

Synthesised Nature

by Rhiannon Jade

2017 has brought to a head two ends of the environmental spectrum- raging forest fires, fossil fuels imminently running out much sooner than originally predicted, over half the Coral Reef has died, with 90% of the world's reefs set to die by 2050; however, we have rising awareness of 'ecological warfare' such as fracking, movements such as zero-waste has encouraged the trend of reusable household items, coffee cups, etc. and there has been a spectacular spotlight on the ethics of human diet.

I have been a vegetarian for the majority of my life, and for a brief number of years I was vegan, originally through a moral choice. Having grown up in rural Shropshire, my first experience of the ethics of diet came during the foot and mouth outbreak, red meat sales came to a halt and looking out over our local landscape the area was coated in smoke from the incinerated herds of cattle. During this tragic period for our local farmers, I came to realise exactly what meat was and where it came from, having had the euphemism removed I faced the seemingly harsh reality of what I was consuming on a daily basis. Had I have been brought up closer to traditional values of food preparation perhaps my view would have been different at this time, but I was blissfully unaware and disconnected from what appeared on the plate before me. Being a child of the nineties, myself and my brother grew up on prepared frozen meat and vegetables, McDonalds, and the weekly roast. Hunting, gathering, shooting, gutting, and meat preparation, even going to the local butchers, just didn't happen. We had an idyllic countryside upbringing, rather than a practical outlook- being situated only a twenty minute drive from the town centre, convenience was easy. Disconnection from the balance that Mother Nature demonstrates has been

rampant under the guise of 'convenience'. And what is more convenient than omitting all the elements when it comes to nourishment, barre cooking it?

My first real hands-on interaction with the reality of animal products came not through food but through wool. I had always wanted to learn spinning and my first day at a local spinning group I came to a table with several sheep's worth of wool atop- it had not been prepared in any way, just sheared straight off the sheep and bagged up. I was fascinated by the story the fibres held, bits of hedge, foliage, dirt and grime throughout and the lanolin coated my own hands and encouraged the wool to spin like a dream. This initial interaction inspired me manifold, from using natural fibres in art to gardening to what I ate.

Not only are we faced with the morality of factory farming, pesticides, insecticides, GMOs, growth hormones, but there is now a vast array of imitation animal products on the market- imitation milk, meat, cheese, eggs- many of which are pumped full of chemicals (GMOs, flavour enhancers, etc.), and even 'grown in a lab'. Science has succeeded at synthesising nature; this is not a new feat- microbial biomass products (the most popular coming in later decades being Quorn) first came onto the commercial food market in the 1960s due to predictions of protein shortages over the coming two decades- a synthesised 'meat' to feed the baby-boom population.

We are faced with a conundrum: through eating commercially available animal products are we supporting factory farming and unethical treatment to animals? Should animal products even be ours to take (be it a by-product or no)? When we make the seemingly 'ethical' and 'moral' choices of vegan imitation products, it is rarely commented upon the mass-farming of GMO soy products, rapeseed (and other vegetable oils) and so forth, the majority of which are not organic in order to keep up with supply and demand. The run off from the chemicals sprayed on our food sources are affecting *all* wildlife, the water systems, and literally killing the earth. In turn, these chemicals have a severe affect on our bodies, affecting neurotic function and

hormonal processes. Ultimately, what is truly the moral choice? Farming food, be it animal or vegetable, to serve the mass consumer market and the increase in supply and demand, is not a sustainable option. What I seek, is sustainability and ethical buying; I cannot preach morality and support animal rights while supporting the consumption of non-organic GMO foods. Both factory farming and mass non-organic farming is destroying the planet.

Nature demonstrates and teaches us balance. Bio-diversity is an incredibly delicate process, however the issue of morality is not in Mother Nature's vocabulary. The Ego of Western Man seeks to place ourselves completely separate from the whole process, and we try to play God time after time-Mother Nature fights back to bring balance and order to the planet. We are just one piece of the intricate clockwork which makes up this biosphere, every single element fine-tuned to serve the good of all. When we extract ourselves in a bid for control, the whole mechanism grinds to a halt and all are affected.