**“The (dis)taste for bottled water”**

**Andrew Biro**

**Acadia University**

**andrew.biro@acadiau.ca**

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“Taste classifies and it classifies the classifier.”

-Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 6)

This paper explores our current “(dis)taste” for bottled water. The larger research project will a discourse and content analysis of bottled water advertising and anti-bottled water campaigns, focused geographically on Canada. This particular paper is based on a sample of these campaigns, so the conclusions herein are tentative.

The growth in consumer demand for bottled water has been remarkable. This is especially the case in North America. While the phenomenon of bottled water consumption (i.e. mineral water) is long-standing in continental Europe, in North America it was not that long ago that bottled water consumption was virtually unheard of. Average per capita consumption in the United States in 1976 was a mere 1.6 gallons (6.1 litres).

This is not that surprising, since, in North America as elsewhere, household access to clean and cheap (if not free) water was an important feature of modernization (and modern urbanization). In the global North, water delivery infrastructure was an important part of the municipal socialism (or “gas and water socialism”) of the late nineteenth century. In developing capitalist economies, working classes struggled at the national and urban scale, not only for legal rights like the right to vote and to organize, but also for tangible goods and services. Access to a secure water supply thus constituted what Karen Bakker calls a “material emblem of citizenship” that both served as index of popular power and legitimated state rule (Bakker 2010).

Over the course of the 20th century, developing countries largely followed suit. The 19th century model of urban hydrology (universal household piped delivery) served as the standard for “development,” even though in many parts of the global South this was not achieved universally, with some 800 million people worldwide still lacking secure access to an improved water supply.

But if bottled water consumption was rare in mid-1970s North America, this was certainly not the case a quarter-century later. In 2001, per capita consumption had increased more than ten-fold, to 18.2 gallons (68.9 l) annually. By 2006, it was 27.6 gallons (104.5 l). (Earth Policy Institute n.d.; see also Clarke 2004, 9) Although consumption decreased slightly during the 2008-09 recession, by 2010, it had resumed its upward trajectory. Moreover, while the nineteenth and early twentieth century model of piped household delivery was monopolistic (one water delivery company, usually publicly owned and operating at the municipal scale), bottled water consumption takes place within highly fragmented competitive markets, with over 2900 different brands of bottled water sold worldwide by the middle of the first decade of the 21st century. (Connell 2006, 343)

At the same time, this growth has not been uncontested. Indeed, there are few goods whose commodification is as sharply contested as water. This contestation has occurred at a variety of scales and in different forms. One general way of characterizing it is as a dispute between views of water as a “commodity” or a “right.” Globally, activists pressed to get the United Nations to formally recognize a universal “human right to water.”[[2]](#footnote-2) In some countries, a “right to water” is recognized constitutionally (e.g. South Africa) or in other legal forms. And at municipal scales (where water delivery is organized, as noted above), there are legal and political battles over the terms under which water is delivered (pricing regimes, terms of connection, whether utilities can cut off supplies in cases of non-payment, etc.)

In their recent book, *Plastic Water: The Social and Material Life of Bottled Water*, Hawkins, Potter and Race argue that the emergence of the phenomenon of mass bottled water consumption is the product of three intersecting developments: the first of these is a set of technological innovations that produced the polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottle. Second was the rise of new discourses of health associated with biopolitics (“biocitizenship” and subjects with a “will to health”). And third is “the wider intensification of branding” that is frequently associated with neoliberal or postmodern capitalism (2015, xviii-xix).[[3]](#footnote-3) The cultivation of the taste for bottled water on a mass scale, in other words, is made possible by changes in “packaging, branding, and the new health discourses.”

We will take this tripartite foundation as the starting point for our analysis, and examine the ways in which these three concepts – convenience, status, and health – are used to cultivate a taste for bottled water.[[4]](#footnote-4) We will also examine the ways in which each of these are contested and reshaped by anti-bottled water campaigns. The aim is to provide a map of the discursive landscape around bottled water, or the “bottledwaterscape.”[[5]](#footnote-5) As we will see, while the language of “convenience” and “health” figures prominently on both sides (bottled water marketing and anti-bottled water campaigns), the similar terms mask a conflict over the scale at which “convenience” and “health” are to be understood. We examine these two terms in the sections that immediately follow. The discourses of “health” are also closely connected to discourses of “purity,” and through this we can see some of the ways in which the bottledwaterscape is more complicated than a binary opposition (bottled water companies versus anti-bottled water activists) might suggest. This line of analysis is pursued further in the final section, on “taste” and status, which seeks to understand the bottledwaterscape within a broader critical-theoretical framework.

Convenience

One of the most common ways that the taste for bottled water purchases is cultivated, or the purchase of bottled water is rationalized, is through its *convenience*. The serving-sized plastic container that is, as Heidegger might say, “ready-to-hand.” The novelty of bottled water (compared to tap water) is that it is available ubiquitously in stores and from vending machines, contained in single-serving sizes, and portable in lightweight and virtually indestructible containers. As Hawkins et al note, the marketing of bottled water, particularly in its earlier phases, focused on it as a product that was convenient, particularly for the kinds of people who are “on the go.”

One critical response to this focuses on the ways in which “convenience” is conceptually or sociologically “constructed.” On the very first page of their book, Hawkins et al provide an extended quotation from a monologue by comedian Lewis Black, about the rise of bottled water. Among other things, Black focuses on the ways in which we have, in the name of “convenience,” made the practice of getting a daily necessity far more difficult and inefficient:

Try to go through this logic with me: our country had water coming to our homes and even if we were locked out we could still get clean water and we said: “No, fuck you! I don’t want it to be so damned convenient, I want to drive and drive looking for water – just like my ancestors did.” (quoted in Hawkins et al 2015, xi)

A second kind of contestation involves attention to the ways in which convenience is literally “constructed.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Take, for example, a *New York Times* story from 2007. John D. Sicher, Jr., the editor and publisher of *Beverage Digest*, is quoted justifying bottled water purchases in terms of its convenience: “The issue is convenience and shifting consumer preference. It’s not so easy, walking down Third Avenue on a hot day, to get a glass of tap water.”

What is unstated in Sicher’s comment is that Third Avenue is an environment that has been constructed in ways that make tap water scarce. The “ready-to-hand-ness” of bottled water, and the “inconvenience” of accessing tap water in public spaces, is the product of a whole history of human decisions and actions. In some places ,the story is one of decisions about the physical manipulation of the environment (not installing or removing infrastructure like water fountains. But on Third Avenue, the story is in fact somewhat different. There, as in other densely populated urban settings in the global North, we are not presented with a lack of drinking water delivery infrastructure. Rather the problem is the regime of private property rights and social norms that make it “not so easy” (or at least not cheap) to access that infrastructure.

A third way way in which the discourse of “convenience” is contested, by environmentalists in particular, is by expanding our view from to the product’s entire life-cycle. Single-serving disposable plastic containers seem “convenient” only to the extent that what happens after the bottle is disposed of by the consumer remains largely hidden from view. On the other hand, if bottled water is re-scaled temporally and spatially, then the “convenience” of portable single-serving containers can be juxtaposed against the *inconvenience* of non-degradable plastic bottles littering lived spaces and overwhelming landfills, and global warming induced by the fossil fuels used in bottled water production and transport. Here, the anti-bottled water campaigns struggle to rescale bottled water by making longer and broader scales visible, using dramatic images to rouse people from the consumer dreamworld and its “flush and forget” culture (see Figure 1).

Health/ Purity

A second theme in the cultivation of the taste for bottled water is with its connection to health. Hawkins et al provide a good overview of the rise of the discourse of “hydration” and the ways in which it was taken on by bottled water marketing. (Hawkins et al 2015, chapter 3).

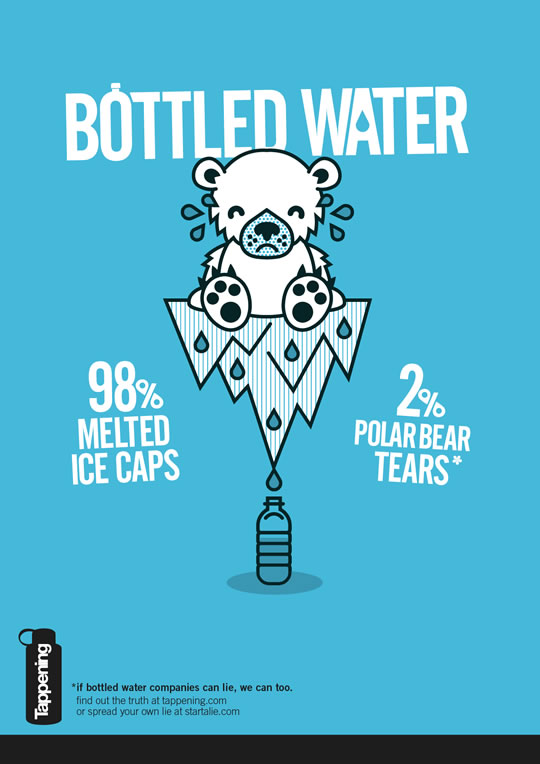
 

Fig. 1 Anti-bottled water ads. City of Toronto (left) and Tappening.com

Hawkins et al note that for sedentary bodies (as opposed to high-performance athletes, where the research on hydration originates) “no reputable evidence justifying the eight-times-eight rule [drinking eight eight-ounce servings (1.89 litres) of water per day] can be found. (Hawkins et al 2015, 63). But it isn't clear that anti-bottled water campaigns consistently contest the ideology of hydration or “frequent sipping.” Partly this may be because of the complex alliances that underlie anti-bottled water campaigns, which include (among others) municipal water utilities and public sector unions, whose work relies on water consumption.

Rather than contest health claims directly, anti-bottled water campaigns appear to shift scales. Bottled water marketing focuses on the connection between healthy (individual) bodies, or healthy bodies agglomerated into “healthy families.” Anti-bottled water campaigns, by contrast, talk about “health” in the context of “healthy communities,” as their campaigns often focus on efforts to restrict large-scale water extraction by bottling companies in local communities. The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)’s campaign for World Water Day 2016 includes seeking municipal resolutions to “End the sale and distribution of bottled water.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Their “water” page on their website begins with the text: “Water is a precious resource and a vital public service. Public drinking water and wastewater services are human rights, and the lifeblood of *healthy communities*. We’re all better off with publicly owned and operated water services.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

More strongly contested, however, is the related claim of bottled water’s “purity,” which is at least sometimes implicitly associated with healthiness, as in Nestle’s “Pure Life Natural Spring Water.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

Claims about bottled water’s purity tend to be based on a binary opposition between human and non-human worlds. Tap water arrives to us after flowing through extensive pipes and industrial filtering systems. “Municipal” water, by definition, is deeply implicated in human (cultural, political) systems. Indeed, it could be said that in the late nineteenth century, concomitant with rapid urbanization and industrialization, municipal water is produced for the first time at an *industrial* scale.[[10]](#footnote-10) Even more, we could say that modern municipal water provision represents the application of Fordist principles of standardized mass production and consumption to the water sector (a point to which we shall return).

Bottled water (and particularly “spring water” – see below) often trades on the association of nature with purity. Fiji Water’s “About Us” page on its website, for example, extensively describes the ways in which its water is insulated from anthropogenic forces, concluding that the water is “free from human contact until you unscrew the cap. Untouched by man™”[[11]](#footnote-11)

Thus anti-bottled water campaigns often “debunk” the implicit purity of bottled water. This is sometimes done by pointing out the more extensive testing requirements that are imposed on municipal tap water, compared to bottled water (which is regulated as a foodstuff, under the FDA in the United States and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in Canada). In other cases, it is done by pointing out that bottled water often is sourced from municipal tap water.[[12]](#footnote-12)

On the other side, the public-ness of municipal infrastructure, in the sense of its open-ness, is one way in which this concern about water purity is articulated. [germ theory] Particularly in the environment of heightened security sensitivity since September 11, 2001, the very fact that the consumption end of water infrastructure (like public water fountains) can be accessed by anyone, presents it as a potential threat or site of vulnerability.

Over the last decade or two, people in Western societies in particular have become more concerned about policing the borders around their bodies, and attentive to the liminal spaces where our bodies interact with the environment. Andrew Szasz (2007) describes this concern as an “inverted quarantine.” Rather than confine threats (people with particular illnesses) to a specific location, physically separating them from the healthy population, in an inverted quarantine, the space around our individual bodies (or families or households) has become increasingly securitized. Bottled water, like organic foods or home security systems, provides an example of this phenomenon.[[13]](#footnote-13)

As well, as part of the political-cultural environment of neoliberalism, people have become generally less convinced that government is reliably able to provide us with safe tap water. In terms of water delivery, Bakker (2010) notes that both the dominant models of public and private water delivery are highly imperfect, and thus uses the term “governance failure” to capture the commonalities of both “market failures” and “state failures.” We are less convinced that governments can or will do the things that they say they are going to do. If public water provision was once seen (or perhaps more accurately, *idealized*) as a “material emblem of citizenship,” governments’ capacity or willingness to fulfill their terms of the social contract is open to increasingly question. The recent case of lead poisoning in Flint, Michigan provides just one dramatic example of this. This is both a cause and effect of the neoliberal revolution that has taken place over the last 30-40 years, which has aimed precisely at reducing the scope of governmental action. Public sector austerity undermines governments’ capacities to act effectively, that lack of effectiveness becomes increasingly visible, and trust in public institutions is thereby undermined.

On the other hand, we should be careful not to place the blame entirely on neoliberalism, or to romanticize the pre-neoliberal (and largely pre-bottled water) era. Water provision can be understood as a “material emblem of citizenship.” But in practice “citizenship” is not a universal category. As Bakker (2010) points out, struggles for access to water are contingent on claims to citizenship, or “the right to have rights.” “Governance failure” (in the domain of provision of access to clean water, as in others) occurs because the acquisition of the material emblems of citizenship is always a product of historical struggles, which continue into the present even in the “developed” world.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Taste and Status

The third way in which taste for bottled water is cultivated, is through concerns about taste and status. On the one hand, differences in taste might seem to be the most obvious or natural way in which distinctions about ingested substances are made. Drinks (and food) are ingested through the mouth, thus necessarily contacting the tongue’s taste buds. Confirming it as a thoroughly physic-chemical process, and distinguishing it from the “social and aesthetic” sense of the term, Wikipedia’s entry for “Taste” begins: “Taste is the sensation produced when a substance in the mouth reacts chemically with taste receptor cells located on taste buds in the oral cavity, mostly on the tongue.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Objects, in other words, have a taste, and subjects have the capacity to sense them. On the other hand, water is often conceived as a “tasteless” substance. In blind taste tests, consumers are often unable to tell the difference between bottled and tap water, leading some to assert that the demand for bottled water is “pure hype” (Olson et al, 1999), manufactured by clever marketing. As Connell puts it: “In the world of advertising water is far from homogeneous, even if the taste is not on the palate but in the imagination.” (Connell 2006, 347)

Such accounts, however, are deficient for two reasons. First, the claim that “water is tasteless” presumes that water is undifferentiated, that the ingested substance is pure H20. The water*s* with which we come into contact, however, are never entirely pure H20. In addition to different sources providing different compositions of minerals and other dissolved solids, municipally governed tap waters (or bottled waters regulated by national or sub-national governments) are often treated in a variety of ways (chlorination being one of the more common treatments for tap water). There are differences between waters that may be sensible on the palate, although of course the multiplicity of waters means that there is no singular taste-sensation ascribable to either “tap” or “bottled” water as overarching categories. As evidence for this multiplicity, we might cite the phenomena of the water sommelier, and water menus, complete with distinctive taste descriptions (soft, creamy, slightly salty, etc.) for each of the waters on offer.[[16]](#footnote-16) Also not surprising is the rise of bottled water during the era of post-Fordism, or a regime of “flexible accumulation” (Harvey 1989), with its emphasis on small-batch production and niche marketing, rather than the earlier Fordist era’s reliance on standardized mass production and consumption.

The second deficiency is in the claim that “taste” is entirely subjective. Marx’s claim that “The forming of the five sensesis a labour of the entirehistory of the world down to the present” suggests that “taste” is not “only in the [individual] imagination” as Connell suggests. Taste, like the other senses, is shaped by historical processes, including cultural histories as well as biological-evolutionary ones. Wikipedia’s only concessions to the historicity of taste are to differences in taste capacities among different species (e.g. cats cannot taste sweetness), and within individual lifetimes (one sentence on the phenomenon of “acquired taste”). But as noted above, “taste” has a “social and aesthetic” meaning, as well.[[17]](#footnote-17) “Taste” in this sense resides in the subject’s capacity for discrimination, as well as in the object. The subject’s taste (whether one has (good) taste or not) is as much about social status, the preservation of a particular social order (refraining from actions that are “in bad taste”), and social “distinction” (Bourdieu 1984), as it is about individual gustatory sensation. One example of this blending of social status with gustatory sensation is found in Ray’s & Stark’s water menu’s description of the British Hildon brand of water: “a taste and composition which is uniquely Hildon and a favorite of the Royals.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

More broadly, the entwining of taste and status can be seen in the segmentation of the bottled water market itself. Presumably, few people actually compare the taste-sensation of Hildon water with generic or bargain brands. Rather, the difference is signaled through price differentials and marketing techniques (including celebrity endorsements) that connote taste, luxury, and distinction. Thus we can understand the rise of bottled water in North America as a two-staged response to the Fordist production of water through to the mid-twentieth century. In the first phase, bottled water in general is presented as a distinctive, niche market good. It is for those (at first, relatively few) who have the disposable income and refined sense of taste to distinguish bottled from tap water. Most sources cite the beginning of bottled water’s take-off in North America in the late 1970s. Hawkins et al note that this is the moment when the PET bottle is invented (Hawkins et al 2015, 7-11).[[19]](#footnote-19) It is also the moment when the Fordist compromise is beginning to unravel, and also the moment when the neoliberal attack on public sector spending (including public water infrastructure) begins.

The second phase occurs when, as with so many other goods in consumer capitalism, bottled water itself is produced and consumed on a mass basis. As Daniel Gross asserts, writing in 2007, at this point: “Bottled water is an industry, not a craft” (Gross 2007). When more people are willing to distinguish themselves by drinking bottled water, the need for discrimination is satisfied by distinguishing *among* bottled water brands. “Taste” is recognized not simply by consuming bottled rather than tap water, but by consuming (at a higher price) premium bottled water brands like FIJI or Bling.

One frequently noted feature of contemporary consumer capitalism is the extent to which individual identity is created by consumption choices. In an early analysis of this phenomenon, Jean Baudrillard argues that the “system of consumption” is structured like a language. Individual consumption choices are the utterances by which we signify our identity to others. In a “consumer society,” the point of consumption is not the fulfillment of unmediated biological needs, but the assertion of status or (class) identity. Thus for Baudrillard, “the object [of consumption] becomes substitutable in a more or less unlimited way” (1988, 76-77). In other words, discrimination among bottled waters is neither in the palate nor in our “imagination” (Connell 2006) of how the water tastes, but in our imagination of how drinkers of particular kinds of water are seen. This phenomenon has intensified as Baudrillard’s “consumer society” has evolved into a society structured around “personal branding” (Hearn 2008).

Richard Wilk succinctly remarks that “Bottled water is an exceptionally clear example of the power of branding to make commodities a meaningful part of daily life” (Wilk 2006, 305). Because water itself is “tasteless,” it is a transparent vehicle for conveying sign status.

Charles Fishman discusses personal branding explicitly (and critically) with respect to bottled water:

In the array of styles, choices, moods, and messages available today, water has come to signify how we think of ourselves. We want to brand ourselves—as Madonna did—even with something as ordinary as a drink of water. We imagine there is a difference between showing up at the weekly staff meeting with Aquafina, or Fiji, or a small glass bottle of Pellegrino. Which is, of course, a little silly. (Fishman 2007)

Ferrier, describing increased bottled water consumption as a function of “changes in ways of life,” similarly notes that: “In [industrialized] countries, most people have office works and the bottle of water is now a common element on a desk, next to the computer and the telephone. Drinking expensive bottled water (compared to tap water) is a sign of a rise in the social scale.” (Ferrier 2001, 18).

While in a sense Fishman is right to assert that it is “a little bit silly” to worry about what your colleagues will think of you if you show up with the “wrong” kind of bottled water, there is also some truth to it. Received wisdom has it that our judgments are often formed pre-consciously.[[20]](#footnote-20) Because of our constitution as social beings, we are much more often concerned at a subconscious level with how other people see us, or how we think other people are seeing us.[[21]](#footnote-21) Human beings in contemporary Western societies are not just social beings, but social beings who live in societies that are larger than face-to-face and marked by high levels of inequality, and where that inequality is marked and enforced by market transactions and economic power rather than state-imposed violence. For that reason, we are much more concerned about the kinds of things that we consume, the kinds of clothes that we wear, the look of the water that we drink - in short, the way our consumption makes us appear to others. At the same time, we are also embodied as meta-conscious individuals: individual beings who are conscious of their consciousness, or beings who can think about their thinking.

That status signification through consumption choices is a feature of contemporary capitalism is significant for anti-bottled water activists. At one level, the response to bottled water marketing has been to cultivate a distaste for bottled water: to position bottled water as an undesirable or distasteful good. Such campaigns may focus on the environmental consequences of bottled water consumption, by re-scaling “convenience” (as in figure 1, above), or by undermining associations of bottled water with “purity” (see figure 2).



Figure 2. FIJI Water subvertisement, author unknown.

At the same time, because this struggle occurs within postmodern capitalist society, individuals who are the targets of such campaigns, need a way to *signify* their distaste for bottled water. It is occasionally possible to publicly signify the refusal of bottled water (e.g. by ordering tap water in a restaurant). Gross, for example, suggests that the transformation of bottled water into a mass consumer has led to “the new snob appeal of tap water.” (Gross 2007). A brief report for the Earth Policy Institute, optimistically notes that “From San Francisco to New York to Paris, city governments, high-class restaurants, schools, and religious groups are ditching bottled water in favor of what comes out of the faucet.” (Larson 2007) This both confirms the ways in which consumption functions as a social (rather than merely individual) phenomenon, and also the ways in which identity formation through consumption is about differentiation or distinction, as Gross suggests: tap water is available at “*high-class* restaurants.”

Despite the universalizing impulses of public water provision, water consumption even in the Fordist era was in a sense privatized. Municipal water is piped directly into private homes, where most drinking water consumption is done. If water drinking is done in private, then it is more difficult to signal a distaste for bottled water publicly. The ubiquitousness of refillable water bottles can be understood in this context as a means to signal distaste for bottled water. At the same time, it participates in both the ideology of hydration (Hawkins et al 2015, chapter 3), and in the more general ideology of consumerism.

These contradictory pressures suggest that the phenomenon is more complex than the binary “bottled vs tap” might initially suggest. In the early to mid-2000s, when a number of northern and Midwestern American cities, struggling with fiscal constraints and a surplus of municipal water generating capacity because of declining population, seriously considered, and in some cases produced, bottled public municipal tap water (AP 2004, Hartzwell 2005; Hill 2002). While those ventures tended to fall quickly by the wayside, more recently there has been at least one case where a private venture explicitly trades on the quality or taste of public municipal tap water. (Figure 3)



Fig. 3 Source: http://www.tapdny.com/

Not surprisingly, “taste” here incorporates gustatory sensation “just like mom used to serve,” but also the distaste cultivated by environmental critiques (“No glaciers were harmed making this water”) as well as cultural ones (“without the funny accent”). What kind of people drink “the anti-bottled water bottled water”?

While Tap’d NY appears to no longer be available, the incorporation of various critiques of bottled water lives on in ethical bottled water brands. Antipodes bottled water, available at Ray’s & Stark, proclaims itself to be “the first premium water in the world to be carbon neutral to the dining table, anywhere in the world.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Perhaps most famously, Ethos bottled water, sold at Starbucks, and at one time endorsed by Matt Damon, sends five cents from every purchase to a fund “to help support water, sanitation, and hygiene education programs in water-stressed countries.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Ethos Water consumers can feel like they are “doing good” with their bottled water purchases, and are making wiser consumption decisions than those who are seduced by celebrity endorsements (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Jamie Foxx endorsing Bling water[[24]](#footnote-24)

While some may make an exception to their opposition to bottled water for such ethical brands, others will insist on subsuming Starbucks’s “ethical” brand in their anti-corporate critique (see, for example, [www.ethos-water.com](http://www.ethos-water.com)). Where to draw the line? When opposition to bottled water first started to develop at the university where I work, about a decade ago, students started arriving to classes with Nalgene refillable bottles. While these containers certainly require less plastic consumption than single-serve containers, they are no less branded items. Just as “pure water” is a marketing chimera, ethical or moral purity here appears to be (nearly) impossible: even in engaging in one of the most basic metabolic acts, we are engaging with, and thus in some way reproducing, a social system where status inequalities are asserted through acts of consumption.

In an article on gender and the politics of water access technologies in the Global South, Yoko Arisaka argues for a critical theory that is attentive to the possibility of people who are not able to articulate their interests and desires in the conventional (Western) terms of liberated subjectivity. Arisaka writes about poor women in the rural global South, for whom access to piped water in the home was *dis*empowering, because it took away a key social focus of their daily lives (gathering to collect water from a communal source). Presumptions about Western conceptions of agency, freedom, and convenience are inappropriate for that social context:

marginalization often involves the fact that the marginalized may not even think in terms of the political conception of identity-formation, either because they are systematically disempowered, or the powers of agency are made systematically unavailable, or because the very idea of the “political” or “critical consciousness” is foreign…

To appreciate the different forms of the political beyond the usual Western version, one must… understand from their own perspective what it means to be liberated. (Arisaka 2001, 5-12).

But perhaps the “systematic unavailability” of such things as political agency (as this is conceived in the Western political tradition), is not restricted to the context of the rural global South. We should be open to the possibility that a different set of powers or aspects of human liberation are unavailable in the urban global North. If so, then examining the cultivation of the taste for bottled water might point us to the limits, even if these are only dimly perceptible, of a social form in which individuation is possible only or at least largely through consumption.

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2. This was recognized by the UN General Assembly in July 2010 (Resolution 64/292). See <http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hawkins, Potter and Race do not explicitly tie the rise of branding with neoliberalism or postmodernism. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In an earlier study, Catherine Ferrier (2001) argues that the main drivers are: 1) concern for “health and safety” and 2) “changes in ways of life.” The latter includes both the convenience and portability of plastic bottles (“lighter and easier to carry”), intense marketing, and status concerns. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Bottledwaterscape” is a neologism I have derived from the term “foodscape,” which is itself derived from “landscape.” In all three cases, the animating idea is that “nature” (land, food, water) both exists as a material thing, and is represented in specific cultural ways. Landscape paintings, for example, represent physical terrain in ways that both mirror but also highlight or distort certain features, with the ideological effect of providing viewers with a particular idea or understanding of what “the land” is really like. For an example of this type of research, focused on the “corporate-organic foodscape,” see Johnston, Biro, and McKendrick 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The emphasis on “construction” in the literal sense of the term is indebted to the work of Steven Vogel. See, for example, Vogel (2002), especially section III. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <http://cupe.ca/world-water-day-take-action-public-water> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <http://cupe.ca/water>, emphasis added. CUPE is a large union, but includes some locals with members working for municipal water utilities. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <http://www.nestle-waters.ca/en/brands/nestle-pure-life-natural-spring-water>. According to the website, it is “the second-most sold bottled water brand in the world.” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Nineteenth-century London was the first city to exceed the per capita water consumption rate of Ancient Rome. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. http://www.fijiwater.com/company/ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See, for example, Clarke 2004; Olson 1999. In the US and Canada, water labeled as “spring water” cannot legally be sourced from tap water. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Szasz claims that his encounter with bottled waters upon moving to New Jersey sparked the more general idea of an “inverted quarantine.” See “’Inverted Quarantine,’ a lecture by Andrew Szasz” Oct 18, 2010. <https://vimeo.com/16297857> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The regulation of racially segregated water fountains under Jim Crow provides a clear historical example of the connections between water access, citizenship rights, and “purity.” More recently, according to a 2008 study, 93 (out of about 600) First Nations communities in Canada were then under boil water advisories. (“Investigative Report” 2008) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taste>. (March 20, 2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. In North America, the most famous is Ray’s & Stark Bar in Los Angeles, where Martin Riese (“America’s first water sommelier”) has crafted a 40+ page water menu, comprised of 20 different bottled waters. The terms above are all taken from this menu, which is available online at

    <https://www.patinagroup.com/rays-and-stark-bar/menu#Water+Menu>. On Riese, see, for example, Ricchio (2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Despite different etymological roots, in French “gout” similarly refers to gustatory sensation and aesthetic distinction. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. <https://www.patinagroup.com/rays-and-stark-bar/menu#Water+Menu> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. US production of PET bottles was “negligible” in 1977, 2.5 billion in 1980, and 5.5 billion in 1985 (Hawkins et al 2015, 7-8). Of course, PET bottles are used to contain beverages other than water, as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This line of psychological research is famously popularized in Malcolm Gladwell’s, *Blink* (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Within the canon of Western political theory, this point is perhaps most famously emphasized in Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*. For a more recent account grounded in contemporary evolutionary biology, see Moss and Pavesich (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. <https://www.patinagroup.com/rays-and-stark-bar/menu#Water+Menu> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. http://www.starbucks.ca/responsibility/community/ethos-water-fund [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. This image was downloaded from the Bling water website a couple of years ago, but appears to be no longer available online. A short video clip of Foxx endorsing Bling can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmKqwWZU3dk> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)