

## Chapter 7

# Bottled Water Practices: Reconfiguring Drinking in Bangkok Households

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### Introduction

This chapter examines bottled water practices in Bangkok: how they function practically; how they become meaningful and normalised; and how they interact with everyday household water routines. Single-serve bottled water is generally classified as a fast food commodity driven by the logics of the global beverage industry and designed to be consumed outside the house. Drinking water from a branded bottle is seen as a form of leisure consumption vastly different from turning on the tap and interacting with a state utility. But can bottles and taps be so easily set in opposition, one emblematic of a product, the other of a service? Is the distinction between these two drinking practices as clear-cut as this? What of the many places where state or commercial water utilities are non-existent, underdeveloped or unsafe? In these settings the meanings and efficacy of bottled water, bought from street vendors or home delivered, operate far beyond the registers of frivolous leisure consumption. This is just one of many examples that blur the distinction between taps and bottles and reveal the complexity of drinking water practices. Both bottles and taps deliver water and discipline its consumption via a variety of socio-technical and economic arrangements. And in many settings these different arrangements are inter-articulated, in the sense that they influence and interact with each other in complex and various ways. The challenge is to understand these interactions and to investigate the processes whereby drinking practices are made meaningful.

Our interest is in how the matter of the plastic bottle comes to matter in different settings. How does a fully materialised account of drinking practices make it possible to think about the interactions between bottles and taps in more productive ways? A focus on drinking practices foregrounds the efficacy of bottles in different settings. It also shows how objects and practices are mutually constitutive. This approach situates the water bottle within the routines and habits of everyday life *and* the ways in which artefacts participate in these routines and help constitute the social. Practices, then, are always more-than-human. Rather than see them as an expression of human agency or culture they have to be understood as complex associations of materials, technologies, norms and bodily habits that are sustained and modified through repeated performance or enactment. In the case of the plastic

water bottle, these practices vary significantly according to context. As an object designed for portability and single use it is most alive outside the home. How, then, does the bottle mediate inside and outside, or stasis and mobility? And how does it impact on household water practices? In what ways does the tap as the endpoint of a service interact with the bottle as beverage or commodity? How do these distinctions reverberate on the 'economy of qualities' (Callon et al. 2002) that variously values water? These are the larger questions driving this chapter, but first we explain our approach to the question of practice.

### Thinking Practices

There is no question that drinking water from plastic bottles is a relatively new practice. Think back 20 years and ponder where you saw water bottles: in the gym, definitely, on desks, maybe. Now they are ubiquitous. Everywhere you look there are bottles: in cars, tucked into special pockets in backpacks, on lecture theatre desks, in hands as people jog, handed out free at events, lying in the gutter discarded; the list goes on. Bottles have become part of the material density of everyday life; they have become domesticated, and in the process they have inaugurated a range of new conducts. The challenge is to understand how this object and the activities that have incorporated it into daily use have co-evolved: how bottles and bodies have become connected and interact, generating new ontological realities for drinking (Mol 2003: 6).

Studies of consumption or material culture are of limited help. As Elizabeth Shove and colleagues (2007), Bill Brown (2003), Jane Bennett (2001) and others have argued these approaches pay insufficient attention to the materiality of the commodity: to the ways in which its material qualities participate in the constitution of markets and consumers. Theories of material culture implicitly render the commodity a passive object of cultural inscription, a surface on which 'culture' gets to work and makes meaning. In these frameworks practices are largely things humans do *to* or *with* things to express identity, social positioning or deeper social order. While there might be a commitment to the social as constructed, 'practices' in these frameworks appear relentlessly human – as emanating from human consciousness, intentionality and discourse.

What is missing in these approaches is an understanding of how material things participate in shaping bodies, actions and meanings; what uses they afford; and how these affordances are continually extended in practice,<sup>1</sup> which is to say how the social is both produced and practised in and through relations with artefacts and is therefore not exterior to these relations. Hence the turn to science and technology studies (STS) in many accounts of practice, for it is here that distributed forms of agency are recognised, and where the more-than-human or hybrid dynamics of meaning and matter are central. Also important in this approach is the refusal to

1 For an excellent account of 'affordance' see Mike Michael (2000: 61–67).

allow macro categories such as 'culture', 'economy', 'society' any 'trans-historical ontological validity', as Tony Bennett puts it (2009: 102). What this means is that, in this analytic mode, reality is enacted or performed through the multiple relations whereby things get associated. So it is not a matter of identifying actions and practices as evidence of social forces or representations of deeper structures but rather of tracing how 'the social' emerges in the dynamics of both durable and fleeting assemblages.

However as Shove and colleagues (2007) argue, STS still has limitations when it comes to developing a fully materialised account of practices and enactment: 'The Latourian contention that artefacts literally construct socialness has yet to be worked through in any detail' (2007: 14). *The Design of Everyday Life* is their attempt to redress this problem with a close analysis of how various materials become implicated in everyday practices of consumption, renovating, design, photography and more. The empirical focus is on tracing the relations between objects, bodies, meanings, forms of competence and routines in a range of settings. What is especially valuable about this method is the commitment to understanding how material things and technologies become integrated into practices as performance, and how this both realises their various material affordances and also, at the same time, stabilises social relations over time (2007: 148). This does not mean that practices become fixed performances endlessly repeated. Practices continually evolve and are continually integrating new elements that might emerge from bodies – material that presents new possibilities, practical knowledge that shifts over time or unexpected disruptions to routines.

Drawing on Theodore Schatzki (1996), the key point Shove and colleagues make is the distinction between practice-as-performance and practice-as-entity. Practice-as-entity has a relatively enduring existence over time and space. It refers to the ways in which practices are made durable via the relationships between norms, materials, shared meanings and bodily routines. Practice-as-performance is the specific enactment, the active doing through which practice-as-entity is sustained, reproduced and changed. This refers to the contingent dimension of practices, the ways in which practices are both reproduced and continually reinvented in action (Shove et al. 2007: 12–13). This theorisation of practice pushes accounts of domestication and appropriation of technology and objects beyond the registers of mutual co-evolution of people and things. This can implicitly endorse an approach in which humans tame things: in which the thing is incorporated into existing routines and spaces rather than being actively involved in making and remaking them. In other words, it can imply a certain form of material stasis, or 'socio-technical closure'. Once the thing is stabilised or embedded in contexts it remains relatively unchanged. The value of Shove and colleagues' approach is its insistence on the role of materials as actants that can suggest and transform practices; that is, on practices as complex assemblages of the human and non-human that are always on the move (Shove et al. 2007: 8).

In our wish to make sense of the massive growth in bottled water consumption this account of practices is extremely valuable. It forces attention on 'drinking' as

both a practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance, and it foregrounds the role of the bottle as a commodity that participates in the emergence of new practices. This also opens up a new approach to thinking about sustainability. Rather than critique the rise of the bottle as an environmental catastrophe, or as a threat to the provision of safe drinking water, (which is the dominant trope in most analyses of bottled water to date) a focus on drinking practices pays close attention to the ontological realities of bottles in action. The issue then becomes how does drinking water *from bottles* emerge as a new practice? What is involved in this practice: what practical knowledges, routines, norms and more sustain it? And what kinds of implications does bottled water practice-as-performance have for other drinking practices? If drinking water from taps can be considered a practice-as-entity, a spatially and temporally enduring assemblage that frames drinking water as a service, how do bottles interact and interfere with this? How have bottles reinvented water, its technical delivery and ways of drinking?

These questions have a different political orientation to that of critique. They involve an *ontological* politics because they focus on how bottles come to matter – on the kinds of worlds they perform. These worlds or realities are not simply ‘constructed’, they have to be practised or enacted into being and this involves choices, obstructions and interference from other ontological realities. While we are concerned to trace bottled water practices in a range of settings we are also interested in how these might *interfere* with other sorts of drinking practices. ‘Interference’ here is an STS term that in John Law’s (2004: 5) account means that realities are being practised everywhere, that they are complex, uncertain and interact with each other – this is difference. This difference suggests how ontological realities may become ontological politics because difference can mean both conflict and dissent and the imagination of alternative realities. As Annemarie Mol (2003: 7) says: ‘[I]f reality is multiple it is also political.’

This account of politics extends understandings of practices in important ways. For a start it makes it possible to see how bottled water enacts ontological realities that are different from and may (or may not) interfere with other drinking practices. Reducing these differences to the logics of a commodity/service opposition does not get anywhere near understanding how bottles and taps interact. This opposition denies the way drinking practices might mix up the ontologies of taps and bottles rather than oppose them, or how they might get enacted in specific places, sometimes producing interference and at other times innovation.

To see these ontological politics in action we turn now to a case study of bottles in action in Bangkok. Our aim is to document a range of provisional arrangements that are in place for drinking water. These involve all manner of objects, routines and networks in households and beyond, and they show how bottles are generating new practices, markets and drinking performances. They are also being incorporated into existing practice-as-entity regimes in ways that complicate the distinction between product and service. The key purpose of this case study is to investigate how specific material affordances of plastic bottles, in all their varieties, are realised in practice. And how, in some arrangements,

these practices enact ontological realities that interfere with the imagination and provision of more sustainable alternatives.

### Provisional Networks of Water in Bangkok

The process of organising everyday drinking water involves collaboration with a range of human and non-human others in the household and beyond. In Thailand, where we conducted fieldwork, rainwater was traditionally collected in large earthen jars placed outside households – a practice that persists in some parts of the country today. More recently houses have been fitted with galvanised drainage gutters and metal pipes directing the water into big, ceramic storage jars. In urban Bangkok, where atmospheric contamination of rainwater has become a problem, many households and condominium residents inevitably enter into some sort of arrangement with the metropolitan tap water system. Vestiges of past practices are nevertheless apparent in the accounts of some of our Bangkok informants, who specified the taste of rain as a value they loved in drinking water.

Since 1999 the Metropolitan Waterworks Authority (MWA), a state enterprise administered by the Ministry of Interior, has guaranteed that Bangkok tap water complies with WHO drinking water standards after treatment at the source. Water is regularly tested for key contaminants at various locations in the municipal network and the results are uploaded onto a consumer map on the MWA website. Most of our informants were aware of state guarantees, but expressed doubts about the quality of pipes and their maintenance, especially in older buildings and sections of the city. This view of pipes as an unreliable intermediary was also promoted by bottled water industry informants we interviewed:

*No matter how good your water is, somehow you have to find a way to deliver the water to the consumer and when you talk about tap water, you are talking about the piping system, and the piping ages – rust, pollution, all that sort of thing. People doubt the maintenance.*

In these circumstances of perceived unreliability or risk, householders described entering into a variety of arrangements with mundane devices and technologies in the interests of organising safe drinking practices. These included boiling water from the tap, installing filtering systems in kitchens, arranging home delivery of drinking water (Home and Office Delivery, or ‘HOD’) or making use of the water vending machines which can be found in some Bangkok neighbourhoods. Water vending machines began appearing from the late 1990s. These machines were marketed as a low cost source of safe drinking water. Essentially a filtering device, they are connected to the municipal water system and run by private operators. They are coin operated and require the consumer to bring their own container. More recently large PET bottles bought from supermarkets have emerged as another domestic water source. Single serve PET bottles are generally not seen

as a staple form of household consumption; they are usually bought while out and about. They may, however, find their way into the house at the end of a daily excursion where they are often refilled and reused. Each of these arrangements involves varying degrees of labour inside and outside the household, and the coordination of bodies, technologies, forms of competence and routine. Such routines are themselves entangled with other routines – preparing meals, going shopping, stocking the kitchen – and must be adjusted in relation to the material particularities and conditions of the elements at hand: water is heavy, transporting sufficient volumes for household use calls for a vehicle, Bangkok traffic is bad, the water vending machine is hard to get to and so on. What became apparent in our study was the multiplicity of these practices and their adaptability to different conditions and elements over time. In the context of the arrangement of new drinking water practices, tap water tended to be limited to other domestic uses such as washing and bathing, cleaning kitchenware and clothes, and cooking.

One way of approaching the multiplicity of drinking water practices is to position the consumer as a participant in *provisional networks* of distribution, preparation and supply. In the household these networks are provisional in two senses: they are about *making something available*, and they involve routinised practices which may nevertheless be subject to revision and some degree of change or innovation in the presence of new technologies, services or products such as filters, water vending machines or PET bottles.<sup>2</sup> This is the nature of the relation between practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance. Drinking practices are also subject to change in the context of new styles of life, such as condominium living, a major and relatively recent development in Bangkok which, alongside convenience stores, supermarkets and shopping centres, is promoted as a hallmark of cosmopolitan modernity. Our informants were engaged, or had been engaged at particular points in time, in degrees of reflexive activity about the various components of such networks in relation to everyday values like reliability, cost, health risks, taste, social status, practicality and convenience. This shows that it is not simply new technologies or products that inaugurate changes in practices but rather their capacity to prompt reflexive activity and generate what we might call ‘ontological doubt’ about the security or stability of existing arrangements.

### Good or Service?

Is the provision of drinking water a good or a service? Framed as a service, it could be thought to follow the logic of what Michel Callon and colleagues describe as ‘making available’, where the customer, ‘by opening a tap ... sets in motion

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2 This metaphor of ‘making available’ is particularly apt in the Thai context, as water is intimately tied into practices of hospitality. The first thing houseguests customarily receive on entering someone else’s house is water. A common expression for generosity is *nam jai*, literally, to have a water heart.

a complex arrangement of humans and non-humans whose actions have been adjusted in relation to one another and prepared for mobilization at any time and at any point of access to the network' (2002: 208). Services imply an ongoing relation with the customer, in which the provider agrees to make certain things available on certain conditions for a period of time. Moreover in service provision, customers become 'an element in the system of action. They act, react and most importantly interact' (209) – a feature that Callon and colleagues see as producing a customisation of the relation. In some ways Callon and colleagues seek to blur the distinction between goods and services. Goods are cast in terms of the sequence of actions and operations in which their properties are worked on and qualified. Here products are goods seen from the point of view of their production, consumption and circulation, a process that involves various forms of organisation and reflexive activity on the part of economic agents. Because these processes include specific devices for registering and incorporating consumer desires and preferences, the distinction between product and service becomes blurred. The general aim seems to be to direct attention to the contestable processes through which products are qualified and their properties stabilised.

Importantly for Callon and his co-authors, the qualification of a product can consist of work on the image of the product, or work on its actual material form, or both. There is no need to distinguish between 'primary' and 'secondary' qualities in this regard: for the purpose of positioning, these attributes share the same ontological status. This point is particularly helpful for thinking about the bottled water market, and a welcome rejoinder to the popular notion of bottled water as a case of constructing semiotic desires about nothing. For nothing is learnt in such approaches about how the bottle itself comes to matter.

This blurring of the distinction between goods and services is extremely pertinent to drinking water practices in Bangkok. It offers a valuable framework for thinking about how the properties of *both* are continually modified in interactions with the economic agent (or householder) and other elements of drinking water practices. These interactions reveal, as Callon and colleagues argue, the contestable processes through which products and services are qualified and their properties stabilised. In the case of water these processes most often involve its qualification as safe or drinkable. As we have seen, home consumption of drinking water from non-tap or MWA sources is largely dominated by the HOD industry and water from neighbourhood vending machines, though use of PET bottles is on the rise. The HOD industry is often regarded as the environmentally friendly approach to dispensing bottled water because it reuses the large 19 litre PC bottles in which it delivers the product. For this reason it is understood within the industry as a service:

The bottled water cooler industry differs from the bottled water industry, which bottles water in small bottles, in that the former is service-based whereas the latter is product-based. This difference is very significant for the organisational structure of the bottled water cooler company (Barnett 2008: 30).

Specifically, the company must arrange regular scheduled delivery and collection, maintenance and repair of the relevant technologies, customer care, and industrial cleaning and reuse of the 19 litre PC (polycarbonate) bottles which typify the industry. Cleaning the PC bottles is a complex operation that involves administering cleaning solution and rinsing the inside and outside of the bottles using a jetspray system. As one HOD industry informant explained, it must also contend with other possibilities:

*When your bottle comes from the market, you never know what your bottle has been in contact with, what kind of contamination. That's why our company tried to persuade the consumer to recap your bottles after use, but we haven't been successful as yet, because people say, what the hell? You know, so the contamination comes along.*

*The worst part is when your customer or your consumer doesn't really, you know, care about, take care of the bottle. They put it as a container for some kind of petroleum, or some kind of pesticides, or whatever, and when you bring this bottle back, the only solution for that is that you have to discard the bottles. So when the bottle comes back from the market the first thing that the operator does is, they have to do the sniffing test. And if it smells of petroleum or something then they put it aside. The majority of times you have to destroy the bottle. And then they do the cleaning of the outside, which is quite a difficult one, and after that, you do the cleaning of the inside.*

Here, the customer is positioned as an unreliable intermediary. We can see here that the company's reuse of the bottle requires it to account for the customer–bottle relation. In other words, the reusability of the bottle constitutes certain relations between providers, customers and bottles, rendering each an active element in the provisional network.

In order to think about how disposability is constituted in relation to the bottle, it may be useful to consider another situation in which the bottle is reused by the producer. Apart from the HOD industry, an example from the Thai context is the use of single-serve reusable glass bottles to sell soft drinks. (In Thailand, traditional trade channels actually prefer this option because of the higher margins involved.) We can see that in both these cases, *reuse of the bottle* makes certain demands on companies and distributors, ranging from storage space, in the case of empty glass bottles (which makes modern and convenience stores reluctant to take up this option), to the pickup and industrial cleaning of used bottles, in the case of HOD services. Moreover the premium on the bottle's *reusability* grounds the bottle in certain ways. If the bottle travels too far, the distributor makes a loss – thus the mobility of the bottle must be accounted for. This is achieved by grounding consumption in certain locations (such as the home/office in the case of HOD services); by introducing a deposit/refund system; by requiring consumption on the spot (for example in restaurants); or by other inventive means (soft drink vendors working with glass bottles in markets often transfer the contents into a

plastic bag, add a straw and ice, and fasten the bag at the top with a rubber band, allowing the vendor to retain the bottle while leaving the consumer free to roam).

In these instances we can see how a property of the bottle (reusability) institutes specific relations and practices and necessitates certain socio-technical arrangements on the part of suppliers, distributors and consumers. These examples also help to reveal some of the specific affordances of the disposable PET plastic bottle. In quite material and practical ways, the single-serve PET bottle helps to equip or furnish the mobile consumer. Disposability allows a severing of the relation between the provider and the consumer. Indeed the single-serve PET bottle was most often associated with consumption on-the-move rather than the household, the main appeal being its 'convenience'. But what can we say about the growing use of PET bottles inside the home? Since mobility is not a salient value in this context, how does this product position itself in relation to the alternatives?

Not surprisingly it is precisely the material components in HOD networks of delivery and supply – and their tendency to fail – that the PET bottled water industry exploits in its attempts to penetrate the household market. As the head of bottled water at Nestle Thailand reported in the industry magazine:

The new generation of consumers are health-conscious so they started questioning the cleanliness of the returnable 19 litre bottles, especially when the bottle condition and label looked old, alerting a concern on the potentials of poor washing and disinfection. (Muernmart 2008: 8)

Here the company is exploiting consumer experiences of HOD bottles, in particular the mishaps associated with the reuse of bottles in given networks of supply. In other words the property of disposability acquires value in relation to bad experiences with the reusable bottles that characterise the household market. Calculations such as these prompted Nestle to introduce a new 6 litre PET bottle into the convenience store trade channel. But what is especially interesting here is that the positioning of bottled water within this market involves specification, not only of the symbolic, but also the material properties of the product. Consider for example the material-practical concerns that are cited to position it:

Convenient to buy, not that heavy, suitable to carry back home, and a good price per litre – ideal for the new generation family of 2, husband and wife. (Muernmart 2008: 7)

Note in this passage the allusion to a new, 'modernised' consumer with a modern lifestyle, but also the producer's familiarity with the provisional networks within which such consumers participate. Once again, the bottle – including its actual material form – is carefully adjusted to and designed to equip certain routines of modern life. The appeal to new styles of life is not merely symbolic, but promotes the bottle in terms of its specific affordances: not too heavy, but a sufficient quantity of water for a modern household; something you might pick up

at the convenience store on your way back to the condominium. Notice also that these material properties gain their value and significance in relation to existing provisional networks – specifically the potential of these networks to generate insecurity about the cleaning of bottles and the quality of the water.

## Conclusion

What can we take from this case study of drinking water in Bangkok? Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, we can see close attention paid to consumer practices, routines and provisional arrangements on the part of bottled water companies. Perceptions of tap water were affected by the appearance of new technologies and products which promote themselves in terms of safety and reliability. Most of the provisional arrangements we encountered were driven, at some level, by concerns about safety, though it was often difficult to distinguish these from concerns around social distinction, taste and convenience. Here ontological doubt about the safety of different provisional arrangements merged with other rationales for consumption, including social status, taste, convenience and health. In these contexts, tap water was re-purposed to other household activities, such as cleaning, bathing and cooking. In this context these companies are paying close attention to actual drinking arrangements and the ways in which they continually qualify and re-qualify water. The promotional appeal to a modernised lifestyle goes hand in hand with a positioning of products that foregrounds their material properties and affordances as much as their image. Indeed these material dimensions become part of the brand, insofar as the bottle is positioned and experienced in terms of everyday values such as practicality, convenience and cleanliness. If practice theory ‘shifts bodily movements, things, practical knowledge and routine to the centre of its vocabulary’, it would seem that this is one of the key registers in which producers engage in their attempts to position their products competitively (Reckwitz 2002: 251).

Secondly, the material properties and affordances of the bottle acquire their value relationally. More specifically, they acquire their value in relation to the provisional arrangements to which households are accustomed, and the perceived shortcomings of those arrangements. The quality of disposability, afforded by PET plastic, has no really salient value in the household except *in relation to* some of the undesirable aspects of given provisional networks, such as HOD delivery. The salience of this specific characteristic depends on or contrasts with the performance of other materials against which it is compared, such as reusable PC bottles. In this respect, materials such as disposable PET plastic can be regarded as involved in ‘overlapping webs of relational performance’, to borrow Shove and colleagues’ suggestive phrase (2007). These performances consist of specific applications of given materials, and are themselves ‘relative, provisional and inherently precarious’ (Shove et al. 2007: 105). Producers seek to make new markets by promoting specific

expectations of material – object performance. Meanwhile, the material value of PET plastic takes shape in relation to given performances of PC plastic.

This point connects with the next observation we can draw from the Bangkok case study, which concerns the distinction between products and services. Indeed when it comes to water provision it is tempting to argue that the quality of disposability enacts a distinction between product and service in the home space. If, within the logic of service provision, customers are constituted as active elements within a system of action, we can see that much of the appeal of PET plastic is that it severs the need for continued participation within the network, or any ongoing relation between customer and provider. This value can be understood in terms of mobility (dispensing with the need to return the bottle to the provider) or in terms of dislocation (releasing the customer from a provisional network in which certain elements, such as dirty bottles, are unsatisfactorily controlled or accounted for, thus providing safer or cleaner water). In either case, with a disposable PET bottle the ongoing relation between customer and provider can cease at the point of purchase. A question that arises though in relation to the circulation of a good so basic to human sustenance as water is whether severability from provisional networks (as depicted in the logic of products and services) is an adequate formulation? Or whether the provision of clean drinking water ought to be characterised in other terms entirely: not in terms of the logic of choice, for example, but a logic of care, which Annemarie Mol characterises as an interactive, ongoing and open-ended process that does not stop at the point of transaction but rather requires continual modification depending on results and human need (Mol 2008).

Finally, the multiplicity of drinking water arrangements in Bangkok, and their interference with one another, suggests the need to further theorise *convenience*. Not only is convenience commonly cited to account for consumer preferences, it is frequently cited specifically in relation to bottled water marketing (Ward et al. 2009). Elizabeth Shove has discussed convenience in terms of the ability to shift time (2003). In the case of bottled water we can see that it is also connected to practices of movement and thus has spatial dimensions. Etymologically, convenience implies a coming together. It is a coming together of different elements in a network of humans and non-humans in an arrangement that is adjusted to the routines of key actors in that network. As a demand, it takes its bearings from given routines, procedures and competencies. Just as often, though, it is projected as a property onto specific goods, services or arrangements. Convenient products are those that are well-attuned to stabilised routines and procedures in given relations of affordance. Or they promise a new, more desirable or efficient stabilisation, in which specific forms of labour, cost, or time are redistributed. But what is also apparent from our study of Bangkok drinking practices is that convenience is not a transparent value. As we have discussed, it takes its bearings from given configurations and provisional networks (in what situation is lugging a six litre PET bottle home from the convenience store ‘convenient’ exactly?). And as well as citing given routines, the notion of convenience also disrupts or supplants them, making certain practices and competencies redundant and creating the need for

new forms of labour, cost and routine. This is how we understand Mol and Law's claim that different practical ontologies interfere with one another. The value of the object-oriented approach we are advocating is that it can better take account of the dense materiality of stuff like PET plastic and the subtle ways it works itself into our lives, while also exposing the contingency of these workings, their relationality. This could make emerging/naturalised drinking practices more open to change, which is to say, less essential.

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