

CASTING GRIEF: A DOMESTIC PERFORMANCE OF MOURNING

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Design

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the presence and absence of grief and questions how casting, as a performance of mourning, might give presence to grief within a domestic space. The research understands domestic space or home as a space of comfort, defined by everyday habitual routines and rhythms. A creative practice of casting has been used as a means to investigate this version of home. The resulting collection of abstracted cast domestic objects is integrated into the home as soft activations. Through a reading of these objects in situ concerning grief and mourning, this research reveals their register of presence and absence within a domestic experience. This process highlights the relationship between spatio-temporal qualities and experiences of grief, positioning the cast objects as markers and activations for these discoveries.

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PRELUDE

In 1986 my parents met a woman named Jayne. Their relationship grew into something very special, not just for them but for me. From the day I was born, 26th February 1999, Jayne has been an integral part of my life. I would say Jayne is present in the majority of my fondest memories. When people ask me who Jayne is, 'family friend' never seems to sit right. It diminishes her value to me. I want to say she is family, an aunt or a second mother. But even then, it is difficult to define someone's significance in my life with a label. Jayne has always had an excellent aesthetic and an eye for design. We bond over this. In 2015, she started a small business making and selling soy candles in beautiful concrete vessels. It then developed into concrete and pottery homewares. Very soon, my entire home was filled with various concrete coasters, trays, and candles. They became markers of her presence in my most significant spaces. In 2019, Jayne was diagnosed with endometrial cancer. I can't put into words what this news did to our family. It is something I have tried to process, contain, and quite often, something that erupts beyond control. I am just a young man. I don't know what death is. I don't know what grief is. But I am learning.



Figure 1. Bretnall, L. Jayne's Workshop, photograph, 2022.

Jayne working in her casting workshop outside her home.

Her sometimes happy and sometimes dreary space.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This practice-led research investigates the presence and absence of grief within a domestic space. Grief is a profoundly personal experience that can be difficult to make sense of.¹ Artist Sheridan Horn rightly observes that “contemporary artists are re-contextualising culturally embedded symbols, signs, and metaphors to visually communicate and narrate embodied experiences of loss, trauma, grief, and mourning.”² My creative practice of casting, informed by personal experiences of grief, explores casting as a performative practice of mourning, giving presence to grief through cast objects.

This casting practice positions domestic space as the site of inquiry. Accordingly, I wish to identify how grief exists through a register of absence and presence within a home’s routines, objects, and spatial arrangements. Sociologist Morgan Meyer writes that “absence has a materiality and exists in – and has effects on – the spaces people inhabit and their daily practices and experiences.”³ In this light, absence has a presence in space, and through my research, I question how a performative casting practice may give presence to grief and mourning.

The choice to use casting as a creative practice instead of other making methods was heavily influenced by the underlying narrative between myself and my dear friend Jayne, introduced in the prelude. I have a strong relationship with her concrete cast objects that have become almost conduits for my grieving. Within the nature of casting, I realised the potential for casting to act not only as a lens of investigation but to become a performance or practice of mourning and through this positioning, casting as mourning becomes a tool to analyse objects and space, connecting the processes of casting, material qualities, and form to experiences of grief.

1 Sheridan Horn, ‘Living with Loss: An Enquiry into the Expression of Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Art Practice.’ (Birmingham City University, 2018), 4, <http://www.open-access.bcu.ac.uk/7268/1/PhD%20Thesis.pdf>.

2 Horn, 34.

3 Horn, 103.

The structure of this thesis unfolds as a contextualisation of vital thematic concerns, including *casting*, *domestic space*, *the performance of mourning*, and the *presence of absence*. Of the many theorists and practitioners working in these fields, those outlined below and in subsequent sections are the ones I have used to focus my research. Artist Rachel Whiteread's creative practice explores how casting domestic architecture and objects illustrates absence, memory, and meaning. Philosopher Gaston Bachelard and architect Witold Rybczynski define the household as a space of intimacy, comfort, and daydreaming. Artist Taryn Simon's performative mourning piece *An Occupation of Loss* (2016) explores mourning through space, sculpture, and people. Psychiatrist Thomas Fuch's *Presence in absence: The ambiguous phenomenology of grief* and author Caron Lipman's *Living with the past at home: The afterlife of inherited domestic objects* position the experience of grief as a form of presence and absence embodied in domestic objects. I have chosen these thinkers as they are prominent in their field and help me to define the parameters of my research.

A designed methodology and narrative of practice specific to this research constructs the working method to specify – to abstract – to record – and to open. These four working methods fabricate and clarify the framework for this project. Habitual domestic moments become the basis to abstract discoveries into a conceptual and spatial territory. This abstraction connects aspects of mourning and grief into a spatial casting practice of casting, while the methodology informs the making of the designed cast objects. This process aims to create a dialogue between grief, mourning, and the domestic, revealing the spatio-temporal⁴ qualities and habitual rhythms between the designed cast objects and the spatial setting of the domestic.

4 Spatio-temporal qualities exist within spatial changes occurring over time. The rhythms within a spatio-temporal phenomenon consist of a regulated sequence of spatial events or forms. In a home, the spatio-temporal qualities emerge from the habitual rhythms of domestic routines that regulate spatial changes over time. Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński, 'Composing Space/Calculating Space-Time Rhythms', *MIT Press*, October, 156 (2016): 12–74, https://doi.org/10.1162/OCTO_a_00251.



Figure 2. Bretnall, L. Home Workshop, photograph, 2022.

Mixing cement, water, and aggregate in preparation for pouring.

The casting practice always makes me feel grounded. I always put my whole body into the process's rhythms and messiness. It can be physically and sometimes mentally draining.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

Identifying and contextualising the vital thematic concerns present in this research was the first step in understanding how casting as a performance of mourning might give presence to grief within a domestic space. These are domestic space, casting, a performance of mourning, and presence and absence. In this chapter, I will examine each thematic concern through tracing the term *uncanny*. Fuchs suggests that the uncanny occurs when a “familiar environment or a known object assumes an alien, enigmatic or opaque character.”⁵ It is then in the strange, unfamiliar, and ambiguous that a sense of uncanniness is evoked. Fuchs goes on to describe the experience of grief as a “fundamental ambiguity between presence and absence.”⁶ Grief as an experience of uncanniness through an environment or object might occur when what was familiar, private, and secret becomes ambiguous, strange, unfamiliar, and seemingly ghostly.⁷

5 Thomas Fuchs, ‘The Uncanny as Atmosphere’, in *Psychopathology and Atmospheres: Neither Inside nor Outside*, ed. Gianni Francesetti and Tonino Griffero (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2019), 103, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Thomas-Fuchs-6/publication/335001409_The_Uncanny_as_Atmosphere/links/5d49a0b292851cd046a698ba/The-Uncanny-as-Atmosphere.pdf.

6 Thomas Fuchs, ‘Presence in Absence. The Ambiguous Phenomenology of Grief’, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 17, no. 1 (2018): 43, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-017-9506-2>.

7 Fuchs, ‘The Uncanny as Atmosphere’, 103.



Figure 3. Bretnall, L. Stacking coasters, photograph, 2022.

Exploring the unfamiliar through stacking extruded concrete coasters.

The verticality and extrusion of concrete revealed a sense of precariousness. It went against everything I thought concrete was: a symbol of strength.

Domestic space: Intimacy, comfort, and daydreaming

In *The Poetics of Space*, philosopher Gaston Bachelard positions the home as a shelter for daydreaming, protecting the dreamer and allowing one to dream in peace.⁸ To daydream is to imagine and abstract from reality. Bachelard suggests that “imagination functions whenever the human being has found the slightest shelter.”⁹ Inside the shelter of home, we find comfort in the illusion of protection, housing memories in corridors and corners.¹⁰ Even when the spaces that give our memories refuge are gone, the memories remain indelible, and grief can make the experience of home ambiguous.

Architect Witold Rybczynski suggests that the idea of domestic comfort is complex and multilayered as every household has its idiosyncratic domestic routines dependent on the people, culture, and context of space.¹¹ Bachelard builds on this, suggesting that “we house memories and find comfort in the protective illusion of domestic space.”¹² I believe these suggestions indicate that domestic space’s habitual routines and objects reveal spaces of comfort where we house memories and create a protective illusion.

8 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. M. Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

9 Bachelard, 5.

10 Bachelard, 8.

11 Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea*, Reprint edition (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 1987), 230.

12 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 8.

Sociologist and cultural theorist Andreas Reckwitz defines a practice of domestic comfort as a “routinised way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described, and the world is understood.”¹³

Reckwitz’s definition helps me understand Bachelard’s strong argument and describes through the actions, such as the handling and treating of objects and subjects, the routinised ways we may house memories and form shelter in domestic spaces.

Therefore, I have chosen three sites in my home that may reveal comfort areas: a corner, a shelf, and the dining table. Taking the role of the daydreamer, my practice begins with exploring these sites that provide a sense of comfort, shelter, and an illusion of protection. It is within these spaces that imagination functions and routines are revealed.

13 Andreas Reckwitz, ‘Toward a Theory of Social Practices. A Development in Culturalist Theorizing’, ed. Gerard Delanty, SAGE Publications, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5, no. 2 (2002): 250, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310222225432>.



Figure 4. Bretnall, L. Fire Gathering, photograph, 2022.

Chairs gather around the interior fireplace, marking a space of warmth and comfort.

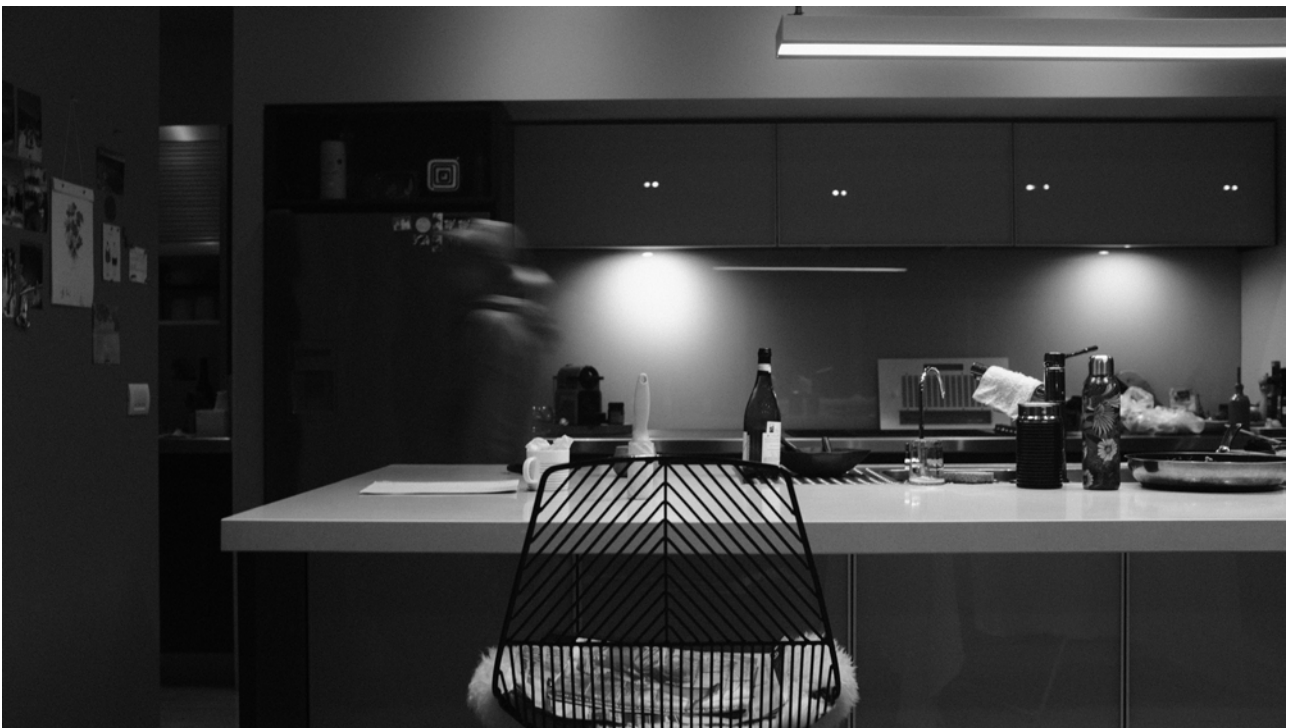


Figure 5. Bretnall, L. Human Movement, photograph, 2022.

Capturing movement and human occupation within the kitchen routine.

Performance of mourning and the everyday

Grief is the emotional response to loss. It exists as naturally occurring internal thoughts and feelings such as fear, pain, and emptiness.¹⁴ Mourning is when we express our internal grief. Grief counsellor Alan Wolfelt suggests we mourn by “talking, crying, journaling/letter writing, using art or music as a means of expressing our grief.”¹⁵ Within my practice, casting becomes the mourning process to express grief.

Mourning performed through various themes is highlighted in the work of artist Taryn Simon where expressions of mourning through relations with space, performance, art, and sculpture are activated in *An Occupation of Loss* (2016) (Fig. 6). Simon brings together multiple professional mourners from various cultural backgrounds to perform their laments to an audience. The laments are performed in small rooms at the bottom of a large, inverted concrete well. The inversion is drawn on for its sonic properties.¹⁶ This installation, according to Simon, negotiates the “boundaries of grief” between the performer and the viewer and the living and the dead.¹⁷ I understand these boundaries to be a type of performative relationship between subject and viewer that represents aspects of presence and absence within the performance.

In *Performative Architecture*, architect Sergio Araya explores definitions and hierarchies of form and function to understand how architecture is performed. Araya defines this as “that which has to do with material and formal conditions, deployed in a certain order which allows it to take form.”¹⁸

14 Alan Wolfelt, ‘Understanding the Difference Between Grieving and Mourning’ (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2003), 1, <https://windsoressex.cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Understanding-the-difference-between-grieving-and-mourning.pdf>.

15 Wolfelt, 1.

16 Taryn Simon, In Conversation: Homi K. Bhabha & Taryn Simon, Transcript, 2017, http://tarynsimon.com/essays-videos/docs/BhabhaHomiSimonTaryn_InConversation.pdf.

17 Taryn Simon, ‘An Occupation of Loss’, Portfolio website, Taryn Simon, 2016, http://tarynsimon.com/works/occupation_of_loss/#1.

18 Sergio Araya, ‘Performative Architecture’ (PhD, Massachusetts, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2011), 55, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/4432727.pdf>.

In Simon's performative installation, *An Occupation of Loss*, the material and formal conditions of monumental concrete pillars give presence to the invisibility of loss through an embodiment of form and sculpture. The scale of pillars corresponds to a level of grief, given the range of professional mourners' cultural backgrounds and the mourning of national, global, or individual grief.¹⁹ While the expression of mourning in Simon's work is external and overt, my practice seeks to reveal and unravel the absences of grief and mourning.

Medical sociologists Caroline Pearce and Carol Komaromy argue that "grief is not something that simply impacts upon the body but rather is performed or enacted by the embodied bereaved person."²⁰ In the context of home, artist Sheridan Horn suggests domestic objects are imbued with human agency and may act as stand-ins for the body and psyche.²¹ Horn refers to philosopher Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) essay *The Thing*, where he examines a ceramic jug, searching for the 'thingness' of an object. He concludes, "The vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that it holds."²² I understood Heidegger's explanation of the void as emptiness, negative space, or nothingness of the object. Horn explores this further in her sculptural installation *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* (2012-2013), interpreting the void of an object as unusable. This anti-art memorial sees a table comprised of mnemonic domestic objects coated in ash, offering a corpse-like presence (Fig. 7). This uncanny metaphor represents a loss of time, encoding symbols of death, human decomposition, silence, and the temporal nature of existence.²³ Similarly to Horn's installation objects, my casting practice explores the temporal dimension of loss and grief through an object's presence and absence within domestic sites and routines.

19 Simon, In Conversation: Homi K. Bhabha & Taryn Simon.

20 Caroline Pearce and Carol Komaromy, 'Recovering the Body in Grief: Physical Absence and Embodied Presence,' *SAGE Publications, Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine*, 26, no. 4 (2020): 394, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363459320931914>.

21 Horn, 'Living with Loss: An Enquiry into the Expression of Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Art Practice,' 140.

22 Horn, 141.

23 Horn, 55.

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Figure 6. Taryn Simon, *An Occupation of Loss*, 2016, installation, Park Avenue Armory, New York. http://tarynsimon.com/works/occupation_of_loss/#2

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Figure 7. Sheridan Horn, *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There*, 2012-2013, installation, Trinity Catholic School, Leamington Spa.

Presence and absence: The silence of mourning

Thomas Fuchs describes the experience of grief as a “fundamental ambiguity between the presence and absence of the deceased.”²⁴ According to phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “absence is itself rooted in presence.”²⁵ Using Fuchs and Merleau-Ponty’s definitions as a starting point, this research sees absence and presence concealed within the routines and objects of a domestic scene, acting as a silent witness.

The storing and display of objects affect their agency within a domestic scene and can take on different meanings. Cultural geographer Caron Lipman describes this handling and organisation of domestic objects as a “ritual of reburial.”²⁶ Lipman suggests that many people often squirrel away objects to protect delicate things, placing them out of sight in a state of absence.²⁷ This process of burying can see domestic objects fade in and out of existence as part of a burial and reburial within a home.

Lipman claims the location of domestic materials (objects) is an important response to people’s affective relationship with home.²⁸ Displayed or hidden objects may affect the habitual domestic routines, and “...the home becomes an uncanny place because it holds secrets or hiding places.”²⁹ Lipman indicates an ambiguous register of presence and absence within domestic objects’ agency and offers a paradox of absence and presence similar to experiences of grief and loss.

24 Fuchs, ‘Presence in Absence. The Ambiguous Phenomenology of Grief’, 43.

25 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary, Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 172, <http://archive.org/details/20200305northwesternuniversitystudiesinphenomenologyexis>.

26 Caron Lipman, ‘Living with the Past at Home: The Afterlife of Inherited Domestic Objects’, *SAGE Publications, Journal of Material Culture*, 24, no. 1 (2018): 92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183518801383>.

27 Lipman, 92.

28 Lipman, 85.

29 Lipman, 86.

This research explores the uncanny and ambiguous register of presence and absence by investigating existing domestic routines and objects. My casting practice highlights these moments, abstracting object forms and positioning them back into the habitual routines of domestic space.



Figure 8. Bretnall, L. Domestic Medley, photograph, 2022.

Unfamiliar concrete extrusion disguising itself within an assortment of domestic markers.

The image on the left side of the photograph is of my sister Georgia, who has lived away from our family for three or four years. This space and neighbouring objects offer a sense of remembrance and absence for my mother.

Casting domesticity

Architect Ross Jenner claims that loss, mourning, and memorialisation are the most apparent manifestations of absence in architecture.³⁰ A less noticeable presence of absence is the notion of space as interval and gap cleared or excavated.³¹ Jenner positions this gap or clearing of nothing space as a space of creation. He explains that “the creation of the nothing is the absolute principle of all creation.”³² Jenner defines this creation space as a ‘pre-ground’ that precedes and grants making.³³ In the context of this research, ‘nothing’ can be understood in casting as an empty prepared mould that is to be pre-cast or fore-cast with a liquid material whose purpose is to solidify inside a substrate form.

Through her sculptural casts, Artist Rachel Whiteread explores manifestations of the presence of absence and, as Jenner describes it, the ‘nothing’ space. Her work transforms void spaces of everyday settings, capturing traces of occupation to solidify and make present notions of loss, mourning, and memory. Academic Rachel Carley affirms, “Whiteread’s works repeatedly draw attention toward aspects of sculpture and architecture that have been repressed or lie hidden.”³⁴ Carley suggests Whiteread’s casting process reveals repressed and hidden details that sit within the architectural interior, holding surface traces of everyday life on the cast forms.

30 Julia Gatley et al., ‘2018 Interstices Under Construction Symposium: Presence BROCHURE’, *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts* 19, no. 19 (2018): 17.

31 Gatley et al., 17.

32 Gatley et al., 17.

33 Gatley et al., 17.

34 Rachel Carley, ‘Rachel Whiteread’s Soundings of Architecture’ (PhD, Auckland, New Zealand, The University of Auckland, 2006), 259, <https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/handle/2292/51025>.

Whiteread's project *Ghost* (1990) materialises the hidden everyday details of an abandoned Victorian home by casting the interior space with plaster that traces domestic occupation (Fig. 9). Whiteread's practice of casting negative spaces can be seen throughout her work. *One Hundred Spaces* (1995) is a collection of translucent cubes in which the negative space of the underside of a chair is cast in resin (Fig. 10). Like *Ghost* (1990), Whiteread manages to materialise the unnoticed absence of our domestic surroundings. By making the familiar strange, Whiteread reveals aspects of uncanniness.³⁵ Fuch's description of uncanniness inevitably comes to mind when Whiteread explores the presence and absence of domestic surroundings, creating a strange and imposing presence of something that was once invisible to occupants.

This research explores casting methods that may manifest grief through the spatio-temporal relations within a domestic interior, its routines, and its objects. Performing grief through scale, similarly to how Taryn Simon corresponds the scale of pillars to levels of grief, situates the cast objects as markers of grief. Therefore, they may start to reveal a presence of absence, associating the anticipation of losing someone, both embodied and performed by the bereaved, through the cast objects.

35 Carley, 18.

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Figure 9. Rachel Whiteread, *Ghost*, 2020, installation, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Interior negative space of Victorian home cast in plaster.

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Figure 10. Rachel Whiteread, *One Hundred Spaces*, 1997, installation, Luhring Augustine, New York.

Negative space of the underside of a chair cast in multi-coloured resin.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

Researcher Lyle Skains writes that “...practice-led research focuses on the nature of creative practice, leading to new knowledge of operational significance for that practice, in order to advance knowledge about or within practice.”³⁶

This research style positions the researcher’s creative practice as a fundamental part of its general inquiry. My research and practice are split into two main avenues of examination: casting as a performance of mourning and the presence of grief within a domestic space. This chapter will discuss the essential methods, procedures, and methodology used to explore these avenues of the research question.

36 R. Lyle Skains, ‘Creative Practice as Research: Discourse on Methodology’, *Routledge, Media Practice and Education*, 19, no. 1 (2018): 85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682753.2017.1362175>.

Methodology

In a conventional spatial design or architectural project, the outcome might be a concrete implementation of a conceptual design. Systems architect Bob Reselman describes this process as a “progression through a hierarchy of phases, starting from conceptual abstraction and ending with a concrete implementation.”³⁷ This project, however, intentionally inverts this process by utilising the traditional phases in a new hierarchy.

My methodology starts with reality, identifying and examining specific and familiar spaces, objects, and habitual routines that define domestic comfort. The next phase takes these specifics through a process of abstraction³⁸ in which domestic objects are cast in concrete and plaster. While maintaining some representation of their domestic reality, they become altered through scale, extrusion, and texture in the casting process. Each cast is documented and recorded, along with the tools and moulds used to create them. The last phase is to open the reading of these objects, allowing the material, form, and nature of the cast objects to connect with experiences of grief.

The previous chapter’s contextualising of domestic space, grief, mourning, presence, absence, and casting has informed the design of this methodology, particularly the specification and abstraction of familiar objects that become unfamiliar or uncanny. The cast objects, in turn, transform into soft activations of mourning, giving presence to grief through the spatio-temporal relations in their domestic locations.

This methodology is split into four phases: specify, abstract, record, and open.

37 Bob Reselman, ‘The Four Phases of Architectural Design’, Enable Architect (Red Hat, Inc., 2020), <https://www.redhat.com/architect/four-phases-architectural-design>.

38 Abstraction, as opposed to abstract art, distorts, and exaggerates reality, rather than producing a realistic representation. Although, it is important to note that abstraction still has roots in the physical. Little Art Talks, ‘Little Art Talks - Abstraction vs. Abstract Art - Art Terms Explained’, Abstraction vs. Abstract Art - Art Terms Explained - Little Art Talks, 2014, <http://littlearttalks.com/posts/5>.

To specify: The domestic routine and daily practice

This stage of the research started with investigating domestic routines and daily practices. It begins a part of the research inquiry by exploring the presence and absence of grief within domestic space. The criterion for this domestic inquiry is centred around the idea of comfort, explored in Chapter 1. Witold describes the experience of *home* as intimate, domestic, and private, leading to a feeling of comfort.³⁹ I investigated key habitual domestic spaces, routines, and objects that embodied my version of comfort while visiting my dear friend Jayne's home and casting workshop. I wanted to examine how the arrangement of her domestic objects defined a particular routine or moment associated with comfort. This investigation was documented as a series of visual specifications captured through journaling.

Journaling is a part of a self-study methodology that allows a level of freedom for the researcher. According to pedagogical researchers Alan Ovens and Dawn Garbett, "Its appeal lies in the freedom it allows the researcher to purposefully record and explore the experiences of being an embodied individual situated in practice."⁴⁰ For this research, the freedom of journaling allowed me to embody Jayne's practice and learn from her domestic space and casting narrative as a form of data collection. In this process, I discovered particular ways we arrange our home with objects to define moments of our daily routines.

³⁹ Rybczynski, *Home*, 231.

⁴⁰ Alan Ovens and Dawn Garbett, 'Weaving Self-Studies through Journaling,' ed. Christi Edge, Abby Cameron-Standerford, and Bethney Bergh, *EdTech Books*, Textiles and Tapestries: Self-Study for Envisioning New Ways of Knowing, 2020, 1.

Whether the functional purpose or pure display of objects, they seem to have an established representation of comfort within Jayne's home. The coffee cup and accompanying coaster are a part of a meticulous and fanatical ritual where she might spend as much time choosing the suitable vessel as drinking the coffee (Fig. 11-12). The lighting of a scented candle becomes a treat at the end of a long day's work. Still, it cannot be enjoyed when the house is dirty and in disarray (Fig. 13). The personal touch of the dwelling space, whether through art, seating, or the positioning of natural light, creates a calming space (Fig. 14).

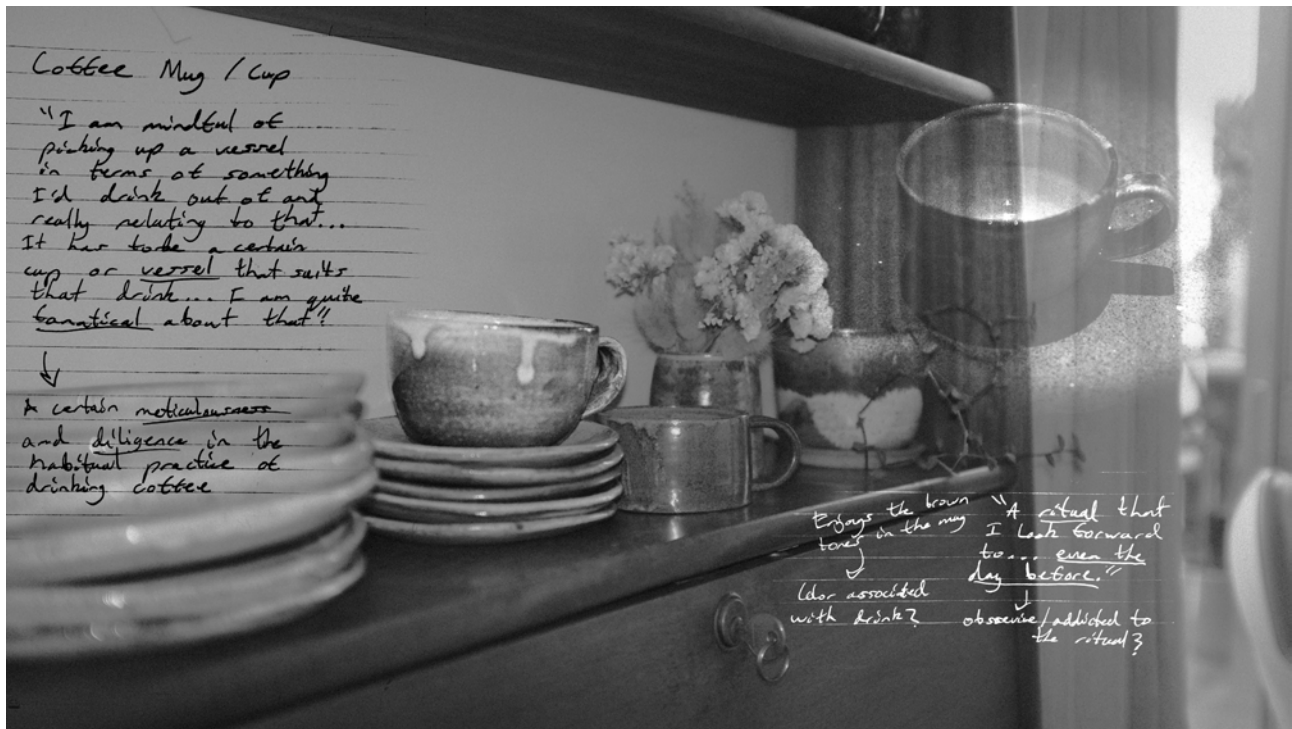


Figure 11. Bretnall, L. Coffee Mug Annotation, photograph, 2022.

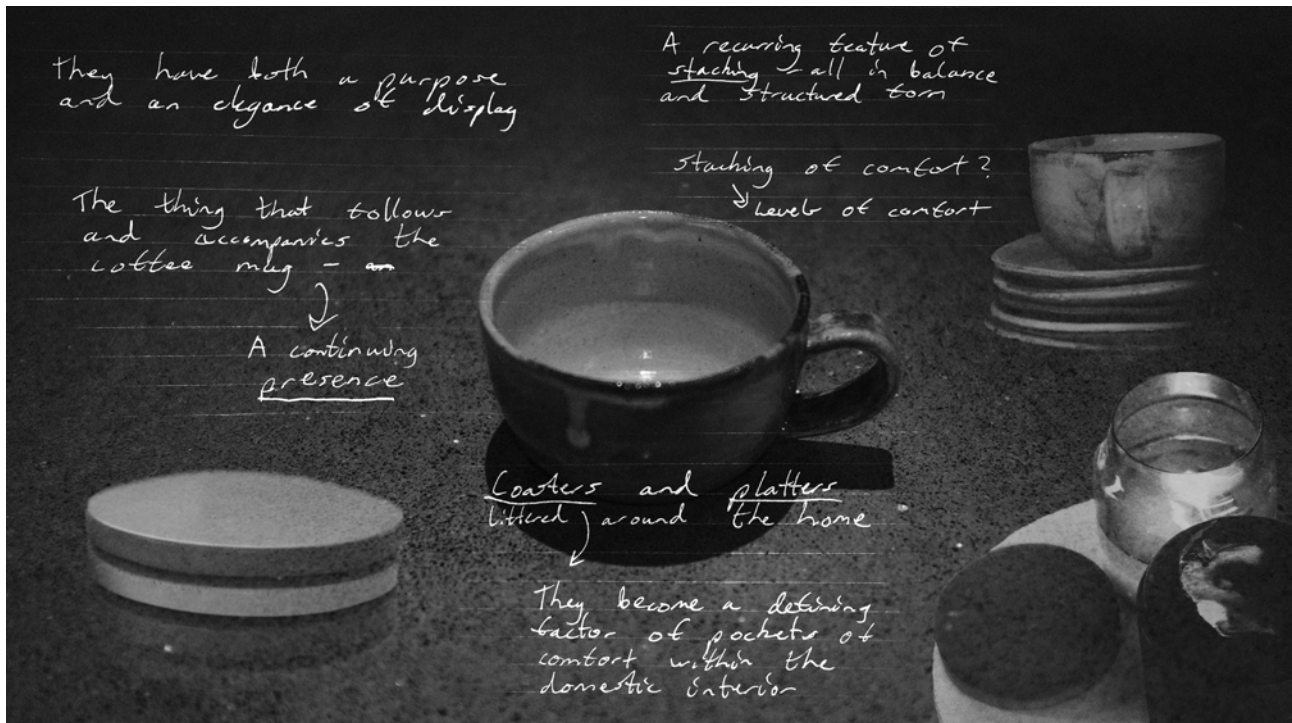


Figure 12. Bretnall, L. Coaster Annotation, photograph, 2022.

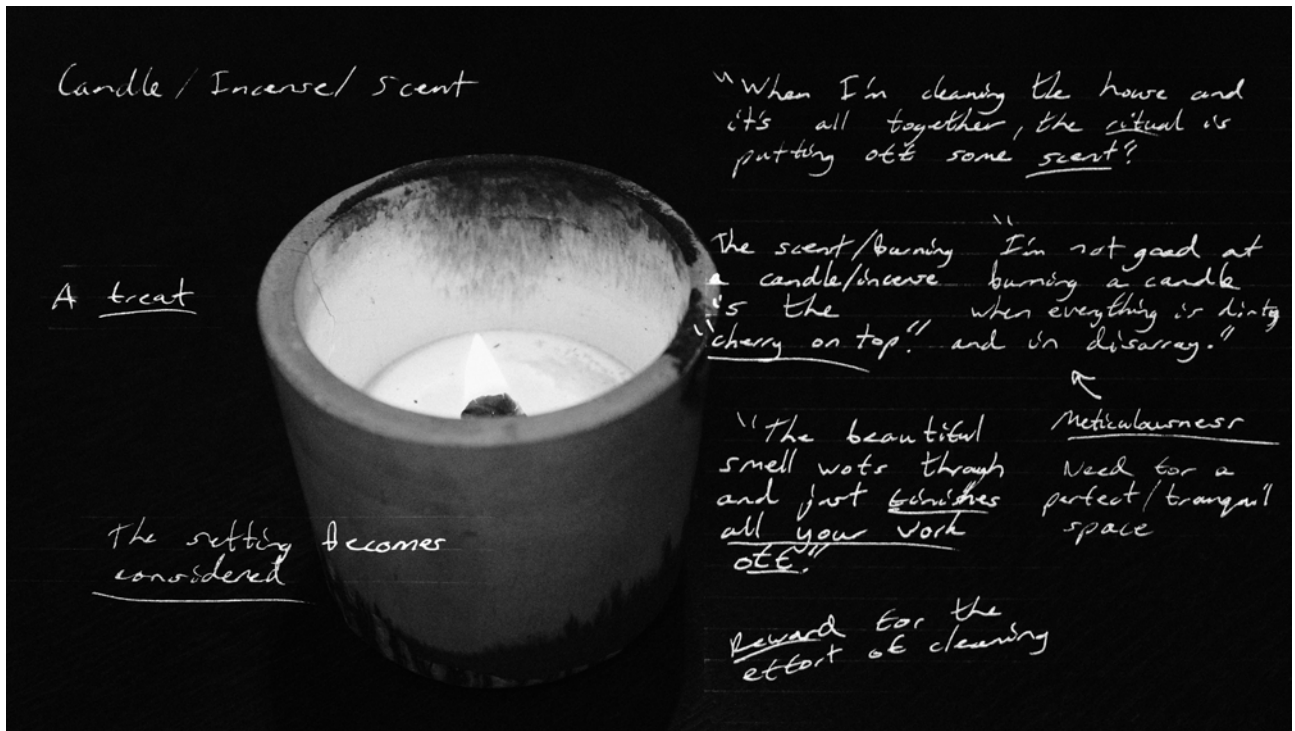


Figure 13. Bretnall, L. Candle Annotation, photograph, 2022.



Figure 14. Bretnall, L. Domestic Space Annotation, photograph, 2022.

To abstract: Casting domestic comfort

In this phase, I used casting as a method to transform the specifications recorded for domestic comfort into a process of abstraction. I preferred casting from moulds to other methods such as pottery or 3D printing as I did not want these abstracted objects to be pure replications of their existing forms. Though the mould provides the form, many unanticipated results occur in the casting process and its controllable and uncontrollable nature. For example, we have control over cement, water, and aggregate measurement and the choice of mould material to pour the cement mix into. But the cast object's cracks, air bubbles, and exterior texture are uncontrollable processes once poured. (Fig. 15-17).

This process resulted in many casts that would generally be deemed as failures. In this research, they are not viewed as failures but instead as opportunities for material qualities to take on a language of grief. In *Mourning Dairy* (2012), theorist Roland Barthes creates a diary of mourning notes concerning time, death, and grief from his mother's passing. The very nature of Barthes's writing is often repetitive and ambiguous, capturing a portrait of his private mourning experiences through a metaphorical language for loss. Barthes writes, "...one could just as well say that I have no feelings or that I'm given over to a sort of external emotivity... but at certain moments not be able to stand it any longer and 'collapsing.'"⁴¹ One might understand collapsing as a moment of failure in the containment of emotions. Concrete failure could be understood as splits, cracks, unexpected breakage, and fragility. These material failures open a metaphor of grief within the nature of casting in my practice (Fig. 18-20).

⁴¹ Roland Barthes, *Mourning Dairy*, trans. Richard Howard, Translation edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 39.

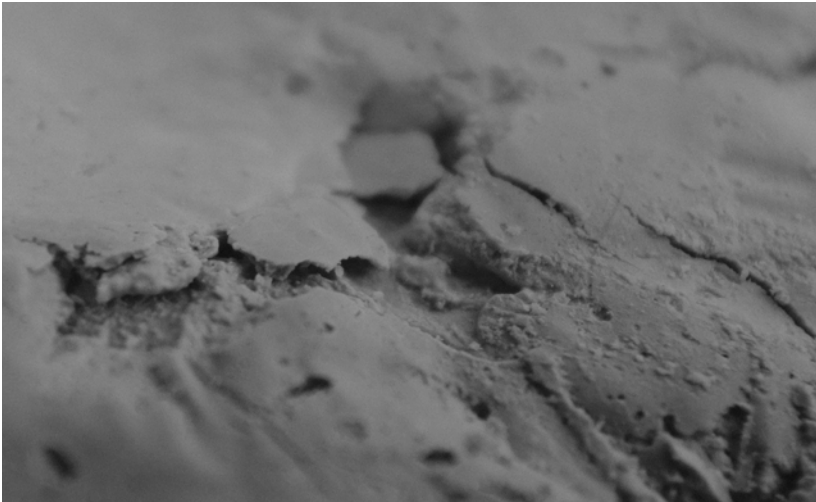


Figure 15. Bretnall, L. Cracks, photograph, 2022.

Cracks form in the hardening process of plaster.



Figure 16. Bretnall, L. Air Bubbles, photograph, 2022.

Small pockets formed on the concrete surface due to air trapped and released within the concrete mix.



Figure 17. Bretnall, L. Spalls, photograph, 2022.

Concrete spalling forming on the surface, exposing the rough interior aggregate. Spalling is the breakdown of the top layer of concrete due to chemical reactions in the curing process.

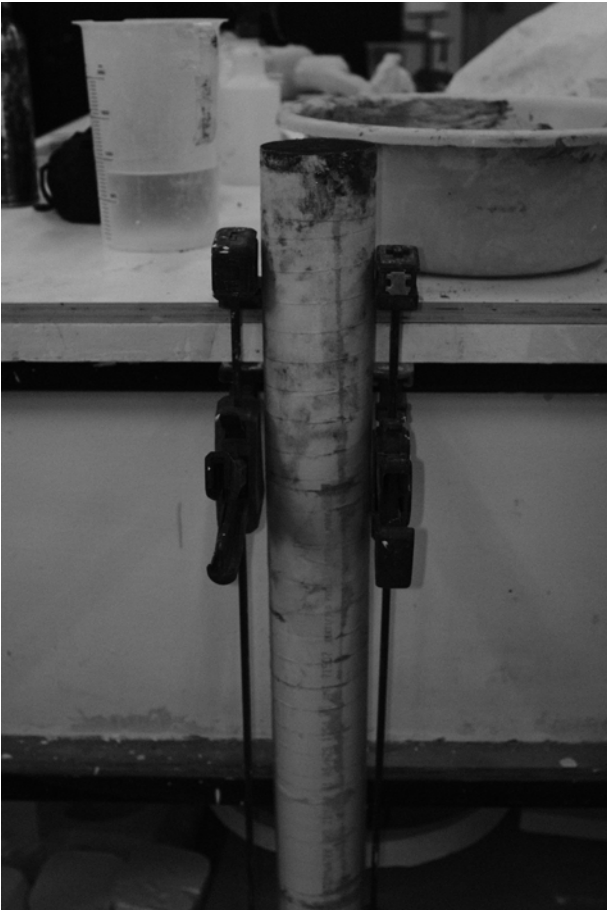


Figure 18. Bretnall, L. Concrete Curing, photograph, 2022.

One-metre-tall PVC pipe filled with concrete curing and solidifying over two to three days.



Figure 19. Bretnall, L. Water Leakage, photograph, 2022.

Excess water leaking through layers of masking tape.

Similar to experiences of grief, this photograph speaks to contained emotions and points of failure.

An individual whose experiences differ from mine might relate to this as an experience of grief. An understanding of being pushed to the edge – their joints splitting, and they fall apart. The masking tape fails to mask the tears.



Figure 20. Bretnall, L. Collapsed Concrete, photograph, 2022.

The result of a concrete object falling and splitting into three relatively clean breaks.

This concrete object fell from the corner during a meeting with my supervisors, creating a sudden shock. At the time, I was okay with it. It was only a test cast and could easily be made again. Although it did bother me, I knew it wasn't a major issue deep down. When reflecting on this moment, the toppling of the object and the clean-up was a minor experience of grief and mourning for my object.

To record: Recording the domestic

From all stages of my casting practice, I have kept a record of every cast object, including the tools and moulds that created them. The record provides a snapshot of the abstracted domestic objects, depicting the habitual routines and my version of domesticity. In this phase, I have taken the role of the archaeologist in recording every discovery (cast object) throughout this project. A large part of my practice has felt archaeological in nature. I have gathered, recorded, and analysed artefacts like archaeologists to uncover information and patterns.⁴² The home and the record become physical sites that are the product of habitual and social routines of domestic space.⁴³ These sites provide the grounds for the visible qualities of grief and mourning in relation to the cast objects and their position in domestic space.

⁴² Archaeologists study ancient human culture and history from various time periods. Through the excavation of material remains, archaeologists study their findings to reveal information on the human past. This archaeological process is similar to the way I am approaching my archiving of findings in the context of domestic space and the presence of grief.

⁴³ Alicia Kent, 'In Two Places at the Same Time: Archiving the Domestic in the Work of Leonora Carrington and Sally Mann', ed. Bex Harper and Hollie Price, Palgrave Macmillan, *Domestic Imaginaries: Navigating the Home in Global Literary and Visual Cultures*, 2017, 101, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66490-3_6.

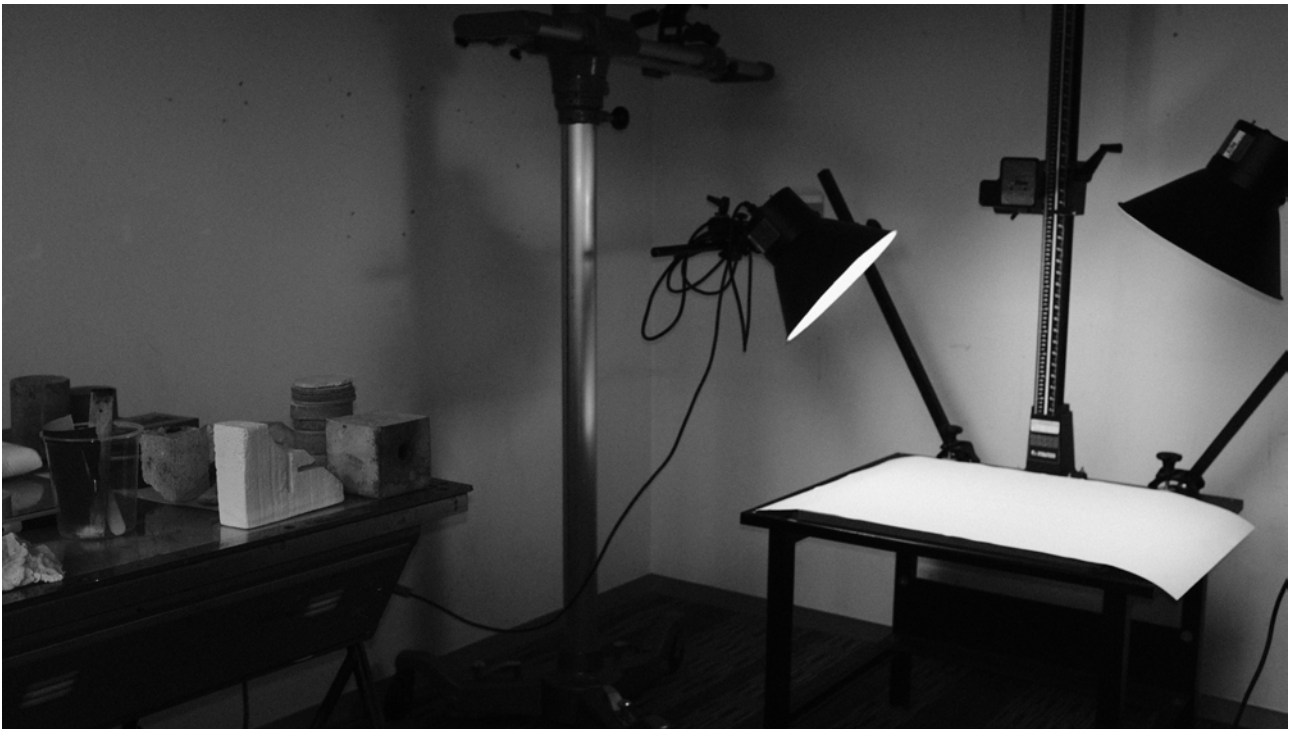


Figure 21. Bretnall, L. Archive Space, photograph, 2022.
Preparing and staging the cast objects, moulds, and tools.

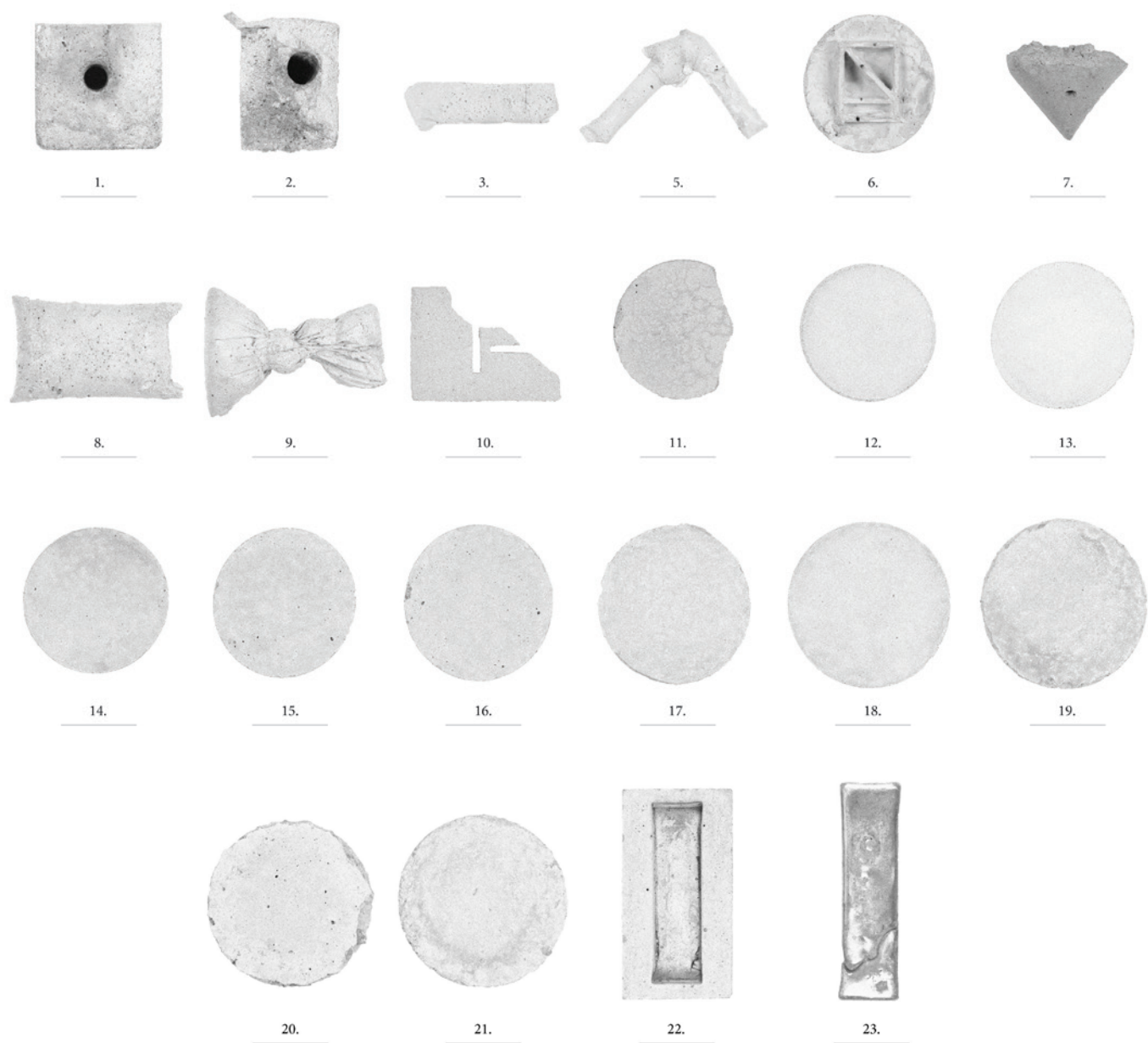


Figure 22. Bretnall, L. Cast Objects Archive One, photograph/digital, 2022.
A digital record of cast objects completed in different stages of the research.

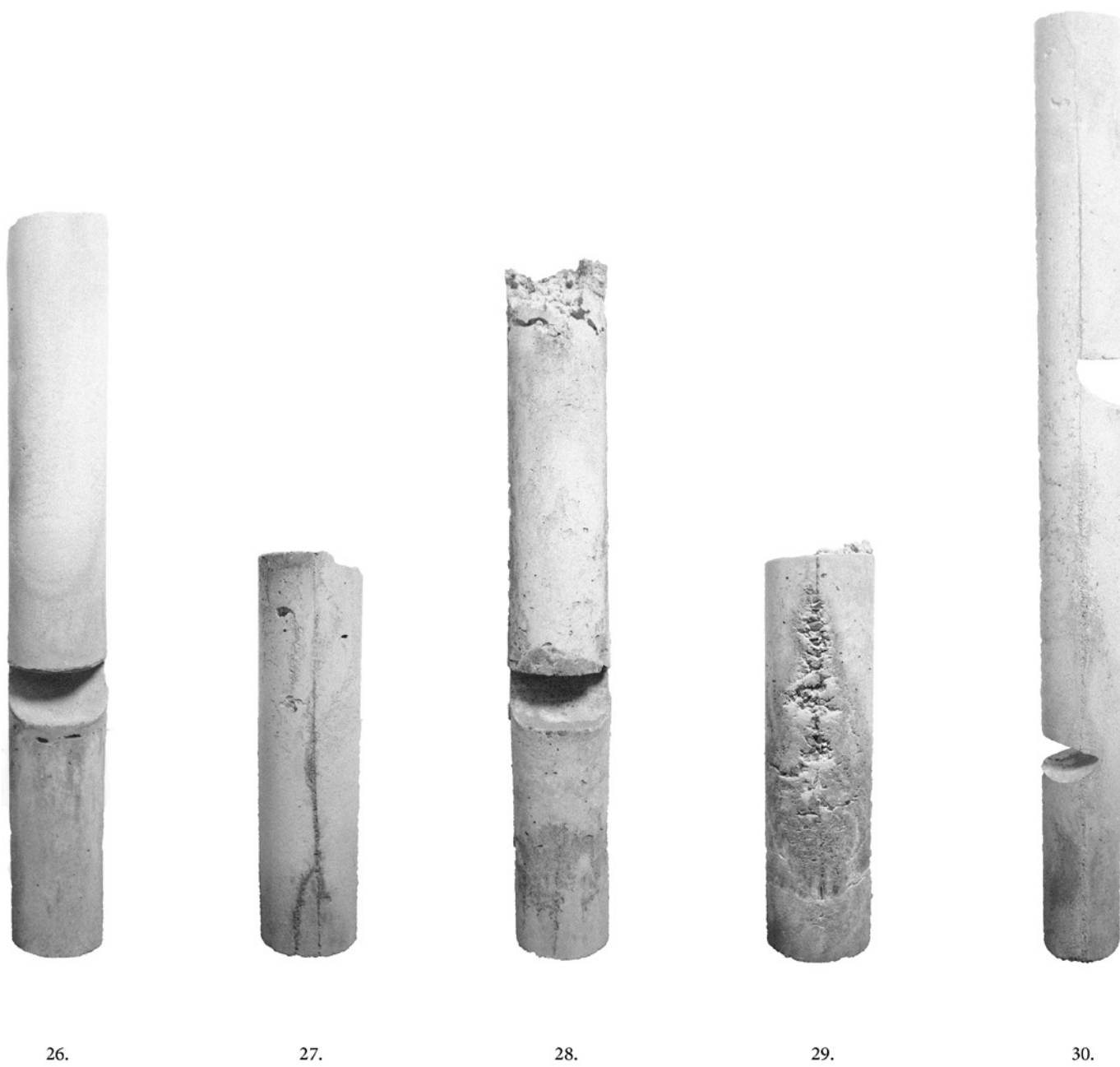


Figure 23. Bretnall, L. Cast Objects Archive Two, photograph/digital, 2022.
A digital record of cast objects completed in different stages of the research.

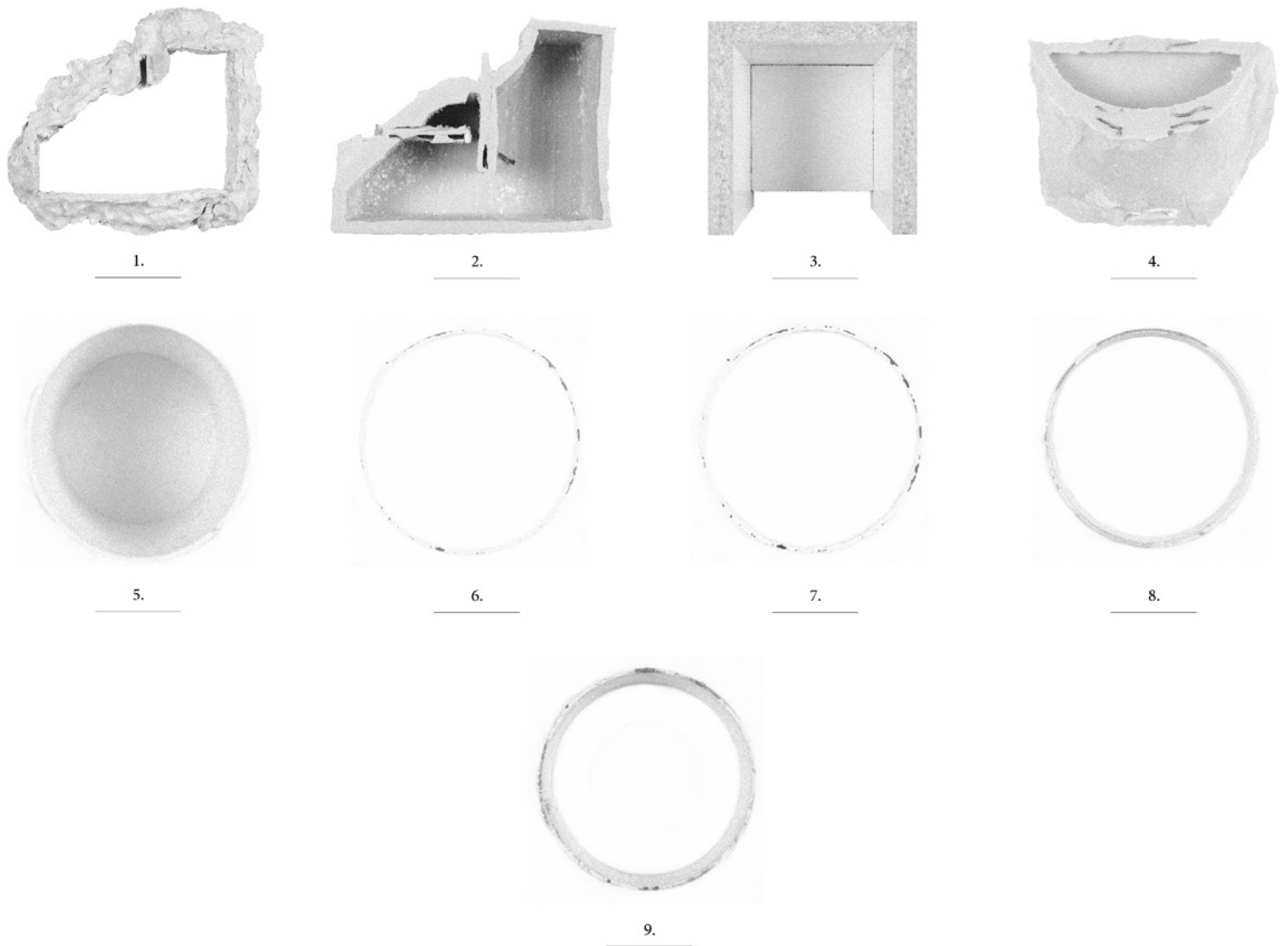


Figure 24. Bretnall, L. Casting Moulds Archive, photograph/digital, 2022.
A digital record of moulds used in my casting practice.



Figure 25. Bretnall, L. Casting Tools Archive, photograph/digital, 2022.
A digital record of critical tools in my casting practice.

To open: Materialising grief

This phase starts to draw connections between the collection of recorded objects, experiences of grief, and expressions of mourning. While the potency of grief and mourning is specific to each individual, there are often collective ways of describing these experiences. To open a reading of my objects, I defined a particular material terminology in my recording of casts. For example, concrete, prevalent in my casting practice, is known for its strength and structural integrity. The failure is more significant when it fails through cracks, breaks, and spalls (Fig. 27). What was seen as strong still has a sense of fragility and precariousness due to the imperfect cast (Fig. 28).

Another critical material incorporated through embellishments (both internal and external details) is bronze. Bronze becomes a recurring motif in the cast objects to utilise a recognisable funerary material, displaying a strong presence in the work.⁴⁴ The bronze highlights the edge conditions of the object, reflecting catching the home's natural light (Fig. 26). It is also used to cover and embellish faults in the concrete, acting as an ornamental suppression of what could be understood as the ugly or messy side of the object.

⁴⁴ Favoured for sculptural works during the Classical period, bronze in the contemporary era is still a preferred material associated with representational and funerary art. Sculptural researcher Martina Droth defines these types of bronze objects as “devices for recreating and making tangible the mysteries of nature and the universe” referencing the possibility that these symbolic and supernatural forces may become tangible. Martina Droth et al., *Bronze: The Power of Life and Death* (Leeds, England: Henry Moore Institute, 2005).

A method I employed to experiment with this opening and material terminology was to explore the formal and material qualities of grief through the lens of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief model: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.⁴⁵ I began to read my cast objects and casting practice as if it were a performance of mourning, investigating and identifying the presence of grief within a photographic exploration. This working method is similar to how contemporary artists evoke and mimic symptomatic grief processes, as recognised by Sheridan Horn in *Living with Loss: An Enquiry into the Expression of Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Art Practice*.⁴⁶

This method was the first stage of opening and reading my cast objects through a lens of grief and mourning. I explored a material terminology of concrete failures, contrasting embellishments of bronze, and an exploration of grief's formal and material qualities through casting. Through this process, I discovered how my casting practice might perform mourning through making and creating cast objects that exist as markers of grief.

⁴⁵ It is worth noting that Kübler-Ross created the five stages of grief model from a patient-centred approach, but it has become widely adopted by all as a framework through which we understand and experience grief. This thesis does not claim this model to be a universal prescriptive model for grief, but rather suggests it is a helpful descriptive model to explore grief's formal and material qualities. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, First Scribner Classics ed (New York: Scribner Book Company, 1997).

⁴⁶ Horn, 'Living with Loss: An Enquiry into the Expression of Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Art Practice', 54.



Figure 26. Bretnall, L. Bronze Edge, photograph, 2022.

Bronze sheet warps around the concrete edge.



Figure 27. Bretnall, L. Break, photograph, 2022.

Pieces chipping and breaking due to the thinness of the concrete.



Figure 28. Bretnall, L. Precariousness, photograph, 2022.

Stacking multiple concrete objects displays the material's inability to hold its linear form. The lean speaks to its precariousness.



Figure 29. Bretnall, L. Anger, photograph, 2022.

The stubborn refusal of the material substrate bonding and releasing from the cast. Traces and imprints of the positive polystyrene form.

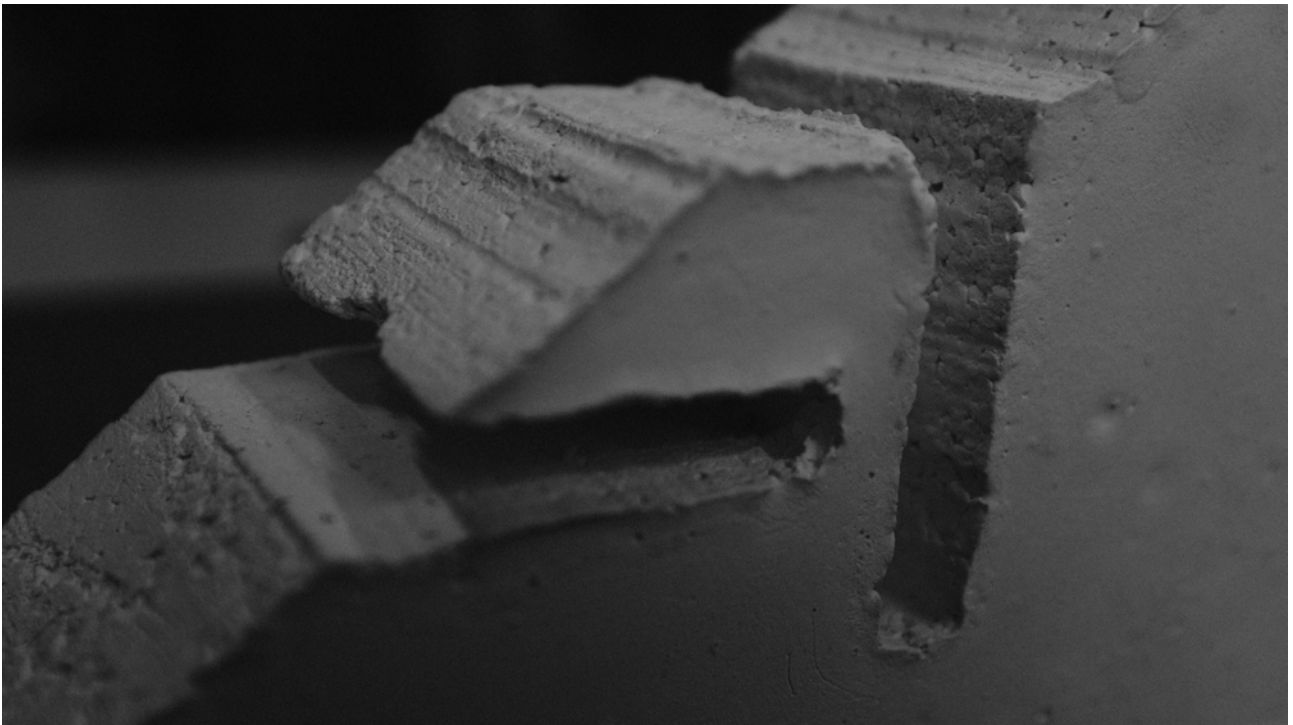


Figure 30. Bretnall, L. Denial, photograph, 2022.

The sharpness of voids, lines, and chips embodies a sense of controlled and uncontrolled anger, with uncontrolled cracks, chips, and air bubbles opposing and striking back against the intended form.

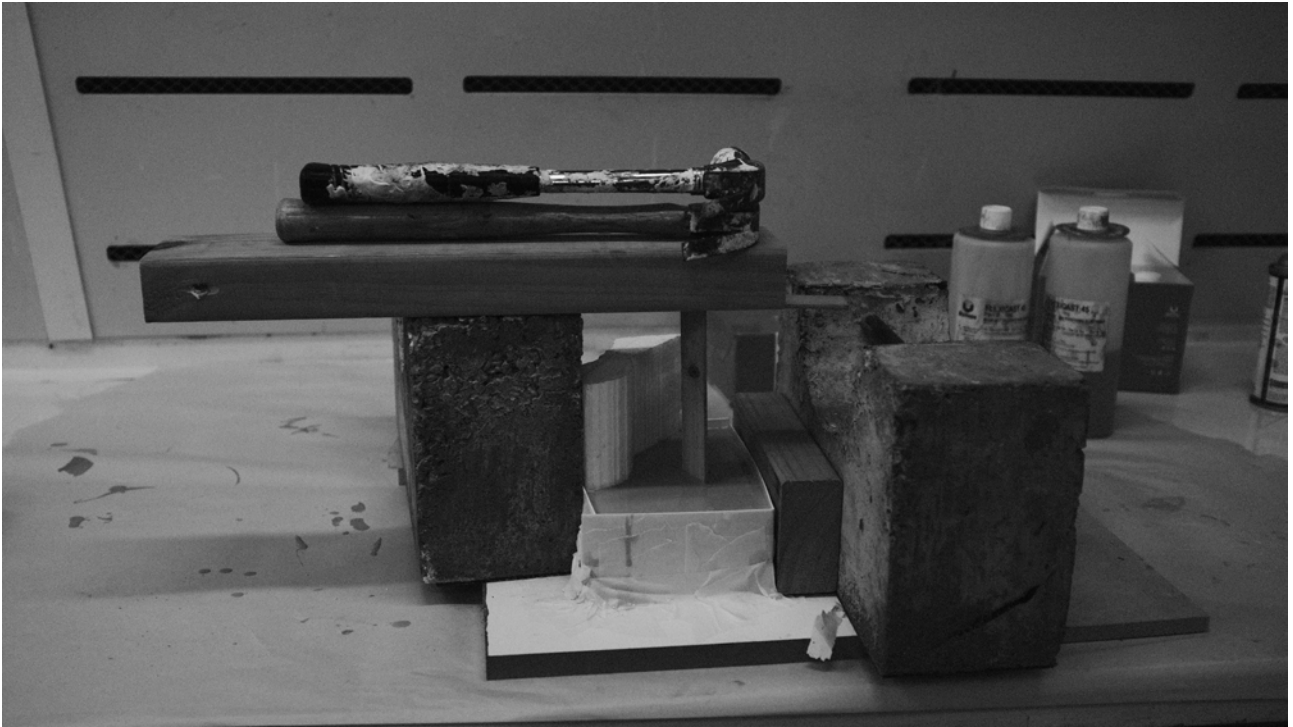


Figure 31. Bretnall, L. Bargaining, photograph, 2022.

Bargaining and the constant negotiating through complications in the casting practice. Concrete weights, timber blocks, and hammers are added periodically to bargain for time so the rubber can solidify without escaping its mould.

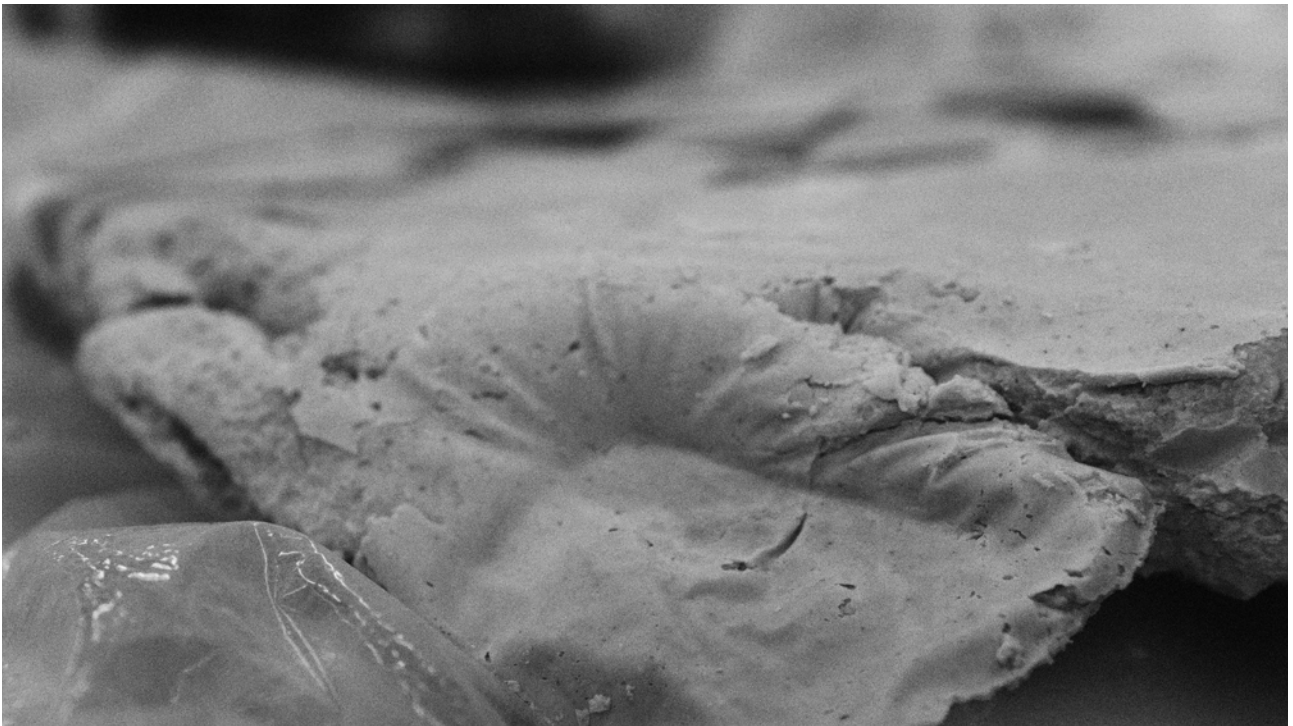


Figure 32. Bretnall, L. Depression, photograph, 2022.

Sunken sections of the casts are understood as moments of depression, displaying crevices and shadows.

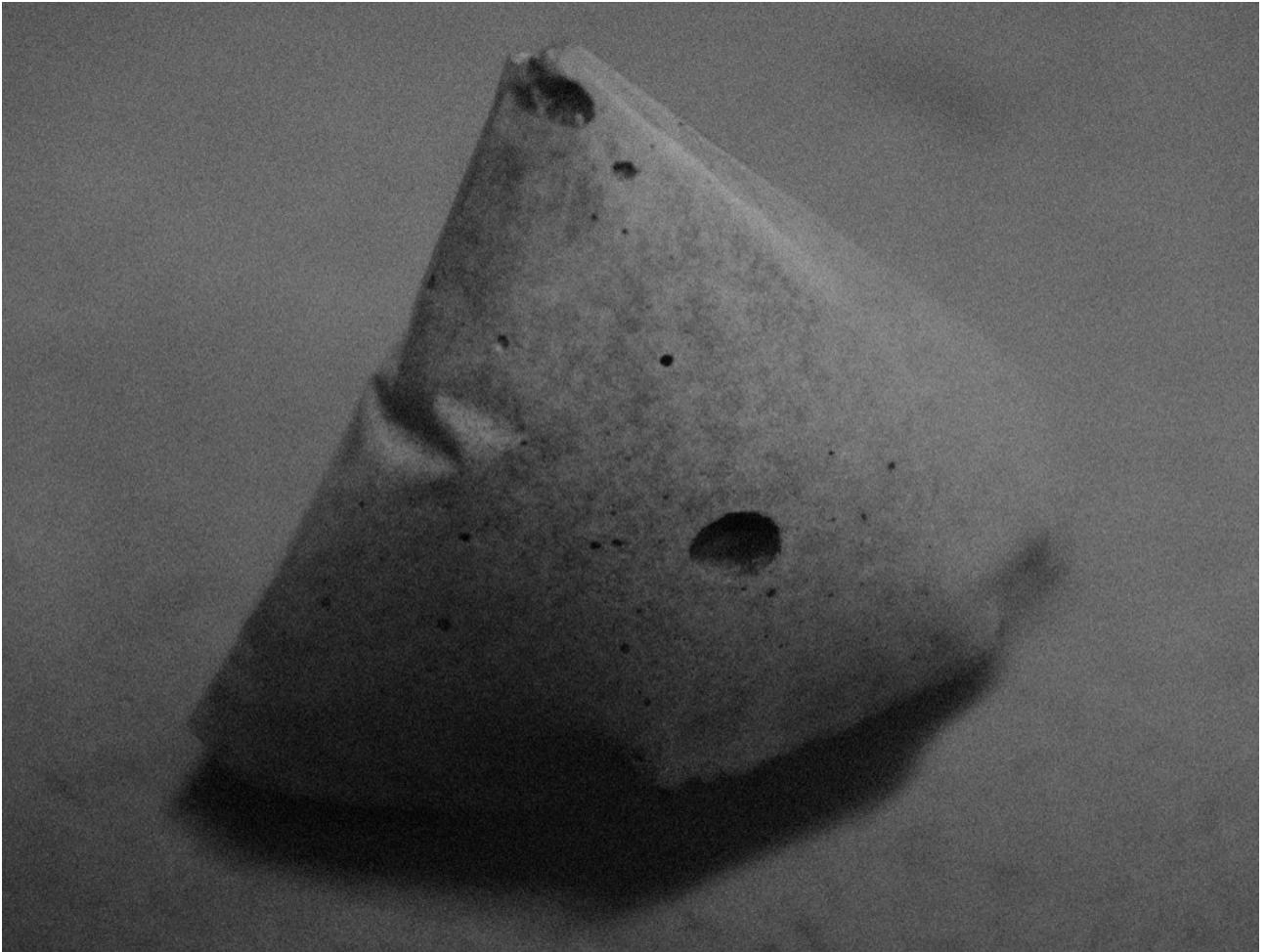


Figure 33. Bretnall, L. Acceptance, photograph, 2022.

The glossy concrete surface results from the acceptance between the substrate mould and the cement mixture.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH OUTCOMES

In this chapter, I discuss the stage of my casting practice in which the cast objects are placed in a domestic setting to examine and analyse the spatio-temporal qualities and habitual rhythms at play. These stages will be split into five subchapters. The first, 'Domestic Mapping,' outlines the specific locations for the objects to be positioned in the domestic setting. 'In Situ' examines and critiques the objects in relation to experiences of grief as an expression of mourning to their surroundings. 'Spatial Relations' analyses how the objects have become markers of grief, acting as soft activations for discussing the spatio-temporal shifts of each domestic location. 'Visual Communication' speaks to the revealing or concealing moments in the documentation that identify a presence or absence of grief. 'Translatable Findings' examines domestic space as a suitable environment for revealing a register of presence and absence of grief.

Domestic mapping: Locating grief

Three specific locations were chosen for the initial installation of my cast objects into a domestic setting that were all part of my daily habitual routine. Each provided contrasting spatio-temporal qualities and habitual rhythms for testing and analysing. In this examination, my home operates as the site, and the three locations were determined through a reflection of my own domestic experience. Introduced previously in the subchapter 'Domestic Space', the installation locations are the following: the glass panel corner where the curtain meets, the shelf that stores cups and coasters, and the arranged dining table (Fig. 34). I have chosen these three sites in my home as they represent more than what they appear to be.

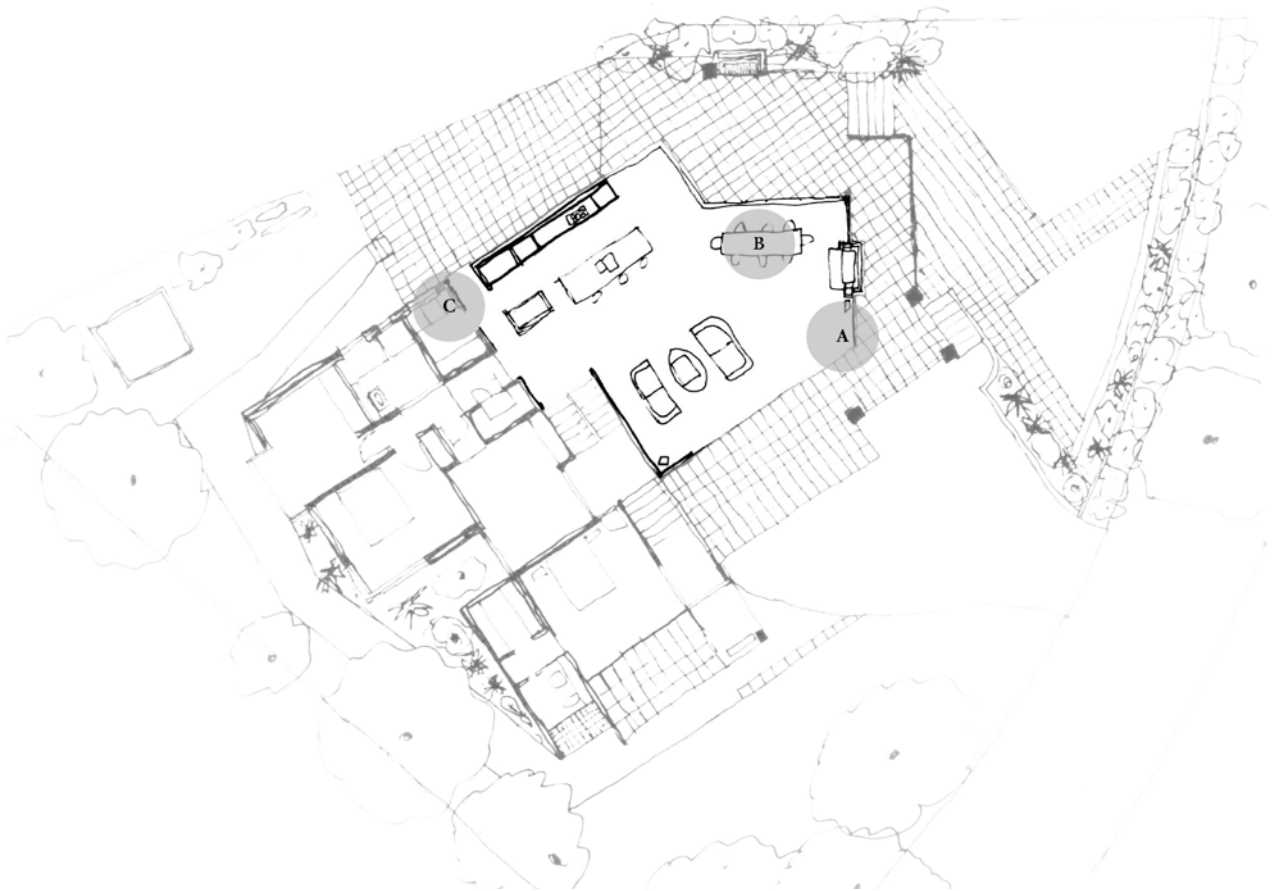


Figure 34. Bretnall, L. Site, drawing, 2022.

Bird's eye view drawing of my home, highlighting the living room.

Corner (A), dining table (B), shelf (C).



Figure 35. Bretnall, L. Domestic Mapping, photograph, 2022.

Curtain corner: A prized haven

The corner is a haven that ensures us one of the things we prize most highly– immobility. The corner is a sort of half-box, part walls, part door – an illustration of inside and outside.⁴⁷

This corner is activated every evening and every morning. As the sun finishes setting behind the house to the west, the curtain is drawn together, enclosing the privacy of the living room from the outside. Every morning, the curtain acts as a thin barrier, reducing the sunlight entering the living room. As the sun rises from the ocean horizon line, the curtains are drawn back, unveiling the interior space to the outside, opening the space for the day's activity. The curtain corner occupies a ritual encounter of the eternal rhythm of night and day. Night becomes a metaphor for death, and morning as a metaphor for those who live on.

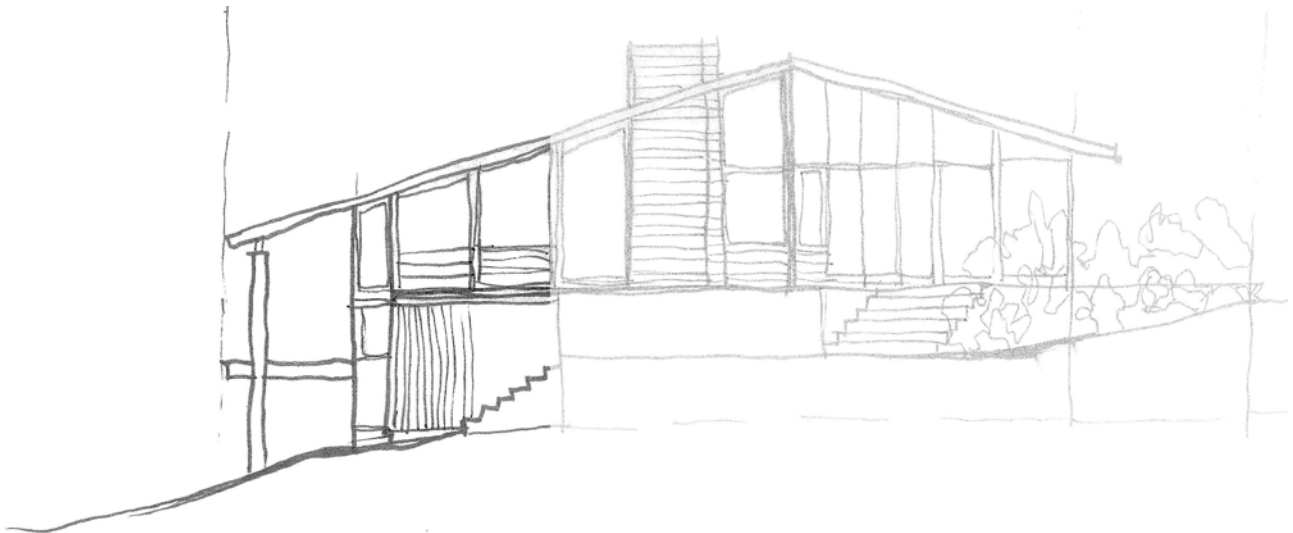


Figure 36. Bretnall, L. Elevation, drawing, 2022.

North elevation, highlighting the curtained corner.

⁴⁷ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 137.

Empty shelf: An intimate hiding place

Images of intimacy that are in harmony with drawers and chests, as also with all the other hiding-places in which human beings, great dreamers of locks, keep or hide their secrets.⁴⁸

Unlike the drawer or chest that uses a lock to conceal their secrets, the shelf sits exposed. Its depth offers an invitation to investigate. The shelf sits above the kettle, holding cups for coffee, tea, saucers, and coasters. As the shelf becomes full, I am forced to reach into the depths and rummage around for the right cup. Because of the number of things stored, there are many spots to hide away in the corners or behind their neighbours, concealing them in the darkness, waiting to be touched. Buried in the very ordinary and everyday act of sharing a hot drink lies an emotional warmth. When the favourite cup goes missing or cannot be found in the rummage, the intimacy of the hiding place becomes fragile, along with anticipated emotional warmth. Why do we mourn and feel grief? Because we have lost something or someone.



Figure 37. Bretnall, L. Shelf, drawing, 2022.

48 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 74.

Dining table: A flat fragility

The flame of a candle on the table sets all the reveries of verticality in motion. The flame has a robust yet fragile verticality. One puff can disturb the flame, but the flame restores itself.⁴⁹

The dining table in my household is mostly a static arrangement that is rarely used throughout each year. It is only activated and re-arranged for special occasions such as a birthday or other celebrations. Because of its passive existence, it holds a greater significance when activated. The selection and arrangement of tableware, decorations, and other domestic objects, such as candles, are not immune to this logic either – their sporadic use only heightens their significance. A space frequently used throughout a day may alter the arrangement and significance of objects and the placement of guests. This speaks to the temporal register of activation and how we may treat domestic spaces.

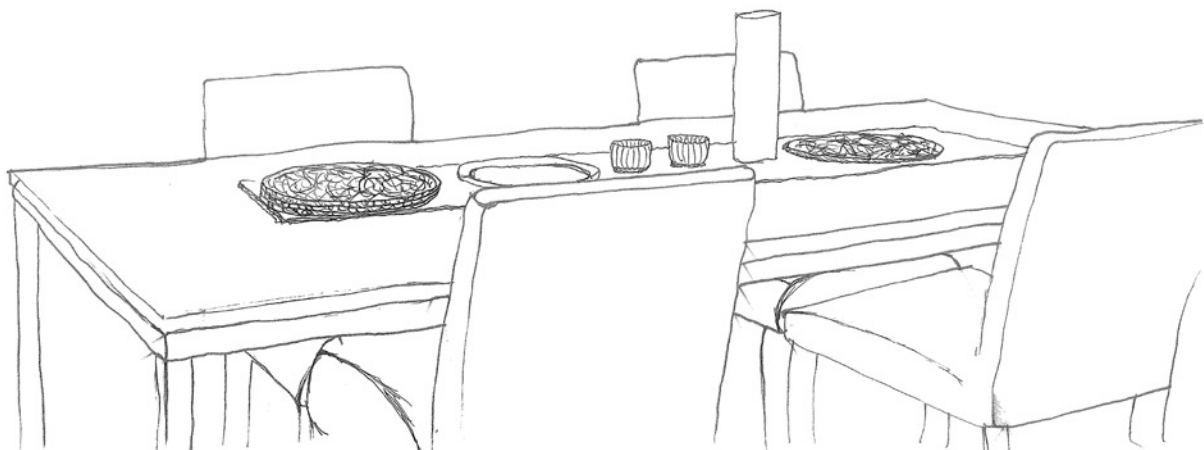


Figure 38. Bretnall, L. Dining Table, drawing, 2022.

⁴⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Flame of a Candle*, trans. Joni Caldwell (Dallas: Dallas Institute Publications, 1988).

In situ: A repertoire of cast objects

Once I had built a repertoire of cast objects in the workshop, I moved them into my home. In this stage of practice, the cast objects are now in situ to settle, dwell, and be home.⁵⁰ Returning them to the domestic scene from which their form originated opened a new way of reading the object's register of presence and absence.

This experience taught me that domestic space could not be recreated or mimicked in another location. A home is a complex structure in which its spaces and routines are established through the relationships between its occupants. Architect Nadia Charalambous rightly notes the interface between occupants introduces a “temporal as well as spatial dimension in the process of interpretation of the domestic experience.”⁵¹ Domestic routines may be individual or collective routines fixed into day-to-day life. The pattern, duration, and frequency of routines influence domestic space's temporal dimension. This understanding of the complexities of home and domestic experience has helped me interpret not just the cast objects themselves but their present qualities in relation to their domestic surroundings.

50 Stemming from 1740's Latin, *in situ* translates to 'in its original place or position'. From its Proto-Indo-European root 'tkei', meaning 'to settle, dwell, be home'. Douglas Harper, 'In Situ | Etymology, Origin and Meaning of Phrase in Situ by Etymonline', accessed 23 July 2022, https://www.etymonline.com/word/in_situ.

51 Nadia Charalambous, 'A Spatio-Temporal Interpretation of Domesticity', *Mixité: an urban and housing issues?*, 2011, 1, <https://gnosis.library.ucy.ac.cy/handle/7/42407>.



Figure 39. Bretnall, L. In Situ,
photograph, 2022.

Veiled grief: A blurred condition

The curtain corner shifts between proximity and distance. As Bachelard writes, the corner is an “illustration of inside and outside.”⁵² The position of the concrete object suggests it is inside, but we can see beyond into the distance. If the glass panels were solid steel, timber, or brick, the sense of immobility and darkness would escalate. It would be a fixed space, closed with no light and no view into the distance. The object acts as a marker of grief, switching between presence and absence through the eternal rhythm of night and day. It defines the inside and proximity of space, echoing reflections in the distance that feel so close you can touch them.

Why is this important? Because that is my experience of grief and mourning. It is simultaneously close and present but distant and abstract.

52 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 137.



Figure 40. Bretnall, L. Veiled Grief, photograph, 2022.



Figure 41. Bretnall, L. Inside and Outside, photograph, 2022.

The transparent glass panels thin the line between inside and outside while the object acts as a marker of proximity and distance.



Figure 42. Bretnall, L. Curtain Threshold, photograph, 2022.

The drawing of the curtain temporally shrouds the object and the line between inside and outside, creating blurred conditions.

I wonder how close something must be inside the corner to give this relational sensation of proximity and closeness?



Figure 43. Bretnall, L. Blurred Reflection, photograph, 2022.

When the curtain is drawn back at a particular time of day, the western sunlight hits the object's left side, creating an echoed reflection in the corner.



It is an elusive presence of what is close and inside, coming and going at certain times of the day. It sits in the thin line of proximity and distance, appearing to be near but distant and at times so light it seems non-existent.

Figure 44. Bretnall, L. Ethereal Presence, photograph, 2022.

The object appears to be almost floating through the lighting and horizon lines of the interior. It becomes an ephemeral light piece.



Figure 45. Bretnall, L. Bronze, photograph, 2022.

The bronze detail sits within the dark side of the object, subtly veiled by the curtain. It waits for the natural light to re-kindle its presence.

Grief's hidden secrets

The shelf shifts between fullness and emptiness through the storage of coffee cups. Its depth creates a shadowy unknown and allows things to be hidden away in its dark recesses.

The ability to hide away increases as the shelf becomes full.

The shelf empties as more cups are used, exposing things hiding in the shadows. Unlike a drawer or a chest, the shelf sits exposed, temporally unveiling its contents and secrets through the rhythms of domestic routine.



Figure 46. Bretnall, L. Grief's Hidden Secrets, photograph, 2022.



Figure 47. Bretnall, L. Fullness, photograph, 2022.

Coffee cups, sugar bowls, and reusable takeaway cups create depth and shadows on the shelf.



Figure 48. Bretnall, L. Exposure, photograph, 2022.

The objects in the shadows are exposed as the shelf starts to empty.

The shelf, like the home, becomes uncanny as it acts as a hiding place. One might attempt to hide from grief, mourning by storing emotions and feelings as secrets. Although there is an attempt to lock these away, they are often exposed at some stage.



Figure 49. Bretnall, L Rummage, photograph, 2022.

Rummaging the shelf in search of a favourite cup.



Figure 50. Bretnall, L. Unfamiliar Touch, photograph, 2022.

Stumbling across an unfamiliar object with a rough surface and cold exposed material.

As I rummage and stumble across something unfamiliar to touch, it may be rough, cold, dusty; a marker of an exposed secret hidden away in the depths and shadows of the shelf.



Figure 51. Bretnall, L. Bronze, photograph, 2022.

The structural bronze bar breaks through the concrete surface, marking a strange exposure.

Grief's cluttered surface

The dining table shifts between gathering and dispersing. There is a considered and purposeful approach to setting the dining table, from tableware, candles, and other decorative objects. The same goes for gathering people, who are spaced between other guests and objects. It is a separation for practicality and order. Like the flame of a candle, the dining table consumes marks and literal expressions of presence. The melting of wax softening and hardening with each dinner, scratches of cutlery and tableware, and pieces of food and drink staining the table surface represent time passing and marks carrying. It is a gathering and dispersing of presence and absence.



Figure 52. Bretnall, L. Grief's Cluttered Surface, photograph, 2022.



Figure 53. Bretnall, L. Dining Table Arrangement, photograph, 2022.

A typical arrangement and spacing of dining table objects in my home.



Figure 54. Bretnall, L. Imperfection, photograph, 2022.

My inability to disguise the object's imperfections exposes itself to the dining table.



Figure 55. Bretnall, L. Bronze Pebbles, photograph, 2022.

Bronze embellishments attempt to turn our attention to ornament.



Figure 56. Bretnall, L. Disguised Imperfection, photograph, 2022.

The object's true form is burdened with cracks, spalls, and blistering. It tries to look presentable within the organisation of the dining table through the bronze embellishment.

There is little control over the fragility of the flame, just like I have little control over the fragility of grief. The organised cast objects' cracks, spalls, and chips speak of loss. They are masked with bronze facades, appearing strong and stable. It is easier to attempt to conceal the dispersion of emotions.

Spatial relations and a time for grieving

When choosing the three locations in my home for investigation, I did not know what I would discover by placing the cast objects in these spaces. At the beginning of the project, I imagined the cast objects and casting practice to be the focal point of the research for examining grief and mourning in domestic space. Although it was still important, I soon realised there was more to understand through their inhabited spaces' spatial and temporal dimensions. I discovered it was the locations themselves that defined those shifts, such as proximity and distance (curtain corner), fullness and emptiness (shelf), and gathering and dispersing (dining table). The cast objects act as soft activations as a means to analyse these shifts through the object's presence in each location. The material terminology used to describe the objects built a bridge between experiences of grief and relational shifts. Then, the objects start to give presence to grief in domestic space, performing mourning by casting.

At the stage of early inquiry, the domestic locations were independent spaces that were only softly activated with a specific cast object. I tested multiple different objects from my repertoire of castings throughout the project. Although I had identified the three locations of interest at this point, I had not discovered their spatio-temporal qualities. These qualities were discovered through the testing of cast objects in situ. Through this process, only a select few cast objects were used to activate these relations from the more extensive repertoire of casts.

While each location and its objects sit in separate micro spaces, they all exist within one larger space: the living room. In each micro space, I have created a triangulated reading between spatio-temporal shifts, their relations with cast objects, and experiences of grief. This gathering of sources, explored through photographic exploration and examination, reveals what can be read in the images beyond literal representations. While examining the relationship between each location, I discovered a distinct verticality to each space. The corner is grounded, the table is midline, and the shelf sits high above the rest (Fig. 58). Through the lens of grief and mourning, it is possible to understand this verticality as the levels of grief, creating visual boundaries of mourning. Height and verticality then become spatial expressions of grief with respect to the relational shifts present in domestic space.



Figure 57. Bretnall, L. Spatial Relations, photography, 2022.



Figure 58. Bretnall, L. Verticality, collage, 2022.

Three various verticalites between each domestic location.

Visual communication and documenting grief

From the very beginning of this research, I made an editorial decision to use black and white photography. I felt an overload of colour might overwhelm an image. Although my research works with specifics from a domestic space, it is investigating them in a conceptual field that is not apparent in just one image. My images act as invitations for seemingly unrelated or immaterial things to reveal themselves. In *Black and White Photography as Theorizing*, Sociologist Saskia Sassen speaks on black and white photography's ability to unsettle meaning.⁵³ Sassen suggests that in black and white photography, it is as much about the non-image as the image itself.⁵⁴ She writes, "...presences hover in a sort of penumbra around the image. We cannot see these presences with our eyes. However, we can see them theoretically."⁵⁵ I have taken a similar approach to my use of black and white photography, theoretically seeing the presence of grief and mourning within the spatio-temporal shifts and relations captured in photographs.

A certain presence that stands out in the objects and their photographs is the bronze embellishments. In its introduction stage, I wanted to introduce colour for the bronze as it signifies a material relationship people have with funerary ornaments and decorations. Amid concrete's weight and opaqueness, the bronze catches the light, appearing electric in the collection of cast objects.

*A presence of the more stable side
of grief and mourning.*

53 Saskia Sassen, 'Black and White Photography as Theorizing: Seeing What the Eye Cannot See', Wiley, Sociological Forum, 26, no. 2 (2011): 438.

54 Sassen, 438.

55 Sassen, 438.



Figure 59. Bretnall, L. Visual
Communication, photograph, 2022.

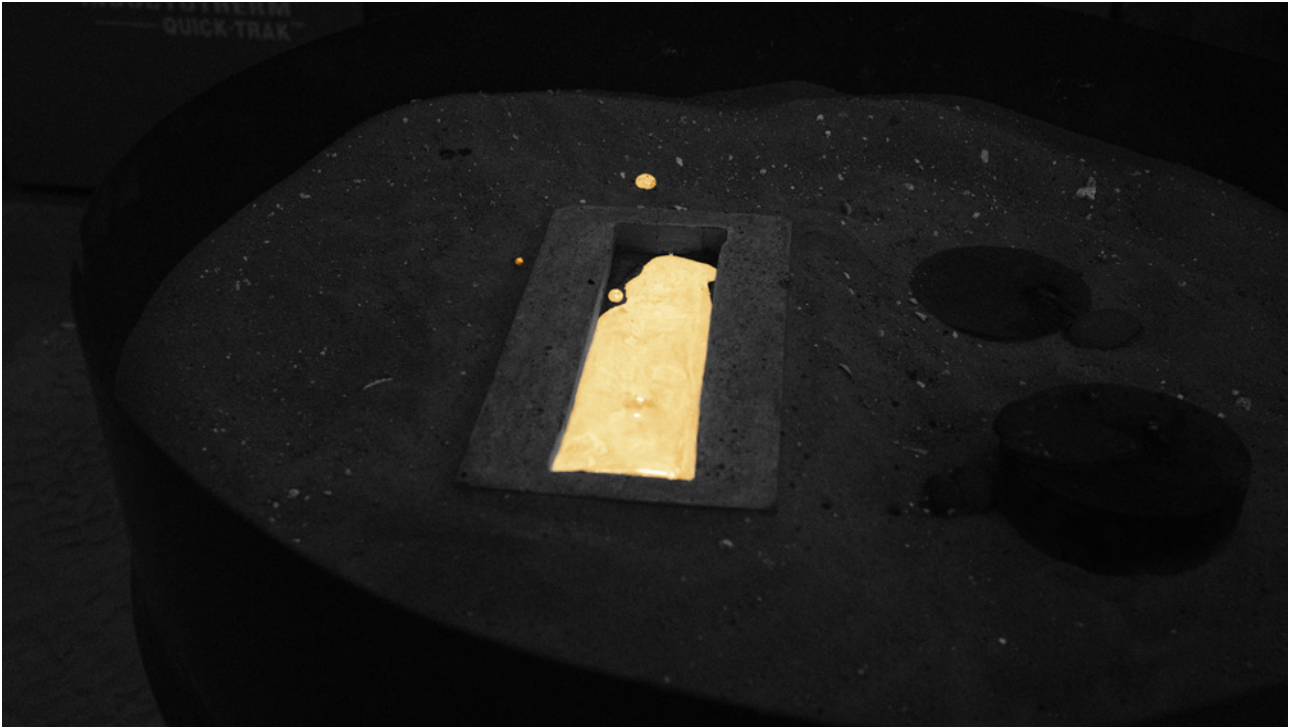


Figure 60. Bretnall, L. Molten Bronze, photograph, 2022.
Liquid bronze poured into concrete trough.

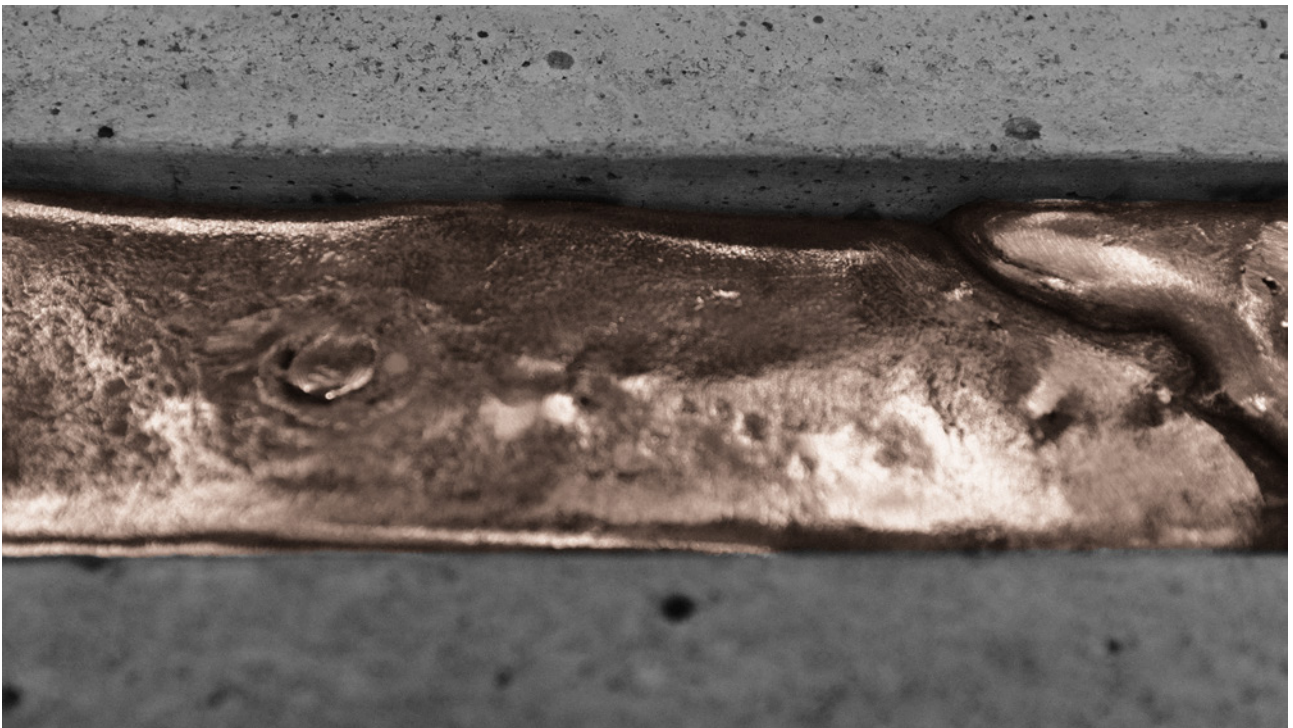


Figure 61. Bretnall, L. Solid Bronze, photograph, 2022.
Grinded and polished bronze ingot.

Translatable grief: Opening the discussion

The triangulated reading of my photographic exploration investigates the three 'data' sources. This method of interpretation creates a whole reading of the cast objects' significance as markers of grief, presence, and absence regarding everyday domestic spaces and their relational shifts.

The first was the spatio-temporal qualities and shifts present within each domestic location. These were proximity and distance in the curtained corner, fullness and emptiness in the hollowed shelf, and gathering and dispersing at the dining table. The second source of 'data' was the cast objects. Their presence acted as markers and soft activations for these shifts. The third source of 'data' came from the relational aspects these sources had with experiences of grief and mourning. This particular data is discussed in my voice as it is an individualistic experience. However, others may resonate with my experience, which opens the data to collective interpretations.

Through this reading of the physical properties of spatial and temporal dimensions, another relational layer of grief and mourning emerges. The presence and absence of something both in proximity and in the distance through the rhythms of the curtained corner expose an intimate vulnerability. The uncertainty of reaching into the depths of the hollowed shelf, finding something unknown or unexpected; the fragility and dispersion of the organised and prepared dining table. These encounters highlight an inherent fragility of the domestic experience, creating an uncanny and ambiguous environment in a space known to be a heightened familiarity. It provides the perfect setting to reveal itself and display its presence within the domestic experience.

For it is the "fundamental ambiguity between presence and absence" that describes the experience of grief.⁵⁶

56 Fuchs, 'Presence in Absence. The Ambiguous Phenomenology of Grief', 43.

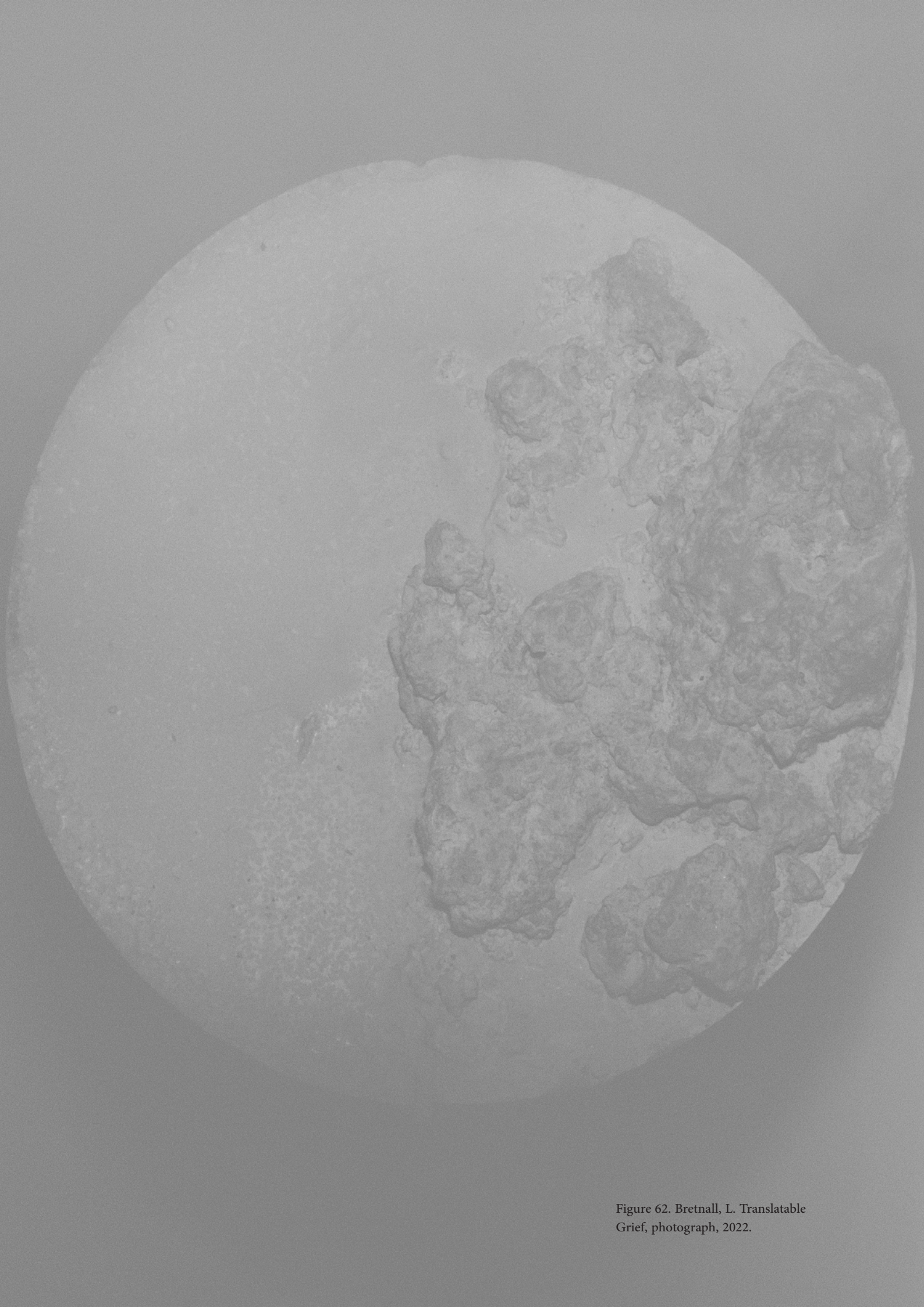


Figure 62. Bretnall, L. Translatable
Grief, photograph, 2022.



One day while moving between my studio space and the workshop with one of my tall and heavy concrete objects, one of my supervisors, Emily, noticed me. She was struck by the sight of me carrying the concrete object across the road. 'Carrying' stuck out as a significant term, just like we carry our grief around with us. Either consciously or unconsciously, I was always carrying these objects around with me on campus. They were a constant weight on my body. The day-to-day actions of my working days became performances of mourning.

Figure 63. Pasang, L. Carrying, photograph, 2022.



Figure 64. Bretnall, L. Carrying, photograph, 2022.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored a register of presence and absence of grief within domestic space and its habitual routines. My version of domestic space and home exists as a space of comfort through the routinised way objects and spaces are treated and activated. Comfort became an underpinning term used to identify domestic specifications to then abstract. My methodology helped create a material terminology to engage with my cast objects as markers of grief. This process led to my casting practice becoming a performative practice of mourning through the resulting cast objects.

The placement of cast objects within the corner, the shelf, and the dining table revealed the spatio-temporal shifts present in each location. While the shifts from proximity and distance, fullness and emptiness, and gathering and dispersing are tied to their respective locations, they all reveal an intimate vulnerability of domestic space. The ambiguity between presence and absence in these spaces have been highlighted and softly activated by the cast objects as markers of grief. The object markers give presence to absence, reflected, hidden, and repeated through the familiarities of domestic routine and its spatial and temporal dimensions. The spatio-temporal nature of grief and mourning interweave within the spatial and temporal shifts of domestic spaces, routines, and objects, making the home a space of duality between familiar comfort and uncanny absences and presences.

For the broader field of spatial design, this research posits a particular relationship between the nature of domestic space and the nature of grief and mourning. The revealing and unravelling of spatial and temporal dimensions of cast object markers introduce a way of thinking about our material relationship with presences and absences. While the potency of this research comes from my own experiences of grief and mourning, it may reveal collective ways one might engage with the spaces most dear to ourselves.

This research opened with the line: "I am just a young man. I don't know what death is. I don't know what grief is. But I am learning." I have learnt that grief and mourning are not finite. They appear at different times and moments in my own domestic life, whether anticipated or unanticipated. While I have started to make sense of these moments through my practice, there are still answers I don't have. The idea that something like grief may diminish over time but is never wholly gone is something I am still trying to understand. It only reveals and unravels more questions and leads to new explorations into the spatialising of grief in the domestic realm – an act of eternal spatial mourning.

Installation

The following exhibition work acted as an extension and further opening from my research conclusion. While the focus on the three domestic locations stayed constant, the testing of new objects in situ shifted the investigation towards eternal rhythms present in everyday domestic life, and the eternal nature of grief and mourning. The exhibited objects and photographs capture the way ordinary domestic objects and settings can be charged with a perturbing and uncanny force of grief. With a focus on eternal rhythms, the exhibition work explored the temporal shift from anticipatory grief to the presence of an absence that remains after a loved one is gone.

The objects and their corresponding photographs are intentionally separated and distanced in order to create a performative conversation between each pair. This acknowledges the 'gap' between the gallery space and the domestic site of my research. While there are equivalents in the gallery space to my home, the rhythms of domestic life cannot be replicated. This informed my decision to create distance between the objects and photographs, I also played with sightlines and existing spatial cues to guide the viewers' reading and experience of the work, revealing and unravelling moments throughout the experience of the installed work.



Figure 65. Bretnall, L. Exhibition Gallery Space One, photograph, 2022.



Figure 66. Bretnall, L. Exhibition Gallery Space Two, photograph, 2022.



Figure 67. Bretnall, L. Bronze Table Runner Print, photograph, 2022.



Figure 68. Bretnall, L. Embellished Concrete Columns Print, photograph, 2022.



Figure 69. Bretnall, L. Patina-Stained Bronze Table Runner, photograph, 2022.



Figure 70. Bretnall, L. Object and Print Performing, photograph, 2022.



Figure 71. Bretnall, L. Patina Detail, photograph, 2022.



Figure 72. Bretnall, L. Cluttered Shelf, photograph, 2022.



Figure 73. Bretnall, L. Bronze Cast Ghosted Cup, photograph, 2022.



Figure 74. Bretnall, L. Exhibition Foyer Space One - Elongated Cast Concrete Objects, photograph, 2022.



Figure 75. Bretnall, L. Exhibition Foyer Space Two, photograph, 2022.



Figure 76. Bretnall, L. Exhibition Foyer Space Three - Veiled Light, photograph, 2022.



Figure 77. Bretnall, L. Exhibition Foyer Space Four - Birds Eye View, photograph, 2022.



Figure 78. Bretnall, L. Cast Concrete Broken Moments, photograph, 2022.



Figure 79. Bretnall, L. Cast Shadow, photograph, 2022.



Figure 80. Bretnall, L. Elongated Shadow, photograph, 2022.



Figure 81. Bretnall, L. Bronze Embellishments, photograph, 2022.

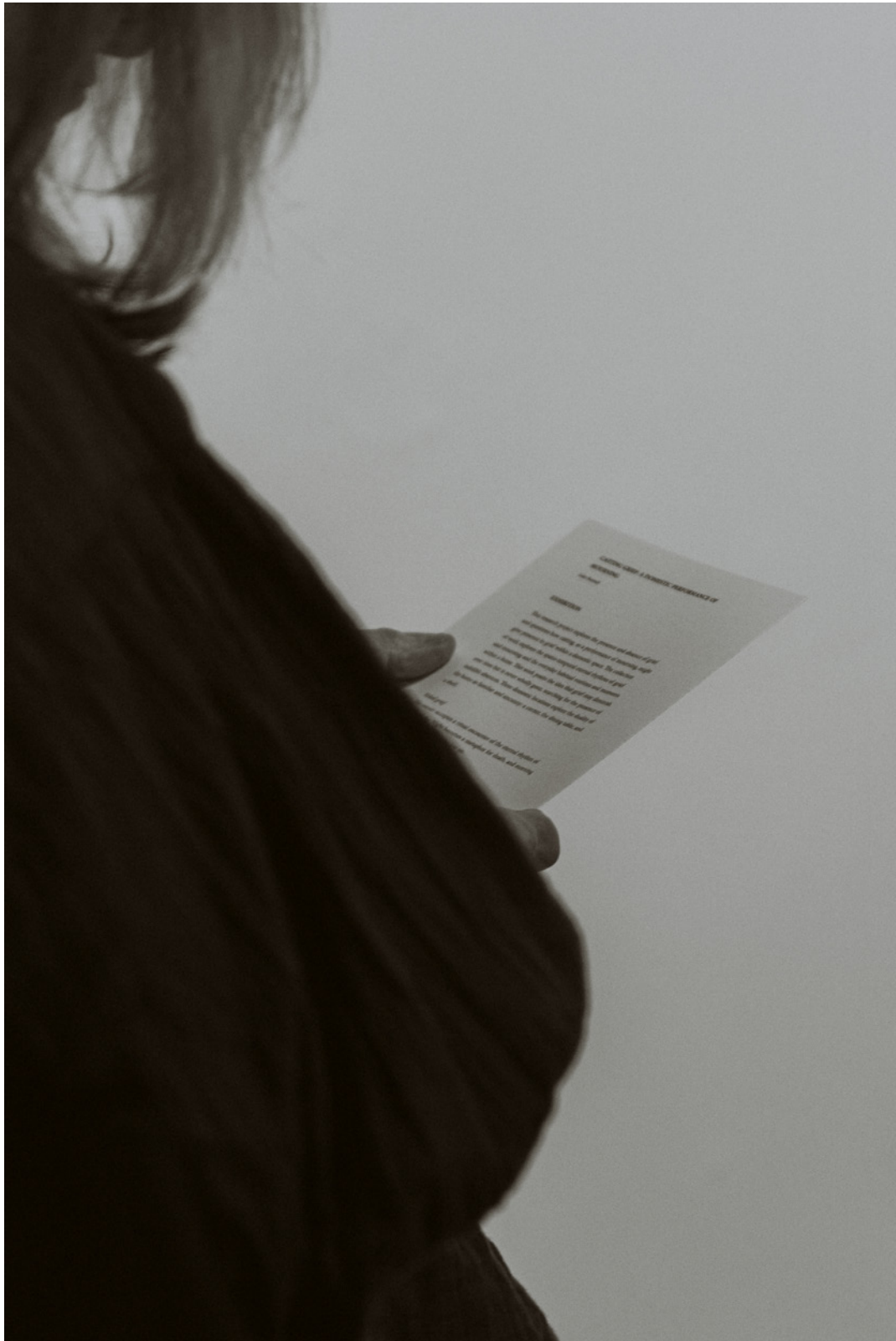


Figure 82. Bretnall, L. Invitation into Practice and Exhibited Work, photograph, 2022.

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