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Tapestry of the Commons

How Water, a Natural Common, Is Impacted by the Cultural Commons

From the beginning of the planet, water was held in common by all the creatures who depended on it for life. As humans began to settle in one place, always near the natural common water, culture began to impact how water was thought of, used and allocated.

Cultural Common	Action	Result
LANGUAGE	we named water: streams, springs, oceans, rain, snow, marshes, fresh, salt, potable, non-potable	separating parts from the whole cycle
NUMBERS	we began to measure water and eventually to meter and charge for it	giving it a monetary value and making it unaffordable to many
KNOWLEDGE	clean drinking water sought, ways to detect water underground, how to save and use water for irrigation, how to control flooding	water becomes less a force of nature and more a resource for humans
HISTORY	records kept of droughts, floods, rainfall, water claims, vernal pools, tribal rights, wars for water	methods developed for "ownership" and control, water as a border
ART	the beauty, the power of nature, fear of water, fountains, Venus, water stereotyped and objectified.	once water is an object, it is easier to be bought and sold
LITERATURE	myths and tales involving water, Neptune, sea monsters, mermaids, Moby Dick, adventure on the seas, water...the unknown	once feared, it is easier to see the need to tame and control
TRAVEL	water is a major way to travel, move goods and discover new lands	water is used to colonize, and is itself colonized/privatized in new lands
RULES	who can use this water, navigate this river, fish this sea, cross this mote	water rules established, water claims, fishing rights
TOOLS	water wheel, steam engine, flush toilets, filtration systems, dams for power and control	water becomes a tool, controlling water is power
TRADITIONS	baptisms, holy water, ritual washing, rain dances, water to wine, walking on water	water is a symbol of purification and mans triumph over the natural
SOCIETY	water allowed cities to exist, sanitation, fire protection	municipal water systems, pollution, homes built in wetlands, sprawl
GAMES	water sports: swimming, surfing, boating, water and snow skiing, hot tubs, scuba, fishing	water valued for recreation, further privatization and gentrification
BREEDS	or brands/ types of water: mineral water, healing waters, spas, bottled waters, distilled	more privatization, commodification
MEDIA	areas promoted for their water assets, bad news and disasters exploited	areas gentrified, market solutions, meme: tap water bad / bottled good
BUSINESS	water became essential to all sorts of business: agriculture, shipping, grinding flour, travel, textiles, paper, mining, building homes, energy	water is itself big business, controlled and sold by multi-national corporations under trade agreements