

Things and cosmology: things as order

Week 6, 27th March 2019

Nancy Munn

Walbiri Iconography: Graphic Representation and Cultural Symbolism in a Central Australian Society. *American Anthropologist* 76(4): 914 - 915

Walbiri - Australian aborigines, Central Australia, desert, small nomadic bands

- Focus on iconography and symbolism
- Forms of representation carried by men exclusively and women exclusively;
Women: Sand stories; simple patterns (U-form, wave, line)
Men: initiation ritual Banba, appropriation of female reproductive power

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the moral and the social order of the society are understood only as they are mapped out onto a cultural landscape which is naturalised by being mapped in turn onto the natural features of geographical landscape.

Importance of materiality in this process:

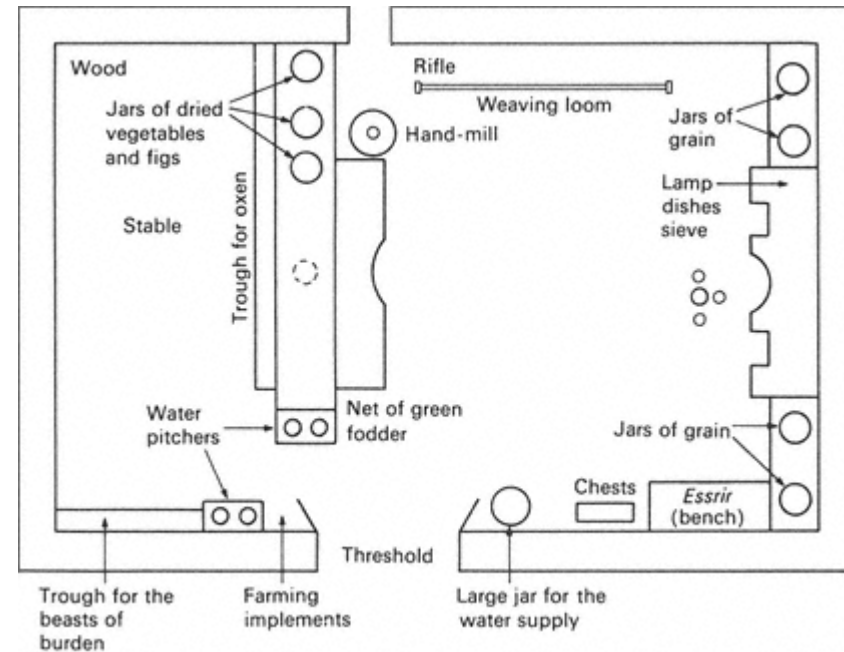
- the properties of the landscape become of central importance; it provides the permanence, the authority, and the massivity which can legitimate the social world
- Material forms provide a medium for present, transient and particular history to be subsumed under a large experience
- past and present are absorbed into an infinite dreamtime

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- Focus on iconography and symbolism
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Pierre Bourdieu: Kabyl House

- *House as the space of objectification of generative schemes*
- *Through habit and living every person builds a practical masterz of fundamental cultural schemes*



Bourdieu, 1979 *Distinction*

- Bourdieu, 1979 *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*
- Kant, Critique of Judgement, 1790 – aesthetic (taste) judgements are individual and disinterested, based on formal qualities of object
- Bourdieu: taste is not individual and is not disinterested

Bourdieu, 1979 *Distinction*



Bourdieu, 1979 *Distinction*



- From art historian concept of culture (studying high arts) to anthropological concept of culture (studying way of life)
- Social position defined by a combination of economic and cultural capital.

Bourdieu, 1979 *Distinction*

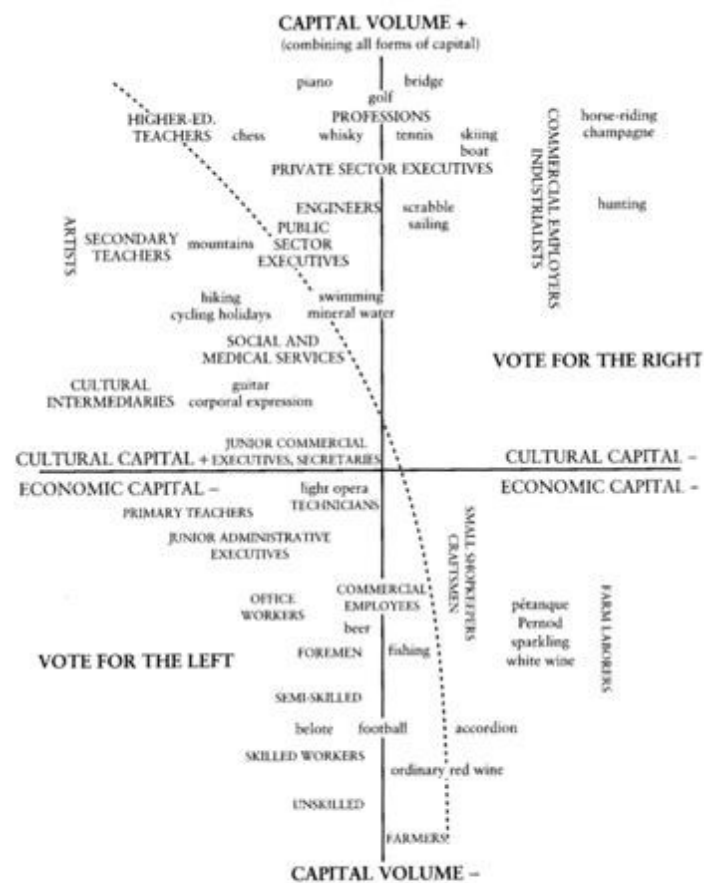


Figure 19.1 The space of social positions and the space of lifestyles (the dotted line indicates probable orientation toward the right or left)

Bourdieu, *Distinction*- Habitus

„system of durable, transposable, dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generated and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends...“ Bourdieu, 1990, 53

- Inscribed to bodies through previous experience (culture is not gloves, it is skin)
- Unconscious
- Individual habitus is in a homological relation to class habitus (defined by economic and cultural capital)
- Individual habitus as creative tool of classification reproduces these forms of capital.

Bourdieu, *Distinction*- taste and symbolic power

- Taste is subjective realization of habitus. Through taste habitus organizes consumption and lifestyle
- Expressed in the language of individual preferences
- „marries colours and also people, who make „well-matched couples“, initially in regards to taste.“ Bourdieu, 1984, s. 243

Taste as symbolic power - Culture is a battlefield of class struggle:

- Hierarchies of legitimacy - Whose taste (in terms of class) will be considered legitimate
- Hierarchies of hierarchies – whose test within dominant class will be legitimate (higher cultural or economic capital)

Bourdieu, 1979 *Distinction*

- Distinction – key term
- Meanings and usage of things is a tool for getting distinctions within the hierarchy of social relations.
- Taste classifies classifier
- Human experience and practice as mimesis and embodiment
- Not a classification of objects, but classification of various structures of tastes and sets of expectations related to preferences of various groups of people
- Differential distribution of social conditions

Critique

- Too concentrated on cultural goods in terms of arts
- Static, does not enable interpretation of change, economically reductionist
- Romantisation of working class
- Is not intersectionalist – does not think of gender, ethnicity, and age
- Omnivores – higher classes consume goods of lower classes

Featherstone: Consumer Culture and Postmodernism

- Habitus is static – is created during primary socialization
- People have higher agency in consumption – they have to interpret and act their preferences in changing conditions. That changes their social positions, relations and lifestyles

Alison Clarke: Aesthetics of social aspiration (in Home Possessions, ed. by Miller)

- Development of Bourdieu's writing on both Distinction and Kabyl House
- Taste preferences – related to social aspirations and imaginations of idealized future
- Relationships and meanings change also in relation to aesthetic schemes.