



## People and the Planet 2013 Conference Proceedings

This article was first presented at the *People and the Planet 2013 Conference: Transforming the Future*, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia, 2–4 July.

All articles published in this collection have been peer reviewed.

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Title: The (Im)Mobile Life of Food and Drink Packaging Technologies in the City  
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Publisher: Global Cities Research Institute, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia  
Year: 2013  
Editor(s): Paul James, Chris Hudson, Sam Carroll-Bell, Alyssa Taing

Series URL:

<http://global-cities.info/news-events/conferences-forums/conferences-proceedings>

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# The (Im)Mobile Life of Food and Drink Packaging Technologies in the City

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**Abstract:** Several studies have looked at the time-space adjusting potential of information and communication technology use and the subsequent impact on the movement of people. But there is a wide array of other more mundane technologies which can also influence the daily time-space paths of people. Food and drink packaging is one such set of technologies and a vital element of the fast food system. In the United Kingdom the growth of the fast food and food to-go industries have been impressive, especially the emergence of convenient breakfast and lunch products which now constitute a significant proportion of all consumer food services. However, accompanying and fuelling this growth is a proliferation of different types of ergonomic packaging which enables foods and drinks to be consumed at almost any place and many more times. The purpose of this paper is to follow to-go packaged food targeted for breakfast and lunches as they get consumed and used in order to explore how these technologies have modified and re-configured people's time-space paths and movement.

**Keywords:** Food and drink packaging, mobility, convenience, time-space, eating practices.

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## 1. Technology and travel

Food and drink packaging may seem, at first glance, an unlikely candidate to explore environmentally unsustainable patterns of daily mobility in the city. Yet developments in food and drink packaging have made fast food and food to-go a possibility, and these particular types of food systems, and the regular patterns of food consumption practices they engender, have had a very great influence on patterns of daily mobility. In the United Kingdom (UK), for instance, it is now rare to go home for lunch, a disappearing practice that has arguably played a part in encouraging people to live further from where they work or on deciding where they send their children to school. Advances in the packaging of food have very dramatically changed the ways in which food is provisioned and consumed while travelling, from the very elaborate dining arrangements of early train, boat and plane travel to the compact and standardized boxed, bottled and canned food one can now purchase, carry and consume on almost any journey. And the fast food and convenience food infrastructures that have been set up in cities around the world, that have been enabled by packaging, have meant more people now buy breakfast and lunch on their way to work changing shopping patterns and typical morning routines considerably. These changes in the consumption of food enabled by advances in packaging have had very real impacts on the experiences and practices of everyday mobility.

So the central focus in this paper is on those types of packaging designed to be used on the go and not the food itself. My argument is that to-go packaging is an absolutely vital part of food systems that inscribe certain convenient eating practices by allowing food to be easily carried, ergonomically consumed and temporarily stored by consumers in varied ways and so deserves to be studied. Moreover, following these particular types of packaging provides an excellent way of capturing the changes in eating practices that have shaped patterns of everyday mobility in the city.

For the purposes of this research the category of food termed ‘food to-go’ incorporates items such as packaged ready-made sandwiches, salads, sushi and an array of liquid drinks, yoghurts, smoothies as well as more ‘traditional’ types of fast food prepared and packaged in-store yet often consumed elsewhere. Concentrating on these mundane technologies and their relationships with everyday travel practices contrasts with the large body of work within the fields of transport studies, transport geography and even an emerging field of mobilities studies which have in different ways aimed to understand the impacts, influences and relations of a wide range of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on daily travel.

A recent review in Transportation Research Part C by Andreev (*et al.* 2010) highlighted how most work on so-called teleactivities—those activities that can be done virtually with ICTs—have tended to concentrate on the domains of work and shopping. Authors and transport scientists have attempted to show and predict how working distantly from home or ordering food and other products online means consumers do not need to physically travel for these tasks and thus may represent a potential contribution to reducing travel demand and creating more environmentally benign societies.

However, while these studies are certainly worthwhile they arguably take too simplistic a view and are too restrictive in scope to properly understand the complex dynamics of travel and the equally complex relationships between technology and travel. Isolating and reducing transport demand as a function of the performance of closed and bounded categories such as work or shopping fails to take into account how activities performed throughout the day are intimately bound up with and shape each other. Moreover, positing that the use of a certain technology as a way of substituting for physical travel is taking a technologically deterministic position that brings with it certain assumptions over the nature of the relationship between technology and social practices. Rather than seeing technology as an external determinant of social practices it is assumed that it is better to understand social practices as being defined and co-evolving with these technologies. The implications from this shift in perspective are profound and mean moving towards more dynamic understandings of the relationship between technologies and social practices.

In addition, transport studies examining the transport effects of teleactivities fail to recognize the profound temporal and spatial effects of these technologies. A number of influential books have highlighted the role of telecommunications technologies in the production and consumption of space in the city (Amin and Thrift 2002, Graham and Marvin 2001, Sheller and Urry 2006). Sheller and Urry (2006), for example, deploy the concepts of ‘landscape’ and ‘technoscape’ which simultaneously organize and yet are also organized by local performances and mobilities. The term technoscape is particularly salient as it is argued that a great number of technological elements are imbricated in the construction and performance of landscapes which also help construct various mobile and immobile subjectivities such as the ‘driver’, the ‘pedestrian’, the ‘cyclist’, the ‘office worker’ and so on. In other words, these

variously mobile subjects consist of both human and non-human elements which interact to reproduce a metabolism of the city. For example, a 'driver' would not get very far without a car, road networks, traffic signals etc. Likewise, many mobile subjects might find it increasingly difficult to move about the city without mobile phones.

One other example of the temporal effects of ICTs which have begun to be considered in transport studies and transport geography relates to the ways in which these technologies can make travel time more productive (Kenyon and Lyons 2007). Viewing travel time as productive is hugely consequential for investment decisions in transport infrastructure as for many years investments in new transport systems was based on the assumption that travel time was unproductive. But studies on the temporal effects of ICTs have also drawn on concepts from time-geography to show how ICTs have unevenly relaxed certain coupling, capability and authority constraints according to certain axis of social differentiation (Couclelis 2009, Kwan *et al.* 2007, Schwanen *et al.* 2008, Schwanen and Kwan 2008,). Within these articles ICTs are often defined as time-space adjusting devices enabling, albeit unevenly, certain activities to be de-coupled from time and space (also see Janelle 2012, Janelle and Gillespie 2004).

The notion of constraint is central to time-geographic analyses and helps explain the organization of individual time-space paths. Hägerstrand (1975) identified three types of interrelated constraint. Firstly, there are capability constraints such as the biophysical needs of humans who need to eat and sleep or the capability of tools and environments to afford certain practices. Secondly, coupling constraints which are engendered by the necessary bounding together of humans with other humans or humans with tools in order to perform certain activities and achieve certain goals. Thirdly, there are a series of authority constraints which are the laws, rules and norms which regulate access and movement through time-space. These constraints together act as structural limitations on the times and spaces of practice and so dictate or impede movement through time and space. For example, work practices are often spatially as well as temporally constrained by a combination of capability, coupling and authority constraints, as was eating for most of history.

Critically, the role of technology and the material world are implicated in coordinating, constraining and structuring the time-geographies of everyday life (Hägerstrand 1976, Pred 1981, Thrift 1977). As Pred mentions:

'Because social reproduction is inseparable from everyday labour and other practices, it is also inseparable from the reproduction of the material world of buildings, transportation facilities, eating utensils, tools, furniture, and other man-made [sic] objects' (Pred 1981, p.7).

Coupling, capability and authority constraints are thus structured by the material world as much as they are by social norms and biophysical attributes of humans. Yet technological change can, in these terms, also be seen as having a capacity to adjust time-space if they loosen some or all of these constraints. These are useful concepts to carry forward in attempting to outline how food and drink packaging and even objects as mundane as eating utensils, as noted by Pred above, shape daily travel patterns. Furthermore, these micro-analyses of the ways in which technology shapes or adjusts individual time-space paths can have important ramifications at a more macro-level and over a longer historical perspective. As Pred (1981) notes social reproduction is inseparable from the everyday individual acts and

acknowledging these links between the micro and macro level can provide fresh insights into the environmentally unsustainable metabolisms of many cities.

The literatures briefly reviewed above go some way to rectifying the linear, causal and deterministic models of transport demand as determined by ICTs within the field of transport studies. However, there is still a neglect of the vast array of many mundane technologies that populate the city and shape time-space paths beyond ICTs. The next section will briefly review literature within sociology that has looked at the temporal and spatial effects of mundane technologies associated with food but which has so far failed to link these findings with their implications for mobility.

## **2. Food practices, convenience technologies and time-space ordering but where are the mobility implications?**

There are many great studies on convenience food that usually emanate from marketing journals and business case studies that seek to understand how market share and sales of these products can be increased. But it is the work on convenience technology and the temporal and spatial ordering of society which is of most relevance for this discussion.

Alan Warde (1999) has investigated how convenience foods are used in response to problems of scheduling created by more complex, de-routinized and individualized time-space paths of everyday life. But he argues that the ability of convenience foods to easily re-schedule and re-sequence the provision, preparation and consumption of meals may also exacerbate the problem of scheduling and synchronization in everyday life. This not only applies to convenience food, indeed, Warde (*et al.* 1998) argue that convenience technologies in general exacerbate the complexity and individualization of time-space paths contributing to feelings of hurriedness and reproducing the fragmented temporal and spatial patterns of everyday life in the city. It is stressed, in other words, that the convenience of convenience technologies lie in their ability to easily re-sequence and flexibly re-schedule activities which paradoxically exacerbate the very problems of sequencing and scheduling that they help resolve.

Recent lines of investigation, using an emerging practice orientated approach, have moved away from concentrating solely on convenience technologies to look instead at the influence of new practices of eating on the temporalities of everyday life (Cheng *et al.* 2007, Southerton 2009, Southerton *et al.* 2012). Nevertheless, much of this literature draws attention to the importance of synchronization and sequencing of food-related practices which shape and are shaped by the (shifting) *materialities, spatialities and network configurations* (understood as person-to-person co-presence). Critically, these studies begin to explore how the provisioning, preparation and consumption of food interacts and gets coordinated with other practices. In doing so this approach opens up the possibility of exploring the interconnections between different types of technologically mediated food-related practices and other non-food-related practices.

However, examinations of convenience food, food practices and time-space paths have largely failed so far to connect their findings to the direct and indirect influences on patterns of mobility and travel practices. Yet there is perhaps real value in integrating transport and mobilities research with this body of work that explores convenience food technologies, eating practices and the time-space ordering of everyday life. Furthermore, if we view the city as a complex adaptive system whose tempo or metabolism is the outcome of the

interaction, across multiple scales, of many social, technical and discursive elements then following mundane technologies at a local level can provide insight into how these emergent macro-level tempos and metabolisms of the city get generated. Relatively large and long term changes in the infrastructure of cities, such as the development of transport systems, certainly condition eating practices but they may also be shaped by them; by the small, local and relatively recent but nonetheless important changes such as in the design of food and drink packaging and transformations in eating practices.

In the remainder of this paper I focus on mundane food and drink packaging technologies and specifically packaging associated with fast food and food to-go to eaten for breakfast and lunch on a work day. I do so to show how such objects, through their capacity to re-order time and space, have a very real impact in reproducing environmentally unsustainable patterns of mobility in the contemporary Western city. I draw on data taken from focus group interviews conducted with young city workers from London, UK and Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK, that inquired after the ways in which fast food and food to-go was used on a daily basis. This sample was chosen as it has been suggested in market research literature that this cross-section of society are the most likely to use and consume fast food and food to-go products and are thus most likely to be able to describe in detail how these foods, and packaging, are deployed both on routine travel trips and in everyday life more generally.

In addition to the focus group data I also draw extensively upon desk-based research both to contextualize the focus group discussions but also to compare and trace historically the co-evolution in the consumption of fast food and food to-go packaged products and the temporal and spatial re-organization of the city. As Alan Warde (2005) notes practices have trajectories, but then so too must the multiple material components that help define and shape them, and so history matters for the understanding of both.

### **3. Food and drink packaging, breakfast/lunch and mobility in the city**

It is apparent that the consumption of fast food and, more recently, a range of foods designed to be eaten and carried on the go are a staple part of contemporary consumer lifestyles. According to Euromonitor market research consistently over 70 per cent of all consumer foodservices have been in the format of a take-away over the past five years (Euromonitor 2011). And a significant proportion of this food taken away constitutes breakfasts and lunches for the UK population. The sandwich market in the UK, for example, was worth £4.27 billion in 2011 (data from Mintel Oxygen 2012b). And the cereal, snack and energy bar market has grown 32 per cent from 2005 to 2011 (Mintel Oxygen 2012a).

As a consequence the lunch hour has been gradually disappearing and more recently breakfasts have been re-sequenced and in many cases also disappearing. Many people are instead eating lunch at their work desks and an expanding proportion of the population eating breakfast there too. A market research survey on breakfast habits conducted by Mintel (2011a) consisting of 2,000 UK internet users found that ‘almost half of all consumers surveyed’ said they do not eat breakfast at home with 26 per cent saying they ate breakfast at their work desk.

Another study of lunchtime eating habits conducted by Mintel of 2,000 internet users aged 16 and over pointed out that most workers eat outside of home and over 50 per cent continue to buy lunch to eat out of the home on a weekday despite the impacts of the recession (Mintel

Oxygen 2010). It is also detailed that younger workers and Londoners are the most likely to engage in these types of practice. A subsequent Mintel report (2011b) similarly showed that, from a survey of 2,000 internet users aged 16 and over, 25 per cent ate lunch at their desks at least two to three times a week. The emergence of these eating practices has prompted some journalists to talk of a new cultures of so-called ‘desk-fasting’ at work (see *The Independent* 2005, *The Times* 2010) or dining ‘al-desco’ (BBC 2013).

These changing eating practices have arguably been conditioned by improvements in the ergonomics of food and drink packaging. It was only in 1981 when the first Marks and Spencer’s pre-packaged sandwich—a salmon and tomato variety (McDonald 2010)—was introduced. This event marked a further shift towards the growing concentration, centralization and commodification of lunch with implications for the time-space paths of daily life. Perhaps more important than the sandwich, which has existed for centuries, was the sealed plastic wedged container that allowed this lunch to be ready-to-hand and carried easily facilitating the consumption of lunch beyond the home, cafeteria or canteen. Furthermore, the plastic wedged container permitted a great deal of flexibility with regards the provisioning of food. This specific type of convenience food could be made in a factory a number of days before purchase and could stand waiting on a shelf for extended periods of time while the packaging retained the freshness of the product. Additionally, this meal could be purchased anytime during the day and could wait, packaged, ready for consumption at another time in the day. The purchase of a pre-prepared and packaged sandwich also meant workers, or their family members, no longer had to spend time in the morning preparing lunches. The packaged sandwich has, therefore, relaxed the traditional sequence of purchasing, preparing and then consuming food for some members of society as these practices get fragmented into a disaggregated set of activities which could be carried out at multiple places, different times and in new sequences.

Many other examples can be used to demonstrate the ways in which packaging has relaxed the constraints of provisioning and consuming food. The introduction of Kellogg’s Nutri-grain cereal bar in 1997, for instance, was designed as a healthy product for ‘busy people who had missed breakfast’ (*The Times* 2012). It immediately gained 50 per cent market share in a cereal bar market that has continued to expand. A key feature of this product is its ability to be de-coupled from other materials and tools as well as the capacity of this technology to be stored for much longer periods than bottles of milk or opened cereal boxes that begin to perish much more quickly once opened. Consequently, individually sized portions of cereal bar can easily be stored at the work desk for convenient consumption without the need for fresh milk, utensils or a bowl. That said evidence also suggests that new forms of fresher packaged breakfasts are emerging that might challenge the cereal bar in the future. A Euromonitor report on packaged food published in 2013 has highlighted some of these innovations in breakfast packaging and products beyond the cereal bar.

‘There were also significant developments in breakfast cereals, with a large increase in the number of individual portion on-the-go breakfast packs which feature one portion of cereal, plus a portion of milk and a spoon included. Premium versions of this style of product were also pioneered by Prêt A Manger and Marks and Spencer, featuring yoghurt pots, granola pots and even portable porridge pots, again all tapping into the ever-expanding on-the-go breakfast market, aimed at higher-income workers who may have busier lifestyles and are more prepared to pay a premium for convenience, taste and health benefits’ (Euromonitor 2013).



All the packaged foods mentioned so far serve to re-configure the sequencing of food practices. Yet the attributes that make these products convenient—their extended lives and the ease of mobility and storage—are enabled by the packaging. Advances in packaging size and shape have made food more ergonomic, thus permitting the mobility of food and its consumption in many more places. Additionally, improvements in the barrier properties of packaging have helped extend the life of these products allowing them to be stored in many more places.

The apparent revolutions in the purchasing and consumption of breakfast and lunch, shaped by innovative packaging, cannot be disentangled from contemporary forms of everyday work life and mobility. For example, in the focus group conversations conducted as part of my research on the mobile life of food and drink packaging it became apparent that the habits of breakfast are shaped by the rigidities of other practices in the morning, including the morning commute, which had to be organized around conventions regarding the start time of work which was more or less flexible for different workers.

‘I’d rather eat something small, I’ll eat breakfast at my desk and I’ll have something like porridge or like these granola bars which I keep there... and I can get up and be at my work desk for 8:55 am, because it only takes me half an hour to get ready if I don’t have breakfast and it takes me half an hour to get to work’ (Excerpt from Focus Group A).

Combining breakfast with work, evidently, contributes and amplifies other changes in the use and organization of space and time elsewhere in the morning such as the time dedicated to commuting to work. The quote above illustrates a finely balanced sequence and scheduling of activities in the morning. The constraints of the commute, and activities performed before and after commuting, are finely balanced with similarly rigid temporally and spatially situated conventions of the morning including starting work at a particular time and doing certain practices associated with ‘getting ready’ such as showering. Breakfast has become a more flexible activity for many of the participants as it can be, and is, re-sequenced as a way of managing the tensions between other more temporally and spatially rigid practices in the morning.

These ways of provisioning and consuming food can also give shape to the temporality of the work day as is illustrated in the description of a typical work day from one of the participants interviewed below:

‘I just think, I tend to finish a little bit later and I say okay just give up lunch and get it all done just sit down and hammer through it to finish at a reasonable time. And also I am always late every single day, I am just pathetic in the morning and because I’m late I can’t really just say I’ll have an hour lunch break. And I think well I started late so I might as well just carry on... I don’t eat breakfast. I might have a snack at my desk like a chocolate bar (laughs) or something. Because I normally have lunch at 12 noon or 12:30 pm, really early’ (Excerpt from Focus Group A).

Note how in this excerpt breakfast and lunch interact with each other to shape the temporalities of a work day. But perhaps more importantly this extract shows how managing time at work through multi-tasking or combining eating with work and through fragmenting food-related practices allows workers to finish work at a ‘reasonable time’. The hour or time

of finishing work was seen as hugely significant for all participants. Packaged food often permitted some degree of control over work time in order to finish at a reasonable time and in a small number of cases (those participants who were on flexi-hour contracts) packaged food allowed finishing work earlier than expected:

C1– ‘But I always used to do that, I would maybe go out for a bit then bring the sandwich back and just eat it at my desk.’

C3– ‘I refuse to sit at my desk because you don’t actually get a break.’

C4– ‘Yeah me too I just go out and sit in a car park or whatever.’

C1– ‘But when I had flexi time it was the more I sat at my desk the more time I can actually have off so it usually took an hour to eat the sandwich because I would have just a few bites.’ (Discussion from Focus Group C)

Yet in other cases where workers are mobile, packaged foods are again relied upon to resist finishing what is thought of as ‘work’ at unconventional hours. The example below of a mobile worker who must sustain business networks over extended distances requiring periodic meetings shows how, when travelling for work, packaged food is crucial to managing and controlling time.

[Talking about buying packed sandwiches or salads] ‘...for me when I was driving around and might have to go up to Glasgow for a four hour appointment and drive home ... I didn’t want to stop for half an hour on the way there or on the way back because that means I get home an hour later... and yeah it’s eating in the car but ...’ (excerpt from Focus group C).

Yet again this example highlights the ways in which packaged food is used to manage time at work and during a work day. Multi-tasking while travelling, echoes the recent work conducted by Kenyon and Lyons (2007) on multi-tasking and the productive use of travel time. In this case, though, instead of using ICTs to perform work tasks or to socialize packaged food is used to eat; two different sets of technology with similar outcomes with regard the experience of travelling and ordering of the day.

As can be seen in the excerpts and discussions presented so far a strong theme concerned the struggle to finish at what are perceived to be appropriate or conventional times. Yet these conventions around finishing ‘on time’, enabled by packaged foods, have important implications for and generate problems associated with mass mobility as large numbers of workers in the city struggle to finish at similar times. Such processes lead to congestion, which is in many ways enabled by packaged food, as workers can more flexibly negotiate and coordinate their work schedules. However, the ability to manage time at work in order to finish ‘on time’ also facilitates the performance of more meaningful practices beyond the work context. In other words maintaining a temporally fixed work schedule is ascribed a great deal of importance as the workers interviewed led very busy lives after work as the following discussion reflects.

A3– ‘...yeah we do but then looking at this (points to a weekly schedule) I was writing this thinking this is so boring but then we do go out...’

A4– ‘...but last week for example Tuesday night we went out for someone's birthday, Thursday night we went out for dinner then we had people back round here...

A3– ‘...yeah Wednesday was that...’

A4– ‘...the amount of time we spent asleep, was hardly any really.’

A3– ‘Yeah I definitely do something every night, Mondays Zumba, Wednesday did we go on Westfield or something else?’

A6– ‘...that's the thing your boring week doesn't really apply because on top of this I will be throwing in 1 million things that aren't routine; that you can't put on a weekly timetable.’ (Discussion from Focus Group A)

A ‘boring week’ in which very little happens after work is viewed negatively. These narratives resonate with cultural theories on the late modern period which suggests an increasing concern with the aestheticization and stylization of life. As Featherstone (1994) points out identities can be made and re-made through the differentiated patterns of consumption at various spatial locations across the city (which in the example above includes the Westfield shopping centre, the gym or dance classes, bars and restaurants etc.). These activities undertaken after work also serve to maintain personal relations with many of the practices highlighted in the excerpt above presuming coordination with others who finish work at similar times. But these activities performed after work also generate mobility as they require being at certain places often dispersed and dotted across urban areas. So packaged food, by giving shape to the temporalities of work, plays a role in giving shape to the temporalities and spatial ordering of everyday life more broadly and, therefore, indirectly generates mobility not related to paid employment and to the tempo and metabolism of the city.

#### **4. Summary and discussion**

The ubiquity and prevalence of packaged convenience food and drink products now offered in UK cities play a role in helping organize the timing and spatial order of the work day. While the focus group data in many ways hidden from view, these technologies were nonetheless there working in the background. And these technologies helped negotiate the temporal and spatial constraints inflicted through the demanding (im)mobilities that come with living and working in the city.

But far from simply saving time these technologies may further exacerbate the complex temporal and spatial orders of contemporary everyday life. They do this by de-coupling food and eating from place and time permitting more temporally and, in some cases (the mobile worker) a more spatially fragmented working practice. Yet these technologies also enable the flexible re-sequencing of eating practices to ensure participation in more meaningful activities after work. Eating breakfast at work can be seen both as a way of overcoming tensions generated by the time-space constraints of the commute whilst also being generative of these tensions by permitting them in the first place. Eating breakfast at work rather than being a simple cause of a lengthy commute may also go some way to extending it by allowing people to live further from where they work.

It is argued, therefore, that technologies of convenience, like the packaging of breakfast and lunches to-go, play an important role in sustaining more or less engrained and routines travel performances inside and outside of work. And these complex time-space paths are helping reproduce environmentally unsustainable patterns of mobility both as part of work and of life in the city more generally.

There is a danger that one reads such accounts as being entirely different than eating and mobility in the past. Clearly both mobility and convenience technology are not only features of the contemporary era. As Burnett (1989) points out some of the most significant changes in eating practices occurred during the period of mass industrialization and urbanization of Britain over the 19<sup>th</sup> century when overcrowded, urban populations had to rely more on commoditized food systems offering pre or part prepared foods. He notes how workers on very low incomes ‘were necessarily more dependent on commercially made products (bread was the first, and most important “convenience food”) bought at shops and markets’ (1989, p. 61).

And in John K. Walton’s excellent book on fish and chips and the working class in Britain highlights how fish and chips were a convenience food regularly consumed at work or on work days at the turn of the last century. He draws on early trade magazines to extract quotes that reveal a sense of why so many consumed this particular food.

‘A large number of warehouse girls and others make their midday meals frequently off fish and chips to save time and trouble involved in going home to dinner’ (Fish Trades Gazette, 6 October 1906, cited in Walton 1992, p. 68).

The consumption of fish and chips, which relied heavily on newspaper as packaging, was used to overcome what might be considered historical, and gendered and classed, frictions of distance. As one Tyneside fish fryer remarked in 1917, ‘it [fish and chips] was particularly popular with those who were at a distance from their home’ (cited in Walton 1992, p. 70).

These historical cases have no doubt also contributed to a particular tempo and metabolism of the city still felt today. Yet important changes have occurred. Burnett (2004) draws upon national survey data to show that even up until 1958, six in every ten workers went home for lunch. And as the evidence gathered from focus groups and market research surveys outlined above suggests going home for lunch is a practice that has all but disappeared as average distances travelled per day have increased.

Certainly there are many other important factors as to why people do not go home for lunch such as the increased participation of women in the workforce and processes of suburbanization that are not explored in this paper. But equally important are the emergence of new and more sophisticated packaging technologies that have shaped and inscribed new eating practices in the workplace and beyond. Examples given above included the Marks and Spencer’s pre-packaged sandwich and the cereal bar. These were not particularly new or revolutionary packaging materials but rather existing packaging done differently and combined in novel ways with food to inscribe new practices of eating which had important ramifications in the ordering of other practices throughout the day. In these ways relatively small technologies, like packaging, that may seem insignificant at first arguably play a crucial role in sustaining many environmentally unsustainable ‘big systems’ and urban metabolisms.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Andy Gillespie, Randal Richardson and Neil Thorpe for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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