

# Social Construction of Nature

Ideas:

Social Construction: What is the social construction of nature?

WHO BENEFITS from social construction?

How are these terms reproduced and distributed?

## Raymond Williams: Nature (from Keywords, 1983)

Nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language. It is relatively easy to distinguish three areas of meaning:

- (i) the essential quantity and character of something;
- (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both;
- (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings.

Yet it is evident that within (ii) and (iii), though the area of reference is broadly clear, precise meanings are variable and at times even opposed. The historical development of the word through these three senses is important, but it is also significant that all three senses, and the main variations and alternatives within the two most difficult of them, are still active and widespread in contemporary usage.

# Pride and Prejudice

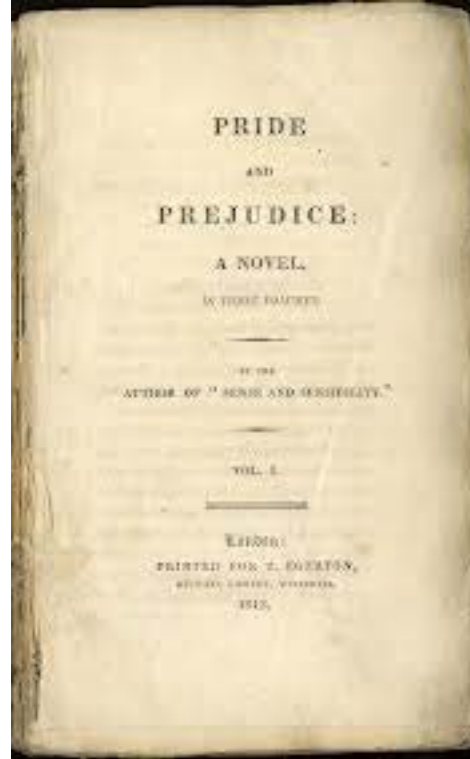
1813:

Very contemporary feel;

So different than  
previous sentiments  
about nature:

is this a RECOVERY  
NARRATIVE?

What is 'nature'?



- a. Beauty of tanned skin
- b. Beauty of body in Nature





**John Gast: 1872**



Grand Canyon of Yellowstone:  
Native Americans Expelled 1870s

Teddy Roosevelt in Yellowstone



# 'Nature' of Progress: Colonialism and Waste Lands



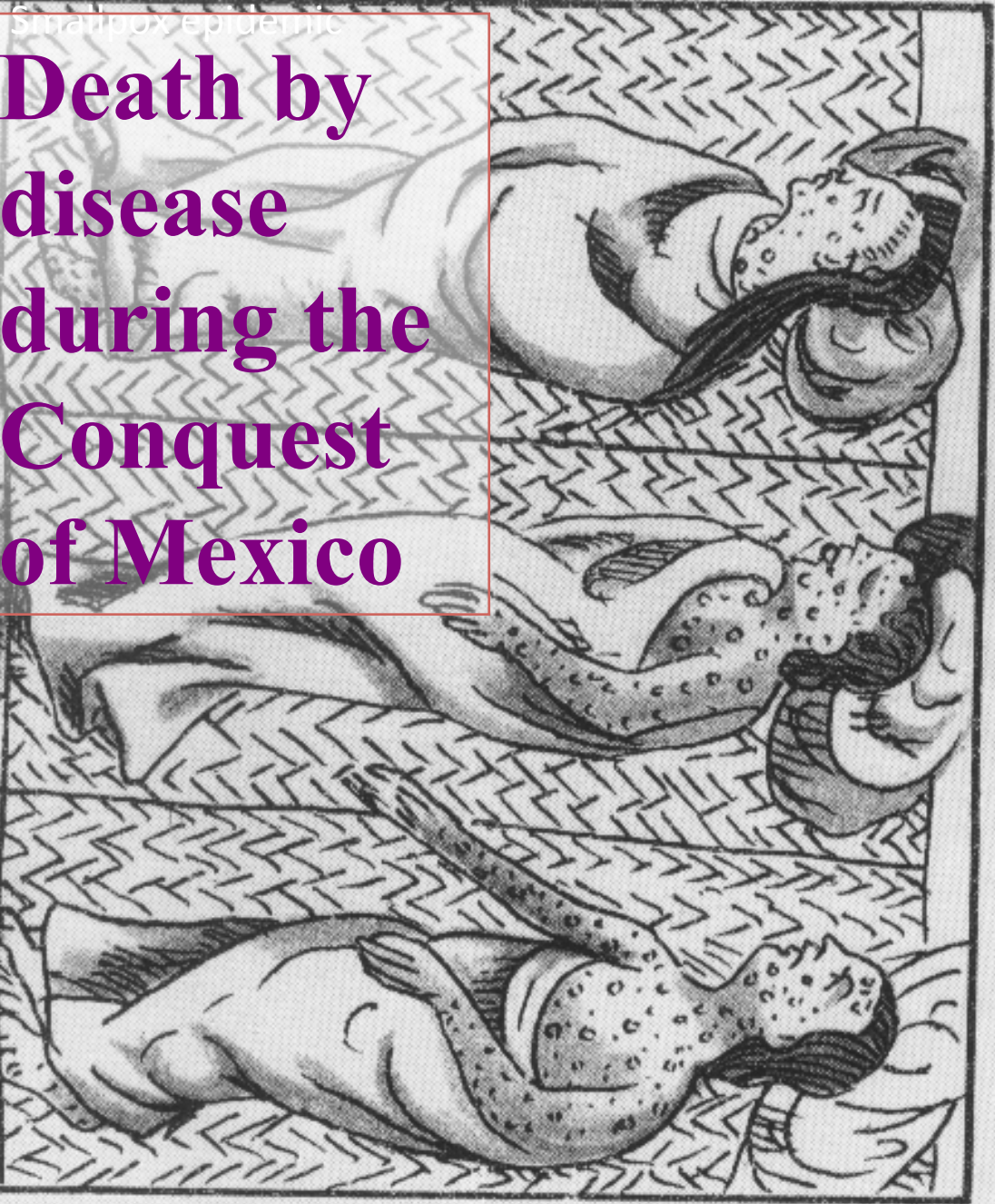
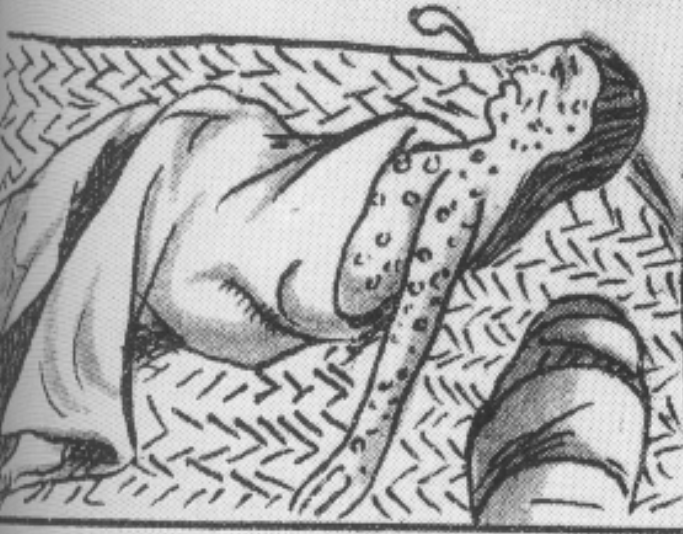
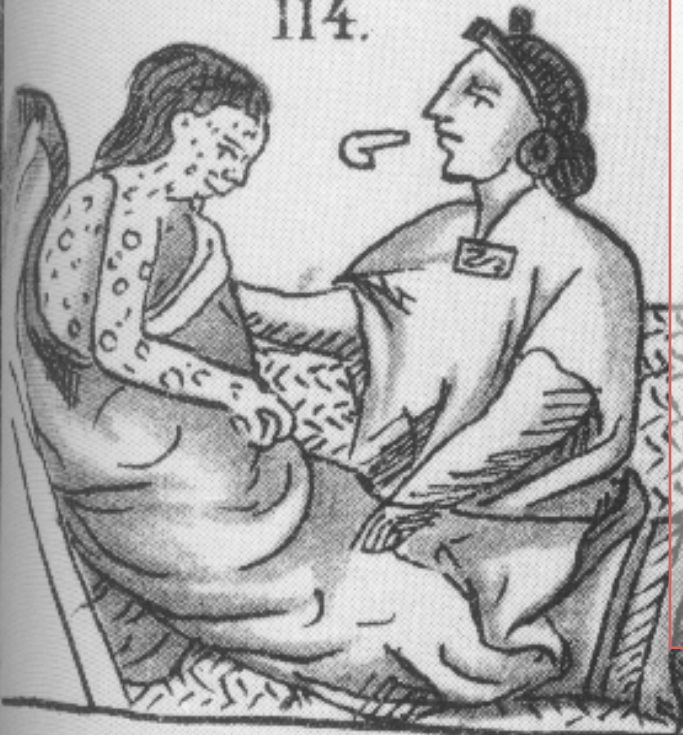
Jared Diamond  
*Guns, Germs and Steel*

- *Narrative:* Conquest was 'natural' because of the development of Western Culture with animals, steel, etc.
- Mexico as Example: It is NOT TRUE that guns, germs or steel won the day
- Politics won: 400,000 Tlaxcaltecan warriors teamed up with Spanish to defeat Aztecs
- Consequence: Colonialism is about politics, political decisions, and greed – nothing 'natural'

114.

Smallpox epidemic

# Death by disease during the Conquest of Mexico







## Attack on Tenochtitlan

- First visit
- Noche triste: Spanish Lose
- La Malinche: Indian princess helps out Spanish
- Tlaxcala: Spanish team up with Tlaxcaltecas
- Diego de Velázquez
- March on Tenochtitlán

Colonialism produced Waste Lands as Colonists redefined American lands as unproductive

This ALSO however occurred in England with 'enclosure' of the commons

1. Peasant farming made use of many common areas that were jointly managed
2. Estate holders 'enclosed' those lands, bringing them into the estate and 'improving' them – they also forced peasants off the land:  
*e.g., Austen Pride and Prejudice: Darcy's estate description*
3. These lands were rented to 'yeoman' farmers who produced for industrial markets
4. Landlords profited: Much migration to the Americans was driven by this enclosure



**Paradox: imposing our presence in nature?  
Returning to nature *via* domination  
'Eden Lost' as social Narrative: Destroying Eden to Reclaim it?**



**Jaws: An earlier vision of nature & technology**

# Contemporary Narrative of 'Return to Nature'

## (Return to Eden)

In Avatar,  
Our ability  
To relate to  
nature is  
mediated  
through  
technology





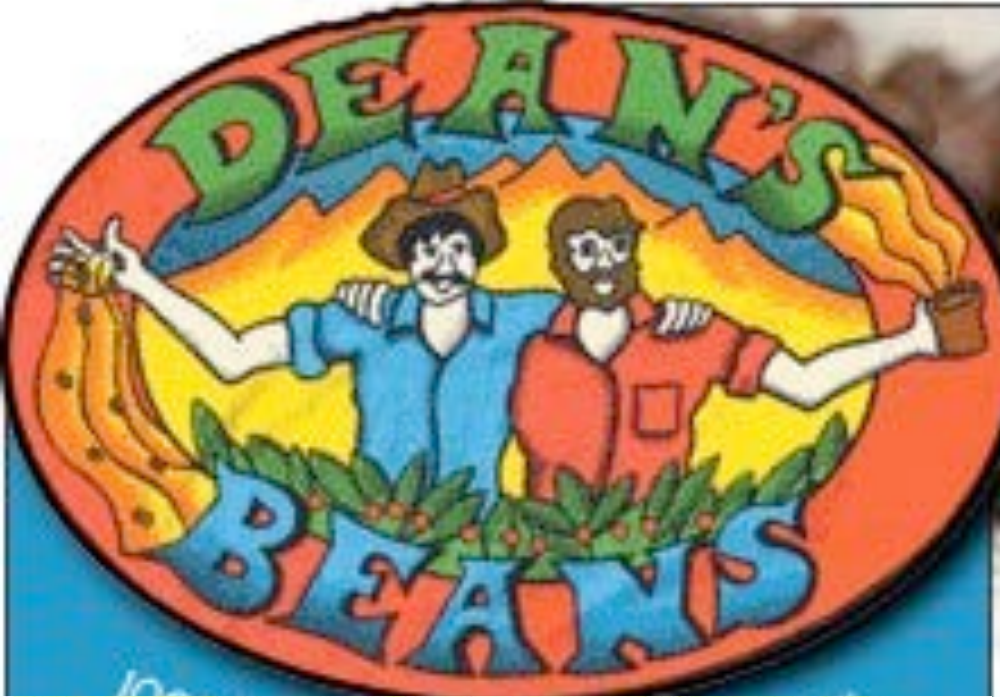
Recovering nature  
Through marketing?



Environmentality: Marketing the environment as a product

‘The Number is the Beast’:

Certification & Organic Coffee:  
A Political Economy



Juan Valdez. Coffee grower. Trendsetter.

**Women in organic  
coffee:  
What impacts?**





Saving People,  
Saving Nature

"I was giving a talk to a new group of [certified] organic producers. I was explaining how they would have a producer number.... Suddenly an elderly individual stood up and said that the 'number is the beast'. At first I didn't understand, but then I realized that he was talking about the beast in the bible, that he thought that [the producer number] was some terrible thing....

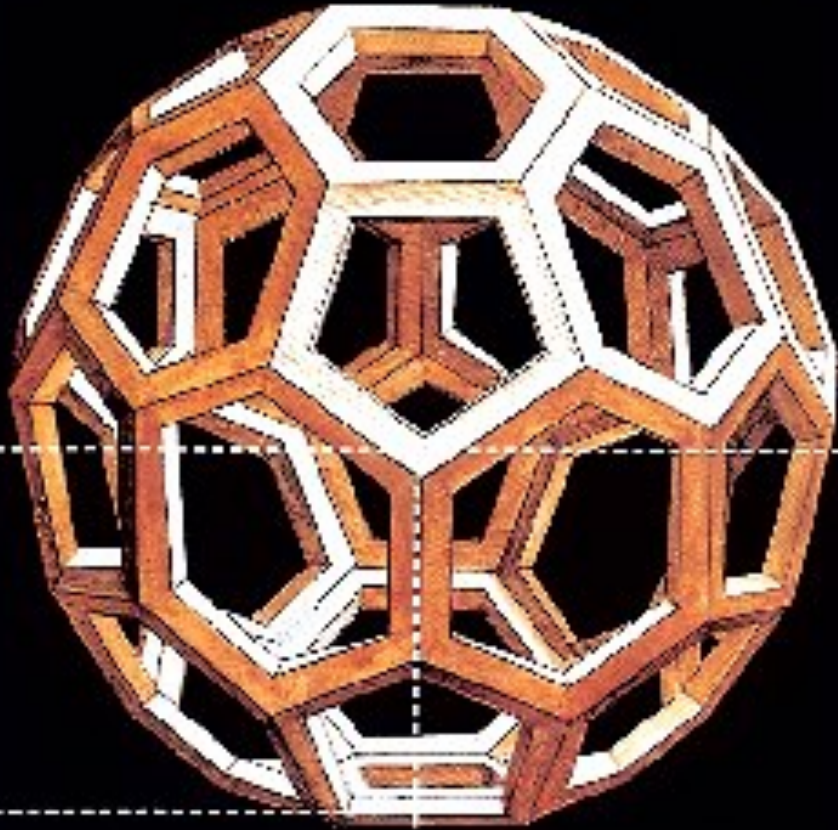
Now you see what we [inspectors] have to confront."

—Organic Certification Inspector 22 July 2000

[certification] is a class of ecological neocolonialism...."

—Organic extension agent 31 January 2000

# Harmony for Prosperity



World Standards Day  
14 October 2011

Image courtesy of ISO/IEC

International  
standards

Creating  
**CONFIDENCE**  
globally



World  
Standards  
Day

14  
October  
2011

# Fin

