

Jennifer

Epiphany of sorts

The first time I went to New Covent Garden Market in Vauxhall, it was like finding both an oasis and a hidden nightmare. Located behind a Sainsbury's supermarket, the large loading yard is the storage and sorting point for the fruit and vegetables that are sold at markets around London. My interest and purpose was to skip and glean some food, friends had assured me that there was an amazing abundance of food rejected and discarded that was to be thrown in the skips, to be disposed of as waste.

This was where I first properly and physically experienced the disgusting level of food aesthetics in London. Boxes of vine tomatoes, avocados, mangoes in winter, a whole array of tropical fruits and berries that had no right to be there, all grown in other countries, transported to London and consigned to the bin. Mountains of good food was deemed 'rubbish' due to minor imperfections, mostly though, there was nothing 'wrong' aside from superficial blemishes. The excess amazed, excited and disgusted me. It was a sickly sublime feeling and a dispute of feelings oscillated between my head and belly.

Sometimes it takes a very physical, visceral encounter with something to be able to feel the knowledge you know. The realisation that I was witnessing only one tiny corner of the excess and waste that repeated itself daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, was a truly overwhelming sensation. I was shrunk to that tiny cog that is smacked speechless by something that is so wrong and so enormously immense. This cycle of waste was not going to stop and there was no escaping the fact that all of us living in London inadvertently contribute to this continuing abuse of resources. The standards, levels, expectations and demands of the consumers were going to increase rather than decline and this criminal waste was an invisible 'by-product' of our consumer standards. Something I had never even considered.

In that moment I could see no foreseeable end or change to our pattern of consumption. Instead the thought that this process of selection and resulting waste was going to get worse and further separate the have's from have not's made me nauseous. Or maybe that was my stomach's reaction to hunger.

The belly side to my reaction was more basic, more empowering. To acknowledge that I was excited by the prospect of this free food and that part of me didn't want this excess to stop was disturbing. Skipping was also one way I felt I could affect the situation. Not only was I able to properly feed my friends and myself for free, but it could be a great, effective recycling system.

NCGM is still one of my sources of food. There are many of us who go skipping there, and there exists almost a sense of community or at least a connection with those who also live on what is thrown away. I can't avoid the fact that going to skip there fills me with conflicting feelings of intense lip smacking at finding delicious foods, and a burning and furious sense of criminal injustice that is more infuriating as there is no one body to direct it to.

This using up what is wasted has permeated my outlook and infected the way I see things, especially in terms of investigating the possibilities of different ways of living. Reclaiming space and using what is abandoned by squatting instead of paying rent is

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another empowering and essential part of my life right now. Instead of just attending events, protests, social centres, projects, actions, I try to be a part of the process, helping with organising, skill sharing and collaborating to create rather than just consume.

It seemed we would use resources up until there was no more left and file it as yet another mismanagement that should have been avoided.