

Recent Works

Year of the Snake _ Compost Library _ May 2025

I am now someone that sits on benches. This might not seem like a noteworthy shift to most, but the urgent, all-consuming need to rest is a new sensation in my body. Or rather, one that I'm not used to responding to.

Previously, I would rattle past them on my way to work, to social occasions, or to exercise classes; my ears full, my mind focused. Benches were decorative artefacts in the landscape, like telephone boxes or electric car chargers, not without their value but irrelevant to me and my purposes. I had turned to them only on rare occasions – as neutral territory for break ups, as a spot to navigate from when lost in a new city, or as somewhere to rage at my internet service provider.

It's not that my need to rest didn't emerge before, it's that I had become especially good at ignoring its call. If previously it was a vibration in my pocket, it had now become a klaxon in my ears, and a blockade in my path, leaving me no other option but to comply and find contact with the nearest chair-like object.

Everything had changed 18 weeks ago, when I realised I was pregnant.

The shock of discovering this pregnancy was only beaten by the shock of learning it was twins, and the final shock that they are boys, identical ones. I was outnumbered in my own body and I was growing two tiny penises, to be born in the year of the snake.

My new relationship with sitting expanded well beyond benches. Suddenly chairs were available to me everywhere. I had a badge that encouraged people to spring up and offer their seats on public transport, busy bar pews and cafe stools were also relinquished without question. I felt like my ass was a celebrity that London wanted to pamper, impress and cater to.

While this new treatment and plethora of seating was an enjoyable novelty, it was also hard to process why. My societal value had only shifted because I was carrying another human inside me. It was not me they wanted, but the resource I was growing. And that resource was two more men. Outsiders didn't know that, but I found it hard to forget.

I had spent so long trying to shrink my body, to become as small as possible to fit the shape I thought would bring me the attention and acceptance I was now receiving. Yet, it was in my physical expansion, in becoming a vessel, that my external value came.

After years of fighting for treatment in the healthcare system, I was now flooded with attentiveness. Headaches received concern, pains led to action, and news of my bowel movements were met with a captive audience. The change was so profound it jarred me.

I was simultaneously expanding and shrinking. Physically, my stomach protruded beyond the fault line of my frame, as my belly button pushed forward to find new territory. Meanwhile my organs contorted and compacted, making space for the growing tenants.

Mentally, my brain was also assuming a different form. It had begun shutting down areas of grey matter in order to heighten those of primal vigilance that fostered connection with, and protection of, the fetuses inside me. At the same time, I was inundated with information about pregnancy.

I learnt that my placenta created 32,000 miles of new blood vessels, the entire length of the River Thames.

I learnt that your skin becomes incessantly itchy, as it grows to cover your new mass.

I learnt that you exchange cells with your baby that stay inside each of you until you die.

I learnt that one of my babies might not survive.

Following that I began crying on benches, on public transport, in social spaces. I have been offered tissues, kind looks of compassion. I am now learning about C-sections, about twin separation surgery, about TTTS and SFGR and other obscure acronyms I never expected to know. I have had to reassess my understanding of control, of hope and acceptance. Most importantly, I have had to learn to cope.

I look around at other women on benches. Those with buggies and babies. I had once readily dismissed them as part of another strata of society, of an adulthood I had no knowledge of, or interest in. But I now realise the distance between us is a matter of months. The chasm is shrinking. I feel like I am on a turbulent ride hurtling from the self I once knew to an identity and life I can't yet comprehend, but at least I am sitting down.

A Life in Fridges_July 2024

Fridges are the window to the soul. They reveal our priorities, our concerns, how busy we are, how organised, the state of our health, and of our bank balance. Rachel Roddy once described her life through the ovens that she owned, but I see fridge shelves as the vitrines of our existence, cataloguing life's transitions.

I have always looked to food to understand people. My siblings and I would giggle in the supermarket trying to figure out what shoppers intended to make with their random purchases: vodka and eggs, six red bull and premium parmesan, batteries and a melon. Everyone has different versions of essentials.

Fridge #16

Model: Smeg 50s-Style Right Hand Hinged Minibar

Colour: Bachelor Black

The most remarkable fridge I encountered was one that I didn't initially own, but became mine during my relationship with its proprietor. It was a squat, black appliance with sleek corners and chrome trimmings. Designed for singletons or Airbnb guests, it encouraged you to subsist on meals out and takeaways. It didn't invite you to stay for breakfast.

When I opened it on our first date, looking to cool a bottle of wine, its contents shocked me. The interior glare illuminated one single object: a jar of mustard. Placed centrally on the middle shelf, its harsh lighting and spacious surroundings were reminiscent of a carefully conserved artefact. The familiar french brand provided an air of sophistication; it was European, continental, well-travelled. It stood proud, knowing it was the owner's only essential item. No milk, no eggs, no nonsense. Any meal was incomplete without this heroic condiment. Its signature yellow spanned countries and hues, from the amber jars of French Dijon, to lemon American squeeze bottles and flaxen tins of English powder. It did the work, it accompanied anything and everything. Ketchup was for children, mustard was for adults.

This solitary fridge item did make me question its owner. Still, the tiny kitchen where it sat became the setting for our relationship. We spent late nights by its side, showing each other the shiniest versions of ourselves. I told anecdotes from my years abroad, spoke at length about creative projects and my plans for the future, carefully choosing stories where I appeared brimming with brightness and humility. But behind my highlights reel lay the desperation to be known for my achievements, not my mistakes.

Dating is always an act of self-editing. I shared the details of my life like presenting a meal on the table, hoping that no one would look behind my fridge door, or at the state of the kitchen. I thought that if I repeated my revised life story enough times, it would become true in my own mind. I wanted to be seen as smart, adventurous, strong willed, not someone who squandered their potential in reckless pursuits of pleasure. Those early days were full of desire. I yearned for external validation as I yearned for more food, eating lightly to present myself as unburdened by needs. The fridge contents mirrored our heady beginnings, all fun, no function: milk for coffees in bed, olives for martinis, pastries for late breakfasts and leftover pizza from nights out. We assembled, we didn't cook.

Fridge #1

Model: Russell Hobbs High 80/20 Fridge Freezer

Colour: Milk-teeth White

My first fridge was neither small nor cosmopolitan, but it was notable for changing my relationship with food from practical to problematic. At first, it was a towering white cuboid that my small hands nudged open in search of snacks. It housed an array of bland products that swelled and contracted at the same speed as my family grew and ate. The shelves were filled with bricks of cheddar, industrial blocks of butter and lunchbox-friendly tubes of yoghurt. Each item had family-size labels and appealed to the fussiest of palettes. My early memories of this fridge are hazy, as its exterior was only a barrier to the delight inside. I never knew what lay behind its doors, as I did not buy the ingredients nor think about how they could be combined to feed five hungry mouths. I yanked it open, hunting hits of sugar and glasses of cool, thirst-quenching milk, gulped fast before being caught and chastised for the greatest sin: ruining your appetite.

Stealth snacks were my sustenance in childhood. With both parents in full time work, the job of feeding me and my siblings was often managed by a grandparent, babysitter or other available adult. I registered my disapproval with this situation by defiantly refusing their food. Breaded extinct animals, fried potatoes grinning on my plate, beans swimming in red sauce; nothing would pass my lips. If it wasn't pasta and cheese, I wasn't interested. When unmonitored, I would skulk to the kitchen and devour all that I could fit in my tiny body (on one occasion, spoonfuls of sugar from the bag). The more I refused meals, the more angry my parental stand-ins grew, teaching me the dangerous lesson that food held power.

My relationship with this fridge changed in adolescence. As my puppy fat fell away, people began to see my body as a site of conversation. Parents, friends, men in the street – everyone had an opinion on its shape and size. In high school, you are the ideal audience for diet culture as you have infinite time and a burning desire to fit in. I learned from magazines what teens now glean from social media: if you control what you eat, you can control your appearance and, in turn, control what people think about you. The prospect is intoxicating. I became invested in food shopping, wanting to switch to low fat yoghurt, skimmed milk, and anything that might aid this determined shrinking to gain acceptance.

Fortunately for me, this heightened attention on what I was eating led to an even greater interest in cooking. Once I learnt how to make food taste delicious, I was less inclined to avoid it. My first recipes were maximalist and unique; I added wine gums to cake batter and crisps to pasta bakes. I then discovered pesto – the height of gourmet – and put it on and in everything. I was a playful alchemist, enthusiastic in my discoveries and unperturbed by my failures. I loved preparing family meals and my skills gradually elevated from mac and cheese to fajitas, paella,

risottos and eventually cooking the sacred christmas dinner. Leaving home for university derailed this culinary development, as I realised it was harder to be creative when you were paying for the ingredients.

Fridge #2

Model: Argos Simply Value Fridge Freezer (Small)

Colour: Mildew Magnolia

My second fridge was small and stinky. It sat beneath the two hotplates and three cupboards that comprised the entire kitchen in my student flat. Now solely responsible for purchasing and preparing my own meals, I quickly realised how little I knew about nourishing myself. Mould developed on the barren fridge shelves as cupboards became the dominant food source. Fresh produce was expensive, but 19p bags of penne provided the perfunctory job of sustenance I needed at the time. Whenever my flatmate and I went home, we raided our parents' kitchens for premium products like tuna tins, tubs of peanut butter, jam jars and even loo roll. My early passion for cooking could not contend with my dwindling bank balance, my cockroach-infested kitchen and my perpetual busyness.

I was eager to explore London and sustain myself with experiences rather than recipes. Disconnected from my body and bolstered by youth's invincibility, I survived on infrequent sandwiches, minimal sleep, and large quantities of alcohol. The supermarket reduced section dictated my consumption of luxuries such as meat, cheese and vegetables. But after twelve days in bed with salmonella, I started paying attention to sell-by dates. Bulk buying remained, but it was in the form of crates of cider, bought gleefully for low prices, but met with misery when fishing for the final cans before the fourth consecutive houseparty. This fridge was not a site of optimism, but of trepidation. My dominant memory is unease about the decomposition levels of the few items it contained, or fear that my flatmate had finished and not replaced our milk, which facilitated our staple diet of own-brand cereals.

Fridge #3

Model: Polar Heavy Duty 600Ltr Double Door Catering Fridge

Colour: Intimidating Iron

My next flat didn't have a fridge, only a mattress and a table. After graduating with no career plan, I moved into a sublet in Dalston with my first-proper-boyfriend. While we waited for

our unhinged landlord to order one, we bought ingredients one meal at a time and chilled milk, beer and perishables in sinkfuls of cold water. It was bleak, chaotic and fun. Frenetic with uncertainty about my future, I gravitated towards known sources of joy and secured a trial shift in a professional kitchen.

Restaurant fridges resemble sheds more than appliances. The stainless steel structures stood in rows that demanded discipline and respect. Housing pristine racks of uniform tupperware boxes, all produce was organised according to date and category: herbs, sauces, blanched vegetables, seared meats. Tasks were regimented, careful and precise. I decoupled parsley leaves from their stalks and placed them delicately on kitchen-towel beds. I meticulously weighed out rich, viscous hollandaise, velouté and chimichurri. My fingers are still scarred from slicing tomatoes with a mandolin to ensure equal diameters and minimal wastage. All items were diligently labelled and every surface was rigorously cleaned. There was no question of what lay behind the fridge doors. We had to know, or we'd be fired.

Restaurant kitchens all hide different versions of the same contradictory scene: chefs lovingly constructing meals while abusing their staff and bodies. The back of house atmosphere stands in sharp contrast to the calm lighting, considered plating and subdued ambience experienced by diners. I eagerly joined the ranks of chefs who plagued their insides with paracetamol, cigarettes, cheese slices and gummy sweets – any over-the-counter stimulant I could find. I loved the choreographed chaos of these spaces and the distraction they offered from my racing mind. Adrenaline dulled every burn and encased me in a welcome numbness. The walk-in fridge was my solace: stepping inside was like an icy shower on a summer's day. After hours spent hurling insults, we would all embrace at the end of service and share congratulations as we began to regain feeling in our limbs.

Fridges #4-15

Models: Numerous

Colours: Grayscale

The rest of my twenties saw me leave London and restaurant kitchens behind. I preferred the pace of cafes and the temperatures abroad. Fridges 4-15 were remarkable only for the speed with which they changed and the locations they spanned. There was a small silver one in Berlin, followed by two residential and upwards of twenty professional fridges during my year in Melbourne. After a brief stint back home with Fridge 1, I moved to Liverpool for my Master's degree, where I went through seven houses in four years. The last of these had five

fridges in one room. Originally built as the Brazilian Consulate, it came with a grand staircase, ballroom and aga, all of which I shared with a community of thirteen creatives and four chickens. These years saw many heartbreaks, essays, hangovers and culinary discoveries. My fridges always reflected my current obsession. There was a kimchi making phase, my tinned fish era, and the start of my enduring love affair with tahini. I cooked constantly during this time, adoring the opportunity to share the recipes I'd developed with tables full of friends, family and partners. Black rice with roasted cherries, carrots and burrata, sweet potato gratin with peanut butter, coconut milk and lime, charred balsamic cauliflower with pear, blue cheese and walnuts, each meal was an anchor of joy in the turmoil of change.

Fridge #17

Model: Ambiguous

Colour: Ikea Cabinet Ivory

I was 26 when I first encountered the small black fridge and 27 when we moved in together and sold it. I've never seen the door of our current fridge as it's built into the kitchen unit that came with our new flat. It is covered with postcards, invites to friend's weddings, and a shopping list. Inside, it is filled with the standard fare of health conscious, early-thirties millennials: kefir yoghurt, kale, oat milk, tupperwares of grains and leftover roasted vegetables. It does not meet the strict standards of cleanliness I once adhered to. Advice to consume within 3 days is rarely followed, and it is sanitised bi-monthly at best. I am no longer scared to look inside, as the stocked shelves remind me of the lessons I've learnt about care and nourishment.

We still spend nights by its side, drinking wine and sharing stories. But we don't hide the mistakes anymore, we highlight them and ask for help in finding resolutions. The shininess now comes from knowing the whole mess, as the state of our kitchen and fridge has become a joint responsibility. We try to keep it organised and full, but some days it's batteries and a melon.

Some consistencies have remained in my relationship with all the 17 fridges I have owned. The ingredients have varied, but the same feelings strike with comforting regularity: frustration when the door shelves don't fit standard bottle sizes, joy when discovering there's still some chocolate left, confusion about how to replace the lightbulb that died four months ago and, of course, guilt about six near-empty-but-not-quite jars of condiments. Mustard is one of them.