

Conscious Consumption

Paula Ferreira Tura

*The body is like an earth. It is a land into itself.
It is as vulnerable to overbuilding, being carved into parcels, cut off,
overmined, and shorn of its power as any..*

Clarissa Pinkola Estésⁱ

I'm sorry to disappoint you, but this text does not deal with guidelines or tips on solidary economy, addresses of fairs with organic products, tips to avoid waste or guidelines on green consumption. Not that all these topics are not of paramount importance but, theoretically, we already know all this. We already know how to reduce, recycle, reuse. We know that we are causing global warming and that we overcrowd the oceans with PET bottles or that we are proud to have the largest landfill in Latin America in Baixada Fluminense, Rio de Janeiro.

We all know that we should take reusable shopping bags to avoid the use of plastic bags, that we should reduce the time in the shower, turn off the lights of unused rooms, reduce the use of domestic appliances, use public transport instead of cramming traffic with our cars for five people, but that are actually used by only one. Anyway, if we know all this, why are we writing a book where there is a chapter on Conscious Consumption? What is wrong? Why are all the campaigns and information for waste reduction, for the global cooling not working? To improve our quality of life? I will speculate!

One of my regular activities is teaching Yoga. We often say in Yoga that this practice happens to the body, through the body and with the body. In my classes I welcome people who are tense, I see tight muscles, feet stuck in tight shoes, jaws locked; they are in pain. I offer them a moment of pause, or rather, a training so that they unwind and unlock themselves, feel their breath, smell, skin texture, the palate, that they look within. I suggest that they connect with nature's rhythm. And they try. They really try. They try for years. They are persistent.

Therefore, I will dare to treat the issue of conscious consumption through the body. I believe that the human body is very similar to planet Earth. And it is this

ⁱ ESTÉS. C. P. Women who run with the wolves, p. 210. Ballantine Books, New York. 1995

correlation the theme of text. We experience the world through our five senses. Like Earth, we are basically made up of water; we have a geography with reliefs, depressions, textures; we exhale smells. I compare our blood to magma, our skin to Earth's surface divided into continents, climates and characteristic forests.

Our body, like Earth, is a system and our system depends on Earth's system in order to survive. We are seven billion people breathing the same air, sharing the same water, inhabiting the same planet. We buy objects manufactured in the East; we send food to Africa. Often the process is mediated by machines, but men are the ones who prepare, organize, think. We serve each other by enjoying the limited riches of our planet.

The planet Earth takes 24 hours to rotate around itself. It takes 365 days to go around the sun. We have four seasons in the year. And our bodies, just like the planet Earth, have phases. We are generated in nine months. It takes us about twelve months to walk, twenty-four months to speak with some clarity, and the same time to start using the bathroom. We go through childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age. We are cared for, learn to care and care for others. We procreate and die.

Our human nature of mammalian animal belongs to and depends on Earth. It depends on your system. But we, at some point, decided that Earth should submit to our way of life. A system of designer clothing, imported cars, mobile phones, computers, monoculture, pharmacy franchises with suggestions to buy your whole treatment with a 50% discount. We have created a competitive system in which I must always be better than the other. We have created a fear system: alarms for cars, homes and businesses, satellite tracking, security cameras, dark tint for car windows. We have created a social system that is directly reflected in our bodies.

A system that plasters bodies, which leaves them locked, hard, dressed in fashion trends, attempting to shape personalities; bodies balanced on high heels to distance us from contact with the earth, to keep posing, to show. Bodies that should not respect their genetic makeup, that must be shaped, shredded, perfected to fit into trends. Bodies that cannot feel, that must stifle their senses and move on without questioning it all. We create a system for creating needs: I do not have it, but the others have it and, if the others have it, I also have to have it because otherwise I will be less than them, and if

I do not have what everyone else supposedly has, I will not be accepted and since I have everything that everyone else is supposed to have, I have to protect my assets. Ugh!

And my speculation continues. One of the concerns of our consumption is with water. We drink from the same water as the dinosaurs drank. We pollute the water we are going to drink. We dirty our bodies and the bodies of billions of people that inhabit this same planet. Many countries have no water and we still waste it. I believe that the planet is infinite and maybe it is close to the time of my existence in it. I do not think that other generations have already inhabited it, nor do I care that other generations will come.

Another idea arises: is it not when we have a shower or bath the moment in which human beings connect with the water that nurses our aches and pains? Is it not this moment when we remember life in the womb? Is this not the time of day when we reconnect with nature? When we feel alive, light and free? Even though this water is the same water that we pollute?

And why do not we turn off the lights?

Is the dark not terrifying? Rare are the horror movies that happen in daylight. Our nightmares happen at night. And it is at night that most of us sleep. We expect accidents, assaults, problems to happen at night. If the phone rings after 10 pm we immediately think there is something wrong.

Night and silence terrify us. We turn on music to listen to while we perform other activities. But should not music simply be heard? Should not we sit back and listen carefully to a song? Or allow our bodies to move freely to the rhythm of a song? We fear the possibilities that the dark and the silence give us. We fear that the body will begin to feel. The planet Earth never darkens completely. There is always light in some region while the other recovers, rests. The planet reinvigorates itself the same way our body should be invigorated. Winter provides us with stillness and this disturbs many people. We need layers of clothes to warm up, we need foods richer in fat to increase our body heat; we look for a partner to snuggle with, we mate, we procreate. Winter brings silence and darkness: it is the moment when the seed is quiet underground and there it remains, in the dark, gestating.

Electric / hydro / thermal / wind / solar energy allows us to stay awake for longer. To work harder. To produce more. To outdo ourselves. To listen to more music,

watch more TV, stay connected for longer with the system created by us. Energy thus avoids our contact with ourselves, the experience of silence and the dark, and distances us from the rhythm of our planet.

I have never witnessed recollection, prayer, conscious body movement with fast, frenetic songs, or in artificial environments such as those on poultry farms that host chickens in egg production 24 hours a day. I have also never seen the sunset in the winter at the same time as in the summer. The system created by us humans depends on artificial energy to maintain itself.

I think we do not save energy because we depend on it to keep our internal flame burning. If my pace for eating, drinking, sleeping is not respected, I need extra energy and this artificial energy comes from the electric light that brightens my home and my work. Should we not reinvigorate ourselves through sleep, food, reading, music, conscious physical activity? Should we not feed our souls with art? Should our hands not lovingly touch our own bodies, animals, babies, the elderly? How? How can I touch my body if I do not touch the earth anymore? How can I appreciate my reading if I no longer observe the stars, smell the rain, I do not know how to read the signs of the change of time? How can I enjoy music if I do not hear birds singing anymore?

And why do we eat more than we need? And what does this have to do with conscious consumption if supermarkets are overflowing with products of all varieties from all over the world? What's more, we can grow fruits, vegetables and herbs all year long, overcoming the sad times when we had to wait for winter to eat strawberries. Remote times of a backward civilization.

What is really good is monoculture. Why should we have different cultivars? We are going to plant hectares and hectares of the same type, we put the necessary inputs, fertilizers, pesticides and to please everyone we export a large part and sell the other part for domestic consumption. That's it, a success! The world loves us. We provide for them what is a rarity cultivated in the southern hemisphere. We are cherished, loved, adored.

The body being respected, fed, rested is our fertile land. The way I treat my body is the same way I treat the planet. If I chop, butcher, damage the planet, why would I not do the same with my body, or vice versa? I expect the soil to react immediately and

thus I expect the same results from my body. I expect the soil to always produce, overcome its limitations, change its cycle and thus I expect the same from my body. I expect incredible and amazing landscapes from the planet and from my body as well, and too bad if they do not meet my expectations: I will devour them, manipulate them, modify them, dress in clothes that do not fit me, I will cut myself, I will stretch myself, I will crucify myself.

Before we eat or cultivate, we think of money. We choose what is cheaper. It does not matter what the body needs or what the soil can best provide us. The body and the soil are in the same situation. The body, when well nourished, is healthy and eager; the earth, when being respected, will always provide its best outcomes. An over-nourished body will be ill; an excessively cultivated land will bear defective fruit. We thus create a problem for society. We feed on products we do not need. We grow products that make us sick. But, what do we really need? What are our real needs?

We have all been babies. We were fed, had our nappies changed, were loved and cared for. Our needs today are the same as when we were babies. What do you mean, are you crazy? No, I'm not crazy. We continue to need affection, food, rest, clothes. Over time we learn to read, to write, to walk. And we keep reading, writing, walking. Nothing has changed in our genetics. However, the problem is that we learn to create needs. We think we need to work 12 hours a day, to have a house with countless rooms and a garage for many cars. We think we need pairs and pairs of shoes, pants, several dresses, sweaters, coats.

We think that we need to change cars, cell phones and computers every year and that we need to go out for dinner at least twice a week and that we need to go to the movies or theatre to see the latest shows, on release day, so that we do not miss anything. Anyway, we think, we think, we think and we get used to thinking and doing all this and to value this whole spectacle and we think, or rather, we never think that there is another way.

I know people who dared to question, who dared to reduce their work hours and their salary, and bought a car of an inferior brand to what they had before, but that is still a car that drives well and satisfies them. So we can live in a smaller house and have only one maid, maybe even just a cleaning lady once in a while or even share the household

chores and not need one at all. We can thus spend more time with each other and turn off the countless radios, TVs and lights in empty rooms. The house would be smaller after this daring move, and to deal with the fear of darkness and silence we could sing and talk among friends.

It would thus be possible to hold a party to meet new neighbours and bid farewell to the old ones. As there is the possibility of spending more hours at home, there is great opportunity to cook more and buy less industrialized products. We can even consider a veggie garden at home and dusting off Granny's cookbook. Would it not be the time to do some handcrafts? And how about walking or practicing conscious gymnastics, breathing, stretching?

There is no recipe, there is no rule, there is no formula. There is this speculation. Conscious consumption is directly linked to a conscious life. It depends on the ethics that comprise a conscious life. It is not possible to act without intention. It will be necessary to incorporate change and be the change one wants to see in the world, as Mahatma Gandhi once said.