Non-Western Views of Nature
But First: Non-Human Views of Nature?

Should Environmental Justice include Non-Humans?
All non-humans? Sentient non-humans?

E.G.,
- As above, Beluga Whales at SeaWorld
- Gorillas in the zoo
- Dolphin Killing via nets or slaughter
- Use of Chimpanzees as laboratory animals in drug- or psychology testing
Environmental justice for non-human species, particularly sentient species like dolphins or great apes:
Sympathetic to Idea, however, a few things to consider

1. The class is built around identifying a concern that is amenable to devising a conservation strategy: so, is the issue a conservation-related issue to which we can apply conservation strategies? Or is it rather a moral concern, something like stopping meat eating that would be great but isn’t really open to a multi-prong conservation strategy as such (unless we are eating an endangered species)

2. To what degree is it a ‘global’ issue in the economic and political sense? While dolphin killings, whaling, etc. involve multi-national political struggles, other issues may not

3. To what degree can we identify a specific place, outside of the US and EU, where people are involved in violating the rights of the species?

4. Do animals ‘work’ like people? Alligator baiting...
Differences between western and non-western views of nature

Vandana Shiva:
- Nature and Systems of Knowledge
- Dominant Versus Local

**Dominant:** Colonial India/Capitalist

**Local:** Colonized; Indigenous/Commons
When did we begin to think of nature in commodity terms?

1. Cronon: Chicago, Nature’s Metropolis
2. Neumann: Colonial Administration of Nature

2. The experience of contemporary society: Phantasmagoria
Commodifying nature makes it an object of exchange

We view the commodity in terms of its exchange value; we no longer think of its use-value in nature or of the labor used to produce it.
From Shiva: *Monocultures of the Mind*

**Local Tree:**
Native species used in Food and Forestry

**Eucalyptus Tree:**
(forestry species used in to replace native forests for industrial wood production)
Tepetotutla: Mexican example of indigenous views of nature:

- Nahuales: nature spirits and hybrid human/non-human creatures – natural caprice reflects human caprice and envy
- Springs and eggs: human geomancy and belonging: Relational language and system of place names: system of orders

Toltec Nuahual
Feng shui/Daoism
Yin/Yang: ideas of harmony and balance through the person: division
Qi/Ch‘i: the assembly and disassembly of the one energy that runs through the body and world.
Acupuncture: Correct management of bodily energy, unblocking flows
Geomancy: management of the spatiality of things in order to enhance prospects for happiness and prosperity

Gardens, rocks and places for balancing body and nature
Western Ideas of Nature – In Comparison

i. Fall from Grace – cast out of Eden

ii. People against nature – frontier conquest

Return to Nature

Dominate nature

Two ideas: Paradoxical, Contradictory, at odds, a source of anxiety?

Shiva: The two ideas are not at odds: both RETURN and DOMINATION embrace a Western notion of separation between people and nature.
Forward to Avatar: Seeking a better way to relate to nature...
(This also revisits the colonialism story...)
Conclusion:

1. Remaking of the human-nature relationship since 1800 in western society
   i. Contradiction of ‘edenic return’ and ‘expropriation’ of nature
   ii. Idea of resolution through consumption: are we attempting to ‘buy’ our way back to Eden?

2. Alternative ideas of nature persist
   i. Challenges to commodification of nature in the West: farming/hunting
   ii. Non-Western views of nature persist — both in west and beyond
Contemporary Environmental Policies

1. US: Clean Water Act; Endangered Species Act
2. International: Kyoto Protocol; Basel Convention; Global Conservation
Native American views of Nature:

Nature has a subjectivity, humans can become objectified by nature: (that is, nature ‘punishes’ or helps people)

Differences across cultures with respect to the degree to which nature exhibits a ‘rational’ or calculative reason

Differences with respect to the constitution or location of nature:

  Animist: natural spirits embedded in each living thing

  Deities/Gods: The coyote trickster, of caprice, of graceful power
Ideas of nature in non-western societies

- Not Cartesian: nature is not an ‘object’ separate from the human subject. Unity of human/nature
- Nature has a subjectivity
- Western ideas about non-western societies