The recourse to modern conception of rights ensures that the aff’s call for environmental justice obfuscates the problematic methodological frame and risks REIFYING systems of thought that make unfair environmental distribution thinkable **Clark ‘10** (Timothy, Prof of English Studies, Durham University, “Some Climate Change Ironies: Deconstruction, Environmental Politics and the Closure of Ecocriticism”, Oxford Literary Review, 32 (1))

**(3) The outmoded quest for a ‘liberatory’ method. Environmental questions are plural, cross-disciplinary, contentious and often mutually contradictory. The defining terms ‘environment’ or ‘environmentalism’ seem less coherent concepts than loose containers for all kinds of issues that do not fit given modes of politics. It is perhaps not surprising then that the desire for some intellectual certainty in their stance has led to many ecocritics reaching for** familiar **modernist categories. Greg Garrard describes the general stance of twenty-first ecocriticism as tending towards ‘social ecology,’33 that is, towards arguments that human violence against the natural world is ultimately a product of oppressive structures of hierarchy in the human species.34 In effect, environmental issues can be held to be addressed by engaging questions of equity among human beings. Thus it is today that, while some environmental thinkers confront directly the difficult question of clashes between specific environmental issues and the ideals and norms of inherited thought (e.g. in liberalism), the majority of eco- critical arguments now draw primarily on models of thinking taken from oppositional politics in the modern, progressive/enlightenment tradition. This general stance has been accompanied with an increased attention to questions of environmental justice, ‘the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment,’35 raising such important issues as environmental racism, the elitism of the mainstream environmental politics, and environmental health as a matter of social justice. The environmental justice movement invokes visions of a just society linked in part to the impetus of American civil rights struggle. Picking up this agenda in the late 1990s, ecocriticism gained rhetorical appeal by seeming to extend the terms of that movement to environmental concerns. Mapping environmental politics onto the more familiar human justice agenda has also had some short term intellectual advantages: critics can also bring to bear all the well-used tools of mainstream cultural criticism, following its familiar method of focusing on competing social ‘constructions’ of an issue in terms of various interests and exclusions. A distinction of green criticism becomes simply that it is competing constructions of the environment that are being gauged. Ecocriticism thus rebutted earlier accusations of a romantic anti-intellectualism and of the sacralisation of ‘wilderness’ to gain more immediate political relevance, at least in relation to specifically human, local grievances. Climate change, however, may mark the closure or exhaustion of modes of environmental politics embedded in the modernist, liberal tradition. Val Plumwood writes that ‘the green movement still lacks a coherent liberatory theory,’36 but the blockage may be perhaps to posit such a simplistic theoretical goal in the first place. As a possible global catastrophe arising from innumerable mostly trivial or innocent individual actions, including some which seem politically taboo, such as increased material prosperity, an expanding population or increased longevity, climate change does not present any one easily identifiable antagonist. Its causes are diffuse, partly unpredictable and separated from their effects by huge gaps in space and time. Climate change entangles itself with other environmental problems that seem to present no acceptable solution — the demands, for instance, of an expanding population for new and safely inhabitable space as against the claims to preservation of the habitats of increasingly scarce animals or plants. Can western eco-critics comfortably inhabit a stance from which to engage the environmental degradation latent in the hopes of millions of people in the Far East planning to buy a first car? James Garvey writes: ‘In a more than token sense, a campaign of civic disobedience undertaken for meaningful action on climate change is nothing other than campaign by us, against us.’37 Another danger is that the tendency to voice environmental justice in the usual terms of a demand for equitable ‘inclusion’ is effectively to legitimise the centre from which people claim to be excluded, i.e. not to offer an alternative account of the social good but only to second demands for a fairer distribution of the spoils (‘the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment’). Whatever its strength in addressing local grievances, eco-criticism thus becomes the covert legitimation of consumer democracy.**