

Souping The Remains Of My Childhood

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2025

Exegesis in Support of Practice-based Thesis

Master of Visual Arts

Auckland University of Technology

Abstract

This research investigates the fragility and persistence of memory through black-and-white film photography, using transformation as both a material and conceptual strategy to evoke the experience of fading childhood recollections. *Souping*, a technique in which photographic film is submerged in various food-based or chemical ingredients, induces unpredictable reactions that alter the film's emulsion. Through these disrupted surfaces, I visualise the emotional residue of the past, where memory and material decay intersect.

Driven by a longing for the past, my practice begins with fieldwork: returning to sites of personal significance such as childhood homes, playgrounds, bush tracks, and suburban streets. These revisits act as emotional searches, where I re-encounter familiar spaces marked by time. Using a range of analogue cameras, including 120mm, 35mm, and 16mm film, I document these locations and write on-site diary entries that capture sensory details, fleeting emotions, and embodied memories.

In the studio, my home laboratory becomes a site of quiet transformation. Here, I conduct souping experiments in a pseudo-scientific manner, immersing film in jars filled with various solutions and carefully observing their slow, unpredictable changes. Each jar becomes a vessel of memory, where chemical reaction and emotional resonance merge. This process reflects, observes, and notes the film's transformation, which mirrors the fragmented, shifting nature of remembering.

The installation unfolds within the home laboratory, which functions simultaneously as a working studio and exhibition site. In this space, the boundaries between process and presentation dissolve. Soup jars line the shelves like specimens; some have film while others present dissolved memories, only holding the residue of memories that are blurred and fading. These are displayed alongside printed images from the souped negatives and excerpts from my diary entries. The installation operates as a contemplative environment, where images, text, and recorded soup act as a form of healing memory. It resists fixed outcomes; instead, it exists as a living archive—shifting, unstable, and unresolved—mirroring recollection's fragile, mutable nature.

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in Acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.



Leah Boyd
15/05/2025

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my supervisors, Ziggy Lever and Dienneke Jansen, for their unwavering support, insightful feedback, and generous guidance throughout this journey. Your encouragement and critical perspectives have profoundly shaped my thinking and practice. To my friends and family, thank you for your patience, love, and belief in me. Whether near or far, your presence helped me find clarity in moments of doubt and joy. To those who shared memories with me, joined me on fieldwork trips, or listened to contributions, has meant the world, however small they may have seemed. This project has been a labour of emotion, time, and reflection. I am grateful to all who walked alongside me, even briefly, during its making.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Attestation of Authorship.....	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Figures	v
Introduction	1
Chapter One – Revisiting Memory.....	3
Chapter Two - The Embodiment of Film: Developing Memory Through Souping	10
Chapter Three - From Field Work to the Home Lab.....	23
Conclusion.....	37
Appendix: MVA Exams exhibition documentation	38
Bibliography	51

Figures

Figure 1. Parana Park, Hamilton, b/w 35film negative souped in leftover mince pie, 2025. ...	2
Figure 2. Hamilton East primary school, b/w 35mm negative souped in dry moldy acorns, 2025.	5
Figure 3. Hamilton East, b/w 120mm negative souped in steak & chips, 2024.	6
Figure 4. Otorohanga home, b/w 120mm negative souped in Pink Himalayan salt, 2024. ...	9
Figure 5. Claudelands Park Hamilton, b/w 16mm negative scratched within a Minolta 16 Model P Subminiature Camera, 2024.	11
Figure 6. Stanmore Bay beach, b/w 120mm negative souped in wet flour, 2025.	12
Figure 7. Otorohanga, b/4 120mm negative souped in mince, 2024.	13
Figure 8. Aberdeen Primary School, Hamilton, b/w 16mm negative scratched and light exposer within a Minolta 16 Model P Subminiature Camera, 2024.	14
Figure 9. Nova Paul, Ngā Pūrakau Nō Ngā Rākau (still), 2023, four-channel digital transfer of 16mm film, 32 minutes. Courtesy of the artist.	15
Figure 10. Hamilton, b/w 120 negative, souped in tropical juice, 2024.	16
Figure 11. Kate van der Drift Waning Gibbous to Waxing Gibbous, September 2020, - 37.294498, 175.525848, Chromogenic Photograph from 4x5” Negative, 1423mm x 1100mm, Edition of 5 + 2AP, 2022.	17
Figure 12. Trevor Music Annex, William Basinski - The Disintegration Loops, 2014.	19
Figure 13. Nora Schultz, Discovery of the Primitive, steel, camping mats, PE foam, paper, ink, dimensions variable. 2400 × 1200 mm 2550 × 500 mm, Dimensions, metal, foam mats, paper, ink, lacquer material, 2011, MoMA, NY.....	20
Figure 14. Napier streets, b/w 120mm negative souped before development in dirt, photocopy paper, 24mm, 2024.	21
Figure 15. Mark Dion, The Department of Tropical Research: jungle field station, 2017. Mixed media 97 x 168 x 84 inches; 246.4 x 426.7 x 213.4 cm Installation view, Mark Dion: Exploratory Works: Drawings from the Department of Tropical Research Field Expeditions, The Drawing Center, NY, 2017. Photo by Martin Parsekian. Courtesy the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York.....	24
Figure 16. Nina Canell, Brief Syllables (detail), 2014, telecommunication and electricity cables, steel, wood, dimensions variable. From the series “Brief Syllables,” 2014–.	26
Figure 17. Raglan beach b/w 35mm negative souped in green onion chips & water, 2025.	27
Figure 18. Michael Taussig’s, my notes whilst reading Notes. Drawings. Writeup. (Introduction to Anthropology, Fall 2013).	28

Figure 19. Field work, using 35mm Iford 35-ii camera, Butterfly Creek, 2025.....	29
Figure 20. Studio/Home-like laboratory, 2025.	30
Figure 21. Jars of soups with film, 120 and 35mm, 2025.	31
Figure 22. Jars of rotten foods finished soups, 2025.	31
Figure 23. EP, studio/ laboratory test, 2024.	32
Figure 24. Dark space test, tropolone roof, black paper. Enlarger, 2024.	33
Figure 25. Tacita Dean, Film, 2011, 35mm colour anamorphic film, 11-minute silent 35 mm film projected onto a gigantic white monolith standing 13 meters tall at the end of a darkened Turbine Hall Courtesy the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris/ Los Angeles.....	34
© Tacita Dean	34
Figure 26. Great nana & Grandads Street/house b/w 35mm negative souped in wet lettuce, 2025.	36
Figure 27. Kitchen (food soups) Station and Darkroom (120 film enlarger) Image taken by Paul chapman	38
Figure 28. Light box 35mm slides. Image artists own.....	40
Figure 29. Inside darkroom projection space. Image taken by Paul Chapman	41
Figure 30. 120mm Scraps, potato & onion. Image artists own.....	42
Figure 31. Orange sticky notes. Image taken by Paul Chapman	43
Figure 32. Laminating (nature soups) station, Dry rack with film negatives 120mm & 35mm, Equipment trolley station. Image taken by Paul Chapman.....	44
Figure 34. Equipment trolley/Field Kit. Image artists own	45
Figure 33. Trolley stations. Image taken by Paul Chapman	45
Figure 35. 35mm slide projector station. Image taken by Paul Chapman	46
Figure 36. 120mm Negative film strip. Nanas home and street. Artists own image (note: the image has been cut into three sections for the purposes of this document).....	47
Figure 37. An old door with printed memories. Image taken by Paul Chapman.....	48
Figure 38. 35mm old projector screen. Image taken by Paul Chapman	49
Figure 39. Note Board & Projection space. Image taken by Paul Chapman	50

Introduction

Memory is like analogue film, fragile and susceptible to fading, distortion, and sudden eruptions. In my research, memory is not conceptualised as a linear record but a living, sensory phenomenon shaped by longing, emotion, and the slow decay of time. This exegesis begins with personal reflections on childhood, embracing vivid and obscure recollections. I ask: why do some moments remain sharp while others dissolve? I draw on Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*, where memory is anchored to objects and sites. These places, a childhood home, playgrounds, beaches, hold memory like film holds light: imperfectly, but powerfully.

Personal recollection sits alongside pseudo-scientific methods and philosophical inquiry, particularly into how strong emotions, often tied to trauma or joy, are engraved in the mind. This reshaping of memory is embodied in souping, a process where the film is soaked in organic or chemical mixtures. Each soup is a unique alchemy of matter and time, producing ruptures that mirror memory's volatility. In my practice, time is not background but medium, unfolding slowly in the lab, where waiting becomes a ritual of care.

The home laboratory, set up within a domestic space, acts as a site of emotional excavation, where analogue processes materialise the impermanence of the past. Here, soaked negatives and handwritten reflections accumulate like sediment. These altered materials are carried into the installation, where the film is printed, projected, or suspended, inviting viewers to encounter unstable, tactile, and fragmented memory. The lab and installation form a living archive of recollection and transformation.

Scattered throughout this exegesis are diary entries written during fieldwork visits to significant childhood places. These entries are raw, sensory fragments that complement the visual disruptions of the souped film. Together, they form a dual archive, one text, one image, grounding the emotional register of my practice. The brown text reflects the connection between these diary entries and the studio shelves where each soup jar and film are held. Each entry is paired with an image taken in that location, forming a link between remembrance and emotion, altered through the soup process and time observation.



Figure 1. Parana Park, Hamilton, b/w
35film negative souped in leftover mince
pie, 2025.

Date:09/01/25. — When I returned to Parana Park, I felt all these memories come flooding back of the good old days when I would walk around the park, see the birds in the cages, and play in the water with my younger siblings. Going down the cool yellow flower slides or even trying to get all of us onto the spilling seed that shoots out water. All I could think of was the good times. Each time we came here, we would have lunch and spend the day together relaxing. As I thought more and more about it, it made me realise that I could not do that anymore. I am just too old to play in the water; it would be too weird for someone my age to have fun at a place like Parana Park.

Chapter One – Revisiting Memory

Throughout this chapter, memory is expressed emotionally through childhood recollection, drawing on the work of Henri Bergson, Robert Stickgold, Liyth Ben Antonio, and Ali Shobeiri to frame and support this approach. My childhood has faded, but my memories of those times remain. With each passing day, I still recall certain things that hurt me and things that are special to me. Memories are a funny thing, especially those from childhood, they are formed through a sense of emotion and sensory experiences, expressing the use of impressions rather than logic. However, they return in vivid, yet unreliable fragments shaped by imagination. Memories are powerful and expansive and can wander on for years and years. Memories are central to our personhood because they shape our emotions and deepen our understanding of ourselves; memories connect our past to the present, creating a sense of who we are and how we have changed. Memories do not just recall physical places; they reconnect us to emotions we have felt in a that place at a specific time.

Revisiting places helps me recall something that has been lost; it helps me remember the feelings that have faded as time goes on, I can still vividly remember moments like playing in Claudelands Park, but as days pass, those memories blur. What remains are only fleeting images, while the full details of the moment slip away just as quickly as they appeared. I remember running around and swinging on the octopus with my siblings, and how my stepdad would push us so hard that it would spin so much it felt like we were flying. Yet, everything changed when I revisited the park, taking photos and notes and observing the how the space had transformed. It was not unexpected. I am no longer a child; time moves forward, places evolve, and change is inevitable. Seeing that nothing remained of the playground I grew up with, I felt a void in my heart, a sinking sadness. As I grew, memories faded. That is what happens when time takes charge, transforming a place like a playground into something far removed from my childhood. The area had become 'safer,' in a way, but it also felt caged in. The octopus was gone.

How we think about the past interests me. How does our brain preserve or transform each memory, how do we process these and what do memories look like? Professor of psychiatry Robert Stickgold studies the roles of sleep in memory. His most recent research has shown that participants perform better at a navigation task after having dreamed about

the task.¹ This provides compelling evidence that dreaming plays a functional role in processing and consolidating memories during sleep.² In turn, this explains the idea that dreams can store information and shape our surroundings from within our mind. While memories are rooted in lived experiences, they are not fixed records but fluid reconstructions, subject to change over time and influenced by emotions and new experiences. Dreams draw from these stored memories, often blending fragments of different experiences in ways that defy reality and in turn affect memories.

The mind fills in gaps in memory and dreams, blurring the line between the real and the imagined, creating false memories and misinformation. Author Lilyeth Antonio, in her 2015 paper “Misinformation and Need for Cognition: How They Affect False Memories”,³ discussed how false memories may reflect from retroactive interference, where new information disrupts the recall of earlier memories. Which is particularly true for individuals with difficulty remembering, as their memories are more easily distorted by new experiences. My work explores how memories are fluid and ever-changing. I see dreams as an extension of memory, reconstructing my history and reshaping my perception of specific moments and emotional experiences throughout my childhood. Memories are inherently subjective, emotional, and shaped by perspective. Similarly, dreams are not random visions but a way for our subconscious to reimagine the past. Recalling past lived experiences can amplify certain emotions or ideas, sometimes transforming memories into something more significant or creating an emotional connection to events that may have seemed worn or ordinary at the time.

In the book *Matter and Memory*, Henri Bergson described how perception and memory are linked, proposing that “[⁴]in fact, there is no perception which is not full of memories. With the immediate and present data of our senses, we mingle a thousand details out of our experience. In most cases, these memories supplant our actual perceptions, of which we then retain only a few hints, thus using them merely as “signs” that recall to us former images”.

I have many memories from before I was five or six that I could not picture; nevertheless, some of my most vivid childhood memories come from trauma, as trauma’s emotional

¹ Rober Stickgold, “Harvard Brain Science Initiative.” *Harvard Brain Science Initiative* (blog). Accessed March 25, 2025. <https://brain.harvard.edu/?people=robert-stickgold>.

² Stickgold, “Harvard Brain Science Initiative.”

³ Lilyeth Antonio, “Misinformation and Need for Cognition: How They Affect False Memories”, (master’s thesis, University of North Florida, 2015), <https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/etd/611>.

⁴ Henri Bergson. *Matter and Memory*. translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (George Allen and Unwin, 1911), ix.

impact has a big effect on long-term memory.⁵ Nevertheless, there are also memories that are perhaps trivial, like fragments of a puzzle piece; how a kid broke his arm after he fell off the monkey bars when I attended Hamilton East school, or how I searched for ladybugs by myself on the school grounds. Even though no strong feelings are attached to these little memories, I still remember them like they happened yesterday. I remember these small details because they stood out to me, like the ladybugs or the danger of monkey bars. This interplay between perception and memories aligns with how I feel about revisiting places.

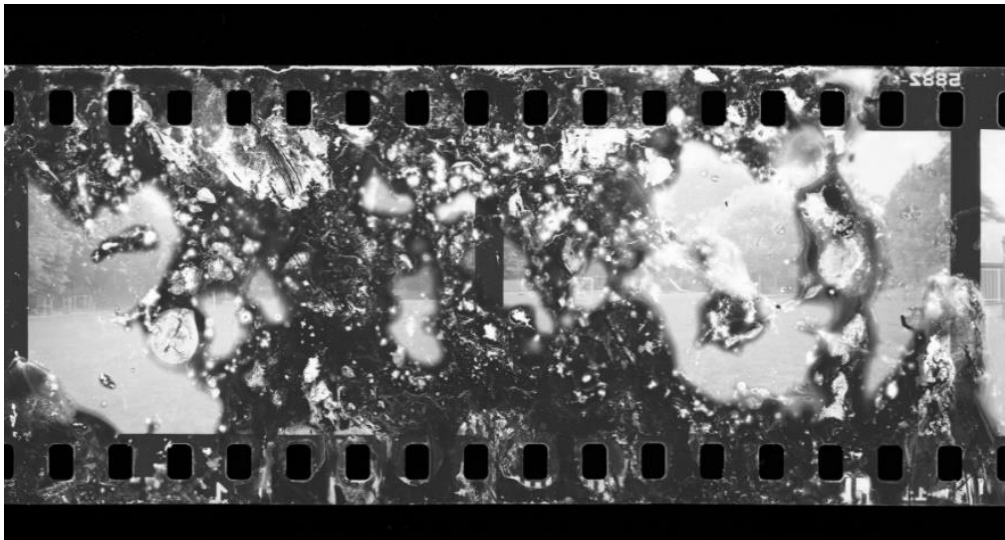


Figure 2. Hamilton East primary school, b/w 35mm negative souped in dry moldy acorns, 2025.

I seek to take photographs based on my childhood memories, no matter how brief or traumatic. I take photographs of memories because they are uniquely mine. I worked with a camera to relive my childhood and my teen years because I enjoy taking photographs of something that was and is important to me. The ability to travel and retrace my steps allows each place to carry a different emotion each time, and no matter what I feel during the process, I am left with a sense of ease afterwards. Those feelings are one of the reasons I keep furthering this exploration: to develop myself and connect with and question my childhood memories, but also to help remember and discover things from my past through a reflective lens.

⁵ Brandi Jones, "Signs of Repressed Childhood Trauma in Adulthood." *Verywell Health*, updated September 9, 2024.



Figure 3. Hamilton East, b/w
120mm negative souped in steak
& chips, 2024.

Date 04/12/24. — People often talked about the shifty streets and the rough crowd, as if it were just 'the hood,' but to me, it was home, even if only for a while. I hated going back there. It was good revisiting a place from my childhood, but I won't lie and say it was a good memory. I hate the street and do not think I will ever return there. The place feels gross and unwanted, but I am also grateful to have lived on that street and created memories from childhood. Nothing changed, not the house, the street, not even the pavement; the only thing that changed is the tree outside my house. Is it better that time has changed things rather than kept it the same?

My memory often brings forth feelings of warmth, safety, and familiarity. Yet, it is also tinged with a quiet sadness, an awareness of time's inevitable passage and the impossibility of returning to what once was. This duality makes memories so emotionally charged; it connects the past to the present in fleeting ways, evoking what is gone while offering a strange kind of comfort in remembrance. It is this fragile balance between longing and loss that brings specific memories to the surface, like when I found Coke, the rabbit, dead in the bush, or when a wētā chased me and left me with a fear that has never quite gone away. These moments are held not just in my mind but in my body, in the patterns I still follow, like staying up late, watching over my younger sister, even long after I have moved out. Memories are not always joyful. Memories collect fragments of the difficult alongside the tender, holding them in tension. This emotional weight of memory has become central to my practice. Working with film is not simply a way to document the

past but a method for being with it, physically, emotionally, and deliberately. The slow, tactile nature of analogue film mirrors the memory process: uneven, uncertain, and requiring attention. Holding a camera, winding film, and waiting for images to appear feel like acts of reflection in themselves. The unpredictability of the outcome echoes how memory functions, not as a perfect recording but as a layered, evolving experience that ties me back to the person I was.

When using black-and-white film, it carries an inherent sense of timelessness, which shows a visual simplicity and emotional depth, much like how we remember childhood. Not in full colour, but in moments, in flashes. My choice to work in monochrome echoes the aesthetic of memory portrayed in film and media, where flashbacks and dreams are often rendered in black and white or sepia tones. These familiar visual cues do not remind me of the past; they shape how I understand memory as something fragmentary, emotional, and often triggered by images. In my work, they influence how I frame my personal history through the lens of photography. Be that as it may, this process is not about capturing apparent reality but embracing imperfections. Film grain, scratches, light leaks, and uneven development symbolise memory distortions. Over time, memories fray, lose detail, and blur together. Much like film, memory degrades, fades, warps and breaks down. These flaws do not detract from the truth of the memory but instead reveal its emotional honesty, what it felt like rather than precisely what happened. In a way, the use of black and white film is both a visual choice and an emotional strategy. It allows me to explore how memory shape's identity through sensation, not fact. Each image becomes a kind of poetic reconstruction, where absence becomes presence, and the unknowable past is reimagined. In this way, memory becomes not just a longing for a place or time but a method of storytelling. My manipulated and souped images, which I discuss in Chapter 2, take this further, visually mimicking how time alters our memories and how those memories, in turn, alter us.

Memory is not just sentimentality—it is a powerful and complex force. It can bring insight and reflection, help us understand our past, or trap us in idealised versions of what it once was. Through processes like souping, I engage with this contradiction: not aiming to preserve memory to capture accurate accounts of what it was, but to acknowledge how we continuously reshape it. These altered images reflect how remembering is always an act of interpretation, filtered through feeling and experience. Memory asks us to consider what is real and imagined and how both can hold truth in forming the self.

Professor Ali Shobeiri in “Photography and Memory’ discussed how we take photographs and preserve our memories and their formulations as aide-memoire which means the use

of tools that help us recall and reconstruct past experiences.⁶ Shobeiri noted that photography falls short of being a memory aid as its spatiotemporal and material nature only gives us one sense: sight. My photographic project activates multiple senses, not only sight, but also smell, through rotting food, chemicals, and natural materials, and touch, through sticky, dry, and wet textures, all of which activate sensory memory. The way the past is explained through remembering and photography is inherently incorporated into a dynamic process. While photography presents an image that embodies past events for some, it also reshapes our memories. My project explores how making photographs of places where I grew up can somehow recover or become those loving memories in the present and future. Photographs can act as visual records of the past, preserving moments in time and allowing us to revisit them later. They capture a specific point in history, a moment in time and reflect the ongoing process of how we remember and reinterpret those moments.

Reliving past events can challenge emotional threshold, but when I revisit places, it embraces my mind and delves through each place and reminds me that this was once home. Through my art practice, I am learning about myself. With my camera, I can reframe my past. With each photograph of a memory I imprint on my younger and older self, to a part of my story that I cannot return to.

In summary, my exploration of memory, through revisiting significant places and photographing them, reveals a personal journey of self-discovery and emotional reconnection with the past. As I reflect on my past, the memories I revisit shape my perception of the present and influence how I move forward. Whether joyful or painful, these memories serve as anchors to my past, and photography becomes a powerful tool for preserving and reshaping them. Through black and white film, I capture the essence of those moments, each image producing a sense of longing for the past and emotional connection that digital photos cannot replicate. As I continue to explore these memories, my practice evolves through souping, allowing me to reinterpret and renew myself.

⁶ Ali Shobeiri, "Photography and Memory." *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Memory Studies*, edited by Lucas M. Bietti and Martin Pogacar (eds). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-93789-8_33-2.



Figure 4. Otorohanga home, b/w
120mm negative souped in Pink
Himalayan salt, 2024.

Date 19/04/24. — The emotions of coming back to the old white house in Otorohanga. I can't remember much for the place but the few I can think of would be jumping on the haybales and feeding the calves early in the morning before school, riding in the scoop of the digger with my siblings and catching the bus with the grumpy driver. Those days were just something special.

Chapter Two - The Embodiment of Film: Developing Memory Through Souping

My approach to the souping process, where the altered film mirrors the fragility and transformation of memory, draws on the works of Anna Dezeuze, Richard Wentworth, Nova Paul, Kate Van Der Drift, William Basinski, and Nora Schultz. Working with film is not merely a technical process; it is an immersive, tactile experience that resonates with my emotions, memories, and sense of self. It is a ritual that binds me to the physicality of my medium and reinforces notions of time, memory, and transformation that define my work. When I develop film, I am physically engaged with the materials—handling the delicate strips of film, measuring chemicals, and observing the gradual emergence of images. This process is deliberate and slow, requiring patience and care, qualities that parallel how we might reflect on the site of memories. Much like the layers of memory that unfold in our minds, the images on the film are revealed gradually, forming connections between what is visible and what remains hidden. This sense of discovery is deeply tied to how I experience my memories—fragmented, blurred, and yet full of meaning.

My physical engagement in the film-developing process is transformative, which reflects my acceptance of letting go of the past and embracing the uncertainties and imperfections not only of my youth but also of the film that I use. Each film strip becomes a representation of a memory and their imperfections; just like memories, film strips include images that appear while others fade, distort, or fail to materialise entirely. If the film does not appear conventionally beautiful, it is not a failure; its success lies in capturing the unpredictability of memory and transformation. Distortions and alterations are integral to the process. How we recall the past determines why some moments stay vivid while others slowly fade. While engaged in the development process, I realised that I am not just developing a film; I am also revisiting the places I am tied to via my memories, guided by feelings of comfort and familiarity. Through film development, I am cleansing my past, allowing memories to resurface and reconnecting with them as part of a bounding process.



Figure 5. Claudelands Park Hamilton, b/w 16mm negative scratched within a Minolta 16 Model P Subminiature Camera, 2024.

Souping film is a transformative process involving immersing film in various liquids, causing the emulsion to shift, crack, and dissolve in unpredictable ways, creating new and unforeseen details (see figure 5 & 6). Removing and cleansing each frame allows new meanings to emerge through unexpected alterations in tone and texture. The method reflects an interest in materiality and transformation, emphasizing how images, like memory, continuously evolve through time. Just as memories fade, distort, or become more vivid depending on context, souping introduces an element of chance, allowing time and chemistry to dictate the film's final appearance.



Figure 6. Stanmore Bay beach,
b/w 120mm negative souped
in wet flour, 2025.

The use of souping allows patterns and correlations to emerge within the emulsion of individual negatives and across the series of images, which I name-tag to track as the film changes. Although rooted in artistic exploration, this project adopts a pseudo-scientific approach through systematic observation and documentation. Each experiment balances controlled and uncontrolled variables, with detailed note-taking and photographic records capturing changes at different stages. While this structured process mirrors a scientific inquiry, it also subverts it through the improvised nature of a home-lab approach. The act of ‘making do’, working with accessible materials, intuitive experimentation, and unconventional methods, challenges the rigidity of scientific systems.⁷ Rather than adhering to strict methodologies, the project embraces unpredictability, resisting fixed categorisation, and the instability of memories.

Each substance/ ingredient in the soup has a role that carries with it its history and meaning. Some are chosen intuitively or for the chemical effects they have on the film. Food from the pantry or everyday cleaning products are drawn from spaces that reflect my upbringing, from the food I ate as a child to the person I am today. I use pantry foods because of their everyday familiarity and because they connect to my past, especially to the homes I lived in while moving frequently as a child. These substances carry traces of domestic memory, family rituals, and sensory connections, which remain rooted in my

⁷ Anna Dezeuze, “Photography, Ways of Living, and Richard Wentworth, Making Do, Getting By'”, *Oxford Art Journal* 36, no. 2 (2013): 281-300.

environment as a witness to the movement, transitions, and care embedded in those everyday spaces. In this way, every ingredient contributes not just to the transformation of the film but also to a deeper reflection on memory, home, and the emotional resonance of the everyday Coleman notes in *The Everyday*, 'The ordinary leads to a recognition of value.' Which suggests that the mundane can become a powerful aesthetic tool when recontextualized through art, sometimes revealing the miraculous.⁸



Figure 7. Otorohanga, b/4 120mm negative souped in mince, 2024.

Date:19/04/24. — Travelling down to my old school was so exciting, and it was shocking to see that not much had changed apart from the stairs and a new garden. One of my favourite memories from this place was when it was prize-giving, and we got water guns from Santa. My brother and I used these guns to play spies out back with the burnt-out tree on the farm.

⁸ Daniel Coleman, "The Everyday: Documents of Contemporary Art," January 14, 2013.

My work combines controlled and uncontrolled elements, creating a dynamic interplay between intention and unpredictability. The controlled aspects include how I capture each image, the locations I choose, and the process of recalling and selecting significant memories for each setting. During the development process, I control how the film is loaded, the chemical components used, and the steps I follow in the darkroom to process the images. However, several uncontrollable factors influence the outcome. One such element is how light interacts with my chosen camera. Which lacks the controls that regulate light exposure. For instance, when using the Agfa Clack, I have no control over the sharpness of the images—images will always appear blurry and unfocused due to the nature of the camera. Similarly, the small format and limited controls of the Minolta-16 compact spy camera make it highly susceptible to light leaks and exposure inconsistencies, often resulting in unpredictable or incomplete images.



Figure 8. Aberdeen Primary School, Hamilton, b/w 16mm negative scratched and light exposer within a Minolta 16 Model P Subminiature Camera, 2024.

Unlike modern cameras, which offer precise exposure settings and built-in light meters to correct for variations, the Minolta-16 relies on manual adjustments and an intuitive understanding of light. I use a light meter when working with the Minolta 16 compact spy camera to measure exposure as accurately as possible. Nevertheless, imperfections still occur due to the camera's sensitivity, the lack of a proper film cartridge (I 3D-printed a replacement), and the possibility of light leaks (as shown in figure 8). The film is unintentionally over or under exposed on bright sunny days, resulting in unpredictable

marks and flares. These imperfections, while partly technical in origin, have become an intentional part of my process, embracing the chance effects to reflect the instability and fragility of memory. The unpredictability of older cameras like the Agfa Clack and Minolta 16 Spy reflects the instability of memory itself.

During development, there is inherent uncertainty about whether the photographs will appear. In the artist Nova Paul's work *Ngā Pūrakau Nō Ngā Rākau* (2023), Paul used plant-based developers, incorporating the leaves of the Puriri tree she films as the developer to create a direct material connection between the subject and process.⁹ This approach emphasizes an ecological and process-specific relationship between the film and its environment. While my process similarly engages with organic materials, I focus on the transformative effects of time, decay, and a strong sense of place. By using food-based and chemical solutions, I emphasize the instability of memory and how it shifts, fades, and disintegrates over time, and by using everyday materials from my own life, I connect the process back to a personal experience, grounding the change of the film to a familiar everyday memory. My approach embraces unpredictability, allowing the film to bear the physical marks of its altered state, reinforcing the idea that recollection is never fixed but always changing.



Figure 9. Nova Paul, *Ngā Pūrakau Nō Ngā Rākau* (still), 2023, four-channel digital transfer of 16mm film, 32 minutes. Courtesy of the artist.

⁹ Nova Paul, "Nova Paul: 'You Point to the World,'" *Art News Aotearoa*, November 9, 2023, <https://artnews.co.nz/nova-paul-you-point-to-the-world/>.

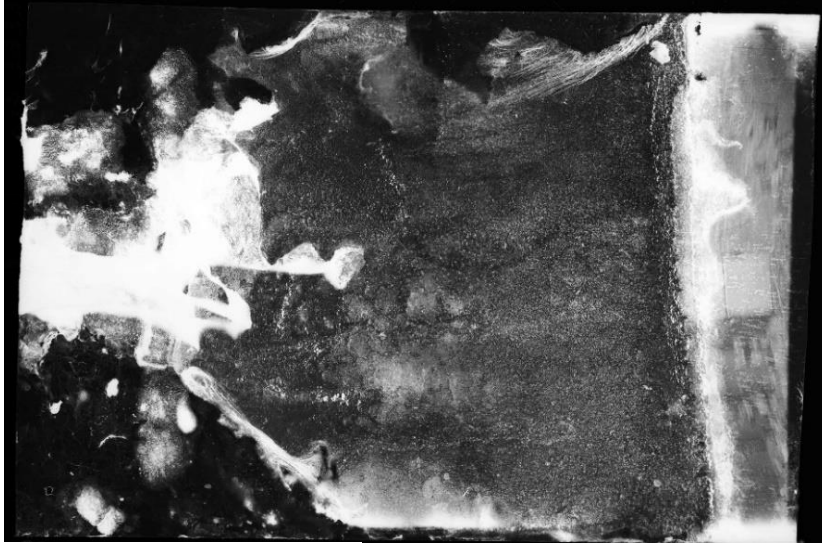


Figure 10. Hamilton, b/w 120 negative, souped in tropical juice, 2024.

Organic substances like fruit juices, tea, or vinegar introduce natural decay; their acids and enzymes break down the film's emulsion like time alters recollections, softening, staining, and reshaping them with warmth or melancholy (as shown in figure 10). In contrast, chemical solutions like bleach or ammonia cause extreme distortion, bubbling, cracking, and erosion, symbolising how memory can become clouded or radically reshaped over time. The reason for using these techniques is to make the physical process of decay a direct representation of memory's fragility and transformation. Just as memories fade, distort, and sometimes become entirely altered with time, the souping technique allows for a tangible manifestation of these processes on film. Each substance applied to the film introduces a different response, just like different experiences or perspectives can alter how we remember something. With black-and-white film, the absence of colour highlights the raw materiality of these transformations, emphasizing textural contrast. Every stain, crack, or breakdown becomes a visual metaphor for how memory shifts, layers, and fades. By embracing these unpredictable changes, the work challenges the idea of memory as a fixed, reliable record. Instead, it mirrors the instability and fluidity of memory itself, constantly changing, always in flux.

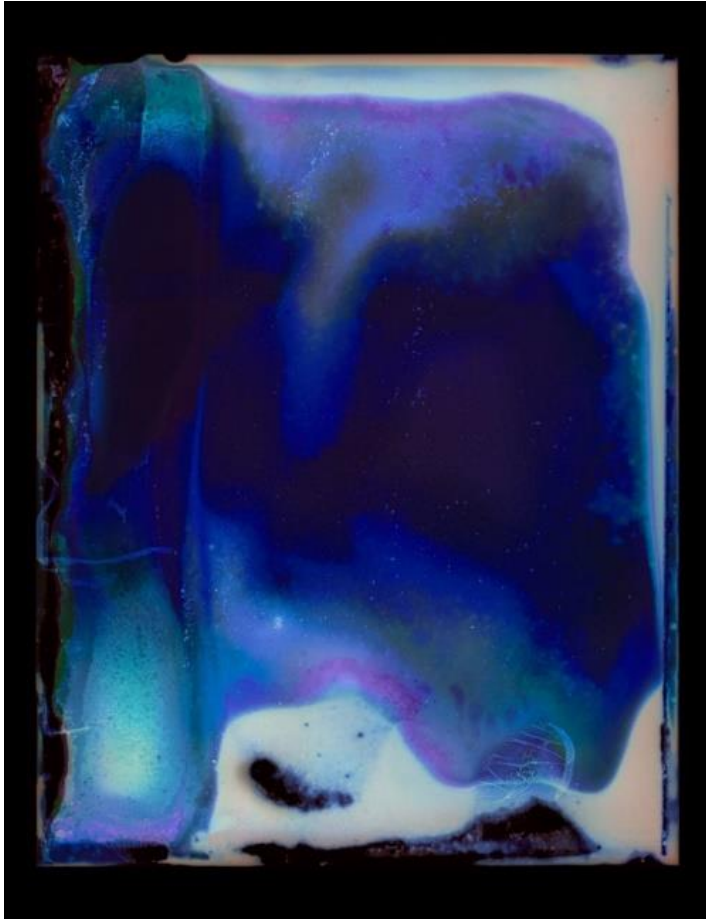


Figure 11. Kate van der Drift *Waning Gibbous to Waxing Gibbous*, September 2020, -37.294498, 175.525848, Chromogenic Photograph from 4x5" Negative, 1423mm x 1100mm, Edition of 5 + 2AP, 2022.

Kate van der Drift is a contemporary photographer who works with analogue photography, often without a camera. She allows natural elements like sediment, bacteria, and algae to imprint onto her materials. In her work *Listening to a Wetland* (2023) (see figure 11), Van Der Drift submerged a lightproof case containing 4x5 negative film sheets in the Piako awa, a river in the Hauraki Plains, New Zealand. As the film interacted with the wetland's natural elements, these imprints created an organic photograph that captures the essence of the river and its environment.¹⁰ This engages the environmental and historical memory to show a process which is embedded with a tangible sense of place, connecting them to the land's history and its ecological transformations. By allowing the materials to be marked by their environment, blurring the boundaries between documentation and organic

¹⁰ "Listening to a Wet Land." Kate van der Drift.

process, the work emphasizes the fragility of memory and landscape. While my work shares an interest in the transformative properties of organic and chemical interactions, my approach differs in its focus on personal and familial connections. Rather than using substances tied to a specific geographical site, I immerse film in materials with emotional significance, such as food, household substances, and everyday liquids linked to my memories.

Kate van der Drift's work and my own are deeply tied to place, each carrying a strong sense of emotional and personal history and an overarching connection to memory. The physical processes she uses to submerge film in the Piako awa and my manipulation of black-and-white films taken in important locations from my childhood allow the medium to play a crucial role in shaping the final images. Our practices highlight the profound connection between materiality, time, and memory, offering different yet complementary perspectives on how the past is recorded and remembered. Distortion presents an in-depth feeling of loss and change; as the film's emulsion lifts, cracks, or dissolves, it creates gaps and ruptures fragments of an image that were once whole but are now altered by time and material.

Kate van der Drift's work is concerned with the distortion of images by submerging them in water over time. The theme of distortion is also central to the work of William Basinski. As noted by Trevor, Basinski's album *The Disintegration Loops* (2002) features the gradual decay of his earlier recordings, using sound to explore duration and entropy through the transformation of materials.¹¹ Starting in the 1980s, he recorded sound sources such as shortwave radio and, decades later, discovered that transferring these recordings to digital formats caused the magnetic tape to deteriorate. As the tape passed through the player, the ferrite particles and backing detached, resulting in gaps and cracks, emphasizing the decay process and the passage of time.

Basinski's work took on deeper emotional weight after the 9/11 attacks when he was living in Brooklyn. He documented the fading daylight from his Manhattan rooftop, and paired this footage with the decaying sound loops, creating a haunting space where memory and loss dissolve into repetition. The footage shows the echoes, cracks, and humming from an auditory limbo, becoming both soothing and unsettling where time and reality blur. The idea of creation and destruction resonates with my practice. Like Basinski's loops, my film undergoes gradual transformation, altered by time, chemistry, and environmental materials. His work mirrors the ephemeral nature of memory, where repetition erodes clarity, much like my souping process, which distorts and reshapes photographic

¹¹ Trevor Music Annex, *William Basinski - The Disintegration Loops*, YouTube, September 9, 2014.

emulsion. Our practices explore the tension between preservation and decay, revealing how time imprints itself onto the material and showcasing how memory is viewed. I see a similarity in our works in that both involve creating something with effort, only to then intentionally embrace its decay and distortion. While Basinski's tapes deteriorate physically, my black-and-white film manipulations embody my feelings of loss and longing for the past.



Figure 12. Trevor Music Annex,
*William Basinski - The Disintegration
Loops*, 2014.

This engagement with material and change parallels artist Nora Schultz's *Discovery of the Primitive* (2011) (see figure 12), which also explores translation, reinterpretation, and the unpredictable nature of artistic processes.¹² Schultz works with found objects and labour-intensive printing techniques, layering impressions to create surfaces rich in history and variation. Her practice demonstrates how material processes alter meaning, which mirrors the effect of how souping transforms film stock into a new visual language. In both approaches, the act of making is as significant as the final image, as each stage of transformation adds to the work's conceptual depth. The unpredictability of Schultz's

¹² Nora – Group Show Moma.

method reflects the unexpected effects of souping, where the process dictates the outcome, resisting complete control.



Figure 13. Nora Schultz, *Discovery of the Primitive*, steel, camping mats, PE foam, paper, ink, dimensions variable. 2400 × 1200 mm 2550 × 500 mm, Dimensions, metal, foam mats, paper, ink, lacquer material, 2011, MoMA, NY

My souping technique and Schultz's work embrace the idea that materials are not passive but are actively involved in the shaping of the image. In my practice, I consider how memory functions fluidly, changes over time, and is rewritten through experience. Like ink pressed into paper, my use of chemicals seeping into film emulsion creates an idea of how memories are imprinted but not fixed, how they are continuously reshaped by the environments and interactions that surround them. The altered film frames serve as visual metaphors for this process, revealing the fragility of recollection and how memories distort and reframe the past. The instability introduced through souping becomes a way to challenge the notion of memory by embracing its layered and evolving nature. In this way, the souping film is not just an act of destruction or manipulation but also a method of

discovery that allows my childhood memories and personal objects to resurface in unpredictable and revealing ways. Similarly, my practice explores how film can act as a site of memory, where materials imprint themselves onto the surface, altering its meaning over time. I work with 16mm and 120mm film, and more recently, exploring 35mm, to recreate and capture a sense of nostalgia and childhood memory. Schultz's transformation of materials into symbols mirrors my use of film as a canvas for layered memory. While she manipulates material through print and impression, I submerge film in organic and chemical substances, allowing unpredictable interactions to shape its surface. In both our practices, time is an active force; Schultz's work reflects the shifting meaning of language through material change, while mine captures the fragility and transformation of memory itself, as shown in *Figure 13*, where the altered film illustrates how memory is shaped and redefined over time.



Figure 14. Napier streets, b/w 120mm negative souped before development in dirt, photocopy paper, 24mm, 2024.

In this chapter, I have explored the relationship between trace and subjectivity in memory-based image-making. “Trace” refers to the marks left by memories and experiences, which, combined with subjectivity, shape how images of memory are created and interpreted. The souped film’s altered materiality highlights the photograph’s ability to act as both a physical and emotional trace, connecting past experiences to present interpretations. My artistic process reflects the interplay between memory, material, maker, and viewer, negotiating how embodied memories and image decay influence how viewers engage with the work.

Chapter Three - From Field Work to the Home Lab

Memory is a key concept in my work. This chapter explores its evolving relationship with place and process through the movement from fieldwork to studio practice, drawing on the influence of Mark Dion, Nina Canell, Michael Taussig, and Tacita Dean to consider how material memory and process shape the home lab as a site of emotional reconstruction. It begins with revisiting sites from my childhood—emotionally resonant locations documented through film and diary entries. These encounters serve as raw material for experimentation in my home laboratory, a space that operates as both a physical and conceptual extension of the field. Suspended, layered, or hung within the space, the film remains in flux, its surface responding to light, movement, and shifting perspectives. This transition from external observation to internal transformation reflects the unstable boundaries between memories and place.

I install my altered film negatives to encourage viewers to engage with the materiality of memories, prompting reflection on what is ‘real’ versus what is ‘reinterpreted.’ The installation invites contemplation without expecting viewers to interact with the lab physically. This tension between what was and how we remember it, draws directly from Henri Bergson’s distinction between the actual and the virtual, as explored through Gillies Deleuze and elaborated by Simon O’Sullivan in *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*.¹³ O’Sullivan noted that “the possible [actual] is realised through resemblance and limitation, whereas the virtual is actualised through difference and creation”.¹⁴ In my work, the souping of the film acts as a method of activating the “virtual”—allowing memory to unfold not as a faithful reproduction of the past but as a creative force shaped by time, decay, and chance. These images are not simply distorted documents but become artefacts of what O’Sullivan described as “pure memory”: an inhuman, intuitive dimension that, like pure perception, offers access to a totality beyond immediate experience.¹⁵ In this sense, the altered film does not just depict a moment lost to time; it participates in memory, becoming an encounter with the past as something unfinished, flickering between what was and what might yet be imagined. Through this lens, memory becomes less about representation and more about transformation, embracing its position within the virtual realm of difference, creation, and imaginative re-actualisation.

¹³ Simon O’Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*. December 16, 2005.

¹⁴ O’Sullivan, *Art Encounters*, 2005.

¹⁵ O’Sullivan, *Art Encounters*, 2005.



Figure 15. Mark Dion, *The Department of Tropical Research: jungle field station*, 2017. Mixed media 97 x 168 x 84 inches; 246.4 x 426.7 x 213.4 cm
Installation view, Mark Dion: *Exploratory Works: Drawings from the Department of Tropical Research Field Expeditions*, The Drawing Center, NY, 2017. Photo by Martin Parsekian. Courtesy the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York.

The artist Mark Dion's installation practice blends art, science, and environmental conservation. His work *Exploratory Work: Drawing from the Department of Tropical Research Field Expeditions* (2017) (figure 15), explores a naturalist's laboratory within an art gallery. The installation was filled with desks, cabinets, and scientific equipment, meticulously arranged to resemble a functioning research space, complete with observational and sampling tools.¹⁶ Dion deliberately disorients the viewer by placing this setting within a gallery context and sometimes installing it on a stage or plinth-like structure. The hyper-realistic recreation of a laboratory prompts a moment of uncertainty — 'Am I in an actual workspace or an artwork?'

Like Dion's laboratory, my studio-home lab blurs the line between documentation and experimentation. Where my approach to fieldwork offers a raw emotional connection

¹⁶ "MARK DION: EXPLORATORY WORKS: DRAWINGS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF TROPICAL RESEARCH FIELD EXPEDITIONS | April 15 - July 16, 2017." *Tanya Bonakdar Gallery*,

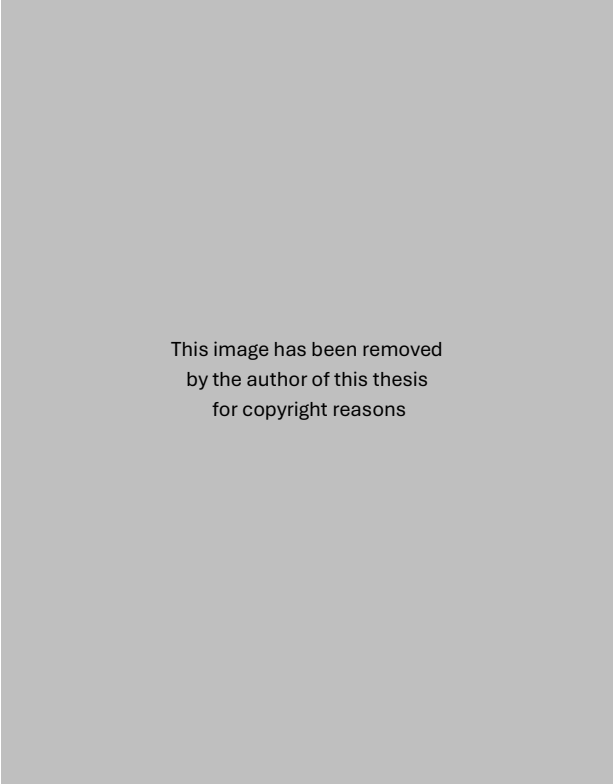
drawn from my lived experiences as a child, Dion's work engages in a seemingly scientific approach. Nonetheless, our work shares a mode of installation, where the lab is presented as a site of an artistic encounter, highlighting the importance of process over product. While my lab functions as a space for active material experimentation, Dion's is a constructed performative environment that critiques the institutional knowledge system.

The flow from fieldwork to home lab to studio to installation reflects Dion's manipulation of context, prompting a similar questioning of authenticity. Just as Dion's viewers are unsure whether they are in a real laboratory or an artistic space, my installations also challenge the viewer to reconsider this boundary.

Like Mark Dion, who carefully stages fragments of history, nature, and scientific inquiry to question knowledge systems, Swedish artist Nina Canell created sculptural installations exploring invisible energies and overlooked materials that shape our understanding of the world. Canell's work brings material forms and immaterial together, allowing dynamic relations to emerge. She describes her approach as working "in a syntax of relations and transfers," rather than producing static objects.¹⁷ Canell's work engages in modern alchemy, exploring themes of transformation, energy, and the delicate tension between presence and absence. The experimental methods she uses are marked by poetic logic and quiet humour, qualities that resonate with my process. Like her, I allow the work to evolve without exerting complete control, embracing material unpredictability. Be that as it may, while her process of moulding is conceptual and combines disparate elements into a relational form, mine is more literal, as I physically soup film, allowing time and decay to distort memory and image.¹⁸

¹⁷ "Nina Canell." *Mendes Wood DM*

¹⁸ "Nina Canell (Gallery 1)." *The Douglas Hyde Gallery*



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by the author of this thesis
for copyright reasons

Figure 16. Nina Canell, *Brief Syllables* (detail), 2014, telecommunication and electricity cables, steel, wood, dimensions variable. From the series “Brief Syllables,” 2014–.

In my studio, I incorporate handwritten notes, diary entries, jar labels, post it notes, each a fragment of personal narrative, a small attempt to pin down fleeting thoughts and memories. These gestures, like Canell’s cables in the work *Brief Syllables* (see figure 16), feature imperfections as carriers of meaning. In my home lab, notes often appear out of sequence or half-finished, mirroring the fragmented way memories surface in my project. They function as archival tools and poetic interventions, revealing my attempts to preserve something inherently unstable.¹⁹ Just as Canell visualises the breakdown of communication systems, where signals are interrupted, rerouted, or lost, I explore how memory is distorted by time, emotion, and subjective reinterpretation. Her work invites viewers to question the reliability of transmitted information; mine asks similar questions of memory. In both practices, there is a tension between preservation and loss, clarity and fragmentation. The sculptural language of disconnection becomes a metaphor for how

¹⁹ Černiauskaitė, Neringa. “Nina Canell.” *Artforum*

meaning slips, fades or transforms, whether through failed electrical currents or the slow erosion of lived experience.

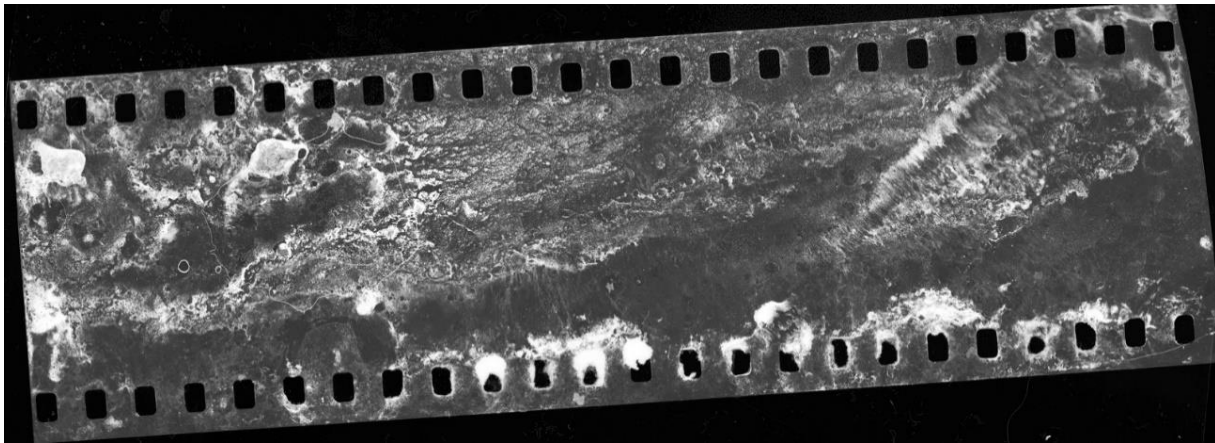


Figure 17. Raglan beach b/w 35mm negative souped in green onion chips & water, 2025.

Date 7/02/25. — Returning to the black sand beach reminded me of having lunch with friends and family. Playing in the seawater with my siblings and building sandcastles. I miss spending every minute with my family and friends. I still get excited to go to the beach, but it feels a little off, and I don't know why; maybe it's because there is no family next to me this time.

In my project, diary entries embrace the emotional ties of my childhood, and I keep notes of each place I revisit, capturing the traces of a place, memories, and emotions tied to those locations. The written anecdotes dispersed throughout this exegesis record my visits to childhood homes and significant sites in words. At the same time, the film I take at those places is altered, conveying the atmosphere and instability of those memories through texture, tone, and residue. The two forms—text and image—create a conversation: the diary entries capture specific moments through language, while the souped film embodies that which resists being put into words. This process reflects an embodied fieldwork, where the writing and revisiting of sites becomes an intimate part of the practice, bridging memory and physical space. Anthropologist Michael Taussig's *'fieldwork' in Notes. Drawings. Writeup* (figure 18) emphasizes the tension between experience and notation, between what is observed and recorded.²⁰ My diary entries align with this approach as I observe emotional engagements with childhood spaces, while the souped images serve as material artifacts of these experiences.

²⁰ AR_11.Taussig-Michael-Fieldwork-Notebooks.PDF - Taussig+Michael-Fieldwork+Notebooks.Rar.

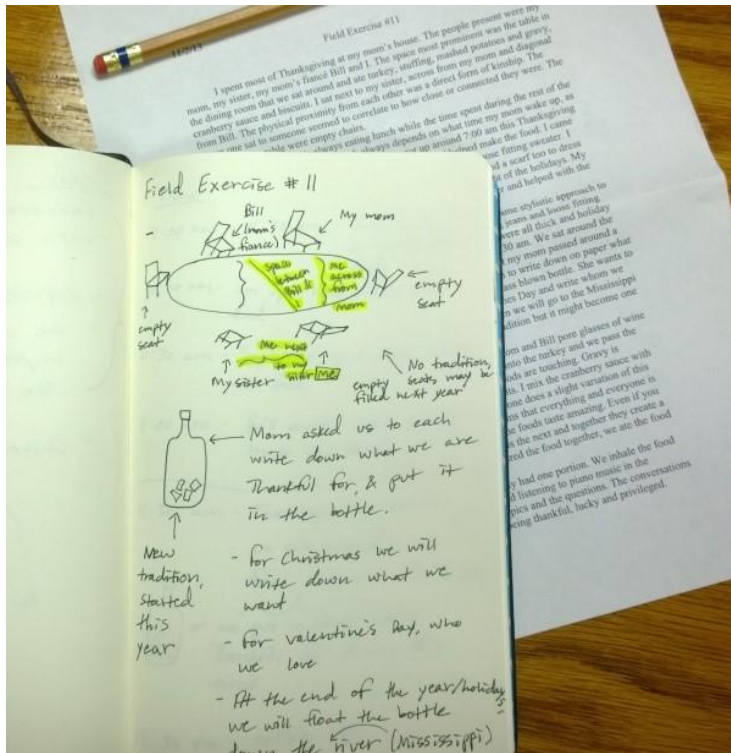


Figure 18. Michael Taussig's, *my notes whilst reading Notes*. Drawings. Writeup. (Introduction to Anthropology, Fall 2013).

Fieldwork, in this sense, is not confined to a single location or methodology but extends into the studio, where working with film becomes an investigation. The altered film functions as both field note and artifact and is evidence of a process that blends interaction and documentation. The substances I use for souping are not random; each has a connection to my memories and family. For example, I souped film of my grandparents' house with lettuce and lemons because I associate those foods with how they loved to garden and spend time outdoors. At times, I used materials found at specific locations, linking them directly to memories of those places. For example, I collected charcoal, sea water, and driftwood from Napier, where I visited a beach, I had once visited during a family holiday. These substances were then used in my souping process, allowing the physical residue of each site to interact with the film's emulsion. The observation of chemical transformation of time encourages the viewers to engage with sensory and materially driven methodology. This methodology challenges the separation between data collection and artistic production, aligning with Taussig's idea that fieldwork is an embodied experience that resists the rigid structure of conventional notation. Taussig's emphasis on drawing as a form of notetaking is relatable to my approach to film

manipulation. He argued that drawing captures something beyond the written word, allowing for immediacy and intimacy in documentation.²¹



Figure 19. Field work, using 35mm Iford 35-ii camera, Butterfly Creek, 2025.

In my practice, the altering of film acts as a visual record that is representational and performative as each film strip bears traces of time, memories, and chemical interactions. The film becomes an active participant in the fieldwork, shaping its own narrative through unpredictable transformations. Just as Taussig described writing and drawing as processes that blur the boundary between observer and observed, my engagement with film is similarly immersive. The experimental nature of my approach embraces chance, material agency, and the tactile process of creation, reinforcing Taussig's idea that fieldwork is an ongoing negotiation between lived experience and its representation. This process acknowledges that documentation is never neutral; it is always shaped by the act of making, the physical engagement with materials, and the unpredictable nature of memory and matter.

²¹ Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, "Drawing with a Camera? Ethnographic Film and Transformative Anthropology." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2015, pp. 255–75.



Figure 20. Studio/Home-like laboratory, 2025.

In line with conceptualising my practice as embodied fieldwork, I positioned the studio and installation practice as an extension of the field and as a home laboratory. This setup allowed for the creative process to unfold through fluid, open-ended exploration, even as materials were used that may become fixed, set, or unalterable. Seeing the process as an art form not only deconstructs the traditional understanding of art (as fixed in time) but also invites viewers into an introspective space where the development of the work becomes a necessary part of the experience. The installation of the home lab becomes an invitation to witness the slow, deliberate alteration of materials. Through engaging with the artwork, viewers can connect with their memories or reflect on the ongoing transformation and the evolving process. This ongoing transformation creates a sense of intimacy with the piece, which, like memories, is continuously shifting and changing. While viewers are not directly involved in the souping process, the work still invites them to witness and reflect on its fluid, transient nature. The relationship between fieldwork and installation reflects my experimental approach, where the process becomes a form of documentation, by collecting data and materials and travelling to significant locations, all of which contribute to the creation of the final installation. Whenever I returned to the home laboratory, I used the photos from my fieldwork to soup each film frame within jars, establishing a connection between the external environment and the internal, transformative process.

Patience becomes an essential material in my process, just as vital as the film, the substances, or the jars: observing what takes place, the slow decomposition, the bloom of mold, the chemical shift in the emulsion. I have constructed a space that echoes the

intimacy of a home but operate as a laboratory, combining the residues of the past and the act of anticipation for my process of tending, observing, and remembering.



Figure 21. Jars of soups with film, 120 and 35mm, 2025.



Figure 22. Jars of rotten foods finished soups, 2025.

For the installation, jars are arranged in rows, never purely for function, but as a form of visual taxonomy. Each shelf, desk, and storage unit are carefully assigned. The largest cabinet contains a heavy smell of rot from the different foods used for souping, including brownies, rotten wet lettuce, tacos, blue bird chips, sweet and sour pork (see figures 21 and 22). These jars are thick with time, like they hold the weight of decomposition as an echo of fading memory. A corner desk houses a different kind of archive. It is where I store chemical ingredients, non-toxic food items such as hair bleach, peanut butter, Nutella, gummy bears, or gross water. The desk is not merely a storage area but also an area where I laminate specific film frames, as they smell of rotten or decaying film. On the smaller corner cabinet, I arrange natural materials: dried plants, lemon rinds, flower heads, grass, bark, organic material. The humble shoe rack, stripped of its original function, becomes a space for empty jars: glass and plastic vessels awaiting their contents, their futures unknown. Each empty jar to me is like a blank diary page or undeveloped film: ready to receive, to hold, to change. My handwritten labels are shown in a personal collection but with a scientific approach, to keep my start and finished dates, materials, and location of each film soup.



Figure 23. EP, studio/ laboratory test, 2024.

My practice embraces what could be considered an amateur process that values rawness, imperfection, and an unpolished quality. It speaks to both the fragmentation of memory and a domestic or familial approach to the photographic image, emphasizing memory's personal and intimate nature, much like the unrefined vernacular photographs taken within the context of everyday life. The use of the makeshift darkroom, where experimentation and constraint coexist, becomes a space where chance, error, and unpredictability are necessary. My unrefined process fosters a deeper connection to the materials, making each step of creation feel more immediate and personal; the so-called imperfections in my work are meaningful traces of the process, echoing how memories are rarely preserved neatly but instead altered, faded, or incomplete. My improvised darkroom's enlarger setup allows me and others to closely examine the surface of the film—revealing unexpected textures, marks, and layers that might otherwise go unnoticed and offering glimpses of the image's material and emotional surface. This is not merely a means of seeing but in a literal sense a form of projection. In working with analogue film, I have explored contemporary methods of projection that enable film to exist in multiple states: as a negative, print, and a light projection. These transformations show the fluidity of memory and its shifting nature by expanding my exploration with projection as an extension of the ephemeral nature of memory itself.



Figure 24. Dark space test, tropolone roof, black paper. Enlarger, 2024.

As both a literal and conceptual space, the darkroom holds a profound significance in my process. It is a place where images emerge from light and chemistry, revealing themselves over time akin to how memories resurface. By working in dark spaces, I engage in an intimate act of discovery, where each exposure, each layer of light, becomes a meditation on time and perception. By incorporating projection and dark spaces into my practice, I extend my engagement with the film beyond its surface, using light to reinterpret and reshape the past. The interplay between illumination and shadow, presence and absence, mirrors how memory operates—some moments remain vivid, while others fade into obscurity. Through this process, I continue to explore new ways to materialise memory, investigating how the act of looking, whether through an enlarger, a slide projector, or a darkroom setting, can evoke deeper connections to the images and emotions embedded within film.

In coming across Tacita Dean's work *Film* (2011), I felt an immediate connection to the vulnerability of the image, which echoes my practice's material focus and appreciation for imperfection.²² Dean engages with photography and moving images not merely as tools for representation, but as tactile, unstable materials shaped by time and process. Her dedication to photochemical methods and the physical nature of film resonates with my exploration of memory and materiality as fragile, evolving constructs. In her installation *Film* (2011) at Tate's Turbine Hall, Dean projected a 35mm colour and black-white anamorphic film, including hand-tinted sequences, in a continuous loop. This large-scale

²² "Tacita Dean: FILM." ACCA

projection immersed viewers in the textures and flaws of the medium itself, transforming film into a sensory experience. Her work honours the impermanence and unpredictability of analogue processes. It opens space to consider the emotional and temporal fragility embedded within them—paralleling my concerns with the instability of memory and the beauty found in its imperfections.²³My own practice shares a similar focus on film’s physical nature and its transformation over time. Like Dean, I am interested in film as an evolving medium, manipulating it chemically to alter its appearance and reflect the passage of time. I am particularly interested in how Dean’s and my work engage with the physical projection of the film. While Dean’s large-scale projection in a darkened space creates a sense of immersion and invites viewers to confront the medium’s fragility, my use of projection is more intimate, often using an enlarger or slide projector in my installation/home laboratory.



Figure 25. Tacita Dean, *Film*, 2011, 35mm colour anamorphic film, 11-minute silent 35 mm film projected onto a gigantic white monolith standing 13 meters tall at the end of a darkened Turbine Hall. Courtesy the artist, *Frith Street Gallery, London and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris/ Los Angeles*

²³ Ann Jones. “Tacita Dean – Film.” *MostlyFilm*, 2 Nov. 2011

This context, with its more controlled and personal atmosphere, contrasts with the vastness of Tate Turbine Hall but still shares a similar engagement with film as a material that can be altered and experienced in unique ways. Dean's large-scale, immersive installation and my smaller, more intimate projections both emphasize the importance of space in how the film is shown. The darkened environments in both cases heighten the viewer's focus on the materiality of film and its inherent transformations. While Dean uses the vast scale of Turbine Hall to explore the film's historical and physical dimensions, my work looks at the film's transformation within a private, experimental context, emphasizing the relationship between the medium, memory, and time.

In summary, this chapter has traced the movement of memory through fieldwork, studio practice, and installation, demonstrating how my home laboratory becomes both a site and a system for emotional and material transformation. Engaging with the philosophies of Bergson and Deleuze, the anthropological insights of Taussig, and the artistic methodologies of Dion, Canell, and Dean, I have positioned memory not as static images of the past, but as an evolving, unstable force activated through material practice. From souping film with familiar ingredients to layering notes, projections, and altered negatives within a carefully curated space, I foreground patience, decay, and creative processes. Like the jars that hold decomposing contents or the film that flickers between presence and absence, my practice embraces uncertainty, imperfection, and slow transformation. It resists traditional boundaries between documentation and art, field and studio, science and emotion. The result is not just a representation of memory but a living engagement with its fragility and persistence—where remembering becomes a performative, material act, and the home lab becomes both a vessel and a mirror for the temporal, sensory, and imaginative dimensions of the past.



Figure 26. Great nana & Grandads Street/house b/w 35mm negative souped in wet lettuce, 2025.

Date 24/03/25. — Going back to my grand nanas and grandad's house felt weird, like I was a stranger observing from the outside. I could not set foot inside the house and see them or even see the backyard. The house itself has changed, the old look of orange bricks with a white top turned into a modern black and white house. I could only just see the inside which was white and clean. The house I knew and loved had old chairs and a rustic feeling. The house I once loved to visit has changed but I guess That's what happens when it has been 12 years or .

Conclusion

Throughout this research project, from fieldwork to home-laboratory experimentation, my understanding of how memory, a longing for the past, and sensory experience can be embedded into material practice has deepened. Working with analogue film, personal recollections, and experimental souping techniques has led me to approach memory not as something fixed but as a process of reencountering the self—through distortion, decay, and emotional resonance. By engaging with interdisciplinary perspectives—particularly the philosophical frameworks of Henri Bergson and Ali Shobeiri and the scientific insights of Robert Stickgold—I began to understand memory as a fluid interplay between perception, time, and emotion. These influences helped me shape a visual and material vocabulary in which souped film embodies recollection's non-linear, fragmented quality. Through the clarity, texture, and erosion of the materiality of the souped film, memory becomes visible. My practice echoes the concerns of artists such as Kate Van Der Drift, William Basinski, Nora Schultz, and Tacita Dean, who have explored impermanence, affect, and transformation through their time-based or process-oriented work. Their influence has encouraged me to treat damage, decay, and unpredictability not as interruptions to the image but as essential to its emotional and conceptual weight. In this way, the chemical disruptions and visual ruptures in my film prints mirror the instability and emotional intensity of remembering.

The transition from fieldwork to the home lab became a ritual of translation—revisiting spaces that shaped me, then reconfiguring those encounters through light, time, and chemical interference. Each film canister, each jar of soup, holds not just visual fragments but traces of place, body, and emotion. Memory transforms within this alchemical space: not preserved but reimagined. Nevertheless, this project does not offer closure—it is not a finished artwork but an ongoing inquiry. My research's open-ended nature reflects the subject it explores as memory itself is never complete. It is constantly reshaped by emotion, time, and circumstance. What emerges, then, is not just a body of images but a philosophy of making that centres fragility, patience, and poetic resonance. The imperfections within each frame are not mistakes but invitations to look longer, to feel deeper, and to accept memory not as evidence but as experience. In resisting clean narratives and polished aesthetics, I have found a deeper connection between self and process. This body of work opens a space for reflection on my past and allows viewers to encounter their emotional textures.

Appendix: MVA Exams exhibition documentation

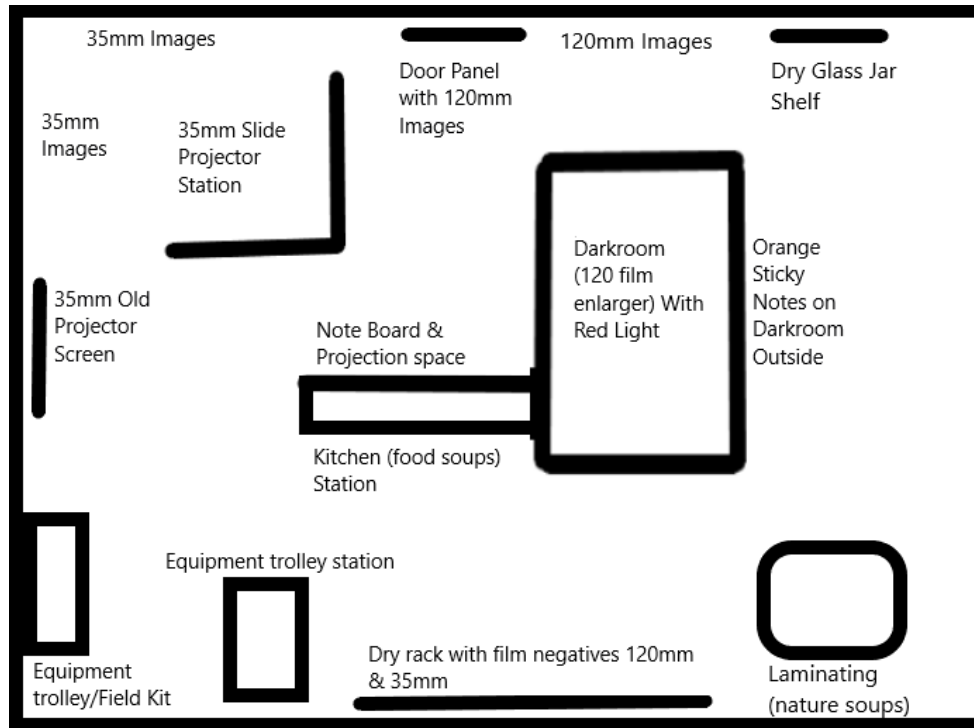
Souping The Remain Of My Childhood

Ngutu Kākā Gallery

19th – 24th June 2025



Figure 27. Kitchen (food soups) Station and Darkroom (120 film enlarger) Image taken by Paul chapman



Kitchen (food soups) Station: Where film is altered using food-based solutions; jars, containers, and cooking-like processes.

Darkroom (120 film enlarger): A developing space for enlarging/ Projecting 120mm negatives and a red-light source.

Laminating (nature soups) station: Used to seal and preserve altered negatives from mold; also creates laminated sheets as another form of presentation.

Dry rack with film negatives 120mm & 35mm: Space for drying film strips after development or souping; ensures film is ready for scanning/handling.

Equipment trolley station /Equipment trolley/Field Kit: Mobile setup carrying essential tools, chemicals, and materials for both fieldwork and studio processes.

The installation *Souping The Remains Of My Childhood* is conceived as a series of stations. The stations shape the workflow of my practice. I move back and forth, making, altering, and observing so each step connects to the next. This circulation reflects how memory works: shifting, repeating, and returning.



Figure 28. Light box 35mm slides. Image artists own



*Figure 29. Inside darkroom projection space.
Image taken by Paul Chapman*

The black plastic structure houses a temporary darkroom, with sticky notes on the outside to help remember what needs to be done. I considered the darkroom “functional” within the gallery space. Inside the darkroom, a red light illuminates the original negative film strips as they are handled and arranged, casting a warm glow that reveals the tactile nature of the process. A fan has been attached to the darkroom to prevent the enlarger from overheating during extended screen projection sessions. This improvised adaptation makes the process sustainable over time, using a timer to turn the enlarger off and on every 15 minutes to help prevent overheating.

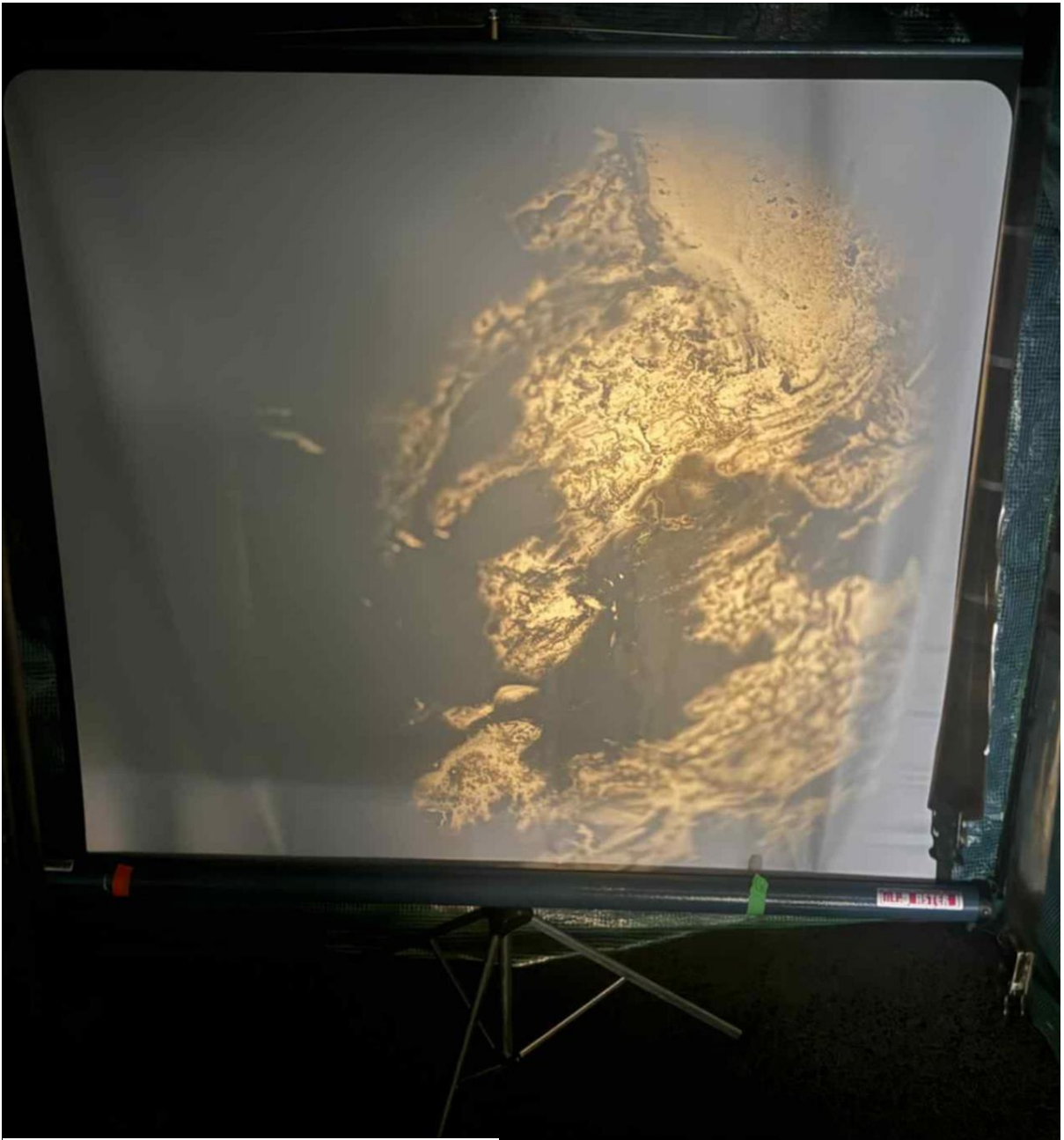


Figure 30. 120mm Scraps, potato & onion. Image artists own

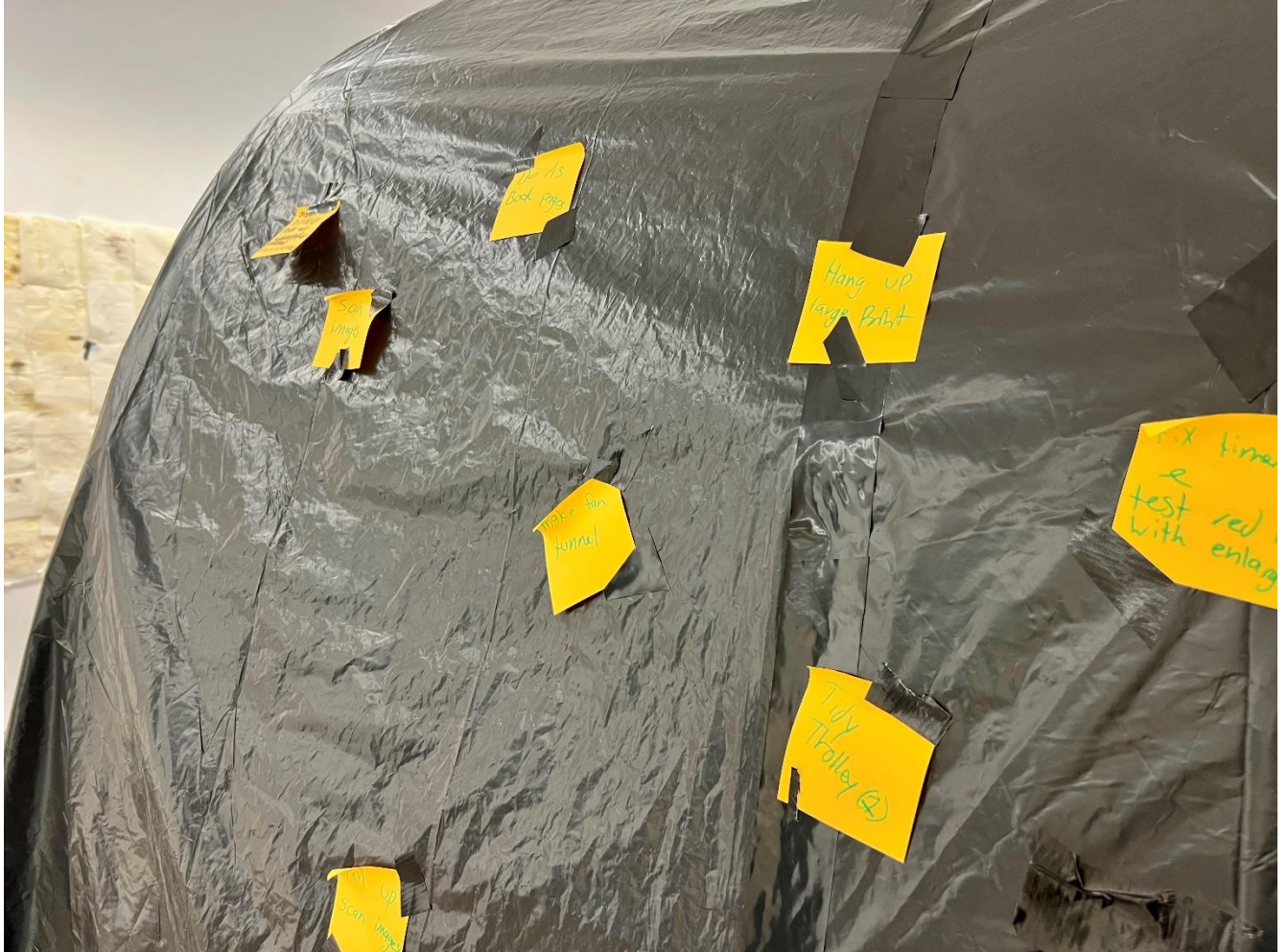


Figure 31. Orange sticky notes. Image taken by Paul Chapman



Figure 32. Laminating (nature soups) station, Dry rack with film negatives 120mm & 35mm, Equipment trolley station. Image taken by Paul Chapman

The laminating station is focused on preservation and transformation. The souping process often leaves the film surfaces textured, softened, and vulnerable to mould. I occasionally needed to laminate and seal these altered emulsions, preventing further decay while also shifting their status, from delicate negatives meant for printing into physical objects that can be handled, layered, or shown flat against a lightbox. This process offers a secondary body of work that exists alongside prints and holds its own tactile and material presence.

The equipment trolleys are stocked with glass bottles, chemicals, measuring tools, protective wear, my field kit, notebook and tools hanging above; it is a functional archive of the materials I use. By making them visible, I signal that the work is not fixed but in motion, always ready for the next step in making. On the wall behind is the dryer rack, which is lined with paper towels, holding film frames that are being dyed and waiting to be scanned.



Figure 33. Trolley stations. Image taken by Paul Chapman



Figure 34. Equipment trolley/Field Kit. Image artists own



Figure 35. 35mm slide projector station. Image taken by Paul Chapman

The 35mm projection space takes form through a workstation-like setup. The shelving unit resembles a viewing station archive, with boxes, pinned negatives, an old projector screen, a door with prints stuck on it, and 35mm containers. The prints surrounding the station are new works that depict the workstation in motion. While the 35mm projector flickers (the 35mm projector has a 15-minute timer to give it time to cool off), its light shines through the workstation onto the cabinet in front.

Next to the projection screen are a series of reminders handwritten onto post-it notes that emerged throughout my making process. Each note on the wall functions as a planning tool and an archive of thought. The green sticky notes, scattered with handwritten reminders, resemble fleeting fragments of memory, urgent and temporary, yet at risk of being lost if not preserved. Alongside the maps of Aotearoa/New Zealand, these notes anchor the work in geography and place, reinforcing my revisitations of childhood sites. Above the projection space lies a large print stretching across the ceiling, hovering like a memory fragment of my great Nana's street and home, which was taken with a 120mm film camera. The enlargement reveals textures, scratches, and distortions that might go unnoticed. Its placement overhead implies memory as something that looms and lingers, not fixed to the ground but drifting, unresolved, and constantly shifting in perspective.



Figure 36. 120mm Negative film strip. Nanas home and street. Artists own image (note: the image has been cut into three sections for the purposes of this document)



Figure 37. An old door with printed memories. Image taken by Paul Chapman



Figure 38. 35mm old projector screen. Image taken by Paul Chapman



Figure 39. Note Board & Projection space. Image taken by Paul Chapman

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