to include marginalized residents of all races who face inequitable distribution of environmental damage (Sze & London 2001).

The tendency for hazardous industry to be concentrated in low-income areas is often based on a ‘path-of-least resistance’ for industries and corporations. An example of this is a 1984 Report by Cerrell Associates for the California Waste Management Board, “openly recommending that polluting industries and the state locate hazardous waste facilities in ‘lower socio-economic neighbourhoods’ because those communities had a much lower likelihood of offering political opposition” (Faber & McCarthy 2003 p.45).

What is referred to as the Environmental Justice movement in North America, Europe and South Africa is also known as the ‘Environmentalism of the Poor’ in many parts of the world. Scholar Joan Martinez Allier
describes the Environmentalism of the Poor as the occurrence of "unequal incidence of environmental harm [giving] birth to environmental movements of the poor" (2002). Proponents of these movements are local landowners in the Global South whose livelihoods are threatened by environmental damage. Examples of the ‘environmentalism of the poor’ movements include Chipko tree-hugging women in India and the Green Belt Movement in Kenya founded in 1977 by Nobel Peace prize winner Wangari Maathai. Furthermore, the discourses of ‘popular environmentalism’, ‘liberation ecology and ‘livelihood ecology’ are largely based on similar sets of ideas.

**Environmental Justice as ‘Praxis’: Action Research**

Environmental justice activist and scholar Eurig Scandrett argues that “environmental justice should be seen as a provisional and contested discourse embedded within a social movement” (2007 p. 4). It is a movement that constantly evolves in response to grassroots activism, cultural values, community organizations, local planning and development and the implementation and enforcement of environmental law. It is a highly interdisciplinary concept that sits at the “crossroads of social movement, public policy and academic research” (Sze & London 2001 p. 1333).

Environmental Justice is largely regarded as a field of social ‘praxis’, which “draws from and integrates theory and practice is a mutually informing dialogue” (Sze & London 2001 p. 1334). In this respect, researchers of the field tend to immerse themselves in the movement, in line with the notion of Puiguert & Valls that the “only way to create relevant social theories is via engaged collaboration” (2005 p. 90). In this respect, academic inquiry into environmental justice is fairly unconventional, involving the “blurring of boundaries between research and subject, the embrace of political projects and values-driven scholarship, despite the risk of losing objectivity (Smith 1999).
Much of the discourse of environmental justice is grounded in the work of Brazilian educationalist Paolo Freire whose critical pedagogy calls for the generation of knowledge via a process of dialogue (Scandrett 2007). Here, researchers and educators alike are called to immerse themselves in their vocational community with the radical understanding that learning will inevitably happen in two directions: both the researcher and the subject will be transformed by a mutual process of learning. Thereby, in the words of activist and intellectual Jeanette Eby: “deconstructing notions of control and condescension, and letting mutuality flourish in all directions” (Eby 2009, p. 58). This phenomenon of mutuality in experiential learning is known as transformative learning, and is called ‘action research’ in practice (Puigvert & Valls 2005). The academic study of environmental justice is based largely upon action research, as knowledge is generated largely from the dialogue within the movement and is constantly evolving in response to the changing context. Scandrett asserts that: “In this dialogue epistemology, knowledge is generated in praxis […] validated not only against the rigors of academic criteria, but also on accountability to communities engaged in struggle and their changing collective understanding” (Scandrett 2007). It is crucial to note that the process of ‘uncovering’ an environmental injustice is largely based upon a cultural dialogue: “environmental injustices are therefore not so much discovered by research (and then responded to by policy makers) as constructed by social processes of which research is a part” (Scandrett 2007).

**Are Justice and Sustainability Compatible Objectives?**

Treading the ground between anti-poverty and environmental movements, environmental justice can be seen as: “a social conflict which exposes negative externalities at the heart of economic development” (Scandrett 2007). Faber & McCarthy (2003) note the capacity of the environmental justice movement to challenge the “‘single-issue focus’ of the traditional environmental movement, which often constrains its
capacity to affect change. Referencing the work of Paolo Eisenberg they discuss the tendency of non-profit organizations to operate in a manner that “fails to recognize the complexity and connectedness of our interrelated socio-economic, ecological and political problems” (2003 p.42).

One of the key strengths of the concept of environmental justice is that the breadth of its scope allows it to address ‘root causes’ of the ecological crises. Middleton and O'Keefe argue that examining social inequity should be a key tenet of the sustainability movement as: “Unless analyses of development begin with not the symptoms, environmental or economic instability, but with the cause, social injustice, then no development can truly be sustainable” (2001, p. 16).

An emergent strain of discourse, especially in the non-profit sector, concerns whether or not environmental sustainability and international development are truly compatible agendas. In a paper declaring a ‘reluctant’ conclusion that social justice and environmental sustainability are “not always compatible objectives,” (2003 p. 83) Andrew Dobson notes that a tension will always exist because ‘reds’ (advocates of social justice) and ‘greens’ (environmentalists) have inherently different motives.

For example, addressing the tendency for poverty alleviation measures to exacerbate climate change, Terrence Dawson and Simon Allen (2007) note the propensity of international development organizations to advocate for the removal of trade barriers and promote international tourism in order to bolster economic growth in the global South. Increased global trade and tourism comes at the cost of an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, thus acting in direct opposition to climate change mitigation efforts. They assert: “Climate change therefore seems to demand that the international community should find new ways of transferring wealth from rich to poor countries, instead of relying on ever increasing volumes of trade and tourism with their associated greenhouse gas emissions” (2007 p. 372).

As an inherently localized movement, environmental justice groups often eschew anti-poverty solutions involving such economic growth. In
tackling localized injustice, groups confront global and international powers that whilst addressing environmental injustices on a local scale. For example, the people of Bhopal, India - as a localized community - seek justice and retribution for the 1984 chemical disaster from global multinational corporations Union Carbide and now Dow Chemicals.

Attempts to link ecological crises with issues of global poverty has spawned such concepts such as ‘ecological debt’ and ‘climate justice’. Ecological debt is the notion that the existing Western consumer culture has been built on resources exceeding the local carrying capacity and thus the West is ecologically ‘indebted’ to other nations (Simms 2005). Climate justice addresses the injustice present in the reality that adverse effects of climate change are, and will continue to be, largely endured by the global South, whilst been caused by the hyper-consumptive culture of the North (Hill 2008). Both concepts thereby press for a justice-based redistribution of wealth amongst and within nations, eschewing anti-poverty solutions reliant on environmentally destructive economic growth.

Asserting that “the issue of environmental quality is inextricably linked to that of human equality,” Agyeman et al. stress the need for the “discourse of environmental justice to be firmly placed within the framework of sustainability” (2003, p. 13). The core tenet of the sustainability ethos is living within the earth’s carrying capacity such that the global ecosystem may maintain its biodiversity and resilience for future generations. The implementation and enforcement of the sustainability-based values on a policy level is referred to as sustainable development.

Perhaps the most widely acknowledged definition of sustainable development is from the oft quoted 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development Report (WCED), (commonly referred to as the Bruntland Report) which identifies sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Baker 2006). Sustainable development theory largely challenges core tenets of the dominant development paradigm, perhaps most notably in challenging the
limits to economic growth. As an early precursor to the conception of sustainable development, two seminal papers by Herman E. Daly and Kenneth E. Boulding rattled the field of economics by challenging fundamental assumptions about the nature of our planet. Boulding’s *The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth* (1966) and Daly’s *The Economic Growth Debate: What Some Economists Have Learned But Many Have Not* (1987) sparked the recognition that the dominant ‘growth’ paradigm of our economy is, at best, incompatible with the exhaustible nature of the earth’s resources (Edwards-Jones, Davies & Hussain 2000). Written with a strong sense of urgency, both papers tackle the question of how the global economy must adapt to a planet dipping into its final reservoirs and reaching its limits. Daly’s *The Economic Growth Debate: What Some Economists Have Learned but Many Have Not* takes a strong stance against the ‘growth’ of the economy, defined as the “a quantitative increase in the scale of the physical dimensions”, as opposed to the “qualitative improvement” inherent in the economy’s ‘development’ (1987: p. 323). His stance is triggered by his recognition that we are nearing the biophysical and ethicosocial limits of our planet (Daly 1987). Sustainable development theory fundamentally questions the dominant notion of ‘progress’, specifically where it applies to progress being associated with an increased domination over nature (Baker 2006). An example of this is the use of integrative ‘Quality of Life’ indicators to measure sustainable development, as opposed to traditional development indicators which measure development in terms of GDP and human consumption of resources. A combination of ‘top- down’¹ (e.g. economic reforms such as emissions ‘cap- and- trade’ programs limit the amount of pollutants that industry may emit) and ‘bottom up’² (e.g. community campaigning against injustice in land use issues) approaches combine in a wide spectrum of individual movements to drive structural change.

---
¹ wherein ‘expert’ opinion is negotiated by a select few and then integrated into a tactic
² wherein ‘expert’ opinion is generated and executed at a grassroots level, (e.g. community campaigning against injustice in land use issues)
Where ‘Top-Down’ Meets ‘Bottom Up’: Environmental Justice and Sustainable Development

There is a growing recognition within the field of sustainable development that tackling inequality and building resilient communities is a vital and necessary precursor to a sustainable society (Baker 2006; Beder 2006; Jackson 2009). In addition to challenging economic growth, sustainable development theory openly admits the "penetration of Western environmentally destructive development models" (Baker 2006, p.3) as a key factor in the perpetration of poverty and inequity in the both within Western countries and in the global South (Kirkby, O'Keefe & Timberlake 1995). Tim Jackson's *Prosperity without Growth* report (2009) outlines '12 Steps To a Sustainable Economy', five of which specifically address issues of community and inequality: “sharing the available work and improving the work-life balance, tackling systematic inequality, measuring capabilities and flourishing, strengthening human and social capital and reversing the culture of consumerism” (2009 p.12)

However, it must be noted that current sustainable development discourse has very little to say about the pragmatics of bringing about cultural change. There are, perhaps, three main reasons for this discrepancy. First, a large part of sustainable development discourse leans closely to what Blowers refers to as 'ecological modernization', and seeks only reform the existing infrastructure without pro-actively challenging its core tenets, which may perpetuate consumption and thus exploitation. For example, whilst Jackson’s 2009 report calls for the “tackling of systematic inequality” he makes no tangible political or economic recommendations on how this can be done, and fails to address concepts such as ‘climate justice’ and ‘ecological debt’ which have the capacity to tackle systematic inequality with a justice-based approach. It is important to note that whilst sustainable development initiatives largely seek to reform existing structures from within, the environmental justice tends to be more
oppositional, challenging the core tenets of the existing infrastructure\(^3\) (Scandrett 2007). Scandrett observes: “Mainstream policy discourse has increasingly restricted [the operation of] environmental justice to policy areas which do not challenge [economic] growth.” Second, as sustainable development is predominantly a top- down initiative, it lacks the capacity to effectively tackle core issues of community cohesion. However well-intentioned, approaches to tackling issues of community from the ‘top-down’ can often cripple grassroots community organizing by imposing artificial community structures using institutions. For example, the late social critic Ivan Illich (1973) identifies the increasingly ‘institutionalized’ nature of our communities as a factor in creating social isolation and decreasing neighbourly reciprocity. To illustrate this the American community development scholar John McKnight (1984) often tells the tale of ‘the bereavement counsellor’ in which a small village has an established system of dealing with death: when someone dies the members of the community go over to the house of the family in mourning to comfort and cook for them. The system functions on the ‘grassroots’ agency of the community in taking the initiative to do so. However, in order to ‘guarantee’ and homogenize this outcome, the village then hires a bereavement counsellor to comfort the mourning. The institutionalization of this duty thereby removes from the community’s initiative in dealing with loss (McKnight 1984), thus unintentionally fracturing initiatives towards reciprocity. This illustration implies that issues of community cohesion are perhaps best tackled with ‘bottom- up’ approaches, instead of the macro- level policy and economic reforms of sustainable development. A third reason that the practice of sustainable development perhaps lacks the capacity to affect change within the core “social logic” of our culture is due to its rigidity as a discourse (McLaren 2003). As a higher-
level policy oriented concept, whose very discourse was generated and perpetuated by international conferences (Baker 2006), its is inherently unable to be responsive to the fluid and localized events that drive cultural change from the bottom-up.

The environmental justice movement identifies strongly as a grassroots, ‘bottom-up’ approach—challenging the core tenets of a political and economic system that perpetuates exploitation and excess-consumption. Benjamin Zephaniah, a poet who famously turned down the prestigious OBE notes the importance of being able to maintain one’s ability to be oppositional. “I don’t want to do government or monarchy approved poetry. We need the freedom to be critical of these institutions, and once you become part of them, that’s very difficult” (Zephaniah in Pool 2009).

An Infrastructure of Consumption and Exploitation

In the World Watch Institute’s *State of the World 2008* report, Tim Jackson (2008) argues that a key reason that materialistic consumerism is so deeply entrenched in our society is that it is perpetuated by an “infrastructure of consumption”. The summation of the effects of dominant structures and institutions in society are geared to promote wasteful and consumptive behaviour: “private transport is incentivised over public transport; motorists are prioritized over pedestrians; energy supply is subsidized and protected, while demand management is often chaotic and expensive, waste disposal is cheap, economically and behaviourally; recycling demands time and effort: ‘bring centres’ few and far between and often overflowing with waste” (Jackson 2008, p. 56) This recognition does not negate the role of individual choice in sustainable decision-making, but instead highlights the means by which our structures and institutions largely promote a “social logic of consumerism” (Jackson 2009). Living in a society with such a heavy predisposition towards excess, Jackson asserts, makes it difficult for even the most highly motivated individuals to live sustainable lifestyles. Noting
that “the issue of environmental quality is inextricably linked to that of human equality” (Agyeman et al. 2003) Jackson’s conception can be built upon to argue that our Western consumer society is also constructed with a predisposition towards exploitative behaviour: disruptive, polluting industry is more likely to go into low-income neighbourhoods than wealthy neighbourhoods, goods produced with ethical labour tend to be more expensive than products of sweatshop labour et cetera. Thus, perhaps a more comprehensive term for that which perpetuates both unsustainable and inequitable behaviour in society is the ‘Infrastructure of Consumption and Exploitation’.

The structures and institutions that perpetuate such hyper-consumptive, exploitative behaviour in our social system are built upon a core set of ideas and assumptions that inform their internal logic (Meadows 1999). This set of dominant ideas and assumptions are woven together to form a social paradigm, or the dominant cultural narrative. In the sociological sense, a paradigm refers to “a constellation of concepts, values, perceptions and practices shared by a community, which forms a particular vision of reality [...] paradigms provide the framework of meaning within which "facts" and experiences acquire significance and can be interpreted” (Capra 1996).

The concept of a paradigm allows us to examine the root causes of our social and ecological crises by providing a framework for the discussion of ideas and assumptions which are not always explicitly stated. Tim Jackson notes how the manifestation of these ideas and assumptions can be seen in “…the subtle but damaging signals sent by government, regulatory frameworks, financial institutions, the media and our education systems: business salaries are higher than those in the public sector, particularly at the top; nurses and those in the caring profession are consistently lower paid; private investment is written down at high discount rates, making long-term costs invisible; success is counted in terms of material status (salary, house size etc.); children are brought up as a ‘shopping generation’, hooked on brand celebrity and status” (2008, p.56).
Thus, although social structures are predisposed to perpetuate wasteful materialism and exploitation, it is vital to address this “extremely powerful social logic” (Jackson 2008, p. 56) that locks both people and institutions into this type of behaviour. For the purpose of this exploration, the paradigm, or social logic, underlying our social infrastructure is referred to as a ‘core cultural mythology’. The core cultural mythology is defined as the ‘lowest common denominator’ of a shared narrative which governs our lifestyles, incorporating the values and assumptions which are widely experienced but rarely explicitly stated.

**Addressing the ‘Core Cultural Mythology’**

Environmental scientist Donella Meadows addresses the subject of paradigmatic change in her *12 Places to Intervene in a System*. She asserts that: “transcending paradigms may go beyond challenging fundamental assumptions, into the realm of changing the values and priorities that lead to the assumptions, and being able to choose among value sets at will” (1999). Referring to Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Meadows concludes that paradigmatic change can best occur when a wide variety of individuals systematically point out the deficiencies of the ‘old’ paradigm while others lead us outside of ‘old’ paradigm by proactively modelling a new one (Meadows 1999).

So what are the deficiencies of our current paradigm that have led to such consumptive materialism and exploitation on a macro scale? Suppose that our core cultural mythology is largely informed by both the varied and dynamic means by which we pursue truth (ie. art, science, spirituality), in addition to more fixed and static considerations such as our biological nature and our historical context. Imagining the ‘core cultural mythology’ as a dynamic entity that is in constant flux, it becomes evident that there will be a constant power struggle for the control of the ideas and assumptions which form the dominant cultural narrative. Since the dynamic processes by which we collectively pursue truth, such as through the sciences, the arts and through spirituality are highly influential in their
ability to impact the core cultural mythology, they are also especially vulnerable to the interests of power (Greig 2007).

In an essay calling upon artists to pursue the truths of the times we live in through honest, socio-politically responsive work, Scottish playwright David Greig argues that one of the key roles of theatre in our times is to resist “the management of the imagination by power” (2007, p. 215). Here, Greig paints a picture of the influence of capital and power on the core cultural mythology:

“The institutions of global capital manage the imagination in the first instance through media institutions. Hollywood cinema, the television and newspapers of the great media empires like Fox and CNN. These forms create the narrative superstructure around which our imagination grows. In this way we learn to think along certain paths, to believe certain truths, all of which tend, in the end to further the aims of capital and the continuance of economic growth. Once the superstructure is in place, our own individual creativity will tend to grow around it and assume its shape so that the stories we tell ourselves, the photographs we take and so forth, are put in the service of the same narratives and assumptions [...] Very few imaginations are totally colonized, just as very few are totally liberated. In most minds there is a constant back and forth- a dialogue between challenge and assumption like waves washing against a shoreline. [...] By intervening in the realm of the imaginary, power continually shapes our understanding of reality” (2007, p. 216)

Greig argues that art has the capacity to resist this ‘management of the imagination’ by the interests of capital by being dedicated first and foremost to the truth, and thereby challenging the core cultural mythology which has led to an Infrastructure of Consumption and Exploitation. Thus, if we are to truly address our social and ecological crises, we require both an art and a science that is unrelenting in its pursuit of truth. This may allow us to recover our core cultural mythology from the ‘management of the imagination by capital’.

Perhaps this sentiment is better expressed in playwright Harold Pinter’s 2005 Nobel Lecture: “I believe that despite the enormous odds which exist, unflinching, unswerving, fierce intellectual determination, as citizens, to define the real truth of our lives and our societies is a crucial obligation which devolves upon us all. It is in fact mandatory. If such a determination is not embodied in our political vision we have no hope of restoring what is so nearly lost to us - the dignity of man” (Pinter 2005).
The Virtues of Storytelling

As we have seen, the environmental justice movement is a highly localized struggle, most often arising in response to injustice affecting a specific community. For a popular movement to take off, an injustice must be uncovered and gain the widespread recognition of the people. Thus, the role of the village bard is just as important as that of international policy makers.

Social change is never a merely intellectual process - it demands the engagement of the senses and the passions in addition to the intellect. In the words of Antonio Gramsci: “The intellectual’s error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned [...] that is, without feeling the elementary passions of the people” (in Conquergood 2002, p.418). The arts provide a space for the engagement of the passions with the intellect and create a forum wherein the key paradigms that underlie a society can be called into question as necessary.

German philosopher Jurgen Habermas describes the process of 'rational reconstruction' as the means by which intuitive knowledge is systematically linguistically and philosophically coded into a 'rational', logical form (1979). 'Rational reconstruction' is used to make sense of external and internal realities via a process of interpretation (eg. interpreting a smile as benevolent), as opposed to generating theoretical knowledge via a process of deduction and description (eg. using the scientific method). Thus, according to Habermas' conception, a great proportion of what we construe as knowledge originates in a sensory-intuitive experience and subsequently becomes codified via a process of rationalization. As artistic creation is an expression of the sensory-intuitive experience, art has the capacity to serve as a precursor to rationalized knowledge.

In a paper entitled Interventions and Radical Research, the performance studies scholar Dwight Conquergood explores the "indirect, nonverbal and extralinguistic modes of communication [in society], rich in
subversive meanings and utopian yearnings” (Conquergood 2002 p.148).

Conquergood provides a particularly illuminative example of the phenomena of 'rational reconstruction' as conceptualized by Habermas in his discussion of the life narrative of the African-American abolitionist and former slave, Frederick Douglass (1818-1895). He quotes at length from Douglass' memoirs, well worth reiterating:

But, on allowance day, those who visited the great house farm were peculiarly excited and noisy. While on their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild notes. These were not always merry because they were wild. On the contrary, they were mostly of a plaintive cast, and told a tale of grief and sorrow. In the most boisterous outbursts of rapturous sentiment, there was ever a tinge of deep melancholy [...]. I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress truly spiritual-minded men and women with the soul-crushing and death-dealing character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes [...]. Every tone was a testimony against slavery [...]. The hearing of those wild notes always [...] filled my heart with ineffable sadness [...]. To those songs I trace my first glimmering conceptions of the dehumanizing character of slavery [...]. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds[...] If any one wishes to be impressed with a sense of the soul-killing power of slavery, let him go to Colonel Lloyd's plantation, and, on allowance day, place himself in the deep pine woods, and there let him, in silence, thoughtfully analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul, and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because “there is no flesh in his obdurate heart.” (Douglass [1855] 1969:99 in Conquergood 2002 p. 145)

This selection of Douglass' memoirs lends valuable insight into the capability of artistic expression to provide a means for the initial voicing and recognition of an injustice. Here, in taking in an artistic expression (ie. the singing of the slaves) Douglass' understanding of the injustice of slavery can be seen to develop from the intuitive to rational stage: "...to those songs I trace my first glimmering conceptions of the dehumanizing character of slavery", by a process perhaps akin to Habermas' 'rational reconstruction'. Douglass' memoirs provide a written record of how the slave songs- a human expression of an intuitive sensibility - serve as a key driving force in the movement towards the abolition of slavery.
Additionally since art communicates in a deeper form of language than words, it has the ability to ‘de-professionalize’ public debates, broadening citizen participation in addressing and identifying key social issues of our time. Conquergood acknowledges the ability of the arts to communicate in a language that transcends what he refers to as 'scriptocentrism', essentially the notion that ‘everything there is to be known can be codified in text'. In reference to Michel Foucault’s idea of “subjugated knowledges”, he asserts that scriptocentrism is a form of epistemic violence that has “squeezed out… the whole realm of complex, finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised, coexperienced, covert- and all the more deeply meaningful for its refusal to be spelt out” (Conquergood, 312). Conquergood thus draws attention to the capability of art (in this case performance art) to exploit these other types of knowledge for a purpose of searching for truths and communicating understandings.

Take for example Pablo Picasso’s Guernica, a painting which depicts the of bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War. The work is remarkable in its ability to communicate the horrors of war in a language beyond words (Martin 2003). In addition to drawing international attention to the Spanish Civil War, it has become a global symbol of Anti-War movements (Martin 2003). A reproduction of the painting adorns the headquarters of the UN Security Council, whose stated mission is to “end the scourge of war.” As a testament to the power of the artwork, US officials had the painting covered for the press conference in February 2003 in which the American government pressed to go to war with Iraq (Vallen 2003).

An example of a performance art that pertains directly to environmental justice, is a performance by ‘political tricksters’ and ‘corporate ethics activists’, the Yes Men, at the 2007 Gas and Oil Exposition in Calgary, Alberta. “Intended as a critique of the fossil fuel industry’s influence on energy policy” (Keim 2007), the piece exploded the logical endpoints of the political prioritization of industry amidst current ecological crises. Posing as representatives of the Exxon-Mobil CEO Lee
Raymond, Andy Bichlbaum—posing as Shepard Wolff—had arranged to deliver a keynote lecture at a luncheon of the conference, to announce findings of Raymond’s study team, commissioned by the Department of Energy (Keim 2007). Bilchbaum / ‘Wolff’ opened his lecture by acknowledging the propensity of current energy policies to lead to “widespread global calamities” thereby posing a threat to oil industry (Keim 2007). Announcing the ‘results’ of the Exxon-Mobil study team’s findings, he announced that “in the worst case scenario, the oil industry could "keep fuel flowing" by transforming the billions of people who die into oil, called ‘Vivoleum‘.

![Figure: The Yes Men's 'Vivoleum Candles'](image)

Bilchbaum/ ‘Wolff’ s ‘research assistant’ Mike Bonnano or “Florian Ossenberg” announced that: "With more fossil fuels comes a greater chance of disaster, but that means more feedstock for Vivoleum. Fuel will continue to flow for those of us left." Keim (2007) reports that:

“The impostors led growingly suspicious attendees in lighting Vivoleum candles made, they said, from a former Exxon janitor who died from cleaning a toxic spill. When shown a mock video of the janitor professing his desire to be turned in death into candles, a conference organizer pulled Bonanno and Bichlbaum from the stage. As security guards led Bonanno from the room, Bichlbaum told reporters that "Without oil we could no longer produce or transport food, and most of humanity
would starve. That would be a tragedy, but at least all those bodies could be turned into fuel for the rest of us.”

In the words of the German playwright Heiner Mueller: “the role of art is to mobilize the imagination” (Waltemath 2004). In 2005 Heavy Trash, "an anonymous arts organization of architects, designers and urban planners" set up viewing platforms on the streets of Los Angeles' gated communities, wherein the general public can look onto the properties of gated homes by climbing onto a platform and peering over (Heavy Trash 2005).

![Image: 'Viewing Platforms' into Los Angeles Gated Communities (Heavy Trash 2005)](image)

Figure: 'Viewing Platforms' into Los Angeles Gated Communities (Heavy Trash 2005)

Constructed after the viewing platforms at the Berlin Wall which historically allowed citizens from West Berlin to see into the East of the city, the platforms juxtapose past and present in order to spark debate on the right to block off access to parts of the city. In a statement on their official website, Heavy Trash voices their intent to promote dialogue on issues concerning privatization in urban planning. USC Lusk Center Director Ed
Blakely and UC Berkeley professor Mary Gail Snyder comment: "When public services and even local government are privatized, when the community of responsibility stops at the gates, the function and the very idea of democracy are threatened. Gates and barricades that separate people from one another also reduce people's potential to understand one another and commit to any common or collective purpose" (Heavy Trash 2005).

**Bibliography**


