

Scotch Whisky, Sustainability, and Commodification of Nature & Culture

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Glossary of Terms

Commodification: the transformation of good/services, ideas, and entities into a commodity for valuation and sale in the market (Marxist interpretation)

Ecological Economics: “refers to both a transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary field of academic research that aims to address the interdependence and coevolution of human economies and natural ecosystems over time and space” (New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics); a stronger focus on modeling than Environmental Economics; generally considered to no longer be an active field

Environmental Economics: a subset of traditional economics that focuses on applying cost-benefit models to environmental resources, environmental quality, environmental services, and their allocation

Ecological Marxism: a critical view of capitalism; capitalism undermines the environment as it grows, exposing capitalism's systemic flaws; market uses up environmental resources, causing market to fail; commodification of nature leads to failure of market and the destruction/mismanagement of resources

Ecological Socialism: elements of socialism (means of production public not private) combined with a focus on restoring the commons; belief that capitalism is the cause of widespread social and environmental disempowerment, war, and poverty due to capitalism's goals of globalization and imperialism

Liquid Modernity: the shift from 'solid modernity' to 'liquid modernity' instead of the shift from modernity to postmodernity; highlights the transient nature of the current world, and the devaluation of place-based experience (Zygmunt Bauman)

Marx's Contradictions of Capitalism: 1. Capitalism undermines workers 2. Capitalism undermines the environment

Myth: a second-order system of semiotics; an extended metaphor; "[myths] express and serve to organize shared ways of conceptualizing something within a culture" (Daniel Chandler)

Neoliberalism: the idea that an economic system characterized by deregulation, privatization, and free-market ideology is the solution to a host of problems including social and environmental justice issues

Post-Environmentalism: the idea that instead of rejecting the technologies believed to have caused our current environmental crises, we should accept them and use them to ameliorate these same problems (Love Your Monsters)

Postmodernity: the time period after the modern era wherein the modern search for meaning becomes irrelevant; everything is meaningless and technology/globalization add to an increasingly nonlinear idea of time and identity

Sustainable Development: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (International Institute for Sustainable Development/ 1987 Brundtland Report)

Sustainability: the endurance and ability to replenish of systems, processes, and resources (each actor in my thesis, and indeed the world, defines sustainability differently)

Sign: the combination of the signifier and signified make up the sign; can be anything that ‘stands’ for something else

Signifier: “the *form* which the sign takes” (Chandler)

Signified: “the *concept* it represents” (Chandler)

Signification: the relationship between the signifier and signified

Time-Space Compression: the shrinking distance between people, places, and concepts (Doreen Massey)

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?

Key Questions

- How does Scotch whisky commodify nature and culture, and what does this mean for the industry's environmental, economic, and socio-cultural sustainability?
- How does the Scotch whisky industry interact with neoliberalism; does the industry inhabit Marx's Contradictions of Capitalism?
- What has driven the industry-wide motivation for sustainability and environmental concern; this question proves especially salient considering that the trend ranges from distilleries directly employing only six people³ to those behemoths such as Pernod-Ricard and Diageo who employ thousands and hold several whisky labels in their portfolios?
- Scotch whisky proves not only a physical export and an enjoyable drink, but a cultural artifact imbued with meaning; where does said meaning come from, who assigns it, and how does this reflect the idea of cultural commodification; how does the commodification of nature play into the physical construction of whisky?
- Who are the arbiters of expert knowledge in the Scotch whisky industry, and how does the time-space compression affect this community; who are the arbiters of expert knowledge in the Scotch whisky industry, and how does a semiotics analysis of the sign of whisky involve this community?

- How does whisky inhabit place/space; does whisky have terroir, and what does that mean?

Methodology

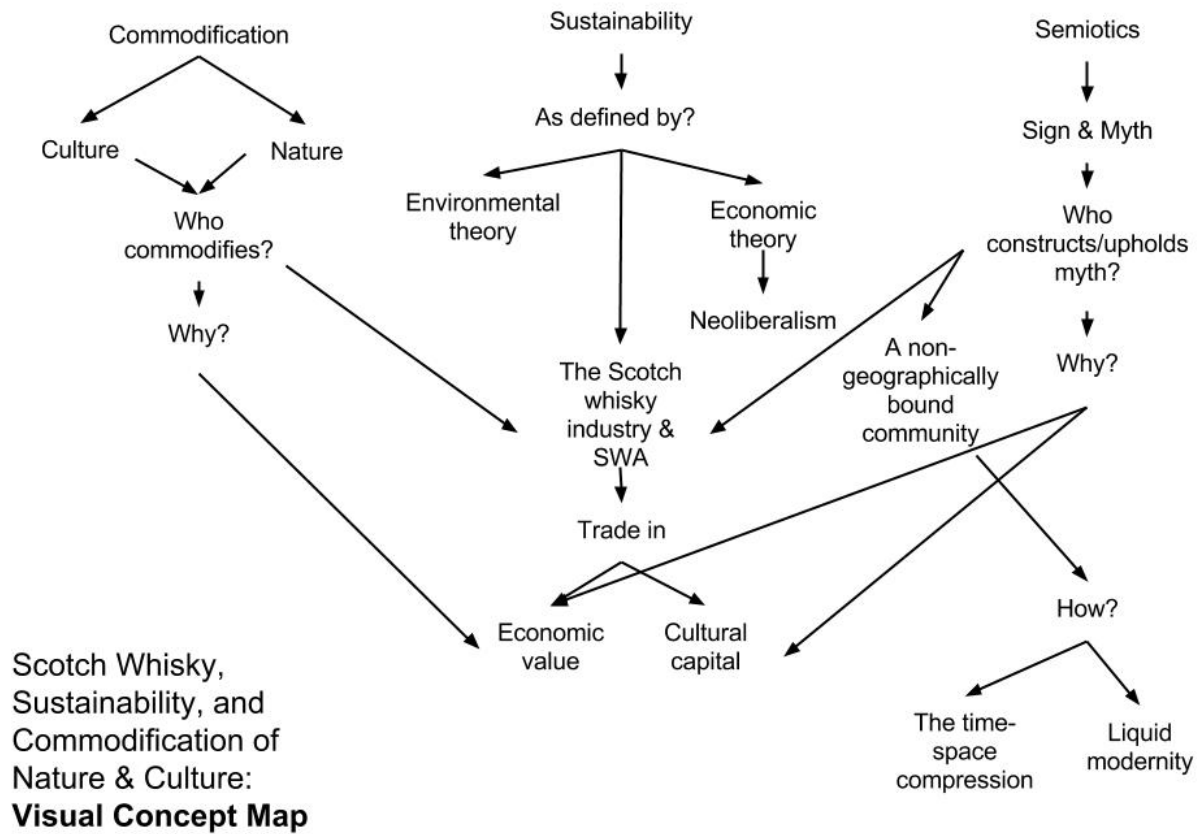
My literature review and theory application and analysis was my primary source of methodology. In order to answer my guiding questions, I reviewed literature regarding environmental and economic theory and applied those concepts to the specific case of the Scotch whisky industry. This led to an exploration of semiotics analysis and application. After determining the importance of the semiotics ideas of 'sign' and 'myth' I then postured that dissemination and upkeep of the myth of Scotch whisky was primarily done by both the Scotch Whisky Association and a non-geographically bound group of whisky enthusiasts connected through the myth of whisky, and communicating through the internet. A consideration of the cultural capital and economic value held by the myth of Scotch whisky led to an analysis of how that value was expressed. Case studies of The Spice Tree Scotch whisky and McCarthy American whiskey served as proof of both the real economic value of whisky, as well as the more conceptual cultural capital of whisky; The Spice Tree proved representative of the power the SWA has over tangible industry product in an effort to maintain the value of the myth of Scotch whisky, whereas McCarthy whiskey proved representative of the economic value available to those who embody the myth of Scotch whisky successfully. This economic value exists within the framework of neoliberal economics and as such an analysis of the ethos of neoliberalism proved important. This value within this system requires commodification of

nature and culture. An analysis of Marxist literature regarding commodification was applied to the Scotch whisky industry. A compare and contrast of 'sustainability' as broadly defined by environmental theory, neoliberal economic theory, and the SWA was done.

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 signifier and signified that make up the sign 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 responsible sourcing of second-use American and European oak barrels for aging, preservation of peat bogs necessarily used in the making of peated malt whisky, disposal of effluent and draff created in the distilling process, sourcing of the barley and yeast used in distilling, copper for still construction and maintenance, and inputs necessitated by the packaging and global distribution process.

Conceptual Outline



Introduction

The myth of Scotch whisky, and indeed Scotland itself, is intoxicating. It is easy to get swept up in. It is easy to get swept up in from an armchair in your living room as you sip your favorite dram, from the myriad chat rooms and websites devoted solely to exploring every nuance of the spirit, and from the countless Scotch whisky ‘experiences’, visitors centers, gift shops, and distillery tours that are heavily sprinkled throughout Scotland. The dram and its community of myth and myth-makers proves nothing but attractive to the untrained eye. However, love and understanding are separate phenomena; it continues to be my love of Scotch whisky and whisky culture that prods me forward in my search for their understanding. Even more than understanding, I have aimed to take a critical eye to Scotch whisky.

This thesis thus aims to explore the Scotch whisky industry in relation to sustainability and its many definitions, and the commodification of nature and culture. This breaks down to exploring definitions of the term ‘sustainability’ in economic theory, environmental theory, and as defined by the Scotch Whisky Association (as an industry mouthpiece). Consideration of neoliberalism and modern environmental theory are taken into account as well. In the exploration of commodification of nature and culture, Marxist theory and motivations behind commodification play in; sociocultural detriments of commodification prove relevant. An exploration of semiotics and myth as they relate to meaning-making in the Scotch whisky community proves salient, as does an exploration of the time-space compression and liquid modernity as they relate to the formation of these communities and their lack of geographic boundaries.

As one facet of Scotch whisky unfolds, another begins to unfold within it, providing for a complex, scaffolding set of relationships and connections that seemingly never ends. The myth of Scotch whisky that is popularly disseminated and strengthened through repetitive narrative reinforcement is not the true story of Scotch whisky. Taking the myth at face value simplifies and devalues what is actually going on with Scotch whisky, however socially and economically valuable that myth may be. While a critical lens may shatter the facade of the myth, it is wholly necessary for a nuanced understanding of the sign, the myth, the community, the industry, the culture of Scotch whisky.

Commodification of Nature & Culture

Commodification of Nature

The commodification of nature, or rather of land, natural resources, flora & fauna, and further aspects of the biophysical environment is to be expected when considering capitalism from a Marxist point of view. Karl Marx tells us broadly that commodification is the transformation of good and services, ideas, and entities into a commodity for valuation and sale in the market. Thus, “all commodities are measured by money and have exchange value,” and “it is this reduction of potential value based on use to one of exchange value that is at the essence of the commodity form” (Gottdiener 2000). While we may not normally think of clean air, fresh water or animals as commodities, in order for neoliberalism to function (and indeed capitalism *en toto*) this approach is deemed necessary. Indeed, “capitalist nature may be provisionally defined as everything that is not produced as a commodity but that is treated *as if* it is a

commodity” (O’Connor 1998). Karl Polanyi, father of welfare economics, also saw land (and labor) as “make-believe or fictitious commodities,” for “land and labor are not produced as commodities in accordance with market forces or the law of value” (Ibid). The modern global economy would not survive one more second if not for its incorporation of these ‘make-believe’ commodities borne from the biophysical environment, namely resources. Again Marx argues that “production not only creates the objects that satisfy needs but also the needs that the objects satisfy” (Ibid). In a world where our global economic system relies so heavily on the commodification of resources that it must create demand and desire for commodification, “commodity production as a whole today replaces ‘the world of durable objects’” (Bauman 2000). This adds to the sense of a toss-away, impermanent culture. The cultural instability caused by the complex nature of modern economics is echoed in many strains of popular thought within social theory.¹

This demand is constantly renewed as commodities themselves are designed to be only fleetingly satisfactory or useful. The cycle of demand and obsolescence and again demand is required for the continued growth of neoliberalism, for “built-in physical obsolescence expands the replacement demand for consumer products. Built-in cultural obsolescence is based not only on the need to expand markets but also status competition which sets the stage for limitless product model and style changes” (O’Connor 1998). This sentiment echoes social theorist Zygmunt Bauman’s construction of liquid modernity in which the worth of commodities is increasingly fleeting and only superficially satisfying. Bauman explains that liquid modernity denotes living “in a world in which deliberately unstable things are the raw building material of

¹ Later sections regarding liquid modernity and the time-space compression illuminate just this thought

identities that are by necessity unstable” (Bauman 2000). Why consideration of the means of capitalist commodification of resources proves especially salient can be seen in the following statement by geographer Neil Smith: “as the premise of further capitalist expansion, uneven development can be comprehended only by means of a theoretical analysis of the capitalist production of nature and space” (Smith 2008). Neoliberal economic thought then spreads past the limits of its discipline, cascading through social theory, environmental studies, global development, geography, and so on and so forth.

Commodification of Culture

The commodification of culture proves somehow even less tangible than the commodification of nature. The transformation of resources into commodities may sometimes yield physical products, whereas the transformation of culture into commodities can prove far more conceptual. The sale of culture may take the form of trinkets or the representation of culture in products, but the culture itself cannot be sold, by strict definition, rather weakened and devalued. The time-space compression has “served to promote the interpenetration and integration of places,” meaning that misinterpretation and flattening of cultures is to be expected more and more as the world hurdles towards inhabiting an ever shrinking global community (Allen and Hamnet 1995).

It is thought that, “the commodification of cultural products may indeed be an exploitive or colonialist misappropriation, but cultural appropriation may also be beneficial to both the source community and the nation as a whole” (Scafidi 2005). Cultural commodification occurs, in part, due to a human want to acquire cultural capital. This interest in acquiring cultural capital via commodified cultural products or tropes, however, can encourage and further catalyze

cultural fetishization and othering. By constructing culture as something to purchase, acquire, or collect, we commit again and again to the capitalist view of culture as commodity. It is increasingly apparent that “consumer society is fetishization writ large” (Gottdiener 2000). Marxist thought aptly notes that “life under capitalism is alienated and dehumanized because all things can be made to exchange for money” (Ibid). The dehumanization of laborers endemic to the Marxist interpretation of capitalism proves eerily similar to the dehumanization endemic to those involved in the time-space compression.

Arguably, even if a community willingly submits to cultural commodification for some form of economic benefit, is it not still harmful simply by the nature of cultural commodification? Choosing to commodify one's own culture does not ameliorate the problematic connotations of the process of capitalist commodification. Willful cultural flattening does not equal equitable or responsible flattening because *it is still flattening, still reductionist*. A further question when considering self-commodification is to whom the profit from commodification flows; “since cultural groups are often loosely organized networks with shifting membership or degrees of affiliation, they tend to lack a single authoritative voice that might channel cultural appreciation or cultural appropriation” (Ibid). In the case of Scotch whisky, the Scotch Whisky Association attempts to take on this normally absent authoritative role; they act as a singular manifestation of a variety of stakeholders in the industry. However, there certainly remains significant concern about the flow of economic benefits to the commodification of Scottish culture by the Scotch whisky industry. Much of the profit of the industry goes to international interests such as distributors, international liquor corporations that only hold a portion of their portfolio in Scotland and are not Scottish-owned, and distilleries that were

historically Scottish-owned but have been recently bought out. Scottish culture, commodified for the sale of Scotch whisky, does not reap the rewards of its own self-commodification.

Considering that the majority of the industry holdings are international, the lions share of the profits goes to international middlemen and corporations, not to Scottish distillers and workers. Many of these same international conglomerates have representatives seated on the board of the Scotch Whisky Association.

The Heritage Industry: Whisky in Context

Commodification: The Dangers and Detriments

As with all of environmental studies, the process of commodifying both nature and culture proves contentious and virtually disentangleable from the actors and processes that make it up. It is readily apparent that “commodities and commodification represent a contentious convergence of economic, social, cultural, political, and moral concerns” (Barham and Lind 2003). We can hardly separate the respective roles of each of these institutions from their participation in the commodification of resources and of the culture of Scotland in the case of Scotch whisky. Whisky’s relationship with resources and with the culture and heritage of Scotland prove primary in the process of whisky making and distribution, but the number of ancillary relationships each of these actors has with the global economy, society, politics, morality and ethics proves endless. The number of relationships each of these actors has is then again amplified by the time-space compression and the ability of infinitely more players to enter into each of these interactions as not just observers but as active participants.

In the case of Scotch whisky, this translates to more and more people having access to the culture of whisky not simply from an observational standpoint, but from the vantage of someone with influence, whether through gaining the role as arbiter of expert knowledge, the role of whisky maker (those newly entering the market as employees or makers of whisky), or simply through neoliberal market participation (supporting social or environmental ethic of whisky by purchasing it continuously with blind faith). As such, the number of people able to possess some sort of knowledge pertaining to whisky and then access influence upon the sign and myth of whisky has grown exponentially, making the issue of parsing out commodification of culture in the case of Scotch whisky all the more difficult.

Classic environmentalism holds that commodification of nature proves detrimental for its monetization of resources. In classical economic theory (and again in neoliberalism), an object/ or resource has essentially zero value if we cannot assign an economic value to it in order to privatize it, which in turn preserves or ‘saves’ it. What this means is that unless we can figure out the functional value of a thing (which in the case of the majority of natural resources and objects is near impossible as many of these things whose use value are not necessarily quantifiable—i.e. clean air, fresh water, tigers), it cannot be assessed and will value zero in the market. Further, in the eyes of neoliberalism, “environmental goods that are not currently valued economically, or are not in some way subsidized by the state, equate to ‘lost income,’ ‘unrealized value,’ or ‘mispriced/underpriced assets’ for nature and people” (Castree 2010). However, economic theory does acknowledge that these resources are very difficult to determine and in turn measure. Indeed, this proves an easy task for no one.

The shared nature of many resources adds to this messy assessment of value demanded by the modern global market. Classic economic theory tells us that in the case of the tragedy of the commons, “the morality of an act is a function of the state of the system at the time the act is performed,” which is given further context with the example of the American bison and its wide scale demise (Hardin 1968). Garrett Hardin, father of *The Tragedy of the Commons*, continues this explanation as follows:

using the commons as a cesspool does not harm the general public under frontier conditions, because there is no public; the same behavior in a metropolis is unbearable. A hundred and fifty years ago a plainsman could kill an American bison, cut out only the tongue for his dinner, and discard the rest of the animal. He was not in any important sense being wasteful. Today, with only a few thousand bison left, we would be appalled at such behavior (Ibid)

This assumption of commons resources is inherently flawed for many reasons, the least of which being the idea that a resource has low marginal value, but high total value if it exhibits scarcity; basic economics tells us that the less we have of something the more it is worth. Thus, the problem actually lies in how resource use is incentivized². However this is a resource-based consideration, when a system-based consideration is far more accurate to the ‘real’ world. Resources do not exist in a vortex, rather are engaged in a complex variety of relationships with other actors and resources. Commodity chain construction is just one example of the manner in which these relationships may be constructed.³

² The water vs. diamonds scarcity example in economics is a salient example of this valuation issue

³ See commodity chain for Bruichladdich

Even ecological economics cannot offer a better, more economically and socially incentivized way to deal with social and environmental inequality and devaluation. Ecological economics as defined by the *New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* “refers to both a transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary field of academic research that aims to address the interdependence and coevolution of human economies and natural ecosystems over time and space” (Palgrave 2008). A significant portion of this may be explained by the trendiness of ecological economics during a certain area within a certain set. Following the spread of popular environmentalism after the 1970’s in the US, ecological economics cropped up as a worthy field of study and consideration. This meant the uniting of environmentalists, ecologists, and economists in an entirely new way. In the past, these actors all saw their field and concerns to be utterly disparate from each other—environment and economics did not consider each other’s systemic functionality and value within their own. More succinctly, “the new *ecological economists* saw the economy as embedded in, and supported by, natural systems; nature was not simply a factor in, but the foundation of, economic activity. By integrating models from ecology and economics, ecological economists sought to provide scientific arguments for preserving the natural world” (Sagoff 2011).

As ideal as this interdisciplinary approach may seem at first, it did not prove a long-term collaboration that resulted in many lasting effects—save for pushing us towards a neoliberal economic approach. Ecological economics “set out to be a redemptive science,” yet failed to remain relevant as time moved on and instead became “trapped in the amber of its mathematical models and conceptual constructs” (Ibid). However, ecological economics did shift the conversation away from neo-Malthusian scare tactics and towards a focus on systems as the

source of market failure and human suffering—as opposed to the claim of neo-Malthusians that a lack of resources was what was going to tear down the framework of modernity and launch us into an eco-dystopian reality. Unfortunately, the connection between economics and ecology could not entirely be bridged. This was due in part to the idea that “ecological economists have argued that they cannot guarantee that growth is sustainable,” and that instead “new technologies will save the day” (Ibid). We can now clearly see this as a reference to the now popularly accepted realm of post-environmental theory. As ecological economics progressed, mainstream welfare economics, in the tradition of welfare economist Karl Polanyi, seeped further into their ethics; this meant that the market no longer fit into nature, but nature into the market. Commodification of resources in an attempt at conservation overtook the field. Although “a few ecological economists chided their colleagues for ‘commodity fetishism’,” the point was too far gone to truly catalyze change and reverse thinking within the field (Ibid).

Ecological economics, as mothballed as it may appear today, continues to reverberate throughout post-environmentalism, neoliberalism, and other approaches to the social and environmental concerns that have come to define this age. The phasing out of this once popular ethic surely serves as a salient warning for those championing post-environmentalism or neoliberalism as the savior of both the market and ecological systems and resources.

Additionally,

Ecological economists today try to put prices on ecosystem benefits and services. This effort by environmentalists is self-defeating. If environmental decisions are fundamentally framed as questions of economic welfare, public officials and the public will opt nearly every time for whatever policy promises more economic growth, more

production, and more jobs. Moreover, in a world where human influence is as ancient as it is pervasive, it may be helpful to recognize that the natural environment where we live is less of an input than an output of economic activity (Ibid)

Despite the flawed legacy of ecological economics, many hold that there is a relatively strong case to be made for the neoliberal economic model and its treatment of environmental policy. Although the originators of neoliberalism did not directly reference its relationship with the biophysical environment, extrapolations have been made in newer neoliberal theory. These posit that neoliberalism deals with social and environmental concern far more effectively than classic economic models. Neoliberalism proves to be an ethic with many facets; Noel Castree claims that neoliberalism encompasses three key aspects: philosophy, program, and practice (Castree 2010). He also notes that, contrary to classical economics, “the neoliberal worldview...is not—despite appearances—fixated on economic liberty alone, although it is emphasized very strongly indeed. Political and civil liberties are featured as well,” which we can surmise means that environmental liberties are taken into account as well (Ibid). However, full participation in the neoliberal framework does entail a certain degree of ‘commodity fetishism,’ as later ecological economists experienced again. Neoliberalism cannot function without assigning economic value to environmental goods, services and resources and systems.

Considering the potential of commodification and value assignment in the eyes of the global economic framework, it cannot be forgone. For “material scarcity is a continual policy constraint; hence, all resources, everywhere and at any time, either are or soon will be private property whose productive potential must be fully exploited” (Luke 1998). Karl Marx’s study of capitalism reminds us that above all else, “capitalism is growth-oriented: it is a process of

commodity production, distribution, sale, servicing, and consumption whose central goal is to realise more wealth (notably, in the form of money capital) than was required to make, move, maintain, sell and dispose of commodities in the first place” (Castree 2010). This certainly holds true for modern neoliberalism as well, although neoliberalism attempts to be more inclusive of the interests of not just the market, but of the socially optimal outcomes of capitalism. However, this does not mean turning a blind eye towards all possible avenues for marketization in the interest of social optimality. It may be true that the “rights of ownership and the use of nature do not necessitate the marketization of biophysical resources, services, or assets,” however is it also true that “once property rights are assigned and legally ‘real,’ the assets owned or accessed should, neoliberals argue, generate a stream of revenue” (Ibid). Thus, the interests of the market likely win over the interests of those who commodify in the name of preservation. This means that we must preserve our resources by commodifying them, further embedding them into the neoliberal economic framework—and yet once this step is taken, neoliberalism would have us simply include them in the market as the next logical step. This proves problematic in a host of different way.

This requirement of commodification of the biophysical environment in order to keep the market fully functioning has ramifications past simply preservationist ethos. The Frankfurt School⁴ posits that “by developing their technological capabilities...human beings have relentlessly extended their domination over nature. But nature reaps its revenge since the domination of ‘external nature’ is accompanied by the increasing domination of ‘internal nature’ (people themselves) and the growing fragility of human existence” (Smith 2008). Full

⁴ The school of social theory and philosophy connected to the Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany. Popularly known for its association with significant theorists such as Jurgen Habermass, Max Horkheimer and others

participation in the market thus engenders a system of disenfranchisement within the market itself; for neoliberalism to succeed, full participation is necessary, and yet it is full participation that, arguably, incites and reinforces alienation.

Taking all of this into account, the case of commodifying culture as opposed to commodifying nature seems even more difficult. In the case of natural commodification, at least there can, in some cases, be observable phenomena; holding with neoliberal economic theory, when a bear is given an economic value it may be preserved, or when a river is given an economic value it can remain free of pollutants. Similarly, they can be sold for profit in a market as long as externalities of sale are abated or ‘paid for’. When a culture is commodified for global distribution there are not directly observable or tangible externalities. The identity of a locale or a people may suffer, their culture appropriated for monetary gain. This can manifest as a cultural erosion of sorts, a misappropriation of cultural artifacts, and consequent weakening of the ties that bind said culture together.

We must then acknowledge that “participation in the heritage industry can be a powerful catalyst for local cultural reproduction, but it also poses a danger to those aspects of culture that natives consciously protect from commodification,” and that this process inherently requires a “process of transforming features of...cultures into alienable products for consumption” (Bunten 2008). In the same way that Marx’s contradictions of capitalism undermine and alienate the worker and so-called nature, cultural commodification alienates the originator of culture from themselves. This means that “by constructing a commodified persona, the cultural-tourism worker can gain control over the product of his labor, namely himself,” however “to the extent that the worker wants to earn a living and the tourism venue wants customers, the worker has

little control over the parameters within which he must present himself; these constraints are manifested as culture in a unifying trope and self-exoticising as the Other” (Ibid).

How then do we deal with the commodification of cultural tropes or artifacts for the direct or indirect gain of that same culture? Further, how can an othered or commodified culture take part in the global marketplace in a positive manner; is this feat impossible? Can cultures be present in the time-space compression without their cultural artifacts being realigned, misinterpreted, or knowingly flattened—all in the name of the success or upholding of the global economic precedent?

Whisky as a Cultural Trope

Broadly, the case of Scottish cultural commodification hits on a plethora of historically contentious issues relating to their participation in the United Kingdom under the historically hegemonic England, and the relationship that Scotland has had with England since their respective nascence, and Scotland’s incorporation into the UK in the Union Act of 1707. Many of the cultural artifacts commonly associated with Scotland have interacted in some significant way with this history. The tartan of Scottish clans, the sheep meandering throughout the highlands, the highlands themselves and their remaining inhabitants—and indeed Scotch whisky—are all salient examples of this. All of these tropes commonly associated with Scotland in the global view have been constructed or significantly affected by England and its relationship with Scotland throughout history. It is important to note that “analyses of the discursive construction of Scottishness identify specific ‘mock-jockery’ narrative content—clans, kilts, tartan, heather and English oppression—alongside more general sociological group identity

formation through reinvention of history, construction of belonging through symbols and community formation,” ought to be considered (Spracklen 2011). It is no secret that this past September 2014 Scotland voted for independence from the United Kingdom and just barely did not win the vote. Scotland remains a part of the UK, but to many Scots’ chagrin; after all, the vote was approximately 45% yes and 55% no. When nearly half of a country is unhappy with their current political state and association, surely there are a wealth of issues relating to this boiling just under the surface. And indeed in Scotland this proves true.

The construction of Scotland within global culture and economy plays along the lines England has been setting for it for centuries. The following examples are simplifications of complex, nuanced histories but worth taking note of nonetheless. The tartan tourists so kitschily purchase on vacation in the form of tea towels and scarves was at one point in Scottish history banned entirely within clans as a means of attempting to staunch inter-clan fighting by the English. They then constructed a Scottish army regiment named The Black Watch that functioned under the command of the greater English army; The Black Watch, who acted as highland patrolmen to a large extent, were the only Scots allowed by the government to wear tartan. The control of heritage artifacts by England continues to be contentious in the example of the tropes of sheep and the highlands. Foreigners think of the North of Scotland to be primarily highlands that house very few people and some seemingly unending number of sheep. What may seem a provincial area now was once the home of many Scots and their clans. The Highland Clearances of the 1700’s were primarily an attempt by the UK government (the UK now including Scotland as of 1707) to maximize profit considering the assets they now reigned over⁵.

⁵ It should be noted, however, that some Scottish landowners also had a hand in these evictions

This meant first ushering out those already inhabiting said area and ushering in an economic asset worth more than Scottish families and their farms: sheep and wool production. As such “the first actions of the government were to destroy the basis of Highland life” (Innes 1991).

Taking all of this into account, the case for Scotch whisky falls into a history fraught with England’s hegemonic disempowering of Scottish tradition. Whisky has been produced in Scotland since the late 1400’s, on varying scales, beginning with very small-scale operations meant for family or community enjoyment. Although not officially legalized until much later, whisky was first taxed by the Scottish government in 1644. The introduction of Scotland into the UK in 1707 led to a series of very unpopular alcohol taxes and consequent riots; the first of these taxes was a general alcohol tax immediately in 1707 and a further malt tax in 1713 (malted barley being one of the main ingredients in whisky). These taxes were instituted due to the burgeoning proliferation and popularity of whisky—and its gradual industrialization. However, the taxes did not succeed in taxing all possible distilling units due to their varying size and geographic distribution. The quality of post-tax industrial whisky fell substantially in tandem with a sharp rise in popularity of ‘bootlegged’ or illegal whiskies (which were theoretically of better quality due to not having to spend money on taxes) (SWA 2012) . During this time, some of the most popular bootlegged whiskies came from the Hebridean isles. These distilleries were small, easily hidden in the hilly terrain, and relatively easily obscured in case of need (i.e. when the taxman came around). According to the Scotch Whisky Association, “by the 1820s, despite the fact that as many as 14,000 illicit stills were being confiscated every year, more than half the whisky consumed in Scotland was being enjoyed without payment of duty” (SWA 2012). Whisky effectively became legal in 1823 with the passing of the Excise Tax (which taxed

distilleries a flat fee of £10 in addition to a fee on each gallon distilled), which staunched illegal distilling and smuggling to a large extent (Ibid).

It should be briefly noted that the rise in popularity of Scotch whisky and its effective legalization in 1823 fall squarely in line with the Great French Wine Blight brought on in Europe in the 1800's by contamination of French vineyards with phylloxera (a wee vine-munching mite from the US that was accidentally brought to Europe). The blight, although not officially begun until the 1860's, boosted the popularity of newly legalized Scotch whisky, helping it to attain industrial production status. The phylloxera epidemic lasted through the start of the 1900's, with incremental progress starting in the 1870's with the grafting of Old World vines onto phylloxera-resistant American vines, and major setbacks throughout, such as downy mildew being brought to Europe from America in the 1880's (Goode and Harrop 2011). This epidemic, while disastrous for decades of wine producers, was a boon to whisky makers; without wine, brandy, and port to drink, consumers looked elsewhere to imbibe. Competition for resources (oak barrels in particular) between the wine and whisky industries would have been reduced as well, allowing for Scotch whisky producers to ramp up production to never before seen levels.

This history cannot be discounted for the very fact that it falls so perfectly in line with the previously discussed cultural tropes and their own stories of interactions with England as a hegemon. The commodification of Scottish culture and heritage cannot be explored without these interactions. The diminutization of Scottish culture by England throughout history is irrefutably important in many ways. England and its proliferation of taxing schemes prove a symptom of this; commodification of Scotch whisky granted them further economic success and

power in the same way that the Highland Clearances did. By disempowering Scottish producers of culture and their cultural icons, England has, historically, gained immensely.

It would be a mistake to claim to understand the complex socio-political environment of last year's vote for independence, and the reverberating effects it continues to have throughout the UK, but the history between Scotland and the greater UK cannot be overlooked. The trend of commodification of Scottish culture via Scotch whisky proves in many ways to be self-directed and self-commodifying, and yet we must examine the history behind the push to industrialize in the first place. This industrialization pushed Scotch whisky from a spirit made at home and enjoyed convivially with neighbors, to one that was known and consumed around the world. The transformation from small-scale to large-scale production and consumption of Scotch whisky pushed the sign of whisky into the international spotlight, and created cause for the myth of Scotch whisky to be formed. The construction of the sign and consequent myth of Scotch whisky requires an examination of the inner workings of semiotics, and indeed the way we conceptualize objects of significance.

The Semiotics of Whisky

A Brief Semiotics Crash Course



via Lagavulin 2015 <http://whiskey.underthelabel.com/l/419/Lagavulin-16-Scotch>

Semiotics is, in essence, the study of signs, which means that “semiotics involves the study not only of what we refer to as ‘signs’ in everyday speech, but of anything which ‘stands for’ something else” (Chandler 2013). This means that signs can take the form of “words, images, sounds, gestures and objects” (Ibid). For our purposes, the words, images, and objects that are the sign for whisky are what matter specifically. The sign itself is made up of two elements called the signifier and the signified. The signifier is “the *form* which the sign takes,” and the signified is “the *concept* it represents” (Chandler 2007). The combination of the signifier

and signified make up the sign; the relationship between the two elements is referred to as signification.

A scaffolding perspective regarding semiotics and the way language constructs things can be found in Roland Barthes' seminal work *Mythologies*, in which he notes that "every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society, for there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking about things" (Barthes 1972). Barthes incorporates semiotics into his theory of the construction of myth, noting that the sign, signifier, and signified are all found in the construction of myth. However, he posits that myth is a second-order system of semiotics, whereas the sign, etc. are first-order. He explains this progression as "that which is a sign [namely the associative total of a concept and an image] in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second. We must here recall that the materials of mythical speech [the language itself, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc.], however different at the start, are reduced to pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth" (Ibid). The value of myth proves incredibly significant, both in terms of cultural capital and realized economic value.

Jean Baudrillard's examination and redefining of the sign also proves incredibly salient. His work claims that "with the planned programming of production, capitalism moves from the production of 'useful' goods and services to the generation of semiotic codes and images" (Baudrillard 1983). Therefore, the focus of our understanding of commodity fetishism today must "shift from exchange values to sign values invested in products as image or symbolic coding, since these modes of coding add value to commodities today" (Luke 1991). On many levels, it is this shift from exchange values to sign values that has made Scotch whisky such a

successful industry. Without the process of whisky's symbolic coding and how exciting and interactive that has been for consumers as well as economically attractive, whisky would not be the cultural and economic behemoth it is today.

However, Baudrillard argues that this process of encoding in order to give meaning to participating in the economy is not one that occurs naturally. We no longer live in the world where "capital only had to produce goods; consumption ran by itself, rather today it is necessary to produce consumers, to produce demand, and this production is infinitely more costly than that of goods" (Baudrillard 1983). Similarly, "as part of the production of demand, Baudrillard argues that the forms and substance of society itself are manufactured to sustain consumption. Consequently, every dimension of social existence today essentially is a complex simulation of reality, designed specifically to sustain the fragile cycles of political, economic and cultural reproduction" (Luke 1991). As such, the market does not naturally call for the whisky industry's outputs, rather the whisky industry must compose the demand for demand. The push for success of the market must come not from the perfect workings of the free market, but from those who require demand in order to exist at all—to save their own place in the market. Commodification must occur in order to supply demand for demand and thus retain a market foothold.

In order to further grasp the weight of Baudrillard's argument, we must clarify the language he uses. Much of Baudrillard's work rests upon this theory of simulacra. Simulacra can be defined as "copies of things that no longer have an original (or never had one to begin with)"; simulation can be defined as the simulation of the operation of an original system or process over time (Goldman and Papson 2012). Barthes describes signification as "the myth itself, just as the

Saussurean⁶ sign is the word ‘or more accurately the concrete unit’” whereas myth itself’s function is “to distort, not to make disappear...myth hides nothing” (Barthes 1972). This proves noteworthy in the case of the self-commodification of the Scotch whisky industry due to the idea that “investment in the sign—in the brand—aims to boost the value of capital via its stock price or its return on investment. In the world of investing, perception is reality—what better tool to mobilize therefore than the simulacra of sign values?” (Goldman and Papson 2013). This proves an incredibly salient point when asking the question of why semiotics matters.

Why Semiotics Matters

The Time-Space Compression, Liquid Modernity, and Heritage

In this construction of signs and myths, we must of course consider those constructing and disseminating the process of the sign and the myth. As global capitalism has taken grip, and neoliberal economics has reigned (i.e. since the industrial revolution, and further—since the technological and social media age), those participating in this process has broadened exponentially. The perpetuation of certain signs and myths has morphed into the widespread availability of interaction in a way that is relatively unprecedented. Now global citizens can participate rather than simply partake in the way signs and myths are formed and disseminated. This is thanks to the time-space compression and its brother liquid modernity. The two act together to catapult a world fragmented by geologic and spatial barriers to communication into the modern era—one characterised by rapid transfer of information via the internet and social

⁶ Ferdinand de Saussure being the father of semiotics and originator of the sign/signifier/signified theory

media. Information is quickly and easily accessible by a greater number of people than ever before.

The time-space compression, or the rapidly decreasing space separating people and ideas, has an inimitable effect on semiotics, and certainly in the case of Scotch whisky within the global market—this rings true. This concept can also be illuminated by the idea that the time-space compression “reflects how various societies have reduced the friction of distance and facilitated interactions among places” (Warf 2011). This means more and more people participating in the same shared global communities and clans of meaning-making. The signs we use are no longer necessarily crafted by small place-based locales, instead by an ever growing community of actors and stakeholders. Thus, community is no longer a physical manifestation involving people and spaces that exist in relative geographic proximity to each other, rather “something that is symbolically constructed, as a system of values, norms, and moral codes which provide a sense of identity to its population” (Spracklen 2011). This means that a community unbound by geographic spatial barriers can inhabit a space-based community that self-selecting members connect to through the myth of Scotch whisky via the internet. The conviviality of sharing in Scotch whisky transcends physical boundaries, now manifesting online in the endless dialogues open to the public on whisk(e)y sites.

Geographer Anthony Giddens’ concurrent theory of time-space distanciation, or “the means by which formerly separate and self-contained systems have come into contact with one another and become interdependent,” fits perfectly into our theory of how the time-space compression affects the sign, myth and community of whisky (Allen and Hamnet 1995). Thus, “the advantage of this approach is that it offers a way of thinking about social life which takes

account of the fact that what goes on often owes as much to those people who are *not present* as to those who are” (Ibid). Although another advantage of viewing communities and relationships in this manner is that “it enables us to think of social life as being unstable and loosely bound,” there are certainly downfalls to this approach (Ibid). Much of the downside of the time-space compression and in turn liquid modernity are aptly characterised by Zygmunt Bauman.

Liquid modernity is a concept constructed by social theorist Zygmunt Bauman that claims that “modern society is characterized by power that has become truly exterritorial, no longer bound, not even slowed down, by the resistance of space” (Baumann 2000). The similarities between the theories of the time-space compression and liquid modernity are undeniable. Bauman, one of the theorists who constructed the idea of post-modernity, later in his work came to the conclusion that post-modernity was not a sufficiently accurate way of characterising the shift into the period after the Modern era. He then argued that a shift from ‘solid modernity’ to ‘liquid modernity’ was more fitting. Bauman argues that liquid modernity may share the same barrier-breaking, empowering nature of the time-space compression, however the ability to reach anywhere anytime has devalued everywhere; as such, “if all parts of space can be reached at any moment, there is no reason to reach any of them at any particular moment and no reason to worry about securing the right of access to any” (Ibid). This cheapening of human interaction is echoed by Doreen Massey, who writes on the effects of the time-space compression.

Doreen Massey prods us to ask “whether our relative mobility and power over mobility and communication entrenches the spatial imprisonment of other groups” (Massey 2006). It is easy to believe that knowledge is power and that the empowerment of the most peoples possible

through the prevalence of the time-space compression cannot possibly be a negative thing with externalities. Yet, as Massey points out, those partaking in the effects of the time-space compression can feel unsettled and in flux; the global community and its concurrent spread of knowledge cannot take the place of a place-based community rooted in cultural security and heritage. The palliative effects of community-based (or rather, place-based) construction of space are rarer and thus more and more important as time lurches forward into the throes of globalization.

As such, the search for “the ‘real’ meaning of places, the unearthing of heritages and so forth, is interpreted as being, in part, a response to desire for fixity and for security of identity in the middle of all the movement and change. A ‘sense of place’, of rootedness, can provide—in this form and on this interpretation—stability and a source of unproblematical identity” (Ibid). With the ‘unearthing’ of these heritages, we must remain aware of the opportunity for cultural commodification inherent in these moments. As the time-space compression draws us together, it provides ample opportunity for the “routinization of cultural representation” that comes with the consumption of culture as a product (Bunten 2008). For, in order for the new global community to partake in myriad and diverse cultural tropes, these must be “packaged according to consumers’ desires” (Ibid). The packaging of culture inherently creates a flattening of said culture. Similarly, “cultural experiences offered by tourism are consumed in terms of prior knowledge, expectations, fantasies, and mythologies” (Craik 1997). The lens used to examine cultures often goes unquestioned, creating ample room for misinterpretation. Considered as such, “tourism becomes part of the trap of consumption, where there is no escape and no freedom other than acceptance of the commercial pact” (Spracklen 2011). What this means is that “there

is no true, authentic tourist experience and no object by which such authenticity could ever be measure” (Ibid). While the insecurity of the time-space compression can unsettle people to the point of usurping another culture in order to find rootedness, some find empowerment in it.

It is arguable that considering the state of modernity within the time-space compression, the process of Scotch whisky can be considered touristic in the way it is constructed and consumed, never mind the considerable amount of actual tourism distillery tours/visits bring into Scotland. Participation in the sign and myth of whisky proves a cultural tour in its own way, albeit a considerably more spatially accessible one. Glocalization⁷ is not entirely at play in the case of Scotch whisky, however the catering to of specific desires proves an important facet of commodifying whisky for successful consumption. Giving consumers access to participation in the process of the sign of whisky is a very attractive offer. This indeed claims to assuage the blind touristic interpretation of Scottish culture via whisky. The exploration and continued construction of whisky by both what are traditionally strictly producers and consumers aids in creating a more nuanced construction and interpretation. As such, “considering a repertoire of identities acknowledges the agency implicit in the construction of the commodified persona. The commodified persona does not blindly accommodate tourist desires. Rather, it represents a give and take between different cultural values attached to cultural representation and transmission” (Bunten 2008). A window into a more ‘authentic’ Scotch whisky experience is one very attractive facet offered to potential consumers of Scottish culture and whisky.

⁷ Glocalization is the catering of internationally recognized products/experiences to local tastes (think McDonalds not serving beef in India, or Nabisco selling matcha flavored Oreos in Japan)

Semiotics and Whisky: Application and Interpretation

Considering the idea that glocalization does not occur especially prominently in the Scotch whisky industry, those wishing to partake in its culture must embed themselves in either the space-based or place-based culture whisky has to provide. Participating in the process of the Scotch whisky sign and myth does not necessarily entail traveling to its place-based construction. The time-space compression has made it so we can participate and perhaps even become arbiters of knowledge in the culture of Scotch whisky without having ever visited its specific place-based culture. The space-based community of Scotch whisky spreads much further than Scotland itself. In this non-geographically bound community:

the emphasis is on meanings that are shared by the population within boundaries raised by the understanding that link the members together...[creating] an ‘imaginary community’, which may be contingent with particular localities, but of which membership is bound only by symbolic boundaries, tacit knowledge and shared meanings...the imaginary community becomes a place for the transaction of meaning, and access is achieved through an understanding of these meanings (Spracklen 2011)

The community exists online—and as such is available to all of those empowered by the time-space compression, those able to contribute to the sign and myth of whisky appear to be virtually limitless. This creates a cascading effect of meaning globally that translates to whisky no longer inhabiting a static sign (either from the perspective of the signifier or signified), but rather that the sign for whisky is a process, constantly in flux, the myth always growing and being reinforced—yet grounded in a place-based heritage locale, wherein visitors do not necessarily need to tangibly interact with in order to partake in.

This space-based manifestation proves important in the case of Scotch whisky due to the idea that, “capitalism has found itself able to attenuate (if not resolve) its internal contradictions for a century...it has succeeded in achieving ‘growth.’ We cannot calculate at what price, but we do know the means: by occupying space, by producing space” (Lefebvre 1991). Although, arguably, capitalism has hardly resolved its internal contradictions—palliated might be a better word—it has certainly grown thanks to the production of meaningful space. Without the limitations of static symbology or strict geographic access, commodification in the name of promoting capitalistic gain has proven wildly successful. Further, “the integration of an erstwhile isolated place of production into a national or international economy, for example, does not alter its absolute location, but in the process of altering its relative location, this act of spatial integration also enhances the realization of abstract labor as value” (Smith 2008). The identification of an Islay whisky as further a Scottish whisky enmeshes its sign into a greater network of myth and symbology; in turn, a whisky from a little island off the coast of Scotland becomes a whisky from Scotland en toto. This proves a part of the universalization of value, cultural and economic, that accompanies the formation of signs that transcend a placed-based identity, instead creating a space within the global community all its own. This created space and inhabited myth have immense value.

We know that “locational advantage should be considered like technological innovation as a source of relative surplus value...individual capitalists are perpetually driven to adopt the most advantageous locations” (Ibid). Considering the effects of the time-space compression, much of Scotch whisky’s locational value exists in a transient state, held in the community of the myth of Scotch whisky. The Scotch whisky sign and myth exist intangibly as a location of

incredible value. By inhibiting and continually building this myth, the whisky industry may capture a significant amount of this value in real economic terms. Myth as a second-order semiotics system creates meaning exponentially, for “commodities are not only the object of human alienation but they are also sign vehicles in the conveyance of social meanings” (Gottdiener 2000). This means that the cultural capital stored in the myth of Scotch whisky equals economic value just waiting to be cashed in on.

Clear Creek Case Study

The Myth of Scotch Whisky and its Value

Oregon-based spirits maker Clear Creek and their award-winning McCarthy Oregon Single Malt Whiskey prove a salient example of just how valuable the myth of Scotch whisky is. In production since the early 1990's, McCarthy has been lauded by a bevy of clout-heavy world famous whisk(e)y reviewers, including the late Michael Jackson⁸, and Jim Murray⁹ as “one of the world's elite whiskies” (Clear Creek 2015). Clear Creek, as a high-end spirits producer, surely knew that the value of the idea of Scotch whisky was worth more to them than the idea of American bourbon. Their other spirits offering range from the \$80 Williams Pear Brandy, which has a whole pear in the bottle, to a selection of ~\$50 grappas made from local Oregon grapes. As such, their customer base is one that has higher end purchasing capabilities; McCarthy whiskey is priced around \$50, but frequently sells out and is highly coveted. Their site claims McCarthy is made in Islay style, complete with a 100% imported Scottish peat-malted barley mashbill. They age in Oregon oak barrels for three years, which is an atypically short period of time for a whiskey of its caliber, yet the spirit continues to be incredibly popular. As Clear Creek notes, “our whiskey would be a single malt Scotch if Oregon were Scotland” (Clear Creek 2015).

It is readily apparent that McCarthy aims to capture some of the market normally captured by Scotch whisky, as their tasting notes are heavily peppered with Scotch whisky references as opposed to being descriptive of the whiskey itself. The site even goes as far as claiming that their whiskey very closely resembles not just Scotch whisky, or even Islay whisky, but specifically Lagavulin. Lagavulin has incredible status within the myth of Scotch whisky,

⁸ The famed whisk(e)y reviewer, not the pop star

⁹ Of *The Whiskey Bible*

and the call to their style imbues McCarthy further the cultural capital endemic of the myth of Scotch whisky. The aim to capture the cultural capital, and more pointedly, the economic value, of Scotch whisky in McCarthy's construction is quite clear. Clearly, Clear Creek believes that the myth of Scotch whisky proves worth significantly more than the myth of American whiskies such as bourbon. It is highly unlikely that McCarthy whiskey on its own, without the dissemination of Scotch whisky myth, would prove as well-known, as imbued with meaning, or as valuable.

Who Speaks for Whisky?

The Scotch Whisky Association and its Role *Self-Promotion or Self-Commodification?*

The Scotch Whisky Association

The Scotch Whisky Association (SWA) is the trade organization that approximately 90% of Scotch whisky distillers belong to. The SWA acts as both a negotiator for the industry in dealings with the government and other regulatory bodies, as well as a promoter of all that is Scotch whisky. They describe themselves as follows: "The Scotch Whisky Association has six departments which fulfil its role of protecting, promoting and representing the industry at home and overseas" (SWA 2015). The SWA is important in that it acts as more than just means of large-scale negotiating, but also as the face of the entire Scotch whisky industry. Broadly, the views of many individual industry components can be surmised by examining those espoused by the SWA. The SWA has extensive clout and as whisky swings into popularity once again, is imposing further regulations of its own. According to one smaller distillery I interviewed, the

SWA used to be relatively hands-on, coming around once every couple of years to check that everything was up to industry standards, but had very recently announced that it would be coming around far more often to keep things up to snuff. This proves indicative of the growing inter-SWA pressure to ensure uniformity of practice and message alike. The commodification of whisky on a broad scale can only be successful if there is a certain level of homogeneity guaranteed within the industry; all Scotch whisky participates in constructing and upholding the sign of Scotch whisky.

One particularly salient example of the Scotch Whisky Association's pressure for industry uniformity of message is Scotch whisky distillers Compass Box, and their 'illegal' Spice Tree whisky. Compass Box, a small brand of blended Scotch whiskies, produces "artisan" whiskies that sell for approximately \$40-300 USD, with their basic blends running about \$50, and receiving relatively good reviews (Compass Box 2009, Master of Malt 2015). Originally released in 2005, The Spice Tree was deemed illegal by the SWA after only two iterations of the spirit. This claim was made on the basis that the whisky did not follow UK laws surrounding Scotch whisky production, meaning as a member of the SWA, they were also actively breaking SWA rules. The illegal acts took place in the aging process, where according to law, only oak barrels may be used as aging vessels and as a means to impart oak characteristics on the whisky. Compass Box was not shy in advertising their variation on this rule, noting that The Spice Tree blend was first aged in new French oak barrels, and then a second time in spent barrels with new oak staves inserted into the whisky as it aged again. They argued that they were simply borrowing a technique popular in the winemaking world (use of staves instead of barrels). This statement is in part true; broadly, international winemaking law allows for use of barrel

alternatives, such as oak staves, chips, or powder. This is due, in part, to the prohibitive cost of barrels (both new and used) and the slow regeneration of both the American and French oak commonly used in both the wine and whisky industries. Nonetheless, the use of oak staves (chips, powders, etc.) continues to be prohibited by law in the production of Scotch whisky.

The fact that both the wine and whisky world require use of oak (wine, to achieve a certain style, and whisky to do the same but also because of strict aging laws), is important to remember in terms of global resource management and competition. Although Compass Box painted themselves as innovators in the world of whisky aging, it is certainly possible that they did not want to pay the high cost required in barrel aging (especially in The Spice Tree case, where the whisky was re-racked into a second barrel, essentially doubling the cost of aging). After being order to cease and desist by the SWA in 2006, The Spice Tree halted production in order to reconsider their aging options, as they believed that their “ability to wage a legal battle versus an entity as well-funded as the SWA was negligible” (Compass Box 2009). Eventually, Compass Box and the SWA came to an agreement wherein their oak staves were replaced with heavily toasted cask heads fitted into older barrels, the purpose of which was to wake up what would be considered a spent barrel¹⁰.

Although from a layman’s perspective one might ask why the shape of the oak involved in the aging process matters (barrels vs staves vs chips vs powders) for whisky specifically, when all forms of oak are allowed in winemaking; oak is there to impart flavor, so why can’t that flavor come from any shape or size of oak? The SWA, and surely much of the Scotch whisky industry, would argue that all of these forms of oak impart different flavors and nuances to the

¹⁰ Oak barrels are not typically used more than a handful of times for aging, depending on the tastes of the master distiller or blender and how well the barrel has held up over time

spirit. Aging whisky in an active barrel is a much different aging whisky in a spent barrel inserted with staves or chips. The shape and form of the barrel itself play an important role in aging; the flow of whisky within the barrel, the ‘angel’s share’ of the whisky that evaporates, and the aging environment that the barrel itself provides are all reasons why active and not spent barrels, and again active barrels and not barrel alternatives prove important. Notably, the SWA argued not for the quality of the whisky, but for the “tradition” of the methodology used in aging (Compass Box 2008). For without the myth and “tradition” expressed in whisky making through the following of strict UK laws defining what Scotch whisky is, the myth of Scotch whisky would prove meaningless; the SWA’s militant enforcement of these laws reinforces that fact succinctly.

The SWA’s Role in Commodification

It is readily apparent that the Scotch Whisky Association is fully invested in the benefits of neoliberalism and willingly commits to its value systems and methods of considering social and environmental issues. Although many would argue that global industry and environmental concern do not typically go hand-in-hand, the SWA surely hopes to quash that notion. In many ways, their approach is pointedly post-environmental. The industry overall has made leaps and bounds in the name of conservation technology and efficiency. Exciting new work is being done regarding engineering more efficient types of distillers yeast that work quicker under higher pressure/heat in an attempt to shorten and make more efficient the distilling process. Energy and water recycling and conservation systems are also experiencing significant progress. New varieties of barley are always being bred for efficiency and hardiness. Draff and effluent are being repurposed in new and more thoughtful ways. Privatization of certain water rights used by

distilleries has driven the production of a water conservation ethic and recycling technologies. Investment in peat by the industry has helped to staunch the use of peat for all other commercial and personal uses save for within the industry; peat is no longer used in commercial fertilizer/mulch or to heat homes. Relatively effective peat protection efforts during the harvesting process has also helped to maintain peat fields and engender peat regeneration. Packaging and waste reduction are not necessarily making noteworthy progress, but are certainly on the docket for future consideration.

It is surely arguable that the whisky industry as a whole proves to be an agent of commodification for economic gain; they appear to be fully invested in neoliberalism. This appears to be working in their favor rather generally, and full participation in neoliberalism by a Scotch whisky industry and the relative success with economic and environmental ‘sustainability’ they’ve experienced is the exception not the rule. Anyone preaching classic environmentalism as the solution to environmental issues would most likely not normally condone neoliberalism as solution to systemic resource depletion. In the case of Scotch whisky, investing in the modern global economic system appears to be helping to assuage issues endemic to capitalism (Marx’s contradictions of capitalism).

Political theorist Timothy Luke has characterized the (at first glance, outdated) environmental policies of Al Gore during his tenure as Vice President of the USA (1993-2001) as a particularly salient interpretation of the way sustainable development continues to be interpreted by those involved in global economic development as well as governmental policy. Considering the face-value clout Gore still has within layman's’ environmentalism, his opined theories are surely still worth considering. His ethos melded ecology, efficiency, and economy

together in apparent seamlessness. His approach, and indeed the approach of overarching neoliberalism posits that “the ecological sustainability of consumption,” can be “remolded into an economic growth ideology,” and “almost magically, accepting sustainable development becomes primarily an economic, and not merely an environmental, calculation” (Luke 1998).

This theory strongly believes that

the initiatives taken by businesses to prevent pollution, reduce waste, and maximise energy efficiencies all should be supported. Ecology can win, but only if it can reaffirm on a higher, more perfect register current premises of technology utilization, managerial centralization, and profit generation. These measures are not taken only to preserve nature, mollify green consumers, or respect Mother Earth; they also must enhance corporate profits, national productivity, and state power (Ibid)

This is exactly why investing in neoliberalism proves to be so appealing to those involved in the industry. The modern educated consumer partaking in luxury commodities (i.e. Scotch whisky) has a vested interest in environmental concerns and so-called ‘sustainability,’ however in order to provide that product to said consumers, industry must participate in forces greater than itself (i.e. neoliberalism) in order to provide that product. It is in the whisky industry’s best interest to totally invest itself in creating a sign and myth that has as much value as possible so as to maximise profit and insure industry resilience. The sign and myth value increase replaces the relevance of the exchange value in the commodified cultural and economic market.

Marxist theorist John Bellamy Foster traces materialism and nature within the writings of Marx, and in this process takes note of theories surrounding and influencing Marx. These shape this strand of learning in noting that “once we recognize that there [historically] is not

necessarily fundamental contradiction between the mere idea of the ‘mastery of nature’ and the concept of sustainability, it will come as no surprise that the notions of ‘mastery’ and ‘sustainability’ arose together in the very same Baconian tradition” (Foster 2000). Bacon, of *New Atlantis* fame, surely espouses the same set of ideas in the fictional Christian, yet science-oriented community of Bensalem in *New Atlantis*. The community, although driven by innovation and science, arguably experience this drive due to certain Judeo-Christian inspirations or foundational morals. Thus, the idea that “it is no accidental occurrence that Baconian ‘improvers’ also included the first advocates of sustainable development,” holds true even in Bacon’s fictionalized utopia (Ibid).

The foothold that mastery of nature via commodification (and our subsequent alienation from it and ourselves, in the Marxist style) holds upon our conception of sustainable development is both long-standing and long-wearing. Neoliberalism flourishes in the application of this history and mindset. It seems, to be sure, the lesser of two evils and an improvement on classical economic models and the failed ecological economic model.

Environmental Strategy Program

The Scotch Whisky Association’s environmental strategy program is self-proclaimedly “the most ambitious, voluntary, environmental sustainability strategy of any single UK manufacturing sector” (SWA 2015). The program consists of a series of (relatively idealistic) goals¹¹ and progress reports in the form of its Environmental Strategy Reports. The program began in June 2009 as the result of a Life Cycle Assessment done by the SWA for the industry as a whole in 2006. This assessment yielded a rather short report and a series of informative

¹¹ See Appendix for a full list

infographics¹². The SWA cites the definition of a Life Cycle Assessment by “an International Standard” as the “compilation and evaluation of the inputs, outputs and potential environmental impacts of a product system throughout its life cycle”; the SWA’s own follow-up definition of a LCA is “a helpful tool for evaluating the environmental impact of a product at all stages within its life cycle—from extraction of resources, through production of materials, to use and disposal” (SWA 2006). The LCA found that “39% of the industry's impact was directly associated with its manufacturing processes, 11% with the distribution of Scotch and 50% associated with supply chain impacts” (Ibid).

The SWA based its environmental strategy program goals on this distribution of impact. This impact can also be thought of as the industry’s total externalities from participating in the market in an attempt to maximise profit. This consideration of environmental impact in addition to economic impact proves a new and rather uncommon consideration for an entire industry. Especially considering that this subject is commonly broached by the industry as “The Sustainability Dilemma,” and “in traditional terms, it is hard to see the economic benefit of sustainability. Innovations that have strong sustainability credentials, with robust scientific backing frequently just don’t make economic sense. This is not unique to the sector, but consistent across the entire business community” (Bright 2012 [WDSC: Science and Sustainability]). This attitude, although not uncommon, is rapidly changing within the distilling industry. The industry is beginning to see the economic benefit of ramping up their environmental ethic—both in the name of economic benefit, but also for greater industry security. In this instance the working definition of sustainability is one crafted by The UK

¹² See appendix for a selection of relevant choices

Government Sustainable Development Strategy that states: “the goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations...” (UK Government Sustainable Strategy 2005). The SWA itself reinforces these views, noting that

Scotch Whisky distillers are not newcomers to sustainability; quality raw materials, traditional production methods, and world famous brands rely on a pristine environment. In recent years, environmental sustainability has shot up the political and consumer agenda. Companies planning for the long-term will need to ensure not only that their impact on the environment is minimal and that their sustainable approach is communicated to ever-more engaged consumers and customers but that they can maintain the quality and availability of their raw material supplies (copper, cereals, water, energy, casks, packaging, etc) (Hesketh-Laird et al. 2012)

What is Sustainability?

An examination of sustainability in the case of Scotch whisky must be informed by the critical theory surrounding the term in literature from various fields, most importantly environmental and economic theory. This theory becomes necessary to consider once the nebulous quality of sustainability as defined by the Scotch Whisky Association becomes apparent. This application of environmental and economic theory to the SWA’s conception of sustainability in many ways reflects the lack of outright definition the Association gives, even considering the above definition of sustainability given by other industry players. The tracing of meaning in both environmental and economic theory proves both an incredible challenge and a searing revelation of the vacuous nature of so-called ‘sustainability’. Beginning with the manner

in which the SWA, as the mouthpiece for the Scotch whisky industry, characterises its definition and approach to sustainability, the nebulous nature of the term becomes clear.

Sustainability in the Scotch Whisky Industry

The definition of sustainability that the scotch whisky industry uses must be put together in a somewhat piecemeal fashion, for it is not ever stated outright. The Scotch Whisky Association bandies about the term frequently yet deigns to define it outright. Its touted Life Cycle Assessment, the basis for its Environmental Strategy, appears to be primarily concerned with energy use and carbon emissions. Considering the literature distributed by the SWA and the ethic it espouses on its site and in its press interactions, a picture of what the SWA deems ‘sustainability’ may be surmised. The SWA seems concerned with the following (broadly referring to the amalgamation of their works towards sustainability): cask sourcing and the practices of American oak farmers; water treatment, recycling, and conservation, including draff and effluent; packaging reduction and use of recycled and recyclable materials; reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; reduction of reliance on fossil fuels and energy use, and implementation of alternative energy sources; influencing supply chain actors to adopt similar environmentally-concerned practices; providing transparency to consumers and stakeholders, and providing a means of feedback regarding their progress.

All of these, it appears, constitute the SWA’s conception of sustainability. Further, they denote continued economic growth in the face of environmental concern. Their emphasis on developing and implementing new technologies designed to conserve/make efficient energies and practices falls in line with a post-environmental viewpoint, as well as with that of neoliberalism. It is clear that the lack of definition given to sustainability outright reflects the

nebulous nature of the term altogether. It is possible that the SWA did not find a definition they felt was coherent, applicable, or specific enough for their needs. It is also possible that they knew the vague nature of sustainability across the board gave them the opportunity to not define it at all. Without a clear definition of a term the SWA bandies about in a considerable amount of promotional material, they may constantly redefine exactly what they mean, never being beholden to one standard or definition.

The SWA doesn't even call upon the Brundtland Report, one of the most commonly cited, and easiest to fill with malleable meaning. The report was the result of a late '80s UN commission on sustainable development. The Brundtland Report defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987). Although this definition is for sustainable development, it is widely cited as the guiding principles for what is broadly known as just 'sustainability' now. Importantly, this definition lends itself very well to the needs and interests of neoliberalism. In this way, the manner in which the SWA does not define sustainability doesn't necessarily mean it is entirely separate from the ethic espoused in the Brundtland Report definition. Both the report and the SWA have a keen interest in finding the economic implications of sustainability.

Sustainability in Environmental Theory

The idea of sustainability in environmental theory, just as within the Scotch whisky industry, is nowhere near reaching a cogent or coherent point. The word sustainability "can be used to mean almost anything one wants it to mean," which is both "part of its appeal," and part

of its downfall (O'Connor 1998). The malleable nature of the world itself hearkens to similar troubles pinning down concrete meaning of words like 'natural', 'green', 'wild', and more. This proves especially salient considering that many of these buzzwords are both highly popular as food/product descriptors, yet they have no legal definition (as 'organic' and 'free-range', however problematic, do). Even a fuller more all-encompassing definition of sustainability cannot truly be pinned down, for there is no formal or even informal consensus within the environmental community regarding a definition for the term. Sustainability must then be defined clearly by those who intend to use it seriously and be defined in such a way that it is actionable and not an amalgamation of lofty ideals by those who cannot see real outcomes. It must be properly defined so as to not be a "cop-out, a sort of toothless sop for people's green consciences without forcing them to do anything too radical" (Goode and Harrop 2011).

Here a consideration of so-called 'weak sustainability' and 'strong sustainability' proves salient, defined as follows: "weak sustainability, in which man-made capital can be substituted for the environment to meet human needs...allows for environmental destruction to some degree in the interests of development"; "strong sustainability...holds that the environment can never be replaced by man-made capital" (Uwasu 2011). Weak sustainability certainly echoes the post-environmentalist ethic regarding development and technology, whereas strong sustainability echoes the ethic of classic environmentalism. Conservationist viewpoints versus preservationist viewpoints may also be applied somewhat seamlessly.

Sustainability in Economics

Sustainability in economics is usually considered within the parameters of sustainable development, which holds with the neoliberal ideas of continued economic growth and concern

for social and environmental issues. Sustainable development as it was originally envisioned was relatively vague, however can now be defined as having distinct interests or goals:

- (i) increasing or maximising human welfare for the present generation;
- (ii) maintaining sufficient opportunities for, or not of hampering the welfare realisation of future generations;
- (iii) conservation or improvement of environmental quality and (renewable natural resource availability; and
- (iv) preservation of biotic and genetic diversity, and specific instances of natural systems and species (van den Bergh 1996)

Sociologist/economist/environmental theorist James O'Connor asks in his essay entitled "Is Sustainable Capitalism Possible?" just that. He notes that "sustainability, in the first place, is an ideological and political, not an ecological and economic question" (O'Connor 1998).

O'Connor explains that "in the present account, the word 'sustain' is taken to apply to all three of the [following] senses: to 'uphold the course' of capitalist accumulation globally; to 'provide the necessities of life' for the peoples of the world; and to 'endure without yielding' by those ways of life are being subverted by the wage and commodity forms," which is to say nothing of ecological sustainability (Ibid). Taking ecological sustainability into account, "even though there is little agreement among ecological scientists about the exact meaning of this expression," capitalism does not appear to be sustainable by any account (Ibid). Taking these four prongs of sustainability as interpreted by O'Connor, we can ask "is sustainable capitalism possible," to which he responds that "no" is the short answer, while "probably not" is the long answer (Ibid).

Even from a post-environmentalist viewpoint, “capitalist production and consumption technology—not only the relations of work and power in the workplace, community, and society as a whole—are often damaging to life forms,” and indeed to the ecosystems and resources required to continue capitalist production (Ibid). However, post-environmentalism continues to champion technology as the solution to wicked environmental problems, and surely the nature of technology necessitates participation in the current capitalist paradigm. *The Limits to Growth* and the work of Thomas Malthus have been widely regarded as failures in their attempt to predict the demise of humankind due to extensive and intensive resource mismanagement; they are considered failures because their models failed to take into account the human factor. The human factor includes humankind’s ability to innovate and implement new forms of technology. As we’ve seen, the earth’s carrying capacity was logically reached decades ago—and yet here we remain. Many would argue that this is due to innovation and restructuring of agricultural systems by new technologies that have circumvented these ‘limits to growth’.

However, the circumvention of the earth’s projected carrying capacity is hardly surprising when we consider the reasoning behind it: capitalism and its unquenchable thirst for growth. Capitalism’s success in avoiding mutually assured destruction with people and environment does not mean its system has proven a success—or a system that has ‘solved’ all of our resource and population issues. Rather, let us consider the following quote as ample explanation of this phenomenon: “the fact that capitalist production relations tend to self-destruct because the kind of technologies used and the way they are used degrade the natural and other conditions of production helps to explain why the world capitalist system has entered a long period of restructuring of both nature and capital” (Ibid). We have learned, and

post-environmentalism champions, that our limits to growth are not determined by the biophysical environment, but by human innovation and technology.

Holistic Sustainability

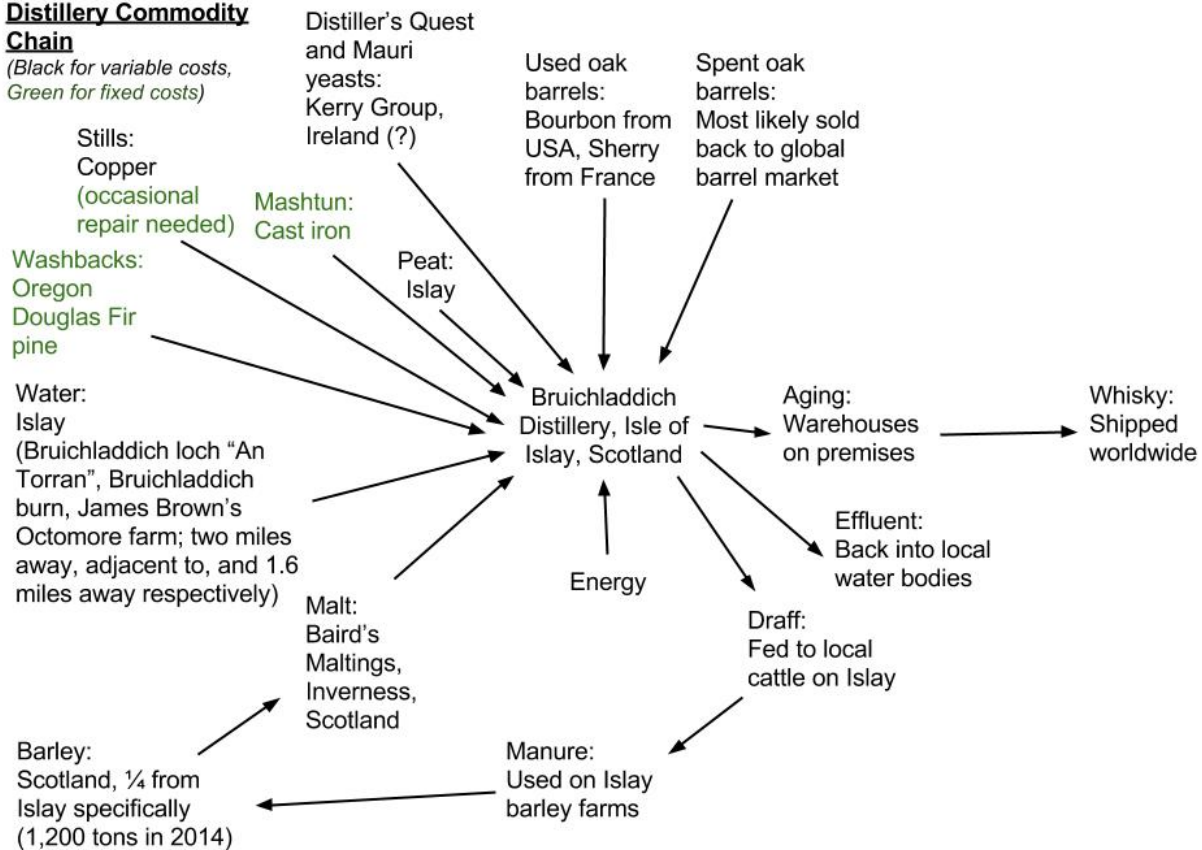
Considering the proliferation of agendas projected onto the word ‘sustainability’ can we possibly interpret them holistically in order to create a sort of all-encompassing super-definition? Specifically, can the three interpretations of sustainability I’ve outlined be meshed together for a holistic interpretation of the term? First, we must acknowledge that any conception of sustainability exists within the current neoliberal paradigm, and that “market-based economic ways of thinking, complete with an emphasis on ‘world’ economic growth, seem for the present to be in control of the major decisions that allocate resources around the globe and drive public policies of most major nations” (Beaton and Maser 1999). Beyond that, sustainability in all of its vaguery cannot be counted upon to provide a reliable or actionable framework. Definitions of sustainability, from the Brundtland Report to conceptions of weak and strong sustainability, to the sustainability facet of the Triple Bottom Line, all prove too nebulous to relate to each other concretely or to hold up to critical evaluation. The palliative nature of the amalgamation of meanings provided by sustainability will keep the term in popular use, yet has effectively stanchoned its serious study in many realms.

Whisky & The Environmental Nuts and Bolts

Tracing Commodity Chains

Bruichladdich Distillery Commodity Chain

(Black for variable costs,
Green for fixed costs)



In an effort to create multiple commodity chains as a means of highlighting the differing levels of sourcing, production, and distribution of Scotch whisky distilleries, even the most self-proclaimedly transparent distilleries fell short of providing enough information for construction of a comprehensive commodity chain. The infographic below shows my rudimentary attempt to break down the commodity chains associated with Bruichladdich distillery on Islay, which champions the themes of terroir and transparency. Bruichladdich, the

self-proclaimed bastion of authenticity to locale, community, and indeed Scottish heritage, still could not connect all of the dots well enough to complete a comprehensive commodity chain. Some of these elements, such as the purchase and sale of oak barrels, may be industry secrets or variable depending on changing markets; however much of the base-level information required was nowhere to (easily) be found. The information I could scrape together came from many places inaccessible to the layman, such as personal interviews and correspondences with Bruichladdich staff, various academic articles, and the tome by Misako Udo entitled *The Scottish Whisky Distilleries*, of which there is only one copy in the US portion of the college library lending system WorldCat and which costs \$385.85 on Amazon.com. Even those with good intentions do not prove entirely transparent.

However, despite the seemingly significant barriers to transparency, whether they be changing suppliers, variable inputs, or industry secrets, many high end winemakers provide incredibly detailed information on each bottling iteration and the influencing factors for a given wine's terroir; many of these winemakers keep these records open to the public, some even on their company websites. What is it about the (luxury) wine industry that is so different from the (luxury) whisky industry? At the end of the day, both industries depend on a global network of consumers committed to their product and the myth it carries. It is clear that "even Bruichladdich, for all its public display of tradition and loyalty to the local community, is dependent on people around the world buying into the ideal and drinking a large dram" (Spracklen 2011). This means investing in the same myth of Scotch whisky used by the rest of the industry (although Bruichladdich does not belong to the SWA). One facet relatively unique

to Bruichladdich is the calling upon of the French winemaking theory of terroir, which imparts significant mythological value as well.

Terroir, or ‘the taste of place’ is a concept developed to describe wine from different wine-producing regions of France, and to give it place-based meaning. A narrow definition of terroir cites France as the only place with true terroir. It also states that terroir is imparted from the climatic and geographic conditions of a given area which make it unique from other areas such as: soil makeup and drainage, elevation, typical weather patterns, microflora (native yeasts, fungi, etc), and more. The narrower definition of terroir focuses more on the ‘land’ than the ‘hand’. This definition of terroir could most certainly not be applied to anywhere outside of French viticultural appellations, let alone to Scotch whisky. However, a wider, more inclusive interpretation of terroir ties together ‘land’ and ‘hand’ to create a definition that takes into account not just geographic and climatic factors, but also the human element of wine/whisky production. This human element is everything from the farming practices of the people growing the grapes/grain to the fermentation/distillation process, to how the liquid is aged; all of these factors can either bring out or stifle the terroir they are meant to express. Another key factor in the broad definition of terroir, and the one that truly marries the concept of whisky to terroir is that of tradition and space. Much of terroir arguably comes from the traditions and mythologies of the areas producing the wines/whiskies and the techniques and standards those those cultures use to express their regionality, or terroir. Terroir does not mean ‘the taste of place’ for nothing, and only by considering the conditions imposed by both the agricultural inputs and the sociocultural inputs can terroir truly be explored.

Bruichladdich says the following regarding terroir on their website:

In the world of wine, *terroir* is revered for the subtle nuances of traceable character, flavour, lineage and integrity it bestows. Yet it is little understood and little cherished in the world of single malt whisky. Could it just be that it's easier to wax lyrical about shortbread and butterscotch "notes" than to get to grips with the esoteric micro-influences on the development of the complex flavour-compounds derived from ripening barley? We label and trace, parcel by parcel, different barley varieties, different farms, even different fields, or *terroirs* many of whose characteristics are retained directly in our maturing whisky stocks, depending on harvest, yield, weather and crop rotation (Bruichladdich 2015)

Terroir, as a means of place-based delineation has immense value within the bounds of the myth of Scotch whisky. As the myth of Scotch whisky has evolved past simply occupying a place-based system of meaning into a space-based meaning, the addition of terroir's place-based meaning gives further nuance to the myth of Scotch whisky.

For comparison of how whisky terroir can be characterized, as opposed to how wine terroir is characterized, see infographics below.

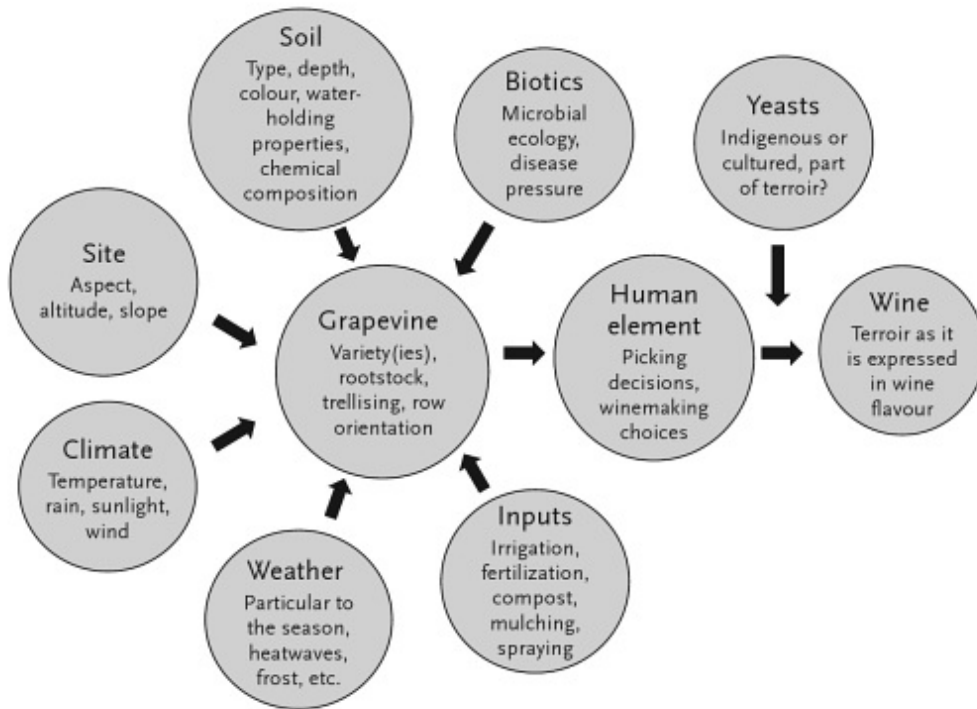


FIGURE 3.1
Influences that shape terroir.

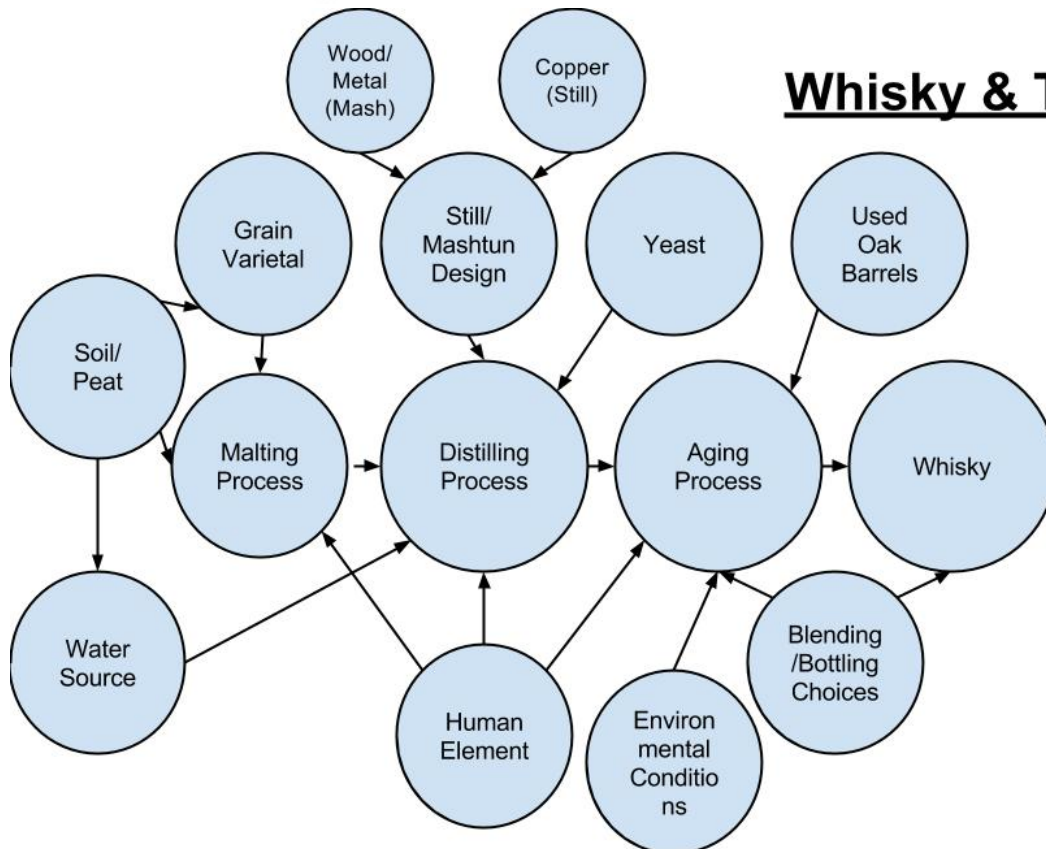


Figure 3.1 via Goode and Harrop 2011

The Scotch Whisky Association & Government Environmental Regulation

Much of the Scotch whisky industry's law enforcement comes not from the British government itself, rather from the Scotch Whisky Industry. The SWA enforces government-mandated laws regarding Scotch whisky for those distilleries and brands that belong to the SWA (approximately 90% of the industry, including major players such as Diageo, Pernod-Ricard, and Beam-Suntory) in the interest of retaining industry consistency. The continued mythologizing of Scotch whisky proves incredibly valuable economically, and as the primary trade organization representing the majority of that industry, the SWA has ample reason to continue to perpetuate that myth at any cost.

As is apparent from the Compass Box whisky example, the SWA is thoroughly invested in retaining a certain version of that mythology, a version that is manifested in law and carried out to a tee by its members. The Spice Tree varied from that myth and went outside the law, and the SWA was right there to threaten legal action if their aging technique was not altered to conform to the law once again. Lacking the resources to fight the SWA (as law enforcers), Compass Box reformulated their prized high-selling whisky to fit the SWA's idea of what Scotch whisky ought to be. The SWA realized the value of their concept of authentic whisky was worth more than what The Spice Tree might add to the myth of whisky.

Similarly, Oregon's award winning American whiskey from Clear Creek Distillery has proven that making their whiskey in Scotch style is worth more cultural and economic capital than making an American bourbon whiskey. Their cashing in on the sign and myth of Scotch

whisky makes an incredibly salient point about the value of the myth of Scotch whisky, and the ends that are gone to in order to emulate Scotch whisky culture.

Scotch Whisky and Greenwashing

In the same way that the term ‘sustainability’ is simply an empty signifier that becomes filled with whatever meaning those employing wish it to have, there is no true, authentic Scottish whisky experience. We know that “Scotland and Scottishness are seen by the tourist as being made authentic through the mediation of the global brand and its relationship to heather, highland kilts, clan tartans, bagpipes, haggis and mountains. There is no other Scotland, no place that offers more authenticity, which we can experience” (Spracklen 2011). The sustainability standards set by environmental theory, economic theory, and indeed the whisky industry itself are all we have to go on; there is no on authentic meaning to the word sustainability. Further, there is not even a legal definition of the collected ethos of sustainability practitioners or originators, as there is for organics, biodynamics, or fair trade (discounting, of course, how far afield the legal definitions of these terms are from their originating principles and ethics). Even viewing these issues of meaning-making through a lens of postmodernity or liquid modernity cannot truly help to assuage the point that all we see is “the mediation of myth and mythology of the authentic,” even considering the postmodern view that “the sham of the experience [can] be embraced for its kitsch value” (Ibid).

However, in the search for the meaning of sustainability or Scotch whisky, a modernist take on meaning is surely applied most commonly. Those attempting to participate in sustainable development in a so-called ‘real’ way most likely do not want to consider the postmodern

pastiche of authentic meaning making necessitated for a postmodern perspective; they want to turn the cogs of industry in order to fulfill their dual neoliberal goals of gaining capital and 'saving the environment'. Just as greenwashing is a means to drawing consumers to industries and products with poor environmental policy by mythologizing themselves as in line with environmental concerns, "unease with commodification leads individuals away from big corporations to small businesses. The industry responds by rebranding artifice as authentic experience" (Spracklen 2011).

Conclusion

The Future of the Industry and Sustainability

It is clear that sustainability as defined by economic theory, environmental theory, and the Scotch whisky industry, are not all the same sustainability. The nature of the word as a vehicle for myriad causes, whether they be economic growth, maintenance or preservation of natural resources, development of efficient technology, or maximization of human welfare in the present and the future, simply proves its impotence. A term that able to be emptied and refilled with meaning again and again surely does not prove a strong basis for any sort of policy or movement. Without a clear definition, legal or otherwise, sustainability as we know it cannot affect change. Such a vacuous term cannot be rallied around. It is clear that sustainability as it is defined by the three parties mentioned above is simply a means to an end. Sustainability is an endlessly popular buzzword; something citing sustainability as a goal or tenet of belief cannot possibly have ill intentions, right? The flaws of sustainability as well cannot be pinned down because there is no strict definition of sustainability; if we cannot find it, how can we critique it?

Sustainability proves clearly inactionable as a concept due to its weakness under even slight scrutiny. It does not stand up.

However, sustainability as self-defined by the industry surely sees success. With no legal definition or precedent to follow, the SWA can self-police their own sustainability standards seamlessly. They produce the standards, they produce the goals, they produce the reports commenting on their progress towards said standards and said goals. And with sustainability and environmental standards self-proclaimedly more stringent than the UK governmental standards and the standards of any other spirits industry out there, who would further question them?

Due to the nebulous meaning of the term ‘sustainability’, a more consistent or actionable version 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 apparent 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, proving 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. The SWA, and further, Scotch whisky’s interpretation of sustainability, rely upon the way the dominant neoliberal system views sustainability. This system relies on the guarantee that the overwhelming majority of those implementing sustainability are those invested in the

Judeo-Christian conception of the singular ‘nature’ ready to be dominated or in need of a steward. As such, this “obsession with a singular Nature that requires ‘sustaining’ is fostered by an apocalyptic imaginary that forecloses asking serious political questions about possible socioenvironmental trajectories, particularly in the context of a neoliberal hegemony” (Swyngedouw 2007).

So far as the industry wants to work within the current global economic paradigm, replete with its own endemic problems, it will surely see continued success. But, as far as the theory surrounding sustainability goes, the vacuous nature of the term has stanchied its growth towards inhabiting a meaning or movement with any depth. Progress towards what originators of the term and movement saw for sustainability would most likely see more meaningful progress towards a similar ethic in burgeoning fields such as resilience thinking¹³. While sustainability may be meaningless, this does not spell the end of progress towards a future consistent with critical environmental theory or one necessarily condemned by the endemic flaws of neoliberalism. Genuine innovation and critical thinking in environmental theory may very well inspire the Scotch whisky industry to question the status quo, as it has pushed me to do in writing this thesis.

¹³ a la James Hopkins’ *Transition Handbook*

Appendix

The distilleries belonging to the SWA as of 2009

SCHEDULE 1

Regulation 9(1)

DISTILLERIES TO WHICH REGULATION 9(1) APPLIES

<i>Column (1)</i>	<i>Column (2)</i>
Aberfeldy	Glenmorangie
Aberlour	Glen Moray (also known as Glen Moray-Glenlivet)
Abhainn Dearg (also known as Red River)	Glen Ord
Ailsa Bay	Glenrothes
Allt a' Bhainne	Glen Scotia
Ardbeg	Glen Spey
Ardmore	Glentauchers
Auchentoshan	Glenturret
Auchroisk	Highland Park
Aultmore	Inchgower
Balblair	Invergordon
Balmenach	Isle of Arran
Balvenie	Isle of Jura
Ben Nevis	Kilchoman
Benriach	Kilkerran
Benrinnes	Kininvie
Benromach	Knockando
Bladnoch	Knockdhu
Blair Athol	Lagavulin
Bowmore	Laphroaig
Braeval	Linkwood
Bruichladdich	Loch Ewe
Bunnahabhain	Loch Lomond
Cameronbridge	Longmorn
Caol Ila	Macallan
Caperdonich	Macduff
Cardhu	Mannochmore
Clynelish	Miltonduff
Cragganmore	Mortlach
Craigellachie	North British
Daftmill	Oban
Dailuaine	Port Dundas
Dalmore	Pulteney
Dalwhinnie	Roseisle
Deanston	Royal Brackla
Dufftown (also known as Dufftown-Glenlivet)	Royal Lochnagar
Edradour	Scapa
Fettercairn	Speyburn
Girvan	Speyside
Glenallachie	Springbank
Glenburgie	Strathclyde
GlenCADAM	Strathisla
Glendronach	Strathmill
Glendullan	Talisker
Glen Elgin	Tamdhu
Glenfarclas	Tannavulin
Glenfiddich	Teaninich
Glen Garioch	The Glenlivet
Glenglassaugh	Tobermory
Glegoyne	Tomatin
Glen Grant	Tomintoul
Glen Keith	Tommore
Glenkinchie	Tullibardine
Glenlossie	

via *The Scotch Whisky Association "The Scotch Whisky Guidance 2009"*

Selected Excerpts From the Scotch Whisky Association's Environmental Strategy Program

Environmental Strategy

Protecting the environment and promoting sustainability help underpin Scotch Whisky's reputation for quality around the world.

The Scotch Whisky Industry's Environmental Strategy is the most ambitious, voluntary, environmental sustainability strategy of any single UK manufacturing sector.

Launched in June 2009, the Strategy aligns members' ambitions and identifies specific, measurable collective goals which go beyond compliance and lead by example. It encourages sustainability across the industry's supply chain. It sets a firm programme of action, supported by the whole sector.

Strategy reached a five-year milestone in 2014. We have been reflecting on the sector's achievements and checking our progress against stakeholder expectations and our ever-evolving operational environment.

We will be publishing our 2014 performance report later this year alongside refreshed targets to ensure that the strategy continues both to stretch and future-proof the industry.

Industry Goals

30 May 2012

There are a number of goals set for the Scotch Whisky industry's environmental strategy:

- To mitigate GHG emissions and increase energy efficiency
- By 2020, 20% of primary energy requirements will be derived from non-fossil fuel sources, rising to 80% by 2050
- We will manage our water requirements effectively
- To engage in the development of Scotland's River Basin Management Plans to ensure that a sustainable and good quality water supply is maintained
- 10% reduction in the weight of product packaging materials by 2020
- 40% product packaging will be made from recycled materials by 2020
- All product packaging to be reusable or recyclable by 2020
- No packaging waste from packaging operations will be landfilled by 2020
- All casks will be made from oak sourced from sustainable forests

- The industry will work with supply chain stakeholders
- The industry will report annually to our stakeholders on our progress to demonstrate how we are meeting our commitments and delivering against our targets

Goals are strongly aligned to the results of the SWA's Life Cycle Assessment which demonstrated that 39% of the industry's impact was directly associated with its manufacturing processes, 11% with the distribution of Scotch and 50% associated with supply chain impacts. The Life Cycle Assessment identified opportunities for the industry to directly improve its performance and opportunities where the industry might work with the supply chain to encourage best practice.

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