

NOMORE PLASTIC

ROSALIE MANN

MAY THE GROWING REALIZATION OF PLANETARY POLLUTION NOT EXTINGUISH ALL THE JOY WITHIN US! ESCHEWING THE STANDARD IMAGERY OF COLLAPSE, NO MORE PLASTIC DEVOTES ITSELF WITH PANACHE NOT ONLY TO SHARING THE INFORMATION NEEDED TO RAISE AWARENESS, NOTABLY AROUND THE DEADLY IMPACT OF MICROPLASTICS ON HUMANS AND OTHER LIVING BEINGS, BUT ALSO SPREADING JOY: THE JOY OF CONSUMING AND PRODUCING WITH AS LITTLE POLLUTION AS POSSIBLE AND WITHOUT HARMING LIFE, INSISTS ROSALIE MANN. SHE CREATED THE FOUNDATION BASED ON THE PRINCIPLE OF THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT: A SMALL INDIVIDUAL TRANSFORMATION CAN LEAD TO A MUCH LARGER COLLECTIVE TRANSFORMATION. EVEN THOUGH PRODUCTION ALWAYS MEANS POLLUTION, AND IN THE FACE OF GREENWASHING AND THE FASHIONABLE REDEFINITION OF BIOPLASTICS, THE OUTSPOKEN FOUNDER ASSERTS THAT A RENEWED QUEST IS UNDERWAY FOR NEW LIFESTYLES IN LINE WITH THE LIVING WORLD. NEW WAYS OF LIVING, INSPIRED BY NEW KNOWLEDGE AND A REDISCOVERED SENSORY EXPERIENCE, ARE NOW POSSIBLE.

INTERVIEW
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<https://www.nomoreplastic.co/>

SB: No More Plastic was created in 2018. You were previously an image consultant for luxury brands and movie stars. Can you tell us about this career shift towards a commitment to protecting the oceans?

RM: The trigger was my son, who was born in 2009. Like many children, he faced health problems while growing up, such as asthma, inflammations and skin problems that I had never seen, which even sent him to the hospital one day. The doctor then told us how common these diseases are in our polluted world. I was stunned and started asking myself, "How can pollution do so much damage to children?" Since I am fortunate enough to be friends with Alexandra Cous-teau [editor's note: co-author of the No More Plastic Manifesto], we were able to talk about it together. That's when everything she had already told me about pollution and marine life, when we were still young in the 2000s, suddenly came flooding back to my mind. At the time, I didn't think the impact of pollution could become a reality in such a short time. But what triggered my drive to get involved was later reading scientific reports that showed me all the danger of plastic pollution: this toxic material never disappears and it is notably choking the ocean and our water. We often talk about deforestation, which is a good, but water is what allows trees to exist and live. Without water, without oceans, trees could not exist. I realized that we were on a collision course with disaster. So while thinking about all the battles to be waged, the fight against plastic seemed fundamental to me, because our use of plastic is now upsetting an entire ecosystem and, above all, the only element that allows us to live today: water and the oceans. Plastic destroys life. I made it my fight, even though the other fights are also very good. This realization moved me on a profound level. All I had to do was go to a café to see that people around me were not aware of the toxicity of plastic. People were wearing blinders: they kept going about their whirlwind lives without worrying about it, all while taking part in the acceleration of plastic pollution.

SB: You were influenced by your reading of various scientific reports and the awareness campaigns led by the activist groups

sharing this fundamental research. Now you have chosen to create a foundation to offer a different path of action. Tell us more about it...

RM: Reading these scientific reports published by NGOs was the trigger for the creation of No More Plastic. In terms of the impact of microplastics on human beings, many shocking assertions are often made without any scientific explanation of the actual process of the study or the tangible consequences of the facts presented. For example, we're told that we ingest the equivalent of a credit card in microplastics every week, which is true. The shock factor of such statements is very useful for galvanizing the public. However, focusing solely on such statements that are intended to make an impact on people's minds, I believe, does a disservice to the cause and will not convince the many skeptics who blame environmentalists for taking up the ecological cause as a kind of religion. It cultivates skepticism about the seriousness, in this case, of plastic toxicity... I didn't start out wanting to create a foundation, I just wanted to join an organization. But when I discovered their techniques and ways of presenting the issues, I didn't really like what was being done. Most of all, it just didn't speak to me... In the same way as another shocking statement: that in 2050, if nothing changes, there will be as much plastic as fish in the ocean... I talked about this a lot with the people I know in order to evaluate the impact of this statement. And the non-reaction between this fact and the connection with reality was shocking... Compared to all the data I was reading, this implied the disappearance of Earth's naturally available oxygen. No one I talked to made this connection. They were stuck in a state of dumbfounded shock. I blamed the activist organizations for creating shock without explaining the essential issues, thus preventing awareness. I was shocked. My friends would say, "Look, Rosalie, wake up, NGOs are a business." In a way, this is not far from the truth, even if they're promoting a very good cause. The immense funding given to the biggest NGOs should have enabled them to do even more. But these funds often come from big companies that are also major polluters. I am not questioning the actions

of these NGOs, I am simply saying that we cannot always rely on shocking statements without explaining what plastic pollution means for humans and living beings.

SB: For example, when NGOs say that we will ingest the equivalent of a credit card a week, what does that really mean for us?

RM: That we will get cancer and that we are making ourselves sterile...

SB: Since 2018, have you noticed a shift in the way major NGOs are raising awareness about plastic pollution?

RM: No, not at all. In their communications on the toxicity of plastic, the major NGOs are sharing a lot of information. All of them, except for a few like the Tara Organisation which I find absolutely wonderful, will use shocking marketing phrases to give you the solution: recycle plastic. And then I say to myself: "You've got to be kidding me!" Why, with all the mind-boggling data on plastics that I read in this or that 18-page study, do I get to the last page and see the only recommended solution is recycling plastic? I want explanations. I have also written to several NGOs that highlight that plastic is and will remain toxic. And to my amazement, the only real answer has come from my ten-year-old son, who put it so well: "We're promoting recycled plastic to save plastic, not to save the planet". It's so true that it's an economy that saves plastic: we're trying to keep the plastic industry afloat, because it generates billions.

SB: The question you raise, in a way, about the economic interest of recycling aligns with other voices pointing out the excesses of overproduction: recycling makes consumption less culpable, thereby strengthening its hold... We can mention the investigation carried out by Flore Berlingen, the former director of Zero Waste France, in her book *Recycling: The Big Smokescreen. How the Circular Economy has Become an Excuse for Disposable Products*. Recycled plastic is widely popular and often the standard for corporate environmental commitments... Why do you think recycled plastic is not the solution?

RM: When I first became interested in plastic pollution in 2018, I started buying a lot of recycled plastic products.

I felt very happy and positive, thinking I was taking part in changing the world... Then I learned, for example, that when you wear a garment designed with plastic, whether in the textile fibers, polyester, or other elements, the plastic will never be destroyed. Over time, this plastic will create microplastics that are visible to the naked eye, as well as plastic nanoparticles which are invisible. Little publicized at the time, this subject has become one of my central struggles, because it is the essential problem of plastic pollution. These microparticles will spread everywhere, in the air, water and soil, and will capture, like sponges, all the surrounding microbes and bacteria. Plastic is immortal. Imagine what it means to ingest the equivalent of a credit card's worth of microplastic per week... The other problem concerns ocean gyres, which are zones where massive swathes of plastic accumulate and float on the ocean surface: they deteriorate under the sun's radiation, which then creates CO2 that is emitted into the atmosphere. All this should be fixed, but it is much more complicated than we are told. We are led to believe that it is enough to recover all these plastics in the water. But what do we do with them? We re-create other products, still with these same materials that remain toxic and that we put back into circulation... I sum up the situation by using the image of a hamster in a cage: we are just going round in circles, we are not solving anything. Today, we would like to fund a study about how the human body is affected by wearing clothes made of plastic fibers, because we are unknowingly ingesting plastic by wearing clothes made of polyester, recycled polyester, or even recycled water bottles, etc. The key, I am convinced, lies in innovation. It will drive us to reinvent production. I'm not in favor of going back to the past or thinking that things were better before. On the contrary, I am very interested in the emergence of innovation.

SB: Do you advocate for the boycott of certain brands or products?

RM: I'm against boycotts because I don't think they work. I prefer to advocate for consumers to challenge their favorite brands

by urging them to innovate if they want their loyalty. That was the goal of our manifesto.

SB: The No More Plastic manifesto has been signed by over two million people... How can it serve as a lever for action?

RM: We are currently working on an application that uses feedback from signatories to present leading brands with their customers' views. The goal is to challenge these brands on several points. I think it is important to create a kind of database to show that the revolt is real, both in rich and poor countries alike. It is not just symbolic. For example, feedback from signatories contradicts Coca-Cola's main argument explaining that it will not change its packaging because consumers are against it. Coca-Cola happens to be one of the brands most challenged by our signatories: they say they do not want to continue to consume Coca-Cola in plastic bottles. I hope the multinational will question its processes thanks to this manifesto and the accompanying application.

SB: How are the collaborations with fashion brands going? With the success of the manifesto, No More Plastic is now taking on a sort of trendsetting or influencer role...

RM: As I said, the idea is not to boycott, but rather to innovate by collaborating with brands. We recently launched an e-shop that offers several innovative products. For example, one of our ambassadors asked us to launch a kind of digital fashion, meaning creations that are not intended to be produced materially, thus reducing the pollution inherent to production. This responds to the needs of a new generation that lives continuously on social media and video conferencing platforms. This type of innovation appeals to me enormously, and so we are in favor of creating virtual T-shirts that show your commitments. In addition, this initiative also met the requests of many people who asked us for No More Plastic T-shirts. But in real life, since we also need clothes - and this was a real conflict for me, because making T-shirts creates pollution - we finally innovated to create a physical T-shirt that is simple and pollutes less. We used a carbon-neutral, biodegradable, algae-based fiber [editor's note: from Pyratex Cosmetics] that is

blended with organic cotton. This T-shirt, made in collaboration with Côme Editions, features several interesting aspects: the algae pollutes much less, and above all, the T-shirt requires less washing, because the algae recovers perspiration. We know that pollution linked to laundry is colossal, and the chance to take action on this point of toxicity impressed and convinced me. We certainly have not reinvented anything, but we have demonstrated a new way to make a T-shirt that is still silky soft to the touch, while sharing a strong message. The T-shirts come hand-embroidered with the motifs of four animals selected for their fundamental place in the ecosystem of life: a whale, polar bear, dolphin and turtle. On the back of each T-shirt is the No More Plastic manifesto.

SB: Is the algae used for the No More Plastic T-shirt a testament to the bioplastic craze? What can you tell us about bioplastics, which are often presented as the panacea of so-called green innovation?

RM: Yes, this algae is a kind of bioplastic, which is used as an alternative to polyester fibers. In general, production generates pollution. To say that using bioplastics will stop pollution is wrong. The important thing, it seems to me, is not to eliminate pollution, which is impossible. The important thing is to find a way to avoid ending all life on the planet. This means asking ourselves in advance about the impact our product will have so that it does not harm life. I call this the butterfly effect. Given that developing a product means polluting, we must think about how to pollute less. Today, the term "bioplastic" is a bit of a catch-all: for example, some materials are said to be bioplastic despite the presence of plastic in them... But bioplastics cannot contain plastic, since it is not biodegradable. It's nonsense, but some materials that contain plastic are intentionally called bioplastics in order to confuse people and favor a certain kind of business. We need to reformulate many of our definitions. Getting back to the algae we used, I'm deeply interested in this material, because it is present absolutely everywhere and reproduces very easily, at a phenomenal speed, and with no need for water. It offers a lot of very compelling benefits. It is fundamental for us to think about all this... At the moment, I am working on make up without microplastics: neither in the formula, nor in the container, and it's great!

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO FIND A WAY TO AVOID ENDING ALL LIFE ON THE PLANET

SB: No More Plastic is notable for its special connections to many celebrity ambassadors. How did you put together such a large community, which seems to tie back into your previous career as an image consultant for movie stars?

RM: At first, we debated whether or not to use celebrity ambassadors for No More Plastic. I was immediately attracted by the idea of working with ambassadors who, like me, did not start off as environmentalists, but who, like me, may have one day felt a trigger, an awareness, whether with us or at a later time. These people may then serve as the source of an awakening for others. In this way, we can branch out of our own silos, which is a point I also criticized about some NGOs whose ambassadors are already convinced of the cause they are promoting. I find it much more interesting to have ambassadors who are the complete antithesis of all that. I share all the information at my disposal with them, and then I observe their reactions. Most of the time, they are phenomenal. For example, high-profile models and actresses have decided to cut back on their air travel. They have told their agents that they will only accept three or four trips a year, instead of 70 or 100... There is also a very famous influencer who is no longer accepting plastic packaging, and who informed me that the packaging for her new brand will be made of recycled cardboard. These may be details, but they all add up to real change, and they are all driven by people who were originally at odds with a green lifestyle.

SB: Can you describe the journey towards commitment among ambassadors who were originally at odds with an ecological lifestyle?

RM: I often talk to people who are invited to become ambassadors, but who turn it down because they feel it doesn't align with their lifestyle as travelers, smokers, consumers of plastic water bottles, etc. Later, they come back to me and say: "I thought about it, and you're right, none of that means I should just sit back and do nothing, and I won't be able to explain to my children that I knew, but didn't do anything".

And then I have a lot of ambassadors who find themselves in a real dilemma between what they have changed in their lives today and what they have to promote, because it's part of their job. That's the complexity. And we are hearing more and more about this. But at the same time, they are constantly sowing the seeds of awareness around the issue of plastic pollution.

SB: Taking action by passing this commitment on to younger generations is essential for you. Among your many initiatives, you have also created No More Plastic Kids...

RM: We owe that initiative to my son more so than to me! The idea is to explain plastic classifications and innovations in order to make this topic a bit more accessible to young people. The goal is for them to understand what they can do, even at their young age. For example, how they can change their snack habits when they go to school, to the beach, etc. Above all, the most important event where every child can really take action is their birthday! Because on that day, they are the king! So they can ask their parents anything. And so they should ask them clearly for no products with plastic, like balloons. We do this in many schools around the world, and the kids love it. They really take to it. The idea is not to take the magic out of a memorable moment and have a gloomy birthday with nothing at all. We design absolutely beautiful birthdays where everything is reimagined in a new way. We have to become more inventive. Children think it's crazy that they can actually do something to change the world at their age.

SB: A world without plastic will require a drastic change in consumption habits, and that means we will have to imagine a whole new world... What do you think of the idea that we might need to poeticize our connection to reality, and therefore to the oceans, in the sense that Jean-Pierre Siméon exhorts in his appeal called "Poetry will Save the World". Because, as he argues, poetry, which has never lost its sensory connection to the world, reveals itself as a powerful means of mediating reality through another possible language, and other available representations of reality...

RM: Absolutely, I am in complete agreement. That's why we launched a writing contest with No More Plastic Kids for children ages five to thirteen. The poems we received were heartbreaking. I think that poetry, and art in general, will push people's mindsets forward much faster and change the world in a much more concrete way than speeches, shocking statements, marketing and all that. There is a magical moment of emotion in a book, a poem, a painting or a film. Poetry is essential, and the children's poems revealed how fundamentally different this whole generation is going to be from ours, because you feel that they are already very much steeped in all these world issues. Their worldview is different from ours. This generation will not be able to repeat the same mistakes, it is impossible. You feel it intensely, and it brings a prodigious breath of hope.