

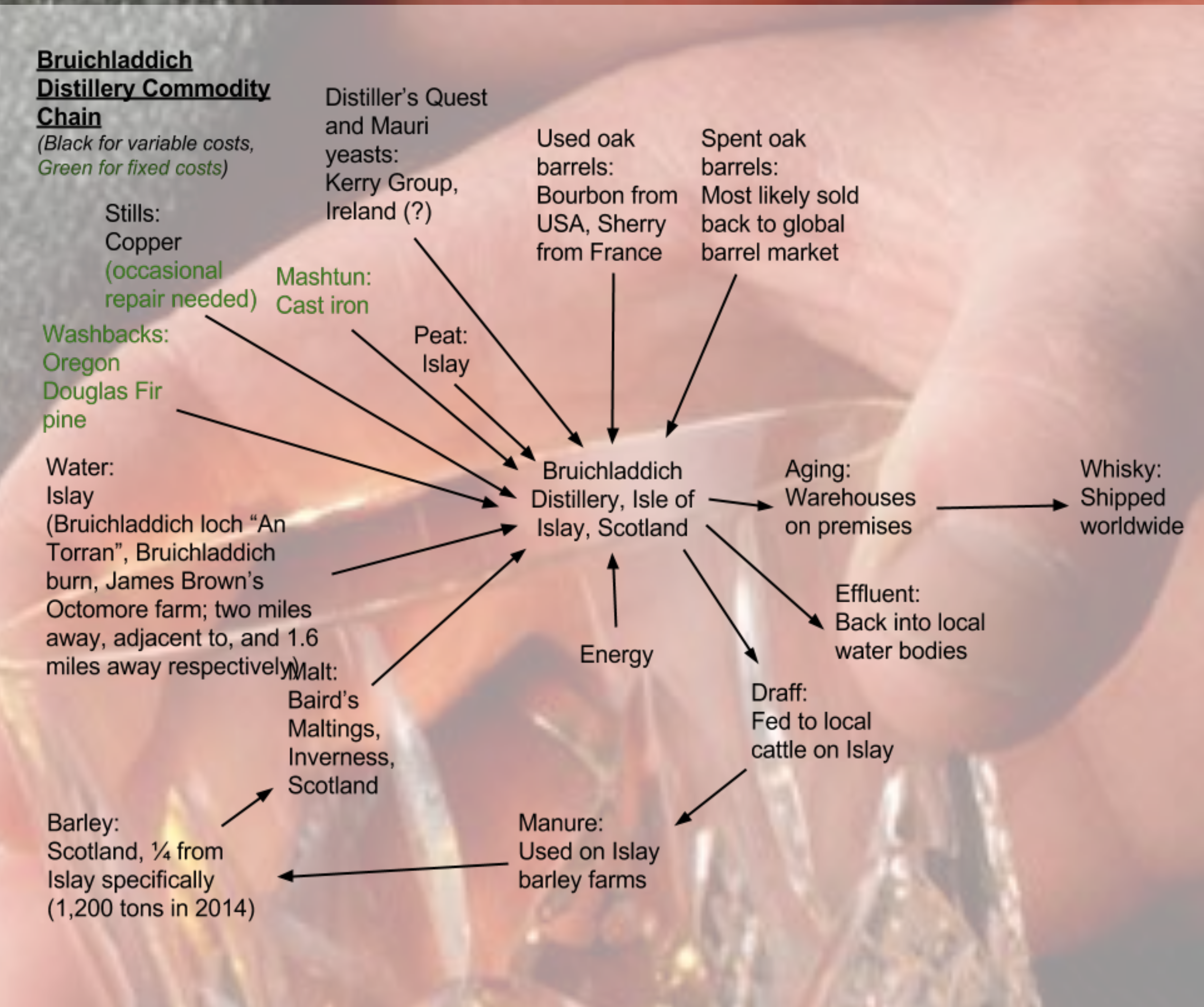
Scotch Whisky, Sustainability, and Commodification of Nature & Culture

Abstract

My research aims to dig into the relationship between Scotch whisky production, sustainability and espousal of an environmental ethic, and commodification of nature and culture. This means exploring questions regarding motivation of the industry and its representative body the Scotch Whisky Association. Further questions of the physical and socio-cultural effects of the commodification of nature and culture are also postured in this process. Included is an exploration of semiotics, and the relationship between the sign and myth of whisky—further who arbiters of cultural and expert knowledge for whisky are that participate in constructing whisky as a sign. In exploring who constructs whisky, a look at who constructs the idea of sustainability also becomes relevant. Neoliberal economic theory is compared and contrasted with modern environmental theory, and whisky distilling industry standards in order to posit whether or not the three can holistically cooperate to maximize economic, environmental, and industry ideals of success. Commodity chain tracing proves one succinct method of exploring the relationships and values in question. This means exploring issues relating to the sourcing of inputs, energy use, and the creation of externalities.

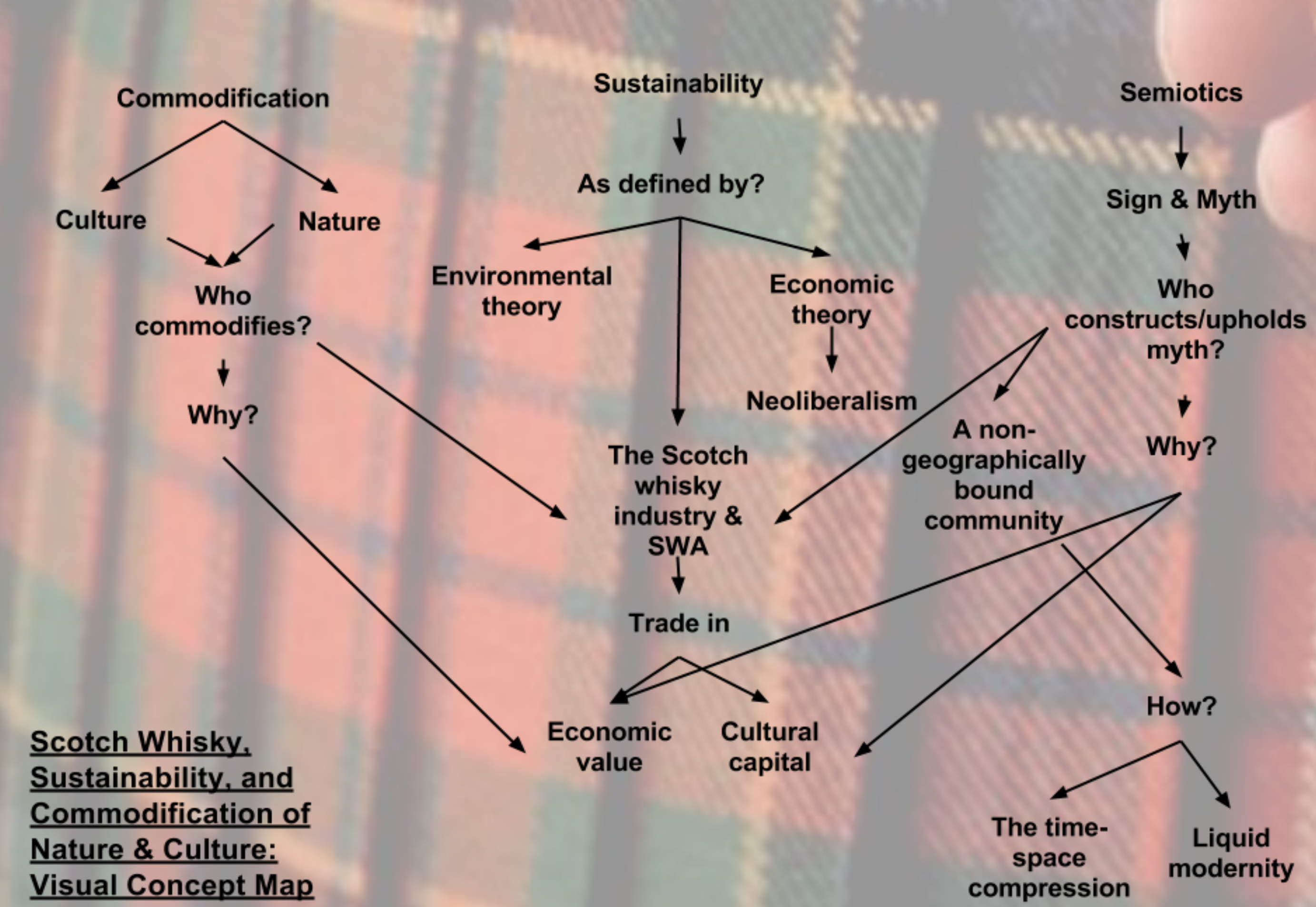
Research Question

For what purpose, and in what manner, does the Scotch whisky industry commodify nature and culture in the construction of the sign/myth of Scotch whisky, and how does this inform the way the industry defines sustainability?



Methodology

- Literature review
- Commodity chain construction
 - Bruichladdich
- Theory analysis and application
 - Economics
 - Ecological Economics
 - Environmental Economics
 - Neoliberalism
 - Environmental Studies
 - Marxism
 - Sustainability
 - Semiotics
 - Sign
 - Myth
- Informal interviews with industry participants
 - Arran Distillery
 - Bruichladdich Distillery
 - Laphroaig Distillery
 - Lagavulin Distillery
 - Chivas Brothers Ltd.
 - David Mahoney: Wine & Spirits Reviewer
- Case studies
 - The Spice Tree Whisky
 - McCarthy Whiskey



Selected References

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Scotch Whisky & Semiotics



- Signifier: the physical whisky bottle
- Signified: the concept/idea of whisky
- Sign: signifier and signified combined
- Myth: pleasure, drunkenness, tradition, luxury, manhood, Scotland

Conclusion

Due to the nebulous meaning of the term 'sustainability', true sustainability can never be achieved, only sustainability as defined by one stakeholder or another. The Scotch whisky industry, as self-policed by the Scotch Whisky Association, can surely remain economically successful; this is due to its power over the myth of Scotch whisky, and its strong belief in the Triple Bottom Line. This neoliberal attitude functions in the current global economic paradigm because it exists within its confines. As long as 'sustainability' is defined within this framework, the industry will deem itself a success. However, due to the endemic flaws of capitalism, sustainability remains void of any true meaning--simply a vehicle for capitalist ventures to use to promote their own growth. Whisky and Scotland itself become commodified and mythologized in order to create and sustain cultural capital and economic value--to support the neoliberal vision of Scotch whisky.