

Une salade, c'est pas comme une tomate (song spontaneously invented by Mathilde Maillard)

In July 2019, we went on an excursion to Fribourg in Switzerland. I took my little purse where I keep Swiss Francs from my last visit, but noticed that it contained only a few coins. In the train we were speculating how much we would have to pitch in for food and that we should eat rather rice and beans to keep the budget under control. Switzerland is expensive, for Europeans.

The experience at the Unlearning Centre in Fribourg, however, was totally unexpected. We had just arrived, when a car came, with crates of food – freegan. Martin Schick had organized a delivery for us and we found ourselves with more than we could handle. All for free and all (almost) expired.

We tried to fit everything into the two large fridges at the NeighborHub, but did not manage. Meat, sausages, vegetables, herbs, juices, ice tea, yoghurt and loads of green salad. That first day we got 2 crates of salad – maybe 20 heads of lettuce. Great! Fresh food!



Picture by Mathilde Maillard

We ate a lot of salad. We ate salad at lunch and for dinner, snacked on it in between. But the salad did not end. Some days later, the car delivered another load to us. There was again salad, new salad. This time, some heads of lettuce, but also some that was already washed and torn into pieces, wrapped in plastic. And some salad hearts, wrapped in plastic film. We were still trying to deal with the 2 crates from the first day. Nicolas made salad soup. We had it warm and iced, with salad on the side. At every meal, there was a salad bowl that could never be finished. One evening, we were high on salad. We could not talk about anything else anymore, could not stop laughing. Mathilde composed a song about salad. "Une salade, c'est pas comme une tomate".

There was also more meat than we could eat, there were bags and bags of herbs that slowly started to rot in the fridge, there were litres of bottled liquid whole egg and many packages of rice pudding, different flavours. There was an opening of a new atelier – a big space with machinery – and it was rented for free. There was a dinner performance at the Belluard festival and the wine bottles kept on being opened and poured into glasses at no extra cost. Generosity came upon us from all sides. It was amazing.

All our lives, we have been hearing about scarcity. At home, we learned how to shut the doors to keep the heat in, we used second hand clothes and we were instructed how to not waste food.

At school, we learned the scarcity of natural resources. We all know about the scarcity of money on our bank accounts. But what happened there in Switzerland in June 2019, was abundance. Suddenly, we were confronted with abundance and we had to deal with it. We had to unlearn how we are used to handle life, when there is scarcity.

And this allowed me to observe many interesting things. I became obsessed. It went automatically. I could not allow myself to throw food away and invented dishes that consumed lots of parsley. I also ate more than I needed, just because I could not see the food being trashed. My attempt was not successful. Lots of stuff that had gotten a second life – saved from the trash of the supermarket could not be saved by us and went on the compost pile.

The Fribourg trip and unlearning for me meant to look into abundance as a concept and the salad became my fulcrum.

