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**Globalization and Me:  
How Plastic Consumption Affects the World in a  
Vicious Cycle of Manufactured Toxic Waste**

Globalization – the worldwide flow of information, capital, people, goods, ideas and culture (Kindler, 2009). To consume or not to consume? That is the question. How do items produced in one part of the world end up on the other side of the world in an endless cycle of manufactured toxic waste? As I began the research for this paper I was concerned with themes of interpretation of material culture and utilitarian items from indigenous groups and third world nations as being appreciated only as art (Barnhart, 2002). I was also concerned with people making art from local materials. But with my interest in recycling and my skepticism of its merits, I tuned into a PBS documentary, *Bag It (2010)*, a film about how plastic bags are hurting people and wildlife and are marginalizing people and ecosystems (Steers, 2009) worldwide. The documentary features recyclable materials' sorters/workers poisoned by plastic smelting from plants situated next to where they perform their low-paying jobs (*Bag it, 2010*). At issue is that this material does not break down and impacts the globe in devastating ways. It is clearly a greed-based consumer and chemical company-driven practice and is unnecessary.

Globalization, much like the shoe that traversed the world (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2009) in order to be manufactured, can also be exemplified in the story of the manufacture of a single plastic bag. This widely used item has involved the production and use of oil, the marginalization of groups of indigenous peoples and oil contamination in places like the Secoyan community of Ecuador, who continue to adapt for survival (Bode, 2009). And like the chemical companies who encourage (control) the manufacture of plastics, the oil companies launch their own campaigns and TV ads about the ways oil companies practice conservation (Bode, 2009). These clean-up

activities are greatly misunderstood by the general public (Bode, 2009). How distressing that a final product used for a few minutes before being disposed of finds its way to a dump, river, out into the ocean and into gyres (swirling vortices of trash in the middle of the ocean).

<http://www.worldandi.com/subscribers/searchdetail.asp?num=16893>) and into the stomachs of innocent animals and sea life. As plastic bags have been banned by many countries all over the world, the chemical industry lobby remains so strong that our country is once again acting as both mass-consumer and large economy behind this trend and is probably ultimately responsible for it (*Bag It*, 2010). [vimeo.com/5645718](http://vimeo.com/5645718) The idea that globalization is really Americanization (Kim, 2009) and the West's idea of a perfect world and creating perfect humanity (Steers, 2012) has once again lead to the wholesale killing of people and wildlife (through contamination by dangerous chemicals).

Equally as devastating is the knowledge that the coffee cups that seem to be made of paper actually have plastic liners, as do all canned goods and sodas we consume. Not only does this marginalize the people involved in this manufacturing and "recycling" process, but it seems to perpetuate a cycle much like the water cycle that is unending.

In fact a lot of this garbage that is in landfills finds its ways to rivers and beaches across the world. Some foot-deep piles of broken un-recyclable shredded debris, becomes the sand at the shore line. In viewing photos of some of these gyres and shorelines, one could mistake the materials and their arrangement for works of art. Birds and sea animals cannot distinguish between these materials once they are photo degraded as they look like plankton or sea anemones. They are consumed by animals and birds and those animals on shore get caught up in them, tangled and strangled (*Bag It*, 2010). Animals either choke on these materials or die from consuming numerous pounds of it that cannot be digested. This phenomenon of the disposable culture is chemical company-fueled and US-driven. This industry has a very strong lobby and the only way we will break the cycle is to consume a lot less of its products and give up our plastic bags as other countries have done.

As I am still concerned with the classification, appreciation and viewing of art as artifact or as art, indigenous western artists have tackled the ideas of using trash and recyclables for their art, expressing the waste in our world as consumption. Artists such as Tim Noble and Sue Webster (Fabricus, 1998) who create art from junk and then illuminate it to create shadows that appear to make entirely different objects or forms than what is seen when viewing the sculpture directly; the sculptures of Chakaia Booker who creates art from recycled tires (<http://www.chakaiabooker.com>); or artist H.A. Schult, a German artist who has created figures from trash (Graffiti, 2010), all demonstrate a concern for the mass collection of useless and non-recyclable garbage. In my own home, in an effort to express one of the swirling masses of trash and vortices in the water, I gathered enough thin plastic material which I collaged into a depiction of a gyre.

With the knowledge that the coffee cup you buy at Starbucks or the Coke can from the local convenience store (both are plastic lined) wind up on the other side of the world in a gyre of swirling waste choking and killing wildlife it may actually become easier to curtail the use of these items. This, in turn, contributes to lowering consumption. This globalization practice considers the rest of the living world. We can start to use less, consider our purchases and use cloth bags when we go to the store.

As Delacruz (2009) points out in her article, we are in the midst of a worldwide recession tied to the collapse of a deeply intertwined global economy as evidenced by climate change which has been attributed to reckless human consumption, waste and wholesale destruction of our environment. This has helped to fuel worldwide poverty, hunger and disease (Delacruz, 2009). She also goes on to say that the achievement of capitalism, democracy, technology and Western ideology have produced excesses, human suffering, social fragmentation and devastation of entire ecosystems (Delacruz, 2009). I concur with her that what happens in the classroom and locally impacts on what happens globally (Blandy, 2009, as cited in Delacruz, 2009). Globalization, art and education are indeed linked.

At the store when they ask whether I choose paper or plastic I will answer with “Nothing, thank-you”, and hope that others will follow suit.

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