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Book Review

*Plastic Soup: An Atlas of Oceanic Pollution*

*Plastic Soup: An Atlas of Oceanic Pollution* is a non-fiction book written by Dr. Michiel Roscam Abbing. He has been working diligently against plastic pollution since 2011 due to his work with the Plastic Soup Foundation (PSF) all the way in Amsterdam. His job is to work on reporting scientific research and developments on the PSF website, as well as giving lectures and informing others about the dangers of plastic pollution all around the world. Overall *Plastic Soup* discusses plastic pollution and the impacts of their production and makeup on not just people but wildlife all around the world. But, the book also importantly discusses innovative ways to recycle and reuse plastics, from artworks to even using plastics to reinforce foundation in houses, to name a couple. This book is split up into 2 parts titled “on the map” and “off the map”. The difference in the two parts is that the first part deals with plastic as a singular object, and dives deep in the manufacturing of plastics, how they are practically in everything we consume on a day to day basis, and the negative events sparked by plastic pollution. The first part in my opinion had more depressing take to it, as it went into detail of the reality of today’s plastic pollution problem. It was highly impactful and real, and had a multitude of pictures to show for it. It also further went into how our ecosystems are taking all of the beating from plastic pollution. The second half of a book takes on a whole new message; it is more hopeful yet still very real about the severity of the issue at hand. We are provided solutions or at least ways to reduce the plastic problem that correlate with the first half of the book. Some events and topics that are discussed in the book are the dangers of BPA, artworks that utilize plastics, the great pacific garbage patch, etc. Since this book holds a variety of topics and timelines, there is not a set timeframe on this book as a whole. The events as whole that the book discussed took place all over the world, in many different countries with different ecosystems, climates, weather patterns, etc. I think that this shows how deep rooted of an issue plastic really is, because if this is a universal problem effecting a multitude of ecosystems and animals, then this clearly is an urgent issue. Overall however, the book ends on a more government and political front, as we are met with many different ways that authorities around the world are stepping in with regulations on ways to solve the issue, as well as the topics of how to produce products responsibly, global sustainability, and finally international treaty’s. These are very significant to the problem, because as individuals we can only do so much to solve the plastic pollution crisis, so having ways to implement laws and regulations to have whole countries and even globally stop the issue is highly vital. I chose this book because plastic is a pollutant I am very passionate about limiting use of as well as protecting our environment. Having prior knowledge due to this current class allowed me to become even more interested with the concepts discussed. I also chose this book because the chapters and unique twists on an otherwise depressing and intimidating issue provided a hopeful context to reading this before I even picked up the book. This book caught my eye due to the stunning graphics presented throughout the entire book, there was not one page that was boring or bland to the eye, and it was stunning to see the concepts visually depicted.

A main point discussed in the book that really caught my attention was in chapter 4 titled “RIP: Rest in Plastic”. This chapter dove into the effects plastic has on animals, their homes, and the pure pain these animals can be put through because of plastic waste. Ironically I really enjoyed how depressing this chapter especially was, for it really tied me into the reading and captured through pictures how sad this truly is. For example, found on page 44 there is a sea lion entangled in what seems to be a fishing net, a very sad yet real depiction of how life threatening plastic can be. The chapter also discussed the ingestion of the plastics that kill thousands of animals every year. For example, it was described that in march 2012 there was a male sperm whale that washed up on a beach in Spain. The whale had ingested so much plastic that it created an entire hole in the whale’s stomach, it had died from starvation. It was reading events like that that really hit me. For innocent animals, drawn to absolute starvation harmed and potentially killed by reckless pollution by humans. This whole chapter was an eye opener that pollution is not just an issue that effects and harms humans, for plastic can kill anything and everything. Animals who are innocent and happen to be extra curious are left starved and injured. I thought this section was well written and really drove home the effects of selfishness of usage and disposal of plastics while using very real visuals to further drive the point home. Something that this book does phenomenally is the usage of real numbers and accurate statistics that further support any points brought up or information presented.

Another main point that was addressed in the book was how nature was being affected. They touched base on how plastic damage and hurt animals and their individual ecosystems, but chapter 5 titled “A Planet Full of Plastic”, really addresses the negative effects on our earth. For example, we are introduced to an entire new kind of rock called Plastiglomerate. This rock found in Kamilo Beach, Hawaii has melted plastic as one of its components. This all occurred in 2014, and it is truly scary to think about all the potential things that plastic has probably implemented itself in since that point. I really enjoyed the transition from talking about the direct effects plastic pollution has had on us as individuals, to other species, and then concluding with how plastic effects the world and nature as a whole. I found that to keep me engaged as well as fairly easy to read and keep up with. What I found especially interesting is the “plastisphere”, and it goes off of the biosphere which is the zone where all the organisms on Earth live. Now there is a plastisphere which is a thin shell of microbes that live on every piece of floating plastic. It is absolutely insane to think about how all the plastic floating in the sea is full of other living microbes all because of human generated plastic. At the same time these microbes can also be a hotspot for transferring bacteria and pathogens, so it poses an obvious health risk. What I did not particularly like about this section was that it ended with uncertainty as to what the outcome of this whole microbe issue might be, and it did not transition to the next section talking about precipitation very well. Other than that, I really enjoyed reading about a topic I have never heard about before especially one about a human generated ecosystem.

A final point really driven home in the book is found in chapter 7 and it is titled “Between Belief and Hope”. In this chapter the ideas discussed are ones that provide a sense of hope for the future. So they include recycling, cleaning up the ocean, bioplastics, and even converting plastics into fuel. I really enjoyed this section for it was definitely a change in theme and tone from the first half of the book. it provided hope and excitement for our future and the new technological advancements that would give our future a bigger chance of living in a world without so much plastic pollution. For example, the book discussed a district in India called Poona, that has designed a facility that can convert all kinds of plastics into fuel. The Rudra Environmental Solution was also founded, and this organization collects the plastic from nearly 10,000 households and converts them into fuel that is then bottled and sold in 122 villages. Another story comes from Filipino inventor Jayme Navvaro. He holds a patent in his work in converting plastic waste into oil. His fuel is cheaper and cleaner than ones bought from the pump along with low production costs. I really found this section interesting, for it was such a turn in the tone of the book. Changing from the more negative hopeless sense in the first half of the book to now having hope and solutions for the future.

Along with the original book, there were a multitude of reviews that I found. The two reviews that I decided on did a very thorough job of doing this book justice. The first review written by Tianna Burke was a very well thought out review that went into the organization and depth of every aspect of the book, along with adding in very short details that the author touched base on. Upon reading the review I was very enthused to see that another reader had the same interpretation of the book as I did. She explained how she really enjoyed the graphics of the book, and I wholeheartedly agree. The graphics placed throughout the pages were highly impactful as Tianna Burke explained in her review. Burke did an excellent job of also explaining the personal effects the book had on her and her lifestyle, for it added a different aspect to the review. The second review also did an excellent job of reviewing the book, just not as in depth and relating directly to the book as Burke’s. This Review, written by Ruth Blunt really used the book to support other research ideas and did not really go in depth about the creative properties it possessed like Burkes did. It was overall still a very good review, and the areas she did go in depth about were also the impactful graphics included in the book. I just wished she went into the organization that really made the book very unique and easy to read.

I give this book an overall 9/10. This is due to the stunning graphics that were throughout the book and the fact that they directly tied into what exactly the topic was. I thought the graphs used and statistics presented were also extremely helpful in understanding the various concepts presented throughout the book. However, only sometimes were the transitions a bit harsh and did not flow smoothly throughout each of the different sections, but I think that just might come with presenting so much information in such a small book. However, the explanation of the topics by the author allowed to easily understand some topics I have never really grasped before. The way the book started off to be a bit more helpless about the future and turned into a book about hope really I would definitely recommend this book to many people and I believe a majority of people would truly enjoy and be receptive of the information in this book. it presents such a wide variety of topics like artwork, biology, environmental studies, politics, and so much more that I feel like everyone could find something they really enjoy about this book. More specifically I would recommend this book to younger kids and teens, for it is a very visually captivating book and the information presented could introduce them into many different career fields or passions to protect the environment. Overall, *Plastic Soup: An Atlas of Oceanic Pollution* is a well thought out book full of a variety of concepts that string easily together as well as the reality of pollution and plastic pollution as a whole that continues to keep the reader entertained and does not stray away from the idea of the need for a brighter future full of more health and less plastic.

Works Cited

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