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Pollution, Alteration, and Climate

Introduction

For my dissertation proposal, I have chosen to focus my area of study upon environmental issues. The main focus of this proposal is to explore three key words that are represented through three images of my choice, in support of three inspirational visual artists. My key words of choice are *Pollution*, *Alteration* & *Climate*, each will link within the research portrayed throughout this proposal, in order to form a final question for my independent research document.

The environment is something that has always grasped my personal interest, especially within recent years and the on-going climate issues being faced daily.

Pollution

“the presence in or introduction into the environment of a substance which has harmful or poisonous effects”

Pollution contributes massively when referring to the environment. Whether it be plastic pollution or air pollution, each year there is a perceptible increase. According to National Geographic, ***“each year, about 8 million tons of plastic waste escapes into the oceans from coastal nations”***. Can you imagine the effects after 5 or 10 years?

Nowadays, plastic is virtually used in everything in our day to day lives – we don’t realise the damage it’s doing. Take for example that the vast majority of packaging from our food and drink produce is plastic. It has been proven that a singular water bottle will take ***“from 70 to 450 years to decompose”***. We have to begin to take action before the damage is irreversible.

With the word pollution in mind, I have focused upon research into the political scientist and author, Michiel Roscam Abbing, who wrote the book *‘Plastic Soup’*.

The book focalises on ways in which we as individuals can tackle the problem, how the marine life is affected, and long-term consequences. The author speaks upon how our planet is *Plastic Soup*, as it just floats around aimlessly in our oceans. Throughout the course of the book, we get a much better understanding of how ***“Plastic dominates our lives”*** as human beings. The reason being how the cost of plastic production is so cheap in comparison to other materials, as well as being light weight and efficient. There are so many pros to plastic production, however, they become easily over-lapped with cons. It is said to be believed that each and every plastic is still present today in some shape or form, as they are made to not dissolve. Instead, the plastics break down into microscopic pieces known as *microplastics*. These are completely invisible to the human eye but still remain a large environmental issue. Animals and wildlife are so heavily exposed to this form of pollution that we have created. Whether it be from accidentally consuming the plastic or simply injuring themselves with it, how is this fair? Microplastics can eventually end up entering food chains, which is extremely unhealthy for our wildlife, resulting in severe consequences – ***“evidence of damage to health is accumulating”***.

Beginning to explore the keyword *Pollution* in more depth, questions have been raised for further arguments. The question being, ‘how is plastic pollution affecting human health?’

There is so much more to this form of pollution, not just affecting our marine life. There is a much deeper investigation into this topic which I will research upon, in order to reach a conclusive question at the end of this study.



Andreas Franke "Plastic Ocean" (2019)

(Accessed March 2nd, 2021)

To acquire my practice into this study, the image demonstrated above spotlights a young girl surrounded by all forms of plastic pollution submerged in water. I find these images so unique and touching. The lighting is so clean, really capturing the emotion and expression on the subject's face. She is drowning amongst our own problems; the plastic seems to be engulfing her as if it's too late to reverse our actions. The subtle pops of primary colours from the various objects instantly grasps our attention and allows us to focus upon them, they each individually complement each other so well. Each of the floating objects are clearly positioned, allowing the audience to identify what is what

and recognise items we commonly use within our lifestyles. Perhaps Andreas Franke wants to portray how damaging these day-to-day items are – and how to re-think our actions before discarding them, simply by recycling or reusing them. The series of these images highlight a variety of different age groups. Personally, I get the impression that this is to portray we are all responsible – and all age groups are affected. Our consequences will show through generations and generations if we don't act upon our actions now. I am very inspired when artists like Andreas Franke raise awareness about these environmental issues – he has the platform to do so with an audience that look up to him. The images are so touching, it almost makes you intrigued to see more.

Alteration

“the process of changing something”

Alteration is the act of change. We have to change the way we are living to help our environment. It is known that most plastics that escape into our oceans are plastic bottles and plastic carrier bags. These items are extremely easy to alternate. For example, instead of purchasing a plastic carrier bag in a supermarket, invest in a bag for life, or even a tote. More so than often, plastic bags tend to be weak, and break within one use. Why not get your money's worth by finding a more reliable alternative?

After reading and studying the book *'Live Green'* by Jen Chillingsworth, it opened up my eye about living a more sustainable life. The book primarily focuses on all the things we do day-to-day but changing them ever so slightly to become more eco-friendly. Author, Jen Chillingsworth discussed in her book how ***“from my experience a slower, simpler life came a greater understanding of our impact on future generations”***. Extending on this quote, Chillingsworth is portraying how our current actions are going to fall back

on generations to come. If we take the time to make more sustainable changes now, our planet will benefit in the future. In the book, Jen talks about how she is teaching her son from a young age to look after and care for our planet. I strongly believe recycling and sustainability should be taught in schools around the world, in order to educate children of all ages - having them know they'll have consequences to face in years to come. So, what are some ways we can become more environmentally friendly? Some examples of this include, purchasing recycled products, recycling old products, reusing water bottles, investing in a reusable carrier bag, greener cleaning products, etc.



Aragon Renocio Antonio "The Plastic Quarry" (2015)

(Accessed March 24th, 2021)

Photographer, Aragon Renuncio Antonio, captured a photo of a young boy appearing to play with a plastic bag. The image is named '*The Plastic Quarry*'. This image really stood out to me as it appears to be a classic portrait shot at first glance, however, when taking a closer look, it most definitely has a deeper meaning behind what is being presented.

The portrait has been edited in black and white. Black and white imagery often conveys emotion more so than colour. It represents the picture being timeless, more serious, allowing the audience to feel more of a connection with what is being illustrated. The young boy's facial expression makes you feel emotional, as if you wish to help him.

Written within the description of the image consists some facts about plastic pollution and the severe obstacles it withholds. This could potentially bring awareness to this matter and give the audience time to reflect upon their actions. The description states ***"every day approximately eight million pieces of plastic pollution find their way into our oceans"***. This litter also massively affects poorer countries on the coasts. This young boy potentially lives in or near a quarry, assuming from the image title. Just like the image shows, the residents have to deal with this problem – which no doubt affects their well-being. Pollution can carry types of bacteria that are so harmful to humankind.

We really have no idea where the litter has been or how has previously handled it.

Through this exploration of *alteration*, we have encountered the question of 'how can we have a more sustainable living?'. There is so much further action we can take to make our planet a healthier place. We have to go that extra mile for a more sustainable living.

Climate

“the prevailing attitudes, standards, or environmental conditions of a group, period, or place”

Climate is the average of weather and temperature over a period of time. Our climate is influenced by various sorts of factors. Two key factors include temperature and precipitation. We are all aware that climate change is on the up within recent years. This is due to humankind – burning fossil fuels (greenhouse gases). These fuels consist of oil, coal, and gas. When these fuels are burnt, they release the harmful gas, carbon dioxide into the atmosphere – doing so will increase the temperature of our planet. According to the Met Office, ***“during the 20th and 21st century, the level of carbon dioxide rose by 40%”***. Can you imagine if the levels keep rising in years to come? What will the future generations have to live with?

Deforestation has a massive part to play when discussing this matter. Deforestation is when forests are getting removed – hundreds and thousands of trees are being chopped down around the world. All the trees impacted within these forests, store the carbon dioxide being let from the atmosphere. When these trees are being removed, the gas has so much built up as there is no trees absorbing it. The massive increase shows that ***“between 2015 and 2020, the rate of deforestation was estimated at 10 million hectares per year”***. So much wildlife lose their homes from this act, highly affecting all species. So how can we contribute against deforestation? When trees are removed, we need to start planting more to replace the ones that we’ve lost. We can all start going paperless, save paper by alternating to emails. As well as, buying recycled products and certified wood products – supporting the companies that are helping fight against deforestation.

Natural historian, Sir David Attenborough, is urging people to change lifestyles to save the planet. Sir David has various television shows that highlight the beauty of our planet, some of which include *Blue Planet*, *Our Planet*, *A Perfect Planet*, and many more. Within these fascinating documentaries, David explores different areas of the world, looking into various countries and the environment within them. Attenborough is 94 years old – born in 1926, so he really has seen the world change over the decades. David exclaims, ***“There is no going back – no matter what we do now, it’s too late to avoid climate change and the poorest, the most vulnerable, those with the least security, are now certain to suffer”***. This heart-breaking statement instantly makes you want to make a change to the way we are living. It is so sad seeing our world fall apart when we can make a difference. David has spread awareness in many different ways, one of which being spending time with Queen Elizabeth for one of his many documentaries. This was such a monumental experience; it was advertised all over news broadcasts – at a high viewing rate.

As I have mentioned previously, climate change is not only affecting us humans, but massively damaging to wildlife and animals. A very touching quote from Sir David Attenborough states, ***“Are we happy to suppose that our children may never see an elephant except in a picture book”***. This quote is insinuating that these animals will soon become extinct – as their habitats are slowly falling to pieces. Future generations will never be able to experience these beautiful creatures in person, but only through pictures. Climates like Africa are getting extremely hot, with dangerously rising temperatures – so harmful to the wildlife.



Cristina Mittermeier "Starving Polar Bear" (2018)

(Accessed March 30th, 2021)

The image above portrays a starving polar bear in its destroyed habitat. The dangerously rising temperatures have melted all the snow, leaving nothing but grass and mud. This heart-breaking image shows the polar bear scavenging for food in the abnormal climate. These animals rely on the snow. They rely on the sea ice to find food and prey – this is all quickly being taken away from them. This image looks so unusual and wrong – the polar bear looks so out of place it's almost unsettling. There are no other bears insight – what has happened to them?

The question arisen here is "Can climate change be reversed, or are our actions inescapable?"

From researching into these three key words, summarising them individually has arisen numerous questions in relation to the proposed question. There is a strong link between pollution, alteration, and climate. The research question of “How is the environment influential in photography?” is currently the adapting question proposed for the independent research document, potentially acting as a key starting point. As my practice is photography, I want to have a more in-depth understanding of how it can be influential. Photography can be so inspirational and can be shown through so many things to reach its target audience. An example of this being newspapers. Newspapers can print images of most things and people will read and reflect. These environmental issues need to be shown more in my opinion, people are not seeing the consequences of their actions enough to do something about it. We need to begin showing these realistic images to schools – this way children will learn from a young age to recycle and to do their bit for the environment. From the research I have explore throughout this independent research document, I have found that pollution is a lot more serious than we think. For example, plastic pollution is more or less damaging to everything – including human and animal wellbeing. This problem can be resolved, each individual has their own part to play to make our planet a much healthier and safer place. We must all go that extra mile to change our lifestyles in order to help others. Let’s be greener and more sustainable – cutting out and reducing our plastic intake.

Throughout the course of this proposal, we encountered various sub-questions, these can be further explored for my future dissertation. These include - , ‘Can climate change be reversed, or are our actions inescapable?’, ‘How can we have a more sustainable living?’, ‘Is photography raising awareness for the environmental issues?’, ‘How is plastic pollution affecting human health?’, ‘Will the realism of environmental photography influence a change in people’s actions?’, ‘How are our current

environmental actions going to affect generations in years to come?’ and ‘How does photography capture the realism of our planet?’. Personally, I believe that these sub-questions can be explored much more in-depth.

The concepts of sustainability, climate change, plastic pollution, humankind, environment, microplastics, litter, alteration, single-use plastic, recycle, and biodegradable have been taken into consideration for further research revolving around my working question for next year.

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