

EDITORIAL

'Unpacking Food and Drink'

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The special theme of *Worldwide Waste Journal* that interrogates the social, economic, political, cultural and aesthetic aspects of packaging, in its contemporary and historical dimensions.

Keywords: Plastic; packaging; ocean pollution; hidden in plain sight

The cover of June 2018 edition of *National Geographic* features a picture of what at first sight looks like the tip of an iceberg visible above the sea surface, but surprisingly reveals itself as something completely different – a corner of a plastic bag almost entirely submerged in water.¹ The all-caps slogan "PLANET OR PLASTIC?," prominently positioned in the middle of the cover, signals the journal's multi-year initiative aimed at raising awareness of the plastic pollution of the world's oceans.

The narrative of this issue of *National Geographic* is not limited to the environmental impact of the plastic waste dumped, blown or washed into the sea, but also outlines the history of this relatively new, man-made material encroaching into the centre of the human existence. Among the presented statistics, two are particularly striking: 1) virtually half the plastic ever manufactured worldwide has been made in the past 15 years; and 2) roughly 40 percent of plastic produced today is intended for single use, primarily in the form of disposable packaging of foods and beverages.

Despite its ubiquity and centrality in 21st century food and eating, packaging is 'hidden in plain sight,' as various scholars have pointed out.² Packaging remains pervasive and unnoticed, so long as it does not become a health hazard or environmental concern, as in the case of ocean pollution highlighted by *National Geographic*. "**Unpacking Food and Drink**" is the special theme of *Worldwide Waste Journal* which explores this largely uncharted territory

beyond the waste dimension. We will publish research that interrogates the social, economic, political, cultural and aesthetic aspects of packaging, in its contemporary and historical dimensions. The collection opens with 'The Tyranny of the Bottle: Vitasoy and the Cultural Politics of Packaging' by Jia-Chen Fu (Emory University), who demonstrates the agency of packaging in new forms of cultural practices around food.

Notes

- ¹ <http://press.nationalgeographic.com/2018/05/16/national-geographic-magazine-june-2018/> Consulted on 13 August, 2018.
- ² Anne Murcott and Katarzyna Cwiertka, "Hidden in plain sight": Researching food packaging in London and Tokyo'. BSA Food and Society Conference, 30 June 2014. The phrase was originally coined by Thomas Hine in *The Total Package: The Secret History and Hidden Meanings of Boxes, Bottles, Cans and Other Persuasive Containers*. Back Bay Books, 1997. See also Cochoy, F and Grandclément-Chaffy, C. 2005. Publicizing Goldilocks' Choice at the Supermarket: The Political Work of Shopping Packs, Carts, and Talk. In: Latour, B and Weibel, P (eds.), *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, 646–657. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

How to cite this article: Cwiertka, KJ. 2018. 'Unpacking Food and Drink'. *Worldwide Waste: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 1(1): 3, 1–2, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/wwwj.24>

Submitted: 17 August 2018

Accepted: 17 August 2018

Published: 30 August 2018

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