



CONTAINERS AND WASTE: ORDERING THE UNRULY

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PRAGUE, ONLINE

AIMS

The ‘container perspective’ charts a new territory for tracing the relations and effects containment might have in the world of discard. Being enclosed, concealed, protected and subsequently released, emptied, or just left open has a transformative potential both for the container and its content. Containment stretches across scales, modifies temporal regimes, transforms value, shapes entropy and order through classification. It offers a perspective on the relations and connections that were previously hidden or too obvious to be noticed.

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VENUE

Online, ZOOM.

In case of interest, please, contact us at sosna@eu.cas.cz.

PROGRAM

Monday, October 25

- 16:00 Welcome
- 16:05 - 16:25 **Daniel Sosna and David Henig** (Czech Academy of Sciences and Utrecht University)
- Containers and Waste: Introduction
- 16:25 - 16:45 **Sasha Newell** (Université libre de Bruxelles)
- Surplus Valuables: The Containment of Clutter and the Animacy of Accumulation
- 16:45 - 17:05 **Pavel Mašek** (Czech Academy of Sciences)
- The Dark Side of the Container: Creating and Manipulating the Inside and Outside of the Container
- 17:05 - 17:25 **Başak Saraç-Lesavre** (University of Manchester)
- End of engagement with deep time? From containment to containerization of nuclear waste
- 17:25 - 17:40 **Zsuzsa Gille** (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)
- Reflections, comments
- 17:40 - **General Discussion**

ABSTRACTS

Containers and Waste: Introduction

Daniel Sosna and David Henig

Our presentation introduces the *container perspective* and its relationship to waste. Drawing on the recent literature on containers (Shryock and Smail, 2017; Høyer Leivestad and Markkula, 2021), we outline the key analytical and theoretical directions for approaching discard and waste through the container perspective. We pay attention to a transformative potential of containers, their content, and the practices and regimes of containment. This potential relates to themes such as materiality, temporality, scale, value, and classification, which already received attention in waste and discard studies. The container perspective, we argue, offers a new angle for tracing relations and regimes that were previously less obvious. Our research experience with municipal and military waste respectively enables us to explore what a journey of ‘thinking with’ containment and containers might look like.

Surplus Valuables: The Containment of Clutter and the Animacy of Accumulation

Sasha Newel

While capitalist ethos encourages consumption as civic duty and profit drives continually decrease the intended lifespan of commodities, material possessions live on in domestic households across the globe. Drawing upon my research in U.S. domestic spaces, I examine the daily struggles through which middle class Americans attempt to keep their possessions under their control through containment, which often constitutes a deferral of ordering or choosing what belongs and what does not. The feeling is often that the clutter is winning, and contemporary popular discourse around hoarding as a mental illness and minimalism as the new moral aesthetic are responses to the anxieties produced by the sensed vitality of surplus possessions. I argue that the dramatic increase in storage space in recent history has only temporarily stemmed the tide of an increasingly global problem - a surplus of domestic vibrant matter that is both too valued and too worthless to place appropriately. And indeed, were we to truly empty our closets en masse - where would it all go?

The Dark Side of the Container: Creating and manipulating the inside and outside of the container

Pavel Mašek

Containers consist of the interior and the exterior. Nevertheless, the inside of the container might not always be what the outside states it is. Building upon Shryock and Smail's (2018) note that things happen inside containers, I explore the movement of once contained things from one container to another. Furthermore, I demonstrate that things that happen inside the container are relational and inseparably interwoven with things that happen outside of it. As Robb (2018) suggests, we should take into account the containers' ability to transform things into assemblages. Containers connect things, thus create relations. Nevertheless, the contained thing might get stuck in the process of containment, whereas losing the initially intended relations, identity, and even its material form, in order to create other types of relationship. The metamorphosis of contained things can be both real and theoretical, yet the results do not have to be necessarily conjoint. The container, thus, might develop into a deliberate or unintended

vehicle of the ideology, where it serves as a medium of hierarchical communication and political order-keeping. In this paper, I build upon my ethnographic research at an auto salvage yard in the Czech Republic, where unusable auto parts are disposed of in general waste containers and eventually end up in the landfill or incineration plant. I will present the idea of the two-sided container, wherein things vanish ostensibly as inside a magician's disappearing-person-box.

End of engagement with deep time? From containment to containerization of nuclear waste

Başak Saraç-Lesavre

In 2010, the Obama Administration abandoned the long-planned and contested Yucca Mountain geological repository project, once established by the national legislation as the only candidate site to be considered for containing the country's nuclear waste for a million years. In the absence of an ongoing national nuclear waste program, private nuclear actors are seeking options to handle their waste on their own terms, making nuclear waste become increasingly object of new forms of economic transactions; assetization and rentiership (Birch, 2017; Muniesa, 2017; Birch and Muniesa, 2020). This phenomenon is well-illustrated by two license applications for proposed private consolidated interim storage facilities pending before the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. By materially, historically, and ethnographically tracing what it qualifies as 'the containerization' of nuclear waste, the paper argues that such a transformation signals both an end of engagement with deep time, and end of attempts to construe 'desirable' and 'valuable' arrangements among temporally distanced collectives.