

## Digital restoration and the invention of analogue: The National Film and Sound Archive of Australia and *Wake in Fright*

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### Abstract

Prior to the advent of digital film technology, analogue film was not analogue, it was simply film. The introduction of digital, thus also marks the introduction of the analogue version. The idea of old media persisting – is dependent on celluloid film being transformed into “analogue” and being classed as an old form of media. In this paper, using the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia and *Wake in Fright* as case studies, I introduce the concept of the *film-version*. Moreover, my paper challenges the relegation of celluloid film as old media, and instead argues that the creation of a distinction between digital and analogue versions gives rise to a new kind of mediatised coexistence. I argue that rather than forming a hierarchy, the analogue and digital form a parallel and dialogical relationship allowing both the new restored version, and the older celluloid version to not only persist, but evolve into the present.

### Keywords

versions, film, digital, restoration, analogue, old media, dialogical relationship

## 1 Introduction

Prior to the advent of digital film technology, analogue film was not analogue, it was simply film. The introduction of digital, thus also marks the introduction of the analogue version. The idea of old media persisting – is dependent on celluloid film being transformed into “analogue” and being classed as an old form of media. However, photochemical processes for moving images are little more than a century old and so to describe them as *old* media (especially in comparison to the written word or painting) is to accept digitisation’s cannibalisation of analogue’s cultural and technological dominance. My paper challenges the relegation of celluloid film as old media, and instead argues that the creation of a distinction between digital and analogue versions gives rise to a new kind of mediatised coexistence. The singular descriptor, “film,” becomes insufficient in this cultural moment – limited as it is to describing cellulose sheets layered with chemical emulsions, or as a synonym for movies or motion pictures. Instead, I argue for the term *film-versions* which can function as

an umbrella categorisation capturing both analogue and digital versions as legitimate and separate, yet connected instances – or versions – of a given film. The digital film-version requires a degree of distortion, change and enhancement of its analogue cousin, in service of producing and creating something that is distinguishable and different. In other words, the digital and the analogue film-version are more than just technically distinct, the two versions are separate pieces of art.

Digital and analogue are, of course, not the only version types or styles that exist within the broader umbrella of the *film-version*. As I have written in other publications like my piece in the *Journal of Mise-en-scene* (Karpinellison, 2019), the practice of *versioning* is one that has a deep history in the global film industry. The existence and proliferation of many versions of films that are grouped under a single legal title or identity has significant ramifications for media and film studies, and it is my hope that this paper draws further attention to the complex ways *versions* impact our understanding of film and cinema cultures. However, while it is true that other version types exist (such as at the



chemical level, director's cuts, changes made for international releases, different standards of definition and fidelity within the category of digital), for the purposes of this paper, I have simplified the distinction between analogue and digital as two major versions, because of the association of oldness and newness with each term respectively.

Thus, I argue that digital restoration *versions* a given film, such that where an original may have previously existed, there are now two different original versions of the same film. These differences can include, but are not limited to, changes to aesthetics, content, dialogue, and even cast. To illustrate this claim, I will draw on my ongoing research into the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) as well as a case study from their flagship *NFSA Restores* program: Ted Kotcheff's 1971 film *Wake in Fright*. I argue that the restoration of this film exemplifies the generative and creative aspect of restoration practices. *Wake in Fright* (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009) represents a compelling case study because not only does it showcase the extent to which restorer transform the film, but also because the account of how the film came to be saved from destruction and obscurity, is intertwined with the technical narrative of its restoration. I will demonstrate that the film's rediscovery led to a kind of archaeological fixation with the analogue version, prompting filmmakers and restorers to attempt to excavate latent detail and information.

This paper will be in three parts. First, I will continue my consideration of the contradictory and multifaceted aspects of restoration practice, and how these practices are influenced by broad and overarching culture of nostalgia (section 2). Secondly, I will turn my analysis to my specific case studies of the NFSA and the film *Wake in Fright* (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009) (sections 3 and 4). Finally, I will consider access to the film as a dimension of its capacity for persistence: To what extent does it matter if multiple versions exist and persist, if only one can be seen (section 5)?

## 2 Restoration – Returning the past to the future

Scholarship on film restoration attests to the practice as a site of fraught and complex debate. Crucial to this debate is an assessment of what it means to restore a film. There is no simple answer to this question. Firstly, consider that embedded within an understanding of *restoration* as a concept, is an expectation of returning a film to some prior state. This concept is not difficult to grasp and functions as a prerequisite for understanding the basic tenet of film restoration. However, where the term becomes more complex is in identifying whether that prior state ever actually existed, or whether or not the previous moment to which a film is being returned is in fact an idealised version of its history, or even an approximation. It is my contention that the process of digital restoration creates the conditions by which a celluloid film can become an historicized cultural artefact and thus a piece of old media.

In order to critique the technical and archival applications and definitions of restoration as a practice, it is necessary to understand the motivations for restoration. One of the key concepts that pervades restoration practices is nostalgia. Svetlana Boym's book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) poses the idea of the link between restoration and nostalgia (what she calls "restorative nostalgia") by unpacking the nostalgic construction of a particular image of the past. For Boym, this process is highly selective, and not necessarily grounded in historical realities. Instead it invokes many assumptions and "invented traditions" of the past. She writes:

Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps... Nostalgia is an ache of temporal distance and displacement. Restorative nostalgia takes care of both of these symptoms. Distance is compensated by intimate experience and the availability of a desired object. Displacement is cured by a return home, preferably a collective one. (Boym, 2001, pp. 41–42)

Here Boym, referring broadly to nostalgia as a cultural mode – articulates the seduction and promise of restoration: the ability to revive

and contemporise memory and history. I argue that film restoration operates, according to this same fixation and mission. Film restoration, particularly the digital restoration of analogue film, claims to reconstruct an artefact of the past as it was intended but also as it is mediated for a modern audience. The restored film needs to not only be recognisable as the same film as can be found in the analogue version, but must match the social and historical memory of that film. At the same time there is a notable institutional and scholarly ambivalence towards defining and locating the practice of restoration.

The International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) has several resources and glossaries that attempt to locate the ethical, institutional, and technical definitions of terms like restoration, access, and preservation. However, in each of their definitions of restoration, a degree of flexibility is present. For example, in the FIAF Technical Commission Preservation Best Practice document, the definition of “Restoration” reads:

Restoration is a complex term which can mean the faithful duplication of an original element using techniques to remove or disguise damage and deterioration, or it can mean the recreation of an original cinematographic work from surviving elements which may be incomplete or from different versions [...] Restoration will inevitably involve subjective decisions, both on technical matters and on the question of content [...] (FIAF, 2009, p. 2)

This definition betrays an unwillingness to constrain the meaning of restoration. Even the first sentence contains a strange paradox. The concept of a “faithful duplication” and “to remove or disguise damage” seems fundamentally at odds. It raises further questions such as: What if the vast majority of audiences had seen the film with damage? Is the removal of this damage still an act of *restoration*? The open-endedness of this definition is particularly apparent when compared with the same document’s clear sentence on the meaning of *conservation* and *preservation*:

Conservation means the safeguarding and protection of original materials from damage, decay and loss.

Preservation means the duplication, copying, or migration of analogue and digital film to a new support or format, typically in cases where the life expectancy of the original elements is limited or unpredictable. (FIAF, 2009, pp. 1–3)

These are definitive principles that a new archivist can observe when conserving and preserving film objects. However, even documents that collect guiding principles like these, cannot offer concrete statements on the nature of *restoration*. Instead, we are left with the impression and assertion that restoration, whatever it may be, is distinct from other archival practices like preservation and conservation. Preservation and conservation are simply practices that involve the extension of the life of a film, as well as the protection of that film from further, avoidable damage.

Another definition of film restoration comes from the National Film Preservation’s *Film Preservation Guide*. Their understanding of *restoration* is as follows:

Restoration goes beyond the physical copying of the surviving original materials and attempts to reconstruct a specific version of a film. Ideally this involves comparing all known surviving source materials, piecing together footage from these disparate sources into the order suggested by production records and exhibition history, and in some cases, enhancing image and sound to compensate for past damage. Film restoration, unlike art or paper restoration, always involves duplicating the original artifact. (National Film Preservation, 2004, p. 4)

Again, in this definition there is a tension between the act of retrieval and recovery of the perceived original object, and the necessary degree of intervention or even construction required to produce the *restored* object. Further, words like “enhance” and “compensate” serve to bring additional weights to the concepts and philosophies at play in the practice of restoration. Duplication and copying are in this definition foundations for the restoration project. Rather than attempting to duplicate

the unattainable object of the past, the duplication is arranged, and assembled using relevant resources and understandings.

It could be further argued that practices like preservation are folded into the practice of restoring a film. Indeed, this is the position of the NFSA who, in their statement on the *NFSA Restores* program (the flagship restoration program at the archive) write: “NFSA Restores is an exciting program to digitise, restore and preserve, at the highest archival standards, classic and cult Australian films so they can be seen on the big screen in today’s digital cinemas” (NFSA Restores Committee, 2016).

By capturing multiple disciplines of archival practice, the NFSA has permitted a degree of freedom and intervention by archivists and restorers in service of the goal of *restoration*.

While preservation and conservation do have more stable definitions, *digitisation* does complicate that stability. In Michael Friend’s “Film/Digital/Film” he writes:

What we call <<preservation>> in the film archives is... a misnomer. There is no such thing as preservation. The motion picture is one of the most ephemeral objects yet created in the cultural sphere with a life span shorter than almost any previous medium. (Friend, 1995, p. 36)

As Friend notes, true *preservation* of a film (either by methods of digital or photochemical preservation or restoration) requires an uncoupling from the analogue medium its crucial fleeting quality. To sustain the film into the present means, in some way or another, destroying the decay which is so unique and specific to celluloid. Friend writes: “If by film preservation we mean the perpetual retention of all of the information in the original negative, we must confront the fact that there is currently no true preservation” (Friend, 1995, p. 38). In the intervening 28 years since Friend wrote this piece for the *Journal of Film Preservation*, however, some interesting technological developments have emerged that challenge this wholesale perspective: that *preservation* is a futile goal. With new technologies such as the state-of-the-art Scanity WetGate machine, it is possible to take extremely high-resolution photo-

graphs of each frame of an original negative, without damaging the film – capturing a new level of latent information in the negative.

However, a new problem – or rather a new aspect of preservation – has emerged. It is now possible to retrieve *more* information from the negative than was previously detectable. In other words, the preservation process would not add new information but rather make visible information that was already there, just unseen. This opens entirely new ethical and artistic questions – ones that I will address and illustrate with my case study shortly, but it is clear that film preservation and restoration are not straightforward conceptually or physically.

Director of the *Österreichisches Filmmuseum*, Alexander Horwath, contributes to further uncertainty to the word *restoration*. Horwath (2017) provides an abbreviated history of the term’s flexible meaning, while also arguing that an inextricable component of the meaning attributed to restoration is the complicated dynamic between the film industry and state archive. He writes.

As victims of flattery (once viewed as “pirates”, film archives are now being courted by the industry to join the game as “partners”), we, in turn, often flatter the industry by offering ourselves as service-providers with a special cultural cachet. (Horwath, 2017, p. 32)

Here, the reciprocal invocation of *flattery* is a valuable reminder that archives engaged in restoration, often do so without the assistance of funding from distributors or studios. That is to say, there is an inherent flattery in choosing to *restore* a particular film, in effect celebrating and embellishing the achievement of the filmmakers and industry who produced the film. Furthermore, this simultaneous acknowledgement of archival cachet and industrial oversight also reminds us that the filmmaker looms, like a spectre, over the practice of restoration both intellectually and sometimes in person. The NFSA’s restoration of *Starstruck* (1982) is one such example where the film’s director Gillian Armstrong (1982/2015) was closely involved in the process. It is this creative figure or these figures of the past to whom a restoration is notionally obliged. This is important to recognise

because it again enhances and complicates the position of an older piece of film. With the filmmaker directly or indirectly involved in the restoration process, the unrestored version functions as an object which captures historical ideas and sensibilities, which, in turn, can converse with the updated sensibilities and taste of a filmmaker whose career has continued after the film's initial release.

Marie Frappat (2016) provides another useful appraisal of film *restoration*. She notes that the term “restoration” is rarely used before the 1980s, and when it does finally emerge as a practice it goes beyond the simple repairing of a damaged film stocks:

But the solution, beyond these specific repairs, often referred to as “restorations” in the grey literature of laboratories and archives, seems to be the “reworking” of the film ... More generally, in speaking of the need for “re-working” we are here referring to all films that are on formats that are rapidly becoming obsolete and have to be transferred to be viewed in a new historical and technological context. (Frappat, 2016, pp. 43–44)

Here, and throughout Frappat's argument, there is a clear resistance to defining restoration as any one specific film related activity. Instead, Frappat goes on to find other terms which could, under the right circumstances, be viewed as synonymous – “reconstituting” and “re-working” just to name a few (Frappat, 2016, pp. 44–45). She frames the exercise of restoration as fraught, but crucially distinct from repair and preservation. To *restore* a film, whether by use of photochemical or digital processes means, in one way or another, to intervene in that film in order to make something new that still communicates its history. This argument is perhaps best clarified by German film historian and preservation scholar Enno Patalas (1998, p. 38):

The restoration of a film should always be an open process, leaving time and space for further “versions” that will not necessarily make the earlier ones obsolete. Each print is a kind of “original” and each performance is unique. So each restoration is an interpretation, a translation, an explanation, a performance.

Patalas frames the exercise of restoration not only as an extension of the life of a film, but also as an evolution. To restore a film is to allow the old media to persist, but it is also to create something new.

But it does more than that. The heralding of digital film technologies also serves, I argue, to define the meaning and limits of celluloid film newly recast as the analogue version. Thus, these old films do not only persist, they become a canvas from which new versions can emerge to live alongside the old print. My argument builds on Patalas' to show that here, not only is each restoration an “interpretation, a translation” but, in the creation of a restoration, the original analogue print itself becomes an interpretation and a translation of the film. Together these two versions present different yet legitimate and original instances of the same film.

While those involved in restoration (archivists and restorers) might view their roles as solely practical and technical, they are, regardless of intent, fundamentally creative and generative. If we accept that these practitioners are themselves creative actors, they can be understood in terms of adjacent theoretical frameworks such as John T. Caldwell's mode of production framework. Caldwell argues all workers in a production culture are capable of self-theorising their labour and the product of that labour. To this end, I will argue that archivists and restorers are engaged in this process of self-theorisation (Caldwell, 2008, pp. 19–22).

I now turn to my case study of the NFSA and *Wake in Fright* to demonstrate how the digital restoration of this iconic Australian film created two distinct versions. The first is a newly-old celluloid print which can be viewed as an object of history, entangled with questions of its material age and claim to originality. The second, is the new digital version of the film, which, now divorced of the technological parameters of photochemical development, invites intervention and creativity in producing a final product that is distinct from its analogue cousin.

### 3 The National Film and Sound Archive and *Wake in Fright*

The NFSA was founded in 1984, after the National Archive of Australia and National Library of Australia had amassed too much film and sound material to be managed as a portfolio of either of those institutions. The NFSA has thus become the premiere repository, accessioning body and exhibitor of the last century of Australian film. They are a state funded organisation, although being a Commonwealth corporate entity they are also able to solicit donations from the public and industry partners. In the years since the institution's inception, they have suffered multiple funding and staffing cuts, but their collection continues to grow. It is worth acknowledging therefore, as a precis on any discussion of the NFSA as an institution that maintaining a collection of more than two million items on a shoestring budget is an enormous task, one that necessitates a degree of compromise and sacrifice.

This background is important to understanding the perceived role and function of their ongoing flagship *NFSA Restores* program which is responsible for the digitisation and restoration of important Australian films. More than simply a routine operation of the archive. This is an outreach program actively aimed at sharing iconic Australian films with a new audience. It is in this context that the resurfacing of an original negative of *Wake in Fright* (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009) becomes so impactful.

### 4 *Wake in Fright*

In 2009 the NFSA's restoration of Ted Kotcheff's *Wake in Fright* (1971 / 2009) joined Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1960) as the only films ever to be screened twice at Cannes. The film follows John Grant played by English actor Gary Bond, a middle-class schoolteacher working in rural New South Wales. Grant decides to travel back home to Sydney for his school holidays but is waylaid in a small town called Bundayabba. While spending the night in this town affectionately referred to as The Yabba, Grant is seduced into a perilous game of two-up at the

local pub. Before long Grant has lost all his money and is plunged into a kind of drunken purgatory. Without the financial means to leave, Grant is stuck in The Yabba, and forced to endure its violent characters, and terrifying drinking culture. By the time the credits roll Grant has been subjected to all manner of tortures, and even been co-opted into the violence. *Wake in Fright* (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009) resists being part of any specific genre and instead manages to straddle the woes of a social realist film and the disturbing tone of a horror movie.

The restoration of the film was awarded the prestigious title of Cannes Classic following the championing of the film by Cannes Classic board member Martin Scorsese. The NFSA's process of getting to this restoration, however, was extremely complex.

While relying on an entirely Australian crew, the film was funded and distributed by several international bodies. Group W, a division of Westinghouse formed the UK and U.S. arm of the production, while NLT was the Australian production company involved. *Wake in Fright* (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009) counted as one of just three films ever financed and produced by Group W, a company that ultimately fell apart after the film was released. This shutdown led to the original negative of the film – that is, the object from which other prints could be made – ending up in the hands of creditors who did not view themselves as having caretaker responsibilities and did not have any other stake in preserving the film. However, NLT Productions, a company that did maintain a modest existence after the film was released, continually lobbied the filmmakers to assist in the production of a DVD or VHS release of *Wake in Fright* (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009). This prompted these filmmakers to mount a search to find the negative and make the film available once more.

Finally, in 2004, all 273 cans of original negative and soundtrack were eventually found by the film's editor Tony Buckley. The cans were being kept in a Pittsburgh film archive and were, upon discovery, sitting in a dustbin marked for destruction. These negatives comprised an intelligible and watchable original instance of the film. This original,

finally retrieved, was then immediately delivered to Canberra to begin restoration.

In brief, *Wake in Fright's* (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009) apparent saviour from incineration imbues the exercise in restoration not only with a quality of urgency and desperation, but with one of excavation. It is this archaeological impulse that I wish to pursue in the subsequent sections of this paper, as I argue, that the *unearthing* of this film contributes to key aspects of the digital restoration process.

In May 2022 I was invited to visit the archive and view both versions of this film back-to-back which provided me with an unprecedented comparative experience, usually reserved for those involved in the creation of a restored or preserved version of the film. During this screening I noted significant differences between the two versions that I will expand on here. Firstly, I noted that in an oral history the archive conducted with the film's director Ted Kotcheff, he specifically drew attention to *Wake in Fright's* colour scheme (Ted Kotcheff & Paul Harris, personal communication, June 17, 2009). In fact, Kotcheff speaks at length about the importance of earth tones in the film. For him the film's colour should only present as reds, oranges, yellows, browns and so on. This is clearly demonstrated when viewing the digital restoration which is heavy with warm earth tones, only occasionally offset by a desaturated green tint that washes over the screen during exterior sequences and is deployed to depict the unnatural intensity of the heat.

The 35mm print's colour, on the other hand, is a bit more varied. While earth tones are similarly highlighted, there are more blues and dark greens giving the interiors a colder more sterile feeling when compared with the restoration.

It appears that the colours that Kotcheff celebrates in his oral history, have received a significant amplification in the restored version. Kotcheff claims that he insisted on "no blues" throughout production, but the blue, coldness of the colour scheme in the analogue print suggests a flawed memory, and a degree of tweaking, that brings the restored version not just into line with Kotcheff's description, but perhaps restores the film as per Kotcheff's memory, and nostalgia (Hartley,

2007). The analogue print's colours offer a compelling departure from Kotcheff's statements, presenting a version of the film that can overshadow the creative control of its director. In this way, old media persists.

At the same time the archaeological impulse brought to the process of restoring the films meant that fulfilling the filmmaker's original vision intensified. Consider the following quote from my interview with the film's editor Anthony Buckley

We were astonished when we saw the bar-room scenes with Chips Rafferty, and Gary Bond the clarity and the depth in the shots! We could read things on the walls that we'd never seen before. It was a blessing in disguise. It was an incredible period of nearly losing the film altogether and then seeing more than was even there. (Karpinellison & Buckley, personal communication, May 17, 2022)

Buckley's admiration for the detail and information drawn from the image through the digital restoration demonstrates that his conceptualisation of restoration is one that sees it using all available technologies to modernise older films. However, this reasoned inference as to Buckley's theorisation of restoration practice does not serve to locate the NFSA's restoration practices in any specific methodological or theoretical mode. Instead, I argue that as per Caldwell's argument that those in a mode of production are competent and agile self-theorisers, the expertise earned by Buckley's time spent working in the film industry imbues him with an authority to create an implicit theory of restoration that is compatible with the NFSA's internal practices. Similarly, while in further instance in this article it is possible to attempt to align restoration practices with theories of restoration like Giovanna Fossati's "film as original" and "state-of-the-art" (Fossati, 2009, pp. 120–125), the purpose of my research is instead to recognise the ultimate legitimacy of the language deployed by those working in the archive to theorise their own version of restoration that sits adjacent to a more academic conception of the practice.

This experience of seeing new detail was consistent with my viewing experience of watching the two film-versions back-to-back.

In particular in interior sequences in the film, such as those set in pubs, restaurants, and hotels, new details emerged. Posters, books, and art that were blanketed in pitch black shadow in the 35mm print, were made legible and visible in the restored copy. Whereas in the analogue print it is possible to make out the record that hung on the wall of John Grant's apartment only as a dark and murky rectangle – in the digital restoration it is easy to see that it is a record and that it is in fact Abbey Road by The Beatles. While a small detail, in this digital version the record contributes to the characterisation of the film's protagonist, reminding us of his metropolitan British origins, which are poorly suited to the harsh masculinity needed in the Australian outback. It is also a reasonable assumption that the choice to decorate this room, as part of the film's set design imagined communicating this detail to viewers. However, when comparing this sequence to the same one in the analogue print, a different tone is evoked. Instead, the dark room where certain details are too shadowy to make out foreshadows the relentless, violent, and morally corrupted activity of the plot following this scene.

Importantly these two versions do not form a hierarchy of original and copy. Instead, they function as legitimate and parallel instances of the film. The old version persists into the present by capturing a different tonality and colour to the digital version. The digital version delivers on its promise of restoration, by not only amending the colour and exposure to match the perceived vision of the filmmakers, but by exposing latent information and detail that no audience to the film had seen previously. In a way, it could be argued that the details drawn out by the restoration process, did not exist prior to the advent of digital technologies. My interview with the lead restorer on the film, Anthos Simon, confirms this sensibility. He told me that the role of an archivist-restorer was not just to return the film to an original state, but in fact to continue the ethos of those filmmakers and technicians involved with the original production, in line with what was possible now. He said:

In the old days, of film grading, all cinematography was shot – the negatives, the labs processed

them, and then there was what's called an RGB pass – a red, green and blue pass. And you could generally change density and colour. What you couldn't change was what was called dynamic grading, which is colour within the frame. If someone says to you, "I love everything, but just this one thing here, can you change this to blue?" you couldn't do that in those days. Whereas now you can! And that was the difference, we were able to do some dynamic grading within some of those scenes to bring out the dartboard that they could never see because it was you know... the exposure was so dark.

Well, some archivists are like: "No, you shouldn't do that, because that's not what the cinematographer could have done at the time." And I said, well, then that's a technicality. Because cinematographers that sat next to us, for the last 20 years, always wanted that scene adjusted." For us, we made the decision to go that extra mile. (Karpinellison & Simon, personal communication, June 1, 2022)

This quote is an excerpt from a longer interview<sup>1</sup> and demonstrates the extent to which both digital intervention in an analogue print is controversial, but also creative. It exposes an artistic impulse, which, in this instance, is enhanced through digital technology. While these kinds of interventions have been possible using older photochemical techniques, it is evident that Simon's decision to make these changes is, at least in part, motivated by the flexibility and scope of the technology at his disposal. Moreover, this decision to brighten the film through dynamic grading, again, demonstrates the way that a digital restoration bears distinctions that transform both the analogue print and the new restoration into singular, legitimate versions of the film that exist in parallel to one another. The brightening of these sequences, and the language used by Buckley and Simon transforms the analogue print's darkness into a choice against this detail, allowing the photochemical processes' aesthetic to persist –

1 Note both interviews with Tony Buckley and Anthos Simon are part of a broader interview project that surveys staff at the NFSA and relevant filmmakers. This research has ethics approval. The ethics code is: 2022/028.



with deep blacks creating a different tonality for the film.

Further, in my viewing I also noted that this approach, as demonstrated by the above quote from Simon, was selective. While the bar-room sequences were generally brighter, a close-up of the two-up tipper (a wooden paddle used to flip coins for a gambling game), which frames a single hand holding the wooden paddle against a black background, was almost indistinguishable across the two versions of the film. Here, common traits like these also develop a new meaning, wherein certain artistic and aesthetic decisions from an old medium like an analogue film, have managed to persist into the aesthetic palette of digital films. The restoration of a film is thus a process of conscious decision making, choosing what can and cannot be brought from the past into the present, and moreover, what needs to change to reflect contemporary and historical sensibilities and tastes.

Finally, I noted that *Wake in Fright's* (Kotcheff, 1971/2009) production being transnational in nature, has also influenced the content of the two different versions of the film. While the restored version of the print has sought out and repaired original audio from the Australian and UK release of the film, the surviving 35mm print takes its audio from the American version of the film. This results in a few very slight differences in dialogue between the two films. One of these involves a sequence in which a woman refers derogatorily to a pregnant dog as a “slag” in the UK and Australian version, while calling her a “slut” in the American version. This subtle moment of cultural translation of gendered insult further demonstrates the agenda of a digital restoration in presenting the film as an original Australian audience would have seen it, despite the fact that the surviving print was of the American version. Here, I argue that again the archaeological impulse and the old media distinction expand, as this analogue version is not only an historical artefact, it also becomes a geographical object, which offers insights into different comprehensions of different audiences of the past.

Thus, *Wake in Fright* (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009) and the National Film and Sound Archive's restoration of this film present as a

profoundly creative exercise – offering not only a new version of the film, but giving further depth, meaning, and understanding to the older, analogue version as well.

## 5 Conclusion: Access

It is clear then that the analogue celluloid print has only recently become an old medium. Its status as an analogue artefact is entirely constructed by the advent of digital film technologies against which it is redefined. However, this creation of an old and analogue category, ushers in a new media environment in which both film-versions, digital and analogue, can operate independently and in conversation. It is my contention, therefore, that digital does not explicitly pose a threat to analogue instead, and to the contrary, providing it with the theoretical and conceptual foundations to not only exist but also to persist. Understanding celluloid film as a partner or even counter to digital film, both of which exist as legitimate film-versions, allows us as scholars and audiences to gain deeper and fuller insights into the value of archival work as well as cultural life of a film text. By exploring the transformation from obscurity to rediscovery to a dual analogue and digital life of *Wake in Fright* I am able to chart the cultural resonance of the film over time.

However, there is a major caveat to this argument. That is, that at this time, I believe that I am the only person to have seen the two different versions back-to-back, with the exception of technicians and curators at the archive. While celluloid and analogue prints remain difficult and expensive to access as opposed to the much more readily available digital editions of these films, a hierarchy is ultimately formed. This hierarchy is based, however, on access rather than actual old media cannibalisation. However, even in the media environment of this access hierarchy, again, a distinction is drawn by way of the presentation of digital's ubiquitous and easily accessible status. In other words, the constructed rarity of the celluloid print creates a niche environment wherein it becomes desirable to see both the celluloid and digital versions of a given film, wherever possible. This is evidenced by the persistence of inde-

pendent and repertory cinemas in programming and screening 35mm original films around the world. As long as this process continues, scholarship and audiences will be able to pursue a comparative understanding of the value of these two film mediums. The ongoing relationship between digital and analogue, new and old media, thus invites both of these versions of film to persist and evolve into the present.

### Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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