

# P a s t i c

SIMMONS  
B. BUNTIN

AFTER MIDWAY: MESSAGE FROM  
THE GYRE, PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
CHRIS JORDAN, SEPTEMBER 2009

Children are plastic  
the doctor says  
as he cuts away  
the splint of my daughter's  
shin, revealing a scar  
curved like the forewing  
of an albatross  
as it levels over open  
ocean — carved  
by the shattering  
door, the plate glass  
scattering like sunlight  
on waves as she  
dove through that hard  
reality, her soft body  
easily severed:

plastic  
like the sensuous  
bottle of soda  
she slides  
into her backpack  
after school, the air sighing  
from the red lid  
before the final twist,  
bottle surfacing  
in the recycling bin,  
cap sinking  
in the day's trash:

plastic  
as in malleable, fix-  
able, her pale flesh  
healing in the dark  
corridor of the cast, dead  
skin black as the ocean  
at night, sloughing away  
like the feathers  
of lying birds:

plastic  
like the odd collage  
of litter discovered body  
after decomposing body  
in the Midway Atoll,  
dull plumage and bleached  
vertebrae vivid  
against the contraband  
of buttons and bottle caps,  
combs and cartridges,  
bobbles and lighters lifted  
from the flotsam  
of the Pacific —  
bright bobbles resembling  
the fish and quick squid  
the albatross catch  
for insatiable chicks:

plastic  
curved by the luminous  
sweep of the sea,  
curved through genetic  
structure, curved  
into crisp gills  
and blue beaks  
and the mouths  
of children severed  
like so many seabirds  
by the dazzling waves.

What's for dinner, mom? Few albatross mothers (or any mom in the food chain) can refuse her chicks' cries for More! But when it's dinner time and you're stuck out in the boonies, say near the Midway Atoll, 2000 miles from the nearest continent, what are your choices? Just do a fly-by to the Great Pacific Gyre and take-out from the food court, a continent-size vortex-driven collection of human waste (what else can we call it?)

The ultimate junk food diet — exceptionally high concentrations of pelagic plastics, chemical sludge, and other debris — is killing tens of thousands of sea-loving creatures through starvation, toxicity, and choking, as Chris Jordan's moving images reveal ([chrisjordan.com](http://chrisjordan.com)). Ninety percent of the Gyre's flotsam is plastic.

According to a 2006 UN report, "Over 46,000 pieces of plastic litter are floating on every square mile of ocean today. In the Central Pacific, there are up to 6 pounds of marine litter to every pound of plankton." (See [tinyurl.com/UNEP-IUCN](http://tinyurl.com/UNEP-IUCN)) Another UN report estimates that a million birds and 100,000 mammals die annually from plastics.

