

ECO-MY -FLAT COMPETITION

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HOW MUCH DO YOU REALLY NEED?

(OR WHAT I LEARNED AT UNI)

The one thing that every student – no matter what your major – should know is that ‘the less you consume the richer you become’.

Which is what the flats who have signed up for the ‘eco my flat’ competition are about to discover. Once you get into living sustainably, you realise just how uncool consumer culture actually is, and you find you stop needing it so much.

And the less you need it, the less you’ll have to work, which – as we know from the current media panic – is becoming a thing of the past anyway. So you may as well get back to basics and learn how to be eco-conscious with style.

This is where taking an Arts course or two can help. Learn why it’s smarter to turn your back on consumerism, and claim sustainable living as an ideology.

So, after twelve years as a student at this University here are some tips dedicated to all the ‘eco-my-flatters’ doing their best to change their world. This is “What I learned at Uni 101”:

SAY NO TO FALSIES

Marx wrote about ‘real needs’ and ‘false needs’. Things like air, water, physical, mental and spiritual nourishment are real needs, whilst the others (the latest technology, brand, or fad) are just there to feed the capitalist machine. Armed with such distinctions, you can claim being broke as your own personal refusal to bow to the ‘Man’.

FEAR NOT THE FEAR FACTOR

The media will tell you that we are in recession and that everyone will soon be unemployed and destitute. The upside to this is that it gives us the opportunity to ditch the 9-5 mentality and start living for yourself. When you lose the fear, and think of the future as a bit of an adventure, you realise you’re in a far better position to accommodate changes should the proverbial really start hitting the fan.

TIME IS RELATIVE

The less stuff you need the less money you need, which means you have more time to do the things you actually like doing. Without work schedules you can study when your brain is at its optimum, and feed your soul the rest of the time. Soon you’ll realise that having time to dig around in the garden

will make you feel so much better than the temporary sugar hit gleaned from something that cost you the equivalent of fifteen minutes behind the counter of a job you don’t even like that much.

LOVE YOUR BODY

Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth* was probably the first academic book I read, years before I attended uni. It taught me that real beauty has nothing to do with billboards and starving models.

Twenty years down the track my decision to ‘love my body’ now affects my consumer choices. Apparently, corpses in America are not rotting as fast as they used to because they’re stuffed full of preservatives (which serves as a lovely metaphor for our current economic system really). Think about this with regards to your own body, and you’ll find yourself counting chemicals instead of calories.

Which is why being a poor student can actually be good for your health. Take pasta sauce - a couple of kilos (or cans) of tomatoes, onion, garlic, and a handful of fresh herbs is a cheaper and far superior alternative to the sugar and preservative-laden stuff that comes in jars. And, if you grow it yourself, you’ll even score some exercise points.

So try spending one day looking at the label of everything that you put into or onto your body. Then think about what your body really needs. If you do decide to eliminate a few consumables, you’ll eventually discover your body will feel and look so much better for it and that you no longer miss what you gave up.

CONSUMERISM IS JUST NOT THAT COOL.

I think it was Marx, who – as I recall it from a reading group – said that capitalism would not fall until it had exhausted every avenue open to it. And in the 21st Century, our current form of capitalism is bleeding like a stuck (caged, hormone-fed) porcine, bred solely to make you fat and unhealthy (my apologies to the much maligned pig, who has done nothing to deserve all the negative connotations associated with it).

But the image is an apt one, our gross consumerism is actually not that attractive – or cool.

Because the marketing industry’s greatest coup is to get us to pay for the privilege of advertising their brands and logos for them. Brilliant – our bodies and our minds are so colonised by logos that we happily fork out a week’s worth of wages for the privilege of buying something made by workers whose working and living conditions we prefer not to think about.

So if you must use your body as a billboard, either promote something you believe in, or use it to make an ironic, post-modern statement about Western culture. If there’s one thing I learned at uni it is that wearing a Nike swoosh with the word ‘Sweatshop’ stencilled beneath it is seriously cool.