

the form of notes while others are bibliographies. The restatements of the Orientalist project are at times repetitive, and inevitably so, but the subtly different takes on Said, and the thoughtful exceptions taken to his position, add to the clear problematic focus of the volume.

These papers add substantially to our understanding of how the western gaze has transformed South Asia. They also struggle to show how we can go beyond it, but one is left with the feeling that all this epistemological agonizing leaves us in a solipsistic state which denies genuine, discoverable cultural differences “out there,” quite apart from the way Orientalism has helped create them. The effect of Orientalism on our understanding is a little like the effect of childhood experiences on adult personality. We all have them, and we are unquestionably better off for recognizing and coming to grips with them, but we can't let them stop us from getting on with the problems of living. Certainly Orientalist history, like any history, is constructed out of our own parochial concerns and interests, but that admission need not paralyse us from investigating and making truth claims about the past of empirical cultural Others.

We have always known the ethnocentric pitfalls of judging other people's corn by our own bushels. This volume sounds the additional warning that counting dry volume measures may blind us from understanding what the most important and relevant things about grain are. It shows us not just how colonialism constructed the Orient, but how we continue to be trapped in our “postcolonial predicament” by the political and social categories we have inherited from the colonial era. History becomes in more ways than one the Joycean nightmare from which we are trying to awake.

**EcoPopulism: Toxic Waste and the Movement for Environmental Justice. By Andrew Szasz. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.**

**Reviewed by Daniel Brook.**

Along with many other social movements, environmentalism grew stronger in its 1960s incarnation. In 1970, the year of the first Earth Day (on 22 April), it looked like payday for the environmental movement as a flurry of legislation passed through the Congress and was signed by President Nixon: the Resource Recovery Act, Environmental Protection Agency, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Clean Air Act, Mining Enforcement and Safety Administration, Consumer Product Safety Commission, and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Whereas the first wave of environmentalism in the United States focused on the conservation of beautiful locales and culminated in the construction of a National Park System (beginning with Yellowstone National Park on 1 March 1872), the second wave of the 1960s emphasized general health and safety in the age of modernity, as opposed to aesthetics, and resulted in the Acts of 1970 and the institutionalization of Earth Day. The third and current wave of environmentalism began on 2 August 1978, when the mass media ran stories on the tragedy of Love Canal. It is to the genesis and development of this current wave that EcoPopulism is dedicated.

Interestingly, though not surprisingly, the Nixon Administration latched on to an obscure passage in the 1970 Resource Recovery Act in an attempt to undermine it through delay. Indeed, the Haldeman Diaries (1994) reveals that as late as 9 February 1971, Nixon “feels the environment is not an issue that's worth a damn to us.” The passage in the Act called for “a report on ‘the storage and disposal of hazardous wastes.’” Nixon's idea was to study hazardous waste rather than regulate solid waste. The report, though, later became the basis for the Resource and Conservation Recovery Act (RCRA) of 1976. So, without any public pressure, the federal government technically began regulating hazardous waste for the first time. However, RCRA essentially remained dormant until Love Canal. Love Canal, an unused navigation channel in Niagara Falls, New York, was physically covered up in the early 1950s. After having been a chemical company dumping area since 1942, it was sold to the local Board of Education in the 1950s for one dollar and a release from future liability. When a school and houses were then built on the site, families moved into the area. In 1976, following heavy rains, toxic waste started oozing to the earth's surface, showing up on school grounds, on people's yards, and in basements. Of the 88 chemicals identified, many at very high levels of concentration, 12.5 percent of them were carcinogenic, with other chemicals linked to other health hazards. The mass media began to popularize and (inter)nationalize this local disaster in 1978, only after two years of intense local activism, thereby “manufacturing consent” (Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 1988) for public awareness and mass fear. Thereafter, Szasz asserts, Love Canal became a “political icon” within environmental consciousness and a rallying cry against the siting of hazardous waste. With an estimated 19,000 hazardous waste sites as of 1980, according to the EPA, toxic waste was clearly a public problem. Now, thanks to political activism and media coverage, toxic waste had finally become a public issue.

In the aftermath of Love Canal, legislators scrambled to pass some sort---any sort---of hazardous waste cleanup law. After much compromise, the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), more commonly known as Superfund, was signed into law by President Carter the month before he left office. While other social movements either floundered or struggled for survival in the repressive era of the Reagan 1980s, the hazardous waste movement grew both stronger and more radical. Indeed, according to Szasz, hazardous waste laws are the only environmental regulations to have gotten tougher under Reagan (after initial weakening). The issue was too powerful to ignore, and the actions of so-called ordinary people had made it so.

Before Love Canal became a national issue, hazardous waste protests were sporadic and isolated. Local groups occasionally formed throughout the 1970s as a response to threats to their local environments, essentially reinventing the wheel in each neighborhood. However, after August 1978 when the image of Love Canal exploded in the national consciousness, there were increasing numbers of protests and increasing networks among them. The partial meltdown at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania the following year (28 March) and the subsequent massive protests and media attention contributed to this trend. Further, the protests were characterized by “exceptional demographic diversity,” seeming to cut across all groups and sub-groups. Informal networking soon led to a formal network. Lois Gibbs, the leader of the Love Canal Homeowners' Association and a former apolitical housewife, founded the Citizens' Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes (CCHW) in 1981, “the first and still most important of these formalizations.” Other national networks later formed and the more established environmental organizations began to address the hazardous waste issue as well.

By 1986, CCHW engaged in issue expansion: "A community can face threat from a host of other sources [besides industrial hazardous waste]---the smokestack emissions of a local factory, unsafe disposal of infectious hospital wastes, toxins stored at a nearby military base." Two years later, as Szasz explains, CCHW literature mentioned global issues for the first time, and in 1989, it resolved to 'broaden [the] movement [to] include all environmental hazards.' The movement shifted from a focus on "hazardous wastes" to "a much more broadly defined 'toxics' movement." And, as Szasz demonstrates, this "process of issue expansion is continuing." Moreover, issue expansion "was accompanied by an increasingly comprehensive, totalizing critique of modern economic production and forms of political power." The movement had developed from NIMBY-ism ("not in my backyard") to what Szasz calls radical environmental populism ("not in anyone's backyard"). In its progressive populism, the movement draws on the best of American history and its democratic ideals: "a struggle of the small people against big government and big business... 'the people' against the privilege and power of dominant, exploiting, selfish, and uncaring elites." As Szasz clearly explains, the phrase radical environmental populism "situates the movement in a larger history of American radicalism while it distinguishes the movement both from earlier forms of populism and from other tendencies in contemporary environmentalism." Although the movement does not employ the phrases, the substance of radical environmental populism is a form of "socialist ecology" (Susanna Hecht and Alexander Cockburn, *The Fate of the Forest*, 1990) or "ecosocialism" (Stephen Croall and William Rankin, *Ecology for Beginners*, 1981). In both phrases, the term can be translated to justice, not in the legal sense, but in the stronger sense of fairness.

It is in discussing radical environmental populism that Szasz is at his best. Szasz, a sociology professor at U.C. Santa Cruz, is clearly sympathetic to the cause and its actors. Szasz describes and analyzes the history of the protest movement against toxics with great confidence, while he theorizes about the present and future with obvious hope and anticipation. Szasz views the protest movement as necessary for changes in governmental policy and corporate practice. Szasz argues that

the hazardous waste movement is responsible for the progress toward waste reduction, but not in the simple and direct sense... Rather, the movement is responsible because it created something like a "scissor" effect: at the centers of formal political action, the movement caused regulations to be strengthened. Locally, the movement threw a wrench into the siting process, making it nearly impossible to build new disposal and treatment capacity. The combined impact...is...the principal historical fact behind...[the] industry's "voluntary" move toward waste reduction.

As one often hears in movement circles, "direct action gets the goods." In this sense, though, the structures of governmental policy and corporate practice are dialectically related to the collective agency of the protest movement; structure and agency presuppose each other. Indeed, an EPA lawyer admitted (at a private law school lecture that I attended on 9 September 1992) that a hazardous waste siting decision ("perceived risk") is based on a formula of "probability risk" (dose or level of exposure times the toxicity) in addition to a community's "outrage" (based on "fairness," "voluntariness," and "benefits").

However, Szasz concedes that, so far, “implementation has not been good enough really to protect public health and the environment.” Yet, commenting on the “average citizens’ immediate concerns,” Szasz characterizes their assessment of the results of regulation as superficial. In contrast, Szasz cites as “real accomplishments” such academic concerns as “the development of ‘issue infrastructure’” (“that complex of knowledge, technology, and institutions that makes it possible for society to understand and cope with any issue”) and “society’s knowledge” (which is “much, much better than it was fifteen years ago”). It is here that Szasz is at his weakest. With his implicit dismissal of a populist conception of reality and its sense of importance for actual environmental achievements, Szasz imposes from above an over-intellectualized value system divorced from the realities on the ground. While analyzing and championing a populist movement, Szasz falls back into the narrow confines of his armchair and ivory tower. Szasz should re-read the inspiring history of ordinary people struggling for survival that he himself chronicles. The hazardous waste movement began in order to achieve a safe and healthy environment, not to increase “issue infrastructure” or “society’s knowledge.” Regardless of how useful such phenomena are to intellectuals, they are not worth much to most of the people who pay the price of toxic waste with their lives. Knowledge is only a tool, albeit an important one. The task for radical environmental populists, we must recall, is to attain a safe and healthy environment for everyone to enjoy. To paraphrase Marx: the intellectuals have only studied the environment; the point, however, is to protect it and make it better. One must always distinguish between means and ends, for when the former become the latter, one has been co-opted.

Szasz exhibits other flaws, both formal and substantive, in his study. In form, his most significant faux pas is repetition. There are, unfortunately, several quotes that are duplicated in various parts of the text. Especially in a book which is not voluminous (it would be somewhat more tolerable in Winston Churchill’s eight volume biography), the reproduction of quotes is frustrating and disappointing, in spite of the value of the quotes themselves. Substantively, Szasz is guilty of omission more than commission. For example, Szasz neglects to make any international comparisons (e.g., How did Canada--its government and people--react to Love Canal? How did Love Canal scenarios play out in other countries?) or to mention the international dimensions of hazardous waste (e.g., its trade and transport, what I have elsewhere called “toxic trade”).

Some examples of topics missing from Szasz’s analytic scope include the maquiladora industry along the U.S.-Mexico border where many “Love Canals” are currently wreaking havoc and both the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade [GATT] have the potential to harmonize standards and regulations down to their lowest common denominator. Another disturbing example of omission is a proposal made by Lawrence Summers (former Chief Economist for the World Bank and presently in the U.S. Treasury Department) to ship toxic waste to the Third World. Summers reasons that underdeveloped countries are also “under-polluted” countries (“Let Them Eat Pollution,” *The Economist*, 8 February 1992). Szasz could have also assessed the European Greens, especially in Germany and Sweden, who have made some significant advances. Although the toxics debate and movement have been globalized, Szasz’s analysis, unfortunately, has not been. Such comparative analysis would have strengthened *EcoPopulism*.

Although I am largely sympathetic to Szasz’s position, he can also be criticized for being anthropocentric. Szasz does not seem to consider the environment for its own sake or the multitudinous effects of toxics on non-humans; Szasz never asks, for example,

“should trees have standing?” (Christopher Stone, *Should Trees Have Standing?* 1988/1972). Nevertheless, within the universe of people, Szasz does a commendable job of linking the issues of class, race, and gender to that of the environment. These crucial issues are all too often either ignored, downplayed, or whitewashed. Szasz, instead, compellingly argues that toxic victims are usually poor or working class and that “[t]heir environmental problems are inseparable from their economic condition.” Moreover, and with tremendous overlap, the geography of toxics production and disposal disproportionately coincides with that of communities of color. Although he discusses the topic of “environmental racism” (Ben Chavis, 1987), Szasz does not enter the debate over whether toxic waste is targeted against people of color per se or against people of color and others who are members of the lower and working classes. Referring to Love Canal, Szasz describes the residents as working class, but does not mention the community's racial demographics. The community was predominantly white, working class, and Catholic.

Sexism and patriarchy also play a role in the search for “environmental justice” because toxics movement protests have revolved around women's traditional spheres: family, the home, health, and community. In no small part due to this, the “vast majority” of members and leaders of these movement organizations are women. Therefore, environmental justice has marched alongside environmental democracy. According to a CCHW publication cited by Szasz, from which the title of this review is taken, “[e]nvironmental justice is a people-oriented way of addressing ‘environmentalism’ that adds a vital social, economic and political element...When we fight for environmental justice, we fight for our homes and families and struggle to end economic, social and political domination by the strong and greedy.” To this end, the toxics movement has reached out to all other progressive social movements and, according to Szasz, may even become the vanguard of a broad populist movement for social justice.

Finally, Szasz employs an interesting methodology which he calls “issue history.” It requires the eclectic and non-dogmatic use of theory, history, sociology, political science, and semiotics in a synthetic, transdisciplinary manner. To this end, Szasz makes good use of government documents, reports, and hearings, news stories and articles in the mass media, public opinion surveys, movement publications, speeches, and interviews, in addition to theories of political economy and postmodernism, in an attempt to analyze the various interrelated facets of the issue of toxic waste. Szasz remarks, for example, that “things become conceptionally interesting exactly when action transcends the boundaries of any one zone.” He continues by stating that “the task, both intellectually and politically, is not just to understand what happens in each zone of activity, but more to understand the conditions under which issues jump from zone to zone, creating complex, dynamic interactions among them.”

It is precisely due to the transdisciplinarity of both the toxics movement and Szasz's study of it that the book is appropriate for so many people. *EcoPopulism* is recommended not only for those concerned with the environment and social movements, but would also be relevant and worthwhile for those interested in media analysis and current events, as well as public policy and political economy. Even with its flaws, *EcoPopulism* provides a fascinating account of a powerful grassroots movement still in progress. If Szasz is correct, the third wave of environmentalism may be swelling into a tidal wave that we won't want---and can't afford---to miss.