

Archiving Change: Film Versions and Cultural Heritage at the National Film and Sound Archive

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January 2025

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian
National University

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Word Count 87,046

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Date 14/01/2025 _____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to first acknowledge and thank my panel of supervisors: Dr. Monique Rooney, Associate Professor Julieanne Lamond, Professor Laurajane Smith, and Dr. Gemma King. I also thank Dr. Katharina Bonzel who served on the panel during the first 18 months of the PhD. My panel's expertise and guidance has been invaluable throughout the course of researching and writing this thesis. In particular, the patience and care with which they supported my interdisciplinary approach has been vital and allowed me the space to produce original work and methods. I also acknowledge and thank Aimee Knight for her work copyediting my thesis in accordance with ANU's editing guidelines.

I thank Elena Guest and Gayle Lake for facilitating my relationship with the NFSA over the course of my PhD. To that end, I also thank my interview participants: Patrick O'Connor, James Campbell, Victoria Ramshaw, Belinda Hunt, Anthos Simon, Tony Buckley, David Elfick, and Meg Labrum. Without their participation, this thesis would not have been possible. I further thank Stephen Forrester, Jedd Bishop, and Nathan Smith for facilitating and arranging my screening sessions in the Arc Cinema.

I extend my thanks and love to my parents, Isabel Karpin and David Ellison. I am extraordinarily lucky and privileged to be the son of two academics who not only have a seemingly endless supply of compassion, but have also offered their intelligence, expertise and support in helping me to complete the thesis. I only hope they know how much I appreciate them and all that they've done for me. I also acknowledge and thank my sister Ondine Karpinellison, who, during one particular moment of despair, completely retrieved me from my panic, read through a draft and gave me a way forward.

I have many friends to thank, all of whom listened to me talk ad nauseam about deeply specific aspects of my research. They cared for me through moves, breakups and

countless PhD obstacles, and truly helped me so much. I want to pay special mention to Juliette Amies, Claire Cao, SORCHA Delahunty, Tomas McKeever-Ford, Milan Monk, James Newbold. Each of whom dedicated time out of their lives to care for me and look after me during the thesis.

From Sydney I want to thank Elijah Abraham, Tiarani Dixon, Sally Ghattas, Hal Hoskins-Fowkes, Emmanuel Jacob, Alex Jasprizza, Raima Rahman, Madelaine Reid, Shivani Sankaran and Michael Sun. From Melbourne, I extend special thanks to Samuel Harris, Eliza Janssen, Ivana Brehas, and Claire White – each of whom regularly checked in from afar and made efforts to see me despite the distance. From my PhD cohort in Canberra, I acknowledge and thank the support and friendship of Emily Catt, Scarlett Do, Seulgi Kim, Karma Kong, Dongkeun Lee, Weiting Lai, Hye-Jin Park, Emma Rayner, Irina Samsonova, Madeleine Tan, Karina Tucunan and Hannah Upton.

I want to acknowledge my newer Canberra friends, who have helped me to feel truly at home in this city and have extended incredible kindness and support in such a short space of time. From walking Kenzo (who I also thank for being a good dog), to keeping me sane to encouraging me to get over the finish line, I thank Hannah de Feyter, Andy Ryan, Hannah Lamond, Charlotte Smith, Tristan Sidgwick, Jane Stanley and Yolanda Yip.

I am fortunate enough to have made lasting friendships with research colleagues overseas throughout the PhD. I am so thankful for Andrew Burke, Lucy Szemetová and Dominique Trudel's generosity and support.

And lastly, I thank Ellen Scally for the time we spent together, which meant so much to me.

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the multiple versions of films held in the Australian National Film and Sound Archive are not simply practical or technical objects, but instead palimpsestic, process-laden records that hold the traces of a film's history and identity. The Australian National Film and Sound Archive's (NFSA) Strategic Direction document states, "The NFSA tells the national story by collecting, preserving and sharing audiovisual media, the cultural experience platforms of our time." This "national story" consists of over three million items, including multiple versions of films (what I term 'film versions') such as alternate formats, cuts and local and international releases. In its preservation and restoration practices, the NFSA necessarily prioritises some versions of a specific film over others.

Focusing on four films selected for restoration, in this thesis, I argue that comparing multiple versions of a single film—a process I call 'versional analysis'—is an important and overdue exercise. This approach not only recuperates the opaque, selective process in deciding which versions of a film the Archive chooses to use for a restoration but also analyses the commercial, political and institutional infrastructure that contribute to a version's continuing existence. It offers an enriched understanding of the film artefact (the chosen version) as never simply singular, but always tethered to its other iterations.

Moreover, I challenge the claim that the act of managing, preserving and restoring film versions can be reduced to a technical exercise. Instead, I show that these processes are necessarily generative. I argue that the changes made to the versions of films I analyse demonstrate the important role the NFSA plays in constructing and revising Australia's national film identity.

Through a case study of unrestored and restored versions of four films held at the NFSA—those being *Wake in Fright* (Ted Kotcheff, 1971), *Starstruck* (Gillian Armstrong,

1982), *Bliss* (Ray Lawrence, 1985) and *Proof* (Jocelyn Moorhouse, 1991)—this thesis critically explores how the Archive’s processes of restoration and preservation actively construct its telling of the “national story”.

These versions, when placed into context and compared with one another, become a lens through which to view the practice of the Archive and its staff. The insights I glean from comparing these versions reveal broader implications for how the institution navigates its relationship to heritage, Australianness and national film history. I argue that the NFSA, through initiatives like the NFSA Restores program, becomes a creator or producer of new film versions. I examine these versions not only in relation to the production of the newest and most recognised instances of classic Australian films, but also in terms of their materiality. These physical and digital objects bear important relationships to historical records at the NFSA and the nostalgia they provoke. Further, these versions furnish evidence of the intersections of commerce, political policy and national memory. In other words, versions are more than echoes or memories of a film’s past—they are explicit and specific instances of a film that locate it in a time and place and contribute to the dynamism of films as records of Australian history.

My approach is a new methodological contribution to the fields of screen and archive studies. Pairing close readings of the films in my case studies with interviews with NFSA personnel allows me to draw important conclusions about the creation of national film heritage. For example, I find staff at the NFSA defer to the filmmakers whose work they preserve, while effacing their own creative and generative input. My analysis, as parsed through my case study films, reveals the tension between the transnational and domestic status of a film over time (*Wake in Fright*); the influence of American filmmaking and commercial trends (*Starstruck*); how the restoration process becomes visible in the final product, and whether the recurring traits in restoration might be understood as forming a

distinct “restoration aesthetic” (*Bliss*); and the way that truth and authenticity become entangled with the indexicality and intangible heritage of analogue and digital media (*Proof*). Ultimately, my thesis demonstrates that the NFSA’s film restorations are palimpsests and arguments for how a particular version and vision of a given film should exist into the future.

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PREFACE

Seeing Versions

In 2022, I visited the National Film and Sound Archive's off-site vaults in Mitchell, Canberra (Ngunnawal lands). The experience was humbling. These vaults contain the vast majority of the Archive's nearly three million items, and are made up of several connected warehouses, each divided into hallways and rooms filled with film and sound artefacts. In each room, the floors and ceilings are made of perforated metal plates. The building's functional design creates the sensation of a seemingly infinite archive. Tilt your head up, and you see four more floors of rooms. Look down, and you see shelving going several storeys underground.

Certain rooms contain just black-and-white 35mm films. Others contain colour film or analogue hardware used for viewing prints. Each room requires a separate, artificially controlled climate. Everything in the collection has its place.

Ahead of the tour, I was warned that each room would have a distinct and not always pleasant smell. Some rooms smelled of leather and paper. Some smelled musty and old. Some were odourless, clean and sterile. But rooms that housed film smelled of acetic acid. I later learned that this phenomenon is termed 'vinegar syndrome.'¹ When strong this vinegar smell exists as a warning of imminent celluloid breakdown, which is common for film that has degraded beyond the point of recovery. But in the NFSA's vaults, vinegar syndrome has been forestalled. The smell is milder but serves as a reminder of the materials' fragility. In this case, preservation experts have intervened and slowed the decay.

¹ "Vinegar Syndrome | National Film and Sound Archive of Australia," accessed March 16, 2023, <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/preservation/preservation-glossary/vinegar-syndrome>.

The sheer size and scale of the NFSA's operation is overwhelming. The collection houses between three to four million items.² Staff work across multiple cities and workplaces to catalogue, control and accession these items in and out of the collection. This is an extraordinary labour, particularly in light of the fact that these items are not just static objects. Many are iconic Australian films, represented by multiple versions. For each film in the collection, multiple releases, restorations, alternate formats, and alternate cuts may be held. Each of these versions revises and remixes the material of its siblings, and NFSA staff are empowered to decide how those versions are seen, suppressed, accessed or changed over time. However, these processes are invisible to those outside the Archive. They are not hidden, but they are so normalised that the work is deemed routine and unworthy of examination. It is vital, then, to unpack why certain versions of Australian films are legitimised as definitive, while others are demoted to purely functional or historical records. As I bore witness to the scale of the NFSA, it became clear that the multiple versions of films held in this archive and others were not simply physical or technical objects, but, as I will show, palimpsestic, process-laden records that hold the traces of a film's history and identity.

² "Media Release: NFSA COLLECTION REACHES FOUR MILLION ITEMS IN 2022" accessed June 25, 2023, <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/about/corporate-information/media-release/nfsa-collection-reaches-four-million-items-2022>.

INTRODUCTION

The NFSA’s Strategic Direction document states, “The NFSA tells the national story by collecting, preserving and sharing audiovisual media, the cultural experience platforms of our time.”³

This “national story” as the vehicle for the cultural experience is represented by the collection I have described above. Millions of films, broken into multiple versions (which I term ‘film versions’), weave together a continuing narrative of Australian audiovisual heritage.⁴ In telling this story, it is important to understand that, through its preservation and restoration practices, the NFSA necessarily prioritises certain versions, and therefore histories, over others.

My Argument

Focusing on four films selected for restoration, in this thesis, I argue that comparing multiple versions of a single film—a process I call ‘versional analysis’—is an important and overdue exercise.⁵ This approach not only recuperates the opaque, selective process in deciding which version of a film the Archive chooses, but also analyses the commercial, political and institutional infrastructure that contribute to a version’s continuing existence. It offers an enriched understanding of the film artefact—that is, the chosen version—as never simply singular, but always tethered to its other iterations.

While versions exist in many forms inside the Archive, I have chosen to centre my discussion on the restored versions of films at the NFSA. This is because restored films are

³ National Film and Sound Archive. *NFSA Strategic Direction 2022-2025* Canberra, 2022

⁴ See [Page 33](#)

⁵ See [Page 33](#)

not only exemplars of how much can change between one version of a film and another, but also of the process of selection and elevation of one version over another. Moreover, these restorations are the result of lengthy collaborations between NFSA staff, filmmakers, rightsholders and contracted labourers. This process is technically and administratively complex—and, I argue, creative and generative. By examining the NFSA’s restorations, it is possible to register the impact of this versioning process. Through case studies of unrestored and restored versions of four Australian films held at the NFSA—*Wake in Fright* (Ted Kotcheff, 1971), *Starstruck* (Gillian Armstrong, 1982), *Bliss* (Ray Lawrence, 1985) and *Proof* (Jocelyn Moorhouse, 1991)—this thesis critically explores how the Archive’s processes of restoration and preservation actively construct its telling of the “national story”. Exploring these restorations reveals the hidden capacities of archivists and restorers to engage in interpretation, curation and shaping of our audiovisual heritage through the film version.

When placed into context and compared with one another, film versions become lenses through which to view the practices of the Archive and its staff. The insights I glean from comparing and analysing these versions reveal broader implications about how the institution navigates its relationship to Australianness and national film history. I argue that the NFSA, through initiatives like the Restores program, becomes not just a preserver but a creator and producer of new film versions. That the act of managing, preserving and restoring film versions should not be reduced to a merely technical exercise. Instead, I show that these processes are necessarily generative.

I examine these versions, not only in relation to the production of the newest and most recognised instances of classic Australian films, but also in terms of their materiality. These physical and digital objects bear important relationships to historical records and nostalgia at the NFSA. They are also evidence of the intersections of commerce, political policy and national memory. In other words, versions are more than echoes or memories of a film’s

past—they are explicit and specific instances of a film that locate it in a time and place and contribute to the dynamism of films as records of Australian history.

I pair my versional analysis, explained in detail in my methodology section, with original interviews with NFSA personnel.⁶ This allows me to draw important conclusions about the creation and management of national film heritage. I will show that NFSA staff routinely defer to the filmmakers whose work they restore, while effacing their own creative and generative input. My case studies reveals the tension between the transnational and domestic status of a film over time (*Wake in Fright*); the influence of American filmmaking and commercial trends (*Starstruck*); how the restoration process becomes visible in the final product, and whether the recurring traits in restoration might be understood as forming a distinct “restoration aesthetic” (*Bliss*); and even the way that truth and authenticity become entangled with the indexicality and intangible heritage of analogue and digital media (*Proof*). Ultimately, my thesis argues that the NFSA’s film restorations are palimpsests and arguments for how a particular version and vision of a given film should exist into the future.

Research Questions

As stated above, in this thesis I argue that comparing multiple versions of a single film is an important and overdue exercise. The new version of a film that restoration creates relies heavily on archivists’ work to contextualise and narrativise that film’s position among its many other extant versions. In this thesis, I argue that this contextualisation and narrativisation constitutes an argument for how the new version should be understood, an argument which began to form during the preservation of earlier versions of that film. This restored version is informed by, and constructed from, all past versions. At the same time, it

⁶ See [Page 58](#)

extends beyond that, gathering together existing versions so that it is, itself, a new production. Because the restoration requires the invocation of newness (a *new* release of an older film), and the careful management and inclusion of older archival objects (a film made using the best available original materials), this restoration is then open to public scrutiny and visibility through exhibition in film festivals and commercial distribution. Thus, as much as the NFSA is governed by an interest in preserving and sharing Australian cinema history, the Archive is also a site of production, navigating the release and circulation of new media. Thus, I argue the NFSA Restores Program not only manages but creates Australian film heritage and history.

To make this argument, my thesis asks two questions:

1. What are the implications of using versions of films to create restorations for the public?

The NFSA is a modern archive. It is actively involved in generating, manipulating and managing national film history. By engaging with the many different iterations and versions of individual films held in its collection, the NFSA creates new film versions and, in turn, builds new film heritage.

Different versions of films held inside the NFSA are used by archivists to navigate and negotiate culture and time, with the more recent restoration and digitisation projects being the clearest evidence of the generative nature of working with versions. This is because the Archive's digital restorations require, by definition, a change in format, adjusting the audiovisual content of a film before presenting it to an audience. While I argue that preservation and conservation as processes do involve a degree of change and intervention, those changes are subtle and difficult to identify. Restorations, however—despite being premised on a commitment to returning the films to a previous fidelity and experience—are

much more apparently changed. These changes are usefully visible and by undertaking a close reading comparing the versions in the chapters that follow I am able to explicate those changes. At the same time, I engaged with the staff responsible for these restorations allowing me to explore the extent to which these differences were acknowledged, dismissed or celebrated.

2. How do NFSA staff members, along with the restorationists, rightsholders and filmmakers they work with, understand and theorise their relationship to the preserved materials of the archive?

This second question aims to address the part of my research that claims the NFSA is a site of production. In this thesis, I interrogate the decisions made in the NFSA Restores program to arrive at one version of a film that is elevated as representative. I then consider the implications of these newly created versions, how the existing (previous) versions figure in their creation, and their role in the archive. For example, I consider the ways in which these “new” and “old” versions might be deployed to service and perpetuate the NFSA’s ongoing restoration and digitisation missions.

In answering the second question, this thesis shows that there are three primary ways in which the Archive is both constituted by, and constitutive of, the films it is obliged to preserve. Firstly, film versions chart and iterate a contemporary account of Australian film archiving. Secondly, these film versions contribute to and predict film archiving’s present and future. Thirdly, film versions are the live and dynamic audiovisual remains of the process of documenting and storing Australian film history.⁷

⁷ Andrew Burke, *Hinterland Remixed: Media, Memory, and the Canadian 1970s* (Montreal ; McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019), 174

My interdisciplinary approach to method is informed by the work of John T. Caldwell and Paul Eggert, Caldwell's book *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (2008) offers new methods and theories for understanding the way workers and staff within cultures of production theorise themselves and their labour. Caldwell's work specifically targets Hollywood film and television production. However, I have transferred and adapted many of his ideas to suit my provocation that restoration at the NFSA is a form of production.⁸ In the subsequent chapters, I will use the frameworks devised by Caldwell to identify and categorise different kinds of workers, and transpose them to apply to archivists, restorationists and staff at the NFSA.

Of particular value is Caldwell's interest in the deference and effacement of workers within Hollywood production cultures. This effacement manifests as a kind of institutional modesty that allows staff to work creatively, producing new versions of films in the collection, while paying deference to filmmakers, and observing their obligations to the Archive's commitment to integrity and impartiality. This notion becomes an important part of answering my research questions. Caldwell's influence on this thesis also extends to his discussion of self-theorisation, wherein workers within a production culture present a particular understanding of the way their work is theorised, along with the product of their work. I argue this concept of self-theorisation can be observed in staff and workers at the NFSA.

My thesis also draws on the work of Paul Eggert, by similarly analogising his arguments with my material. Eggert's book *The Work and the Reader in Literary Studies: Scholarly Editing and Book History* (2019) presents an assessment and appraisal of scholarly

⁸ John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, Console-Ing Passions: Television and Cultural Power (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

editions of books.⁹ Specifically, Eggert approaches the scholarly edition as a kind of argument or theory for how a book should be understood, contextualised and received. In this thesis, I will argue that the restored film version is a compelling substitute for the scholarly edition as per Eggert's analysis. This is what I aim to demonstrate when I claim that the restoration is an argument. A restoration exists as a result of decisions made using the accumulated knowledge, context and history from previous and contemporary versions of that same film.

Thus, my argument will draw from both Caldwell and Eggert's approaches to understanding workers and the product of their work. In the context of this thesis, these terms refer to archivists, staff, filmmakers and restored and unrestored film versions.

Background

The NFSA

In the year of this thesis' submission, two seemingly contradictory events will occur: 2024 marks the 40th birthday of the NFSA, while 2025 is the 90th birthday of the NFSA's collection. This somewhat confusing pair of milestones is the result of an institutional history that extends beyond the existence of the institution itself.

In 1935, the Australian federal government signalled an interest in collecting film by developing a small subsection of the Commonwealth National Library called the National Historical Film and Speaking Record Library. By 1940 this smaller library evolved into the Film Division of the Commonwealth National Library. It was established to begin collecting and sharing important Australian film works. By 1957, the National Library Inquiry

⁹ Paul Eggert, *Work and the Reader in Literary Studies: Scholarly Editing and Book History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108641012>.

Committee, chaired by Sir George Whitecross Paton, released a report that advocated for the National Library's subdivision into three separate institutions: the Parliamentary Library, the National Library, and what was termed the 'Australian Archives'. This report further recommended that the Film Division be absorbed into the new Australian Archives, rather than be retained as part of the National Library.¹⁰

However, the National Library, now a distinct entity, lobbied to keep the film collection and the Film Division. Importantly, though, the Film Division's focus on "distribution rather than [archiving]" meant that the Library prioritised lending films out, rather than practicing archival conservation and preservation. To this day, this legacy of a lending library versus film archive remains. In 2024, there is still a separate Non-Theatrical Lending Collection (NTLC), which is a holdover from prior decades and, until recently, was still managed by the National Library. It is now hosted by the NFSA but pertains to a different remit, allowing interested non-theatrical borrowers like "educational, cultural, social and religious institutions; community groups; churches; film societies; government bodies; hospitals; libraries; museums and galleries" to screen films for a nominal fee.¹¹

The film archive broadly exists as a result of advocacy for acknowledging film as a legitimate art form and a medium worthy of preservation—despite historical reluctance to do so—measured against the rapid deterioration of celluloid due to the medium's physical fragility.

The development of archiving practices for film in the United States, for example, contended with a market interest in the material value of the silver found in nitrate stock. Early film archives had to advocate for the cultural value of the images recorded onto the

¹⁰ *AFI Projections*, "The Film Archive Reports: Anatomy of A Crisis," Sep.-Nov., no. 1 (1983).

¹¹ NFSA, "Non-Theatrical Screening Loans | National Film and Sound Archive of Australia," n.d., <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/non-theatrical-screenings>.

stock, as opposed to the potential financial return of harvesting precious metals from that same stock.¹² The path to a state-run film archive in the US drew on the rhetoric of public film industry advocates, including the President of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) from 1922 to 1945 Will H. Hays. Hays, who developed the Motion picture Production Code (known informally, and infamously as the Hays Code) saw the economic potential in valorising historical images of the American way of life. He envisioned an opportunity to cement the film industry's status as a "good citizen" that could work in tandem with the government to promote a capitalist culture of production and consumption.¹³

In ' *The Past is a Moving Picture* (2012), Janna Jones argues that much of the early 20th-century American preoccupation with archiving is tied to efforts to control and sell an image of growth, prosperity and patriotism. Jones also singles out a 1915 editorial urging the preservation of footage from World War I so that future generations could bear visual witness to American military heroism. Scholars including Jones, Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz have argued that much like the medium of film's complex relationship with consumerism and art, the development of film archives is inextricably tied to a consistent activism and lobbying that regards film objects as worthy of preservation. This history thus conveys the extent to which the concept of film archives is a commitment to staking the value of preserving film.¹⁴

Advocacy for a separate, distinct film archive in Australia managed to gain traction throughout the 1970s when Ray Edmondson, a librarian with a deep passion for film, began

¹² Janna Jones, *Past Is a Moving Picture: Preserving the Twentieth Century on Film*. (University Press of Florida, 2014), 26.

¹³ Jones, 28.

¹⁴ Jones, 19; Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 206–209

to argue for, then lead, a separate unit of staff under the banner of the Film Division but still within the National Library. Edmondson took it upon himself to learn about international archiving processes, and throughout the 1970s, he spent time visiting state-run film archives in Europe and the United States. Upon returning to Australia, Edmondson began to publish reports and amplify his view that a separate, autonomous organisation was needed to manage the safekeeping and archiving of film works.¹⁵

In his 2009 *Metro Magazine* article ‘The National Film and Sound Archive at Twenty-Five’, Edmondson explains that the Film Division, while serving an important purpose, was mismanaged. He writes:

Internally, the Film Division was seen as a ‘backwater’ and outside the mainstream of library work. My report’s recommendation, while not welcomed by the library hierarchy, did no more than articulate a long-standing perception.¹⁶

Edmondson was both involved in and documented consistent, substantial lobbying efforts towards the establishment of a dedicated Australian film archive that could take some of the burden off the National Library. For a time, this subdivision of the Library became The National Film Archive. It was still conjoined to the Library but had a committee and oversight to work towards further building a collection of Australian film heritage.

Working within this National Film Archive, Edmondson also spearheaded a project called ‘The Last Film Search’ in 1982. Under the banner of slogans like “Nitrate Won’t Wait!” Edmondson and his colleagues began an advertising campaign that encouraged the public to come forward with any nitrate films in their personal possession, as these films

¹⁵ AFI Projections, “The Film Archive Reports: Anatomy of A Crisis”; Ray Edmondson, “The National Film and Sound Archive at Twenty-Five,” *Metro Magazine*, no. 162 (2009): 142–47.

¹⁶ Edmondson, “The National Film and Sound Archive at Twenty-Five,” 143.

would not survive without proper care and preservation.¹⁷ The Last Film Search dramatically boosted and supported the public perception and profile of the National Film Archive. This ultimately led to the Government supporting the opening of a dedicated audiovisual archival institution.¹⁸

The NFSA, in its current institutional form, was officially opened on October 3rd, 1984, by prime minister Bob Hawke. The opening of the NFSA as a standalone agency facilitated the consolidation of national film preservation and collection efforts that had been shared between other cultural institutions for the better part of the 20th century.

The NFSA's origin being attached to the success of The Last Film Search provides important contextual information for my thesis. The ethos of the NFSA has, due to this founding project, always been associated with saving objects that would otherwise be lost. This is a particular and important dimension of the sentiment, morality and philosophy that drives film archival practice. The film archive is thus presented as an institution that works to remedy the loss and death of audiovisual history by virtue of building an historically and materially robust collection.

In the years following the NFSA's official establishment, the institution continued to puzzle over its remit and focus. In 1999, the organisation voted to change its name to ScreenSound Australia on the basis that the term 'film' was too constraining, given that the Archive collected television, video and digital files. However, confusion over the change led to another gentle rebranding the following year, when ScreenSound Australia lengthened its name to ScreenSound Australia, National Screen and Sound Archive. Ultimately, in 2004, the

¹⁷ Edmondson, "The National Film and Sound Archive at Twenty-Five."

¹⁸ Ray Edmondson, "THE LAST FILM SEARCH "Last Film Search | National Film and Sound Archive of Australia," accessed November , <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/preservation/preservation-glossary/last-film-search>.

name was changed back to the National Film and Sound Archive.¹⁹ These name changes demonstrate that the NFSA's remit over time was widening to capture the breadth of existing and emergent audiovisual material. Furthermore, what is now collected is impacted by technological change and requires constant redefinition at the institution's top levels. This has led to uncertainty about the future direction of the NFSA and contributes to institutional anxiety around the creative and generative work that takes place within the organisation.

The NFSA's constant redefinition reflects its varied agendas and output. It is anchored to saving objects from permanent loss, and to the development of programs like NFSA Restores. I will demonstrate later in this chapter the various ways in which the Restores program engages complicated ideas of cultural memory, heritage and the contested past, while offering a future-oriented role for that heritage object.

Definitions & Concepts

Before describing the methodology, I deploy to undertake my versional analysis, it is necessary to first provide an account of the modern film archive, and the relationship between the archive as a concept and the NFSA. I will then provide a deeper explanation of my own term 'film versions', with relevant theory and context. Finally, I will engage with the complex theoretical tradition of film restoration, along with scholarly discourse on the ways in which film restoration engages with archives and film versions they produce and hold.

Archives, Creativity and the NFSA

Institutional film archiving is typically viewed as a practice that aims to preserve films for future generations and provides an historical record of the national film industry. This

¹⁹ "Launch of the NFSA Annex and New Name | National Film and Sound Archive of Australia," <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/asset/99058-launch-nfsa-annex-and-new-name>.

characterisation is drawn from a broader conception of archives, one that views their primary function as the collection, storage, preservation and dissemination of relevant documents and objects. In the introduction to her book *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation* (2011), Caroline Frick writes:

Contemporary cultural theorists largely approach and critique archives as sites of power that employ a perceived, naïve belief in adherence to objectivity, despite transparent absences and gaps amid collections... [This] stems from the traditional understanding of archives as repositories for the material produced or generated through the course of business by organizations such as a government entity, a corporation, or an individual.²⁰

Despite critiques of this “traditional” perception of archival objectivity and impartiality, as provided by scholars like Frick, these approaches remain key theoretical drivers of scholarly and governmental discourse on archives in 2024.²¹ Of particular relevance is the common conception that archives neutrally store notionally important objects and documents for later use. As far back as the 1970s, the platonic ideal of the archive was essentially a glorified storage unit. In J.L. Burke and C.M. Shergold’s essay ‘What Are Archives?’, written for the journal *Archives and Manuscripts* in 1976, the authors accuse the public of having a very limited understanding of what constitutes an archive. They write:

One might expect that if one asked the proverbial man in the street, ‘What are archives?’, he would mutter in reply something about old papers and attics. Further questioning may result in a blank look or may even bring the retort of ‘Why not burn the stuff?’²²

²⁰ Caroline Frick, *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 12.

²¹ Jan Baetens, “Exploring Past Images in a Digital Age: Reinventing the Archive,” *Leonardo* 57, no. 2 (April 1, 2024): 235–36, https://doi.org/10.1162/leon_r_02507.

²² J.L. Burke and C.M. Shergold, “What Are Archives?,” *Archives & Manuscripts*, February 1, 1976, 235–40.

The phrase ‘Why not burn the stuff?’ is a reference to T.R. Schellenberg’s 1956 book *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*. Schellenberg similarly despairs that the layperson’s attempt to understand the definition or meaning of archives would be an exercise in pure frustration.²³ These authors’ collective critique of the failures among regular citizens to understand the rich, complex role that archives play leads them ultimately to simplified and streamlined definitions, which help build this “traditional” understanding identified by Frick. For instance, Burke and Shergold write, “The end of all archival effort is to preserve valuable records and to make them available for use. Everything an archivist does is concentrated on this dual objective.”²⁴

While archives, including film archives like the NFSA, have inarguably developed and expanded their role and function since the publication of Burke and Shergold’s piece in the 1970s, the dual objective they describe appears to remain a key tenet of archival practice. It can be seen in the mission statements, policies and foundational documents of both state-based and other international official film archives. In those documents, archives often present themselves as repositories of national and cultural records. They are arbiters of audiovisual heritage, constantly attempting to balance their objective of collection and preservation with their obligations to provide access. For example, the British Film Institute’s 2024 BFI National Archive collections policy outlines their approach to protecting and sharing items in their collection:

The purpose of collections care and conservation is to protect items and works from deterioration, damage and loss through passive and active management measures, to preserve their integrity and to ensure that they remain available for use indefinitely.²⁵

²³ T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, Ill.: The Society of American Archivists, 1956), 1.

²⁴ Burke and Shergold, “What Are Archives?,” 239.

²⁵ British Film Institute, “BFI National Archives Collections Policy,” Policy Document (United Kingdom: British Film Institute, May 2024), 25, <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/34903/download>.

Similarly, in the USA, the National Film Preservation Board, in conjunction with the Library of Congress, devised the National Film Preservation Plan: An Implementation Strategy. First published in 1995, it remains the version in use today and describes an archiving imperative to service the two aims of preservation and access. It reads:

For all those who love film, the unquestionable duty becomes ensuring that surviving—and future—films will not suffer [the] tragic fate [of being lost] and will forever remain a living part of the American Memory, secure for the public’s education and enjoyment.²⁶

The NFSA’s own Collection Policy 2022 document echoes this sentiment, outlining the Archive’s three vital functions:

- > **Collect** audiovisual works and associated documentation that reflect all aspects of Australian experience and our diverse communities
- > **Preserve** the Collection in accordance with best international standards and working within our resources, to ensure permanent access
- > **Share** the Collection so its stores form an ongoing part of the evolution of our culture.²⁷

These official statements from major film archives demonstrate that while, in some cases, there has been substantial reimagining and development of their remit, technologies and additional imperatives, the fundamental purpose of each is still to collect, preserve and share. In the case of the Library of Congress, even the preservation plan—a core document—is still anchored to the past. These foundational concepts yoke the understanding of archives to a

²⁶ “National Film Preservation Plan: An Implementation Strategy | Preservation Research | National Film Preservation Board | Programs | Library of Congress,” web page, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, accessed May 30, 2024, <https://www.loc.gov/programs/national-film-preservation-board/preservation-research/implementation-strategy/>.

²⁷ National Film and Sound Archive, “NFSA Collection Policy 2022,”

more traditional concept of a place where material is stored in a setting that should continue to exist into the future. This engages the other part of contemporary archive critique that Frick introduces: the extent to which archives lay claim to a scientific or technical objectivity and impartiality.

Archival theorist Luciana Duranti's approach to the archive represents a more traditional, restrictive view that implores archives to maintain a non-interventionist approach to archival practice. Other scholars, particularly more contemporary historians like Elizabeth Yale and Carolyn Steedman, remain sceptical of the supposed value of this approach. Duranti suggests that the archive is an institution driven by a mandate of perpetual growth, continually and uncritically collecting important documents and artefacts. She asks rhetorically:

Wouldn't the archival profession betray its primary responsibility if it did not attempt to preserve the societal archives in its integrity, with its characteristics intact, and to do so impartially (i.e., without favoring any users' group or category) and as objectively as humanly possible (i.e., without being consciously guided by its own interests, biases, idiosyncrasies, and culture)? This author believes it would.²⁸

Archivists are, therefore, according to Duranti, discouraged from imposing their selves and identities upon the act of collection, which should be carried out as an intellectually neutral exercise.

By contrast, scholars such as Elizabeth Yale have a different understanding of the function of archives and archivists. Yale describes the archive as a politicised, time-travelling and history-controlling organisation. For Yale, it is necessary to read against assumptions that

²⁸ Luciana Duranti, "The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory," *The American Archivist* 57, no. 2 (April 1, 1994): 343, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.57.2.pu548273j5j1p816>.

the archive functions as a solely objective project—one wherein documents speak for themselves and provide an unfettered account of the past. She writes:

In order to read [archives] accurately, we need to be alert to the formal language, protocols, and customs of their creators... as well as the ways in which those writing (or represented in) documents used those documents to achieve specific ends.²⁹

For Yale, all aspects of the archive are live and imbued with the decisions, morals and personalities of those who use them. Moreover, her advocacy for an attentive reading of archival practice gestures to the inextricable relationship between the work of an archivist and the products of that archive. This understanding of the archivist's role is key to my argument that the NFSA's archival practice is, in fact, generative. The work the NFSA creates is a means through which to understand ideas of history and heritage, as conferred upon the institution by its staff.

Similarly, in Carolyn Steedman's analysis of the archival reader, the archivist and the historian work out of phase with each other. The archivist organises the material that an historian can then observe and study, declaring what is and is not history. Yet the historian comes upon the archived material as if it is not curated. "If you are a historian," writes Steedman, "you nearly always read something that was not intended for your eyes: you are the reader impossible-to-be-imagined."³⁰

This is an especially important observation about not just the capacity for an archive to have unintended readers, but for the disconnection between the scholar who engages with the archive and the way the archive conceives of itself. Despite modern scholarship demonstrating the ways in which concepts like archival integrity and impartiality are at odds

²⁹ Elizabeth Yale, "The History of Archives: The State of the Discipline," *Book History* 18, no. 1 (2015): 340, <https://doi.org/10.1353/bh.2015.0007>.

³⁰ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, Encounters (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 91.

with the actual and active impact of archiving, these notions of objectivity continue to be invoked by scholars referencing these institutions. Media archivist and scholar Randall C. Jimerson explains this tension in his book *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability and Social Justice* (2009). He argues:

Scholars have challenged positivist assumptions about objective, neutral, and impartial archives providing unimpeachable evidence of the past. The archive has become a focal point for analysis and contestation, not simply a hallowed shrine of Truth. Yet, most scholars still discuss “the archive” as though such repositories somehow operate as disembodied institutions, with no human intervention or control.³¹

Archives Power presents a less traditional approach to archival practice and neutrality by arguing that there is a simultaneous effort to expand and enrich the understanding of what an archive is, while also servicing an older ethical framework that needs to promote the idea that archives are not being corrupted by individual and institutional inputs and interventions.

In Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995)—now a foundational text for the study of archives—the author challenges the assumed passivity of the archive by ascribing to it a kind of creativity and power. The archive is, for Derrida, dynamic and live. The tangle of its component parts gives it power to instruct on and shape history. He writes, “In an archive, there should not be any absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity or secret which could separate, or partition, in an absolute manner.”³²

What Derrida describes as the “archontic principle” recognises the intent and choice in collecting and choosing what becomes the archive. Derrida’s challenge to an inert and

³¹ Randall C. Jimerson, *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice* (Chicago, Ill.: Society of American Archivists, 2009), 48.

³² Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression, Religion and Postmodernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3.

technical concept of the archive serves to demonstrate how much power can be derived from the act of choosing which documents and artefacts represent history.³³ This is a crucial challenge to the norms of archival understanding, and it has significant implications for the way I invoke film archives throughout my research. However, the institution at the heart of this research—the NFSA—maintains an obligation to a technical and objective approach to archival practice.

As I have evidenced above, while the concept of the archive has been continually reimagined, cultural and collections policies still frame ideal archival practice as necessarily removed from interests and biases. In the NFSA’s aforementioned Collection Policy 2022, this is stated explicitly: “Our curatorial approach values professionalism, accountability, impartiality, collegiality and the ethical, effective and efficient use of resources.”³⁴

The NFSA’s status as a signatory to the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAPF), an organisation established in 1938 with the aim of sharing international film archiving practices across the world, complicates their position with respect to their commitment to impartiality and ethical use of resources. While the FIAPF echoes these ideas, it also confers upon its signatories an obligation to conduct their primary business cognisant of the film archive’s changing technological and moral functions. The FIAPF’s Digital Statement explains:

While archives are the caretakers of the past, they also shape the future. As our analogue materials migrate into the digital realm, it becomes increasingly likely that these digital versions are the only ones that future generations will know. It is our

³³ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Religion and Postmodernism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 10.

³⁴ NFSA, “NFSA Collection Policy 2022.”

responsibility to not only preserve the “content” of a film but also to preserve its nature.³⁵

This exemplifies the necessity for conceptual and technological agility in contemporary film archiving. It also signifies an acknowledgement of the Derridean treatment of archives, which reckons with their power to “shape the future.”³⁶ Even so, despite this recognition of archival power, the FIAF’s statement is moored to a position that fears the loss of an authentic experience of the past—one that could be infringed upon or risked by the interference and intervention of modern and future archivists. This further demonstrates the competing interests of modernising the archive while retaining some of its core technical function, just enough to continue to justify the three main aims of collection, preservation and distribution.

Thus, while the NFSA can be read and understood as receptive to the current cultural moment, which challenges the “positivist assumptions” Jimerson describes, it has also negotiated a baseline institutional commitment to an older idea of what archives are, and which boundaries they cannot transgress.

The result is a kind of intentional epistemological ambiguity wherein the NFSA is able to explore modern and radical reimaginings of the archive, while maintaining a sufficiency of ethical and technical labour that serves to protect them from accusations of intervention or interference in documents of the past. This dual conception of the archive creates an institutional modesty that allows its staff to exercise their autonomy and artistry in creating and modifying new versions of films in the collection, while always being presented as figures who are deferential to the entire organisation’s commitment to values of integrity and impartiality. This functional instability, which the NFSA has nurtured, is most clearly evident in its restoration initiative.

³⁵ Robert Byrne et al., “The Digital Statement Part III - Image Restoration, Manipulation, Treatment, and Ethics,” accessed June 17, 2024, <https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/E-Resources/Digital-Statement-part-III.html>.

³⁶ Byrne et al.

In the chapters that follow, I will demonstrate how the multiple versions of films restored by the NFSA hold key academic value for understanding and processing the competing aspects of archival practice at the NFSA, and how they affect other important concepts like heritage, Australianness and Australian film history. First, however, it is necessary to define my concept of film versions.

Film versions

I define ‘film versions’ as versions of a film that exist independently and yet are still understood as part of a singular filmic work. In other words, while multiple versions of a given film are distinct and legitimate objects, they are all understood through one categorising film title. For example, the film *Bliss* (1985) is represented by several different versions in the NFSA’s collection.

ID	Title	Version	Duration	Format	Usage
1525626	BLISS	[LONG VERSION]	2:10:00	Digital	Access/Browsing Copy
1525626	BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	Preservation Material
1525626	BLISS	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2015]	1:50:00	Digital	Access/Browsing Copy

While bearing differences like duration, colour and format, each version is still recognised under the title *Bliss*. The title functions as an organising referent, ensuring that viewers of different versions of *Bliss* can identify them as iterations of the same film, despite their variations. In this thesis, I narrow my analysis of the ‘film version’ to the restored version and its relationship to the original archival versions. But the film version is a currency

that operates across a number of domains, and its importance as a conceptual apparatus can be seen by briefly exploring how it operates across several different fields of film analysis. Firstly, in the area of copyright.

Claudy Op den Kamp's book *The Greatest Films Never Seen: The Film Archive and the Copyright Smokescreen* (2018) considers the how the film version can be used to enhance financial rewards by multiplying the film objects over which a rightsholder has control. In the second chapter, Op den Kamp examines the obstacles that copyright presents to public accessibility. She also describes how colourisation of black-and-white films created new versions and, with them, new copyright hurdles:

In 1988...[the Library of Congress] determined that the addition of a minimum of three colours to a black-and-white film was all that was needed to legally copyright the new version as a separate work.³⁷

For Op den Kamp, this is a crucial demonstration of the way copyright was deliberately leveraged by interested parties to create versions that continue to profit from intellectual property rights, despite the fact that other versions of the film have entered the public domain.

Ramon Lobato engages with the film version in the context of distribution, too, when he explores the ways in which film exhibition shapes the film version. Lobato describes how film versions can signal information about the distribution and exhibition history of a certain film. His book *Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Film Distribution* (2012) presents a study of unconventional and non-traditional networks that migrate films around the world. In his first chapter, 'Distribution from Above and Below', he writes:

³⁷ Claudy Op den Kamp and Project Muse, *The Greatest Films Never Seen: The Film Archive and the Copyright Smokescreen*, 2020, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/66446/>.

The act of distribution also materially shapes the text itself, adding another layer of meaning to the viewing experience... Textual subtractions and additions are particularly noticeable in informal distribution circuits, and above all in pirate circuits. Low-quality DVD burning often results in freezing and pixelation, the digital equivalent of static. Timecodes and logos appear, revealing the original source of the pirate version.³⁸

Here, Lobato refers to the ways in which pirated films and bootleg DVDs create a viewing experience that is entangled with the knowledge that the given version is not the official version of that film. I will return to this idea in the Conclusion to this thesis when I look at another Australian film that was not part of the Restores program but took on a versional life of its own when it was bootlegged and uploaded to YouTube.³⁹

The work of both Op den Kamp and Lobato shows the importance of film versions as entities that shape and recreate our understanding of a film. These versions offer important interventions in the way we think about the archival artefact, and I will consider this in my thesis via the case studies that follow. But these elements—the copyrighted version, the internationally distributed version, the pirated version and more—are examples of entities that form context—political, financial and cultural—for the film version that I focus on: the restoration. The restoration is what typically becomes the official version for the NFSA.

The majority of scholarly work that makes explicit reference to ‘versions’ is preoccupied with different language versions of films. For example, Christine York’s chapter “‘Versions, Revisions and Adaptations’: Film Production in Two Languages at the National

³⁸ Lobato, Ramon. 2012. *Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Film Distribution*. With British Film Institute and British Film Institute. Palgrave Macmillan. 18

³⁹ See [Page 254](#)

Film Board', from the collection *Cinephemera*, considers the problem of negotiating French and English-language films in Canada. York describes various experimental approaches to intervening in the form and content of a given English or French-language film in order to translate it for a new audience. Writing on the inclusion of new French narration in the short film *Underwater Round-up* (1949), York notes that new artistic choices were made, such as changing the narration, in translation, to rhyme, and that "a key statistic has been omitted". York interprets the extent of these changes and reflects on the complexity and uniqueness of the challenge of offering the film to a new, French-speaking audience. "The French narration reinterprets the images as raw material," she writes, "like the visuals of the wartime compilation films—and recontextualizes the film as a new product for Quebec audiences."⁴⁰

For my concept of the film version, I acknowledge the value of these examinations of translatory changes made to recontextualise and reinterpret films for different language groups. In many ways, they echo the decisions made in restoration to update the film for a contemporary audience with different sensibilities and cultural knowledge.

In her 1988 article 'Hollywood Babel: The Multiple Language Version', Ginette Vincendeau writes about multiple language versions, which she terms 'MLVs', offering specific terminology for distinguishing between new films and different versions:

Remakes as we know them now tend to copy an older text, appealing to the cinematic memory of the spectator. The relationship between the two versions (e.g., of *Scarface*, *A Star is Born*, *Breathless*) is diachronic, in MLVs it is synchronic.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Christine York, "'Versions, Revisions and Adaptations' Film Production in Two Languages at the National Film Board," in *Cinephemera : Archives, Ephemeral Cinema, and New Screen Histories in Canada*, ed. Zoë Druick and Gerda Cammaer (Montreal, CANADA: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/anu/detail.action?docID=3332831>.

⁴¹ Ginette Vincendeau, "Hollywood Babel: The Multiple Language Version," *Screen* 29, no. 2 (March 1, 1988): 27, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/29.2.24>.

Vincendeau uses the terms ‘synchronic’ and ‘diachronic’ to draw a key distinction between versions and new films. Synchronic literally means multiple objects or ideas existing simultaneously and being received and recognised as the same broad object. Diachronic refers to objects and ideas that change over time, and might be recognised as connected, but are fundamentally different to one another. While useful for discussing different translations and language versions of films, these terms are insufficient when transposed to my discussion of the film version. While MLVs have to exist at the same time as one another, film versions held in the archive are often explicitly created in, or anchored to, a different moment in time. For example, the very concept of the restoration is about creating a meeting point between the present and the past, where a damaged and degraded film object is “restored” so that it may represent an historical experience of that film. In this restoration example, both versions are still bound to the same film title, but they exist at different moments in time.

However, Vincendeau’s interest in distinguishing the versions she describes from other terms like “remakes” is something my research shares. This is because the idea of a version does have substantial currency outside of academia in the film industry, where it is known by such names as the ‘reboot’, ‘remake’ or ‘director’s cut’. This language undeniably markets and celebrates the industrial practice of versioning original film texts to create something new. While reboots and remakes engage ideas of adaptation, remix and parody, they are distinct from the versions I focus on. My research considers the film version, which includes versions that claim to be, for all intents and purposes, the same as any original or older version of that film, just restored, repaired or upgraded.

Paolo Cherchi Usai’s book *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory and the Digital Dark Age* (2019) engages the most directly with the concept of film versions

that I use in this thesis and therefore I draw on his work extensively.⁴² Usai is a curator at the Cineteca del Friuli, and he is a former CEO (then called a Director) of the NFSA. His book is written in the context of his practice-based knowledge, and it deconstructs and presents principles of film preservation and restoration at the beginning of a major cultural and technological turn towards digital filmmaking and archiving. The book concludes with a ‘Reader’s Report’ presented as a counter to the arguments and ideas put by Usai throughout the book. The inclusion of the report in the final published version of the text is already a radical choice that immediately tests the integrity, clarity and strength of Usai’s argument. David Sorfa speculates that the titular reader of the report “might possibly be a fictional construct of Cherchi-Usai himself...”⁴³ In this report, the question of film versions and their legitimacy is directly addressed as a potentially frivolous misuse of archival resources. The ‘Reader’ writes:

If a certain American film survives in a single copy found in the Netherlands, and has Dutch intertitles, it is needless to say a good plan is to restore it as is, lest we otherwise be unable to see it at all. But if that same film is already fully preserved in its American release version, and still another copy of it survives with titles in a different language but much shorter in length, I fail to see the rationale of restoring it once again.⁴⁴

Here the reader acknowledges the danger in opening the archive to the endless possibility of film versions. The more versions deemed legitimate, individual film objects, the more will fall into the archive’s remit of collection, preservation and access. Because of the realities of

⁴² Paolo Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory and the Digital Dark Age*, 1st ed. (Bloomsbury Publishing (UK), 2001), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781838710125>.

⁴³ David Sorfa, “Why Bother with Cinema?, On Paolo Cherchi-Usai *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory and the Digital Dark Age*,” *Film-Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.3366/film.2003.0009>.

⁴⁴ Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 119.

limited resourcing—a condition with which Usai understands all too well from his various executive roles within film archives—there is a risk that misallocating resources to treat each version as legitimate and worthy of preservation will come at the expense of saving other films. As the Reader puts it in the report, “[W]hile some festival advertises the premiere of a new version of *The Absolute Masterpiece*®, thousands of nitrate reels agonise on their shelves.”⁴⁵

For the Reader, the film version risks overwhelming the exercise of creating moving image history by providing competing objectives towards the preservation of infinitely subdivided film objects. The film version could create a pluralistic paralysis, in which the sheer number of versions available makes it impossible to treat any film object or collection as complete. Indeed, the Reader writes:

As often happens when a valid principle is applied too literally, the notion that each print is an original with its own historical identity can be an excuse for an unjustifiable expenditure of time, money and energy.⁴⁶

This idea of versions, and their problematic relationship to uniqueness, is an extremely important foundation for my research and my creation of the term ‘film version’. However, while Usai’s position is compelling, I will argue that the film version does not represent an endless recalibration of authenticity, nor does each film version represent an entrant in the competition for most legitimate or original. In this way, my concept of the film version and my analysis of these versions, does not advocate for resourcing required to examine and re-appraise every single iteration of every single film in the collection. Instead, I argue that ‘film version’ is as much a descriptor of an object as it is a language, tool or framework for

⁴⁵ Usai, 120.

⁴⁶ Usai, 119.

understanding the history, context and archiving of a given film. More specifically, I do not suggest that each version of a given film *must* exist and be treated with care and dignity. Rather, I argue it is essential to analyse and compare the versions that do exist, and how they came to be the versions preserved.

In Chapter 01, I juxtapose the original, unrestored, previously lost iteration of *Wake in Fright* (1971) with the digitally restored version undertaken by the NFSA in 2008. While both of these are film versions, the film that categorises them is singularly *Wake in Fright*. Though the 2017 miniseries adaptation of *Wake in Fright*, directed by Kriv Stenders, is a version of the story—at least from an industrial and intellectual property perspective—it is not a version of the film, and is therefore excluded from my parameters for the scholarly definition of a film version inside an archive.

My research centres on the versions that exist despite insistence they be collapsed into a broader, singular film. The goal of this research is, in part, to bring greater visibility to the film version hiding in the archive, which is otherwise dismissed and reduced to a technical existence. Revealing these versions provides insight into decision-making at the NFSA. Having established the definitions and theoretical relationships that the concepts of film archives and film versions bring to bear on my research, I now turn to the final terminological component I need to address: restoration.

Defining Restoration at the NFSA

The practice of restoration in film archives occupies a complex and, at times, contradictory position in relation to other activities such as preservation, conservation and exhibition. In this section, I will define ‘restoration’ in terms of film versions, exploring how Archive staff—including restorationists, contracted labourers, and archivists—conceptualise the practice.

The concept of restoration has proved highly flexible, and adaptable throughout the ten years of the NFSA Restores program. As this thesis considers the restoration of *Wake in Fright* that predates NFSA Restores, it will be necessary to track how definitions of ‘restoration’ evolved prior to the program’s inception.

NFSA Restores is the Archive’s flagship digital restoration initiative. At the time of this thesis’ submission, the program has just entered its tenth year and has produced over thirty new restorations. On the NFSA website, the NFSA Restores page details the Archive’s understanding of the purpose and concept of restoration:

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.⁴⁷

It is clear from this statement that the NFSA views itself as participating in a film archive community that shares “the highest archival standards” for what constitutes the best form of restoration. Those standards are likely identified through their membership in the FIAF (referred to above) and other associations, such as the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA) and the International Federation of Television Archives (IFTA).

In addition, the statement’s reference to “classic and cult Australian films” recognises the role restoration plays in canonising specific films. Restoration should, it seems, be used to enrich films deemed important to Australian film history, however that metric is determined.

Preservation is also referenced in this statement of purpose, signalling the future value these restorations will serve beyond short-term theatrical exhibition. Including preservation alongside digitisation suggests that the NFSA views restored films as serving a long-term

⁴⁷ “NFSA Restores,” National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, October 28, 2016, <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/about/our-mission/nfsa-restores>.

purpose, and as permanent additions to the collection available to be viewed and used by future generations.

Finally, the NFSA has attached the act of digitisation to the concept of modern restoration. This carries with it a separate set of implications that will be explored through my case studies in the following chapters. It is sufficient to note here that the NFSA's argument for digital restoration is that digital versions are more readily available for exhibition by cultural institutions. Indeed, such institutions can make these "classic and cult" films newly available for modern audiences in modern cinema settings.

In sum, it is clear that the NFSA draws on standards of restoration articulated by international associations. It then uses these to justify the use of new digitising technologies to treat and repair film objects, recontextualising and modernising them so that they can be exhibited, viewed and used into the future.

Distinguishing preservation and conservation from restoration

Despite valiant attempts by organisations such as FIAF and the NFSA to delineate between preservation, conservation and restoration, the lines are inevitably blurred. On the FIAF website's Glossary of Technical Terms, restoration is defined as "the process of compensating for loss, damage and degradation by returning a work of art, an image or artefact to close to its [sic] original content". The key words here are "compensating" and "return". Both terms highlight the explicit and unique aim of restoration to revive a previous experience of a film through chemical or digital treatments. These specific elements are distinctly absent from the FIAF's definitions of conservation ("the processes necessary to ensure the physical survival of the film with minimum degradation") and preservation ("the practices necessary to ensure permanent accessibility to the image content of a film").⁴⁸

⁴⁸ "FIAF Glossary of Technical Terms" (International Federation of Film Archives), accessed June 17, 2023, <https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/E-Resources/Technical-Terms.html>.

Conservation targets degradation as a potential threat to a film's longevity and survival as a material artefact, whereas preservation aims to maintain a film in a state that ensures its usability and viewability in the future. It is therefore possible for restoration to encompass both conservation and preservation. By removing degradation and damage, restoration enacts conservation processes, and by creating a new version of the film for present and future generations, it also works to preserve the film. The reverse, however, is not the case. When a film is accessioned into the NFSA, the necessary processes of conservation and preservation occur regardless of intent to restore.⁴⁹ However, once a film is selected for restoration, the existing efforts in conservation and preservation become part of that film's restoration history.

Restoration as a practice is often challenged for its inadequate management of subjective bias and personal, artistic intervention.⁵⁰ Preservation and conservation, on the other hand, are seen as essential technical labours of film archiving that exert a neutral effect. However, if the three processes are connected, as I have argued, then this dichotomy of technical and creative labour becomes more complicated. As Janna Jones writes:

Most of an archive's labor and its budget are expended in the supervision and protection of its materials. The amassing, sorting, cataloguing, and caring for collections can be likened to the efforts required to keep a domicile in order; it goes largely unnoticed by anyone other than the people attending to it.⁵¹

Jones' account of unnoticed, technical labour as archival norm offers context to the way in which film archives are predominantly preoccupied with the uncontroversial, scientific task

⁴⁹ James Campbell, Interview with James Campbell- Conducted by Zach Karpinellison, Audio Recording, July 12, 2022.

⁵⁰ Sean Patrick Kilcoyne, "You Shouldn't Have Been That Sentimental: *Film Restoration Ethics in Hitchcock's Vertigo*," *Journal of Information Ethics* 19, no. 1 (April 1, 2010): 57–73, <https://doi.org/10.3172/JIE.19.1.57>.

⁵¹ Janna Jones, *Past Is a Moving Picture: Preserving the Twentieth Century on Film*. (Place of publication not identified: University Press of Florida, 2014), 137.

of collecting, preserving and sharing. In other words, preservation and conservation are fundamental, routine practices, they become almost invisible—part of the wallpaper.

Indeed, preservation and conservation at the NFSA are not regularly examined or publicised. They simply continue to function, performing a role that is understood to be important, but neither requiring nor meriting public visibility. While the NFSA is obliged by legislation to promote access to films and other objects in its collection, it is not obligated to promote or create media campaigns about its processes and preservation techniques.⁵² The NFSA is primarily focused on sharing the products of its labour, rather than the labour itself.

However, as Jones continues, she notes that this standard film archive behaviour is complicated and changed by the introduction of a restoration program. Restoration, according to Jones, requires engagement with the public because, for an audience to understand restoration, they need to recognise that it involves an effort to return an existing film to a previous state and exhibit it to a new audience.⁵³ If other archival work is deemed passive, then restoration is considered active. This is because, while film archival work focused on the preservation and maintenance of artefacts in the collection is recognised as technical and highly skilled labour, its relationship to the archive's public visibility is perfunctory and notional. Restoration, on the other hand, invites scrutiny and demands visibility. Jones continues:

Keeping their eyes on the moment of a film's premiere, restorationists also attend to a film's multiple histories: its theatrical release, its alterations and cuttings, its fall into obscurity, its neglect, as well as its previous imperfect restorations. Restoration not only resists singularity, it also privileges what is not known about a film's history and

⁵² *National Film and Sound Archive Act 2008* (Cth) s6

⁵³ International Federation of Film Archives, "RESTORATION," in *Glossary of Technical Terms* (Brussels, Belgium: FIAF), FIAF, accessed March 31, 2024.

highlights the creative and imaginative work that is required to piece history together.⁵⁴

While it is true that restored versions of films are designed and created to be seen in a modern context, the distinction between an archive's restorations and other "efforts required to keep a domicile in order" is not so definite. In fact, I argue it is the modest and unassuming archival work undertaken at the NFSA that justifies decisions made about restorations and their production.

Again, the blurring of the lines between preservation, conservation and restoration is addressed by the FIAF. In their *Technical Commission Preservation Best Practice* document, they consider restoration in more detail:

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, such as the choice of version, soundtrack, titles etc. These decisions must be informed by as much knowledge of film production at the time of production as possible, and by historical information about the specific work.⁵⁵

What is apparent is that there are contradictory impulses inherent to restoration. As the document explains, restoration necessarily involves subjective input. People involved in restoration must make creative choices about how to present the film in a way that is recognisably restored. But there is also an expectation that restoration is informed by "as

⁵⁴ Jones, *Past Is a Moving Picture*, 2014, 138.

⁵⁵ Technical Commission FIAF, "Film Preservation," *FIAF 2009*, 2009, 2.

much knowledge of film production at the time of production as possible, and by historical information about the specific work”, which seems to require an objective expertise that can be brought to the act of restoration. Thus, the extent to which restoration is, as the FIAF admits, complicated is confirmed by the problem that restoration is an exercise in individual and institutional choice, creativity and decision-making, but justified by history and expertise. It is also important to note that there is a significant third lever that affects how restoration is conducted, and why: pragmatism.

In Eileen Bowser’s 1990 essay ‘Some Principles of Film Restoration’, she describes five different kinds of restoration. Of relevance to my research is the fourth type she describes, the version that “plays well”. In Bowser’s words, “a film that keeps in mind a modern audience and the different way we may see things”.⁵⁶ This is the kind that privileges modernisation and contemporary and future audiences. Bowser suggests that this type is primarily reserved for commercial restoration, but the focus on modern audiences reflects the approach of the public institution that is the NFSA.

The fact that NFSA Restores is a digital restoration initiative ensures a technological change that makes archived films viable and available to modern and future audiences. Citing silent film restoration methods that employ new or reissued soundtracks, Bowser argues that “...such versions are distortions of history, they probably should not be the work of film archives.”⁵⁷

If Bowser’s claim that such changes constitute distortion is accurate, this raises further questions as to why an archive like the NFSA would be willing to distort its records of history in service of the creation of restorations. This is the role of pragmatism. The NFSA

⁵⁶ Eileen Bowser, “Some Principles of Film Restoration,” *Griffithiana* 13, no. 38–39 (October 1990): 173.

⁵⁷ Bowser, “Some Principles of Film Restoration.”

Restores program marries the act of creating a restoration with that of screening a restoration. To that end, the NFSA must hold to the view that it is necessary to consider the audience for a given restoration, and to make sure that audience is as large as possible. In part, this is achieved through the process of digitisation, which makes NFSA Restores projects more accessible by virtue of adapting analogue materials to contemporary technological standards. As such, this practical and pragmatic need to cultivate an audience for the restorations also informs how the concept of restoration is understood.

However, it is important to place pressure on Bowser's suggestion that these changes constitute distortion. Arguably, all forms of film archiving, whether referred to as restoration, preservation or conservation, require change.

In his book *Scratches and Glitches: Observations on Preserving and Exhibiting Cinema in the Early 21st Century* (2021), Jurij Meden compares the ancient discovery of fermenting food with the act of film preservation. He writes:

Archaeological evidence testifies that humans have been deliberately fermenting their food since the Neolithic age... Aside from preservation, the metabolic process of fermentation...changes the texture and the taste of food, eventually making it objectively more digestible and nutritious... What this historic lesson teaches us is exceedingly simple. Analog film is dead organic matter. The timespan of dead organic matter is limited. It can naturally be extended only through change... Change, therefore, appears to be an operative word in relation to preservation, and yet remains the dreaded enemy of a film preservation and restoration culture...⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Jurij Meden, *Scratches and Glitches: Observations on Preserving and Exhibiting Cinema in the Early 21st Century* (Austrian Film Museum, 2021), 27.

Meden articulates that preservation necessarily requires change. This view of preservation more accurately reflects actual practice than Bowser's claims of "distortion". Preservation requires physical and material changes to the film artefact in order to extend its life. This interventionist kind of preservation takes two forms.

The first form involves efforts to interrupt the damage and decay that have already begun. For instance, removing mould or halting the celluloid breakdown that results in vinegar syndrome. While one could argue that these efforts aim to capture the film in stasis, maintaining it at a specific point in time, the reality is that these processes become part of the film's material life. Removing such decay insists on a particular version of the film, disconnecting it from its temporal life.

Secondly, and perhaps more convincingly, dynamic preservation includes instances where the film must be transferred from one carrier to another in order to extend its life. This process, such as digitising a film or creating a new "preservation print", radically changes the film's material existence, challenging how the film as an object is understood, presented and accessed.

Both of these forms of preservation require physical or digital changes to the material that is accepted into the archive. The NFSA's senior audiovisual conservator James Campbell says it is sometimes necessary to physically create new perforations on film that has had its perforations torn.⁵⁹ Likewise, when a film is sent through a digital scanner, it may be necessary to use digital tools to create false perforations, as they help the scanner delineate between frames, synchronise audio, and more.

⁵⁹ Interview with James Campbell

This approach to preservation has substantial implications. Each attempt to capture and preserve a version of a film at the NFSA is an active and substantial act of change. Despite this, the focus of preservation and, to a lesser extent, restoration remains centred on minimal intervention and change to return to an original instance of the film. As Meden notes, “Change, therefore, appears to be an operative word in relation to preservation, and yet remains the dreaded enemy of a film restoration and preservation culture.”⁶⁰

The NFSA’s discomfort with the concept of preservation and restoration being deeply entangled with change is evident in the Collection Policy 2022. The Archive divides its practice into what it labels “active” and “passive” preservation. These two forms are cleaved along similar lines to the modes of intervention described above. More specifically, active preservation is concerned with the creation or migrating of film to new formats and carriers as a means of preservation, while passive preservation seeks to treat objects without having to move them to new formats. Both kinds of preservation, as per the policy, are wary of change and intervention:

Active preservation aims to produce new copies that are authentic, complete, of equivalent quality to the original item and reflect as much as possible the author’s intention at the time of its production.⁶¹

This kind of language announcing the NFSA’s sincere efforts to bring its objects as close “as possible” to an historical experience is common throughout its documentation.

On the other hand, “Passive preservation aims to maximise the longevity of original materials through non-invasive conservation treatments (for example, cleaning),” the Policy

⁶⁰ Meden, *Scratches and Glitches*, 27.

⁶¹ NFSA, “NFSA Collection Policy 2022.”

states. But again, despite the use of terms like “non-invasive”, the processes of cleaning and repair bring fundamental changes that prolong a film’s shelf life.

The language in this cultural policy insists upon certain thresholds of intervention. This contributes to an institutional modesty, similar to what Caldwell refers to as effacement and deference.⁶² This modesty overshadows the creative and artistic input of archivists, and instead sees them paying deference to principles and protocols of the institution. To that end, the principles become more central and memorable than the processes themselves. Preservationists are working under the assumption that they should, wherever possible, obscure and erase evidence of their interventions. In other words: their interventions should appear to be as “non-invasive” “as possible” in order to ensure claims to the film version’s legitimacy and purity.

The institutional modesty and dismissal recalibrates the way the archive is received by scholars, governments, filmmakers and the public, which in turn protects the institution and its staff from accusations of bias and influence. As I have argued, film versions both preserved and restored always require a degree of change. However, these changes need not be hidden or downplayed.

My research advocates for these acts of change to be explicated and made visible across preservation and restoration because they are a normal part of archival practice. These changes allow scholars to perceive and understand the institutional and individual impact on these films, which makes analysis richer and more meaningful.

⁶² John Thornton Caldwell, “Introduction,” in *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Duke University Press, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388968>.

Digitisation

Preservation and restoration are also implicated in the evolving discourse on digitisation, which this thesis will explore in detail. However, it is important to note that digitisation only adds further complexity to policies that strive to ensure stability and objectivity in archival practice. Digital technology brings entirely new epistemological and material changes to the way film is preserved, restored and shared. Digitising celluloid film is an act of change.

Digital film technology has often been burdened with the characterisation of being an existential threat to analogue film, but this ignores the way that digital and analogue technologies are not opposed but exist on a continuum . Consider that, prior to the mainstream adoption of digital preservation and restoration techniques, Michael Friend, in his 1995 essay ‘Film/Digital/Film’, calls preservation “a misnomer. There is no such thing,” he writes “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.”⁶³ He notes that true preservation of a film—whether by digital or photochemical methods—requires an uncoupling from the analogue medium and its innately fleeting quality. To sustain film into the present means, in some way or another, erasing the decay that is so unique and specific to celluloid. Friend continues, “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.”⁶⁴

For Friend, the mere stoppage of celluloid’s decay constitutes a failure to preserve it. This is an extreme interpretation of preservation’s function, but it is important to register because this accusation that film’s indexical and material quality as ephemeral is interrupted

⁶³ Michael Friend, “Film / Digital / Film,” *Journal of Film Preservation* 24, no. 50 (March 1995): 36.

⁶⁴ Friend, 38.

by the preservation process exists independently of any specific technology. In other words, both digital and analogue preservation methods will inevitably be considered by certain archivists and scholars as acts that categorically and irrevocably change the substance and content of the film they are attempting to preserve. Digitisation, as a new kind of preservation, while certainly adding further dimensions and complexities to the act, does not, therefore, challenge the uniqueness or legitimacy of a celluloid film object any more than analogue and chemical preservation methods.

I have thus far demonstrated that the term ‘restoration’ is fraught, and closely linked to other terms like preservation and conservation. Nonetheless, it is useful to further consider some of the specifics of film restoration. Marie Frappat’s essay ‘Histoire(s) de la restauration des films’ (2016) offers an appraisal of film restoration, as well as an account of its history.⁶⁵ Frappat notes that the term ‘restoration’ in relation to film was “rarely used” before the 1980s. When the term did finally emerge to describe an archival practice, it went beyond the simple repairing of damaged film stocks. She writes:

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.⁶⁶

Here, and throughout Frappat’s piece, there is a clear resistance to defining restoration as any one specific film-related activity. Instead, Frappat goes on to find other terms that could, under the right circumstances, be viewed as synonymous: “reconstituting” and “re-working”,

⁶⁵ Marie Frappat, “Histoire(s) de La Restauration Des Films.,” trans. On File with Author, *Journal of Film Preservation*, 2016, 1805513509; F2016. 1223816, Arts Premium Collection.

⁶⁶ Frappat, 43–44.

for example.⁶⁷ Frappat frames the exercise of restoration as unstable, but crucially distinct from repair and preservation. To restore a film, whether by use of photochemical or digital processes, requires some form of intervention to make something new that still communicates its history. Frappat continues:

If the term “restoration” seems to have become an empty shell today by dint of covering so many diverse and even contradictory realities, it nevertheless retains an advantage...: that of underlining that the so-called “restored” films we are dealing with, are not the original films, they have undergone a mutation in their material. In short, they are recycled, and they have come to take account of this fact.⁶⁸

Frappat captures the central tension of film restoration: that, while premised on a backward-looking exercise in returning a film to an experience of the past, the extensive interventions required invoke newness in a way that cannot be dismissed. A restoration must both reflect the past and demonstrate its adaptation to the present and future.

Art historian Max J. Friedländer explains the complexities of restoration in his book *On Art and Connoisseurship* from 1927.⁶⁹ Friedländer refers to art restoration, but his principal conclusions are transferrable to the film medium and remain relevant today:

The business of the restorer is the most thankless one imaginable. At best one sees and knows nothing of him. If, out of his own invention, he has provided something good he has got mixed up with the dubious company of the forgers; and with the despised one of the destroyers of art if what he has done is bad. His accomplishment remains out of sight, his deficiency leaps to the eye. Judgment regarding the

⁶⁷ Frappat, 44–45.

⁶⁸ Frappat, 47.

⁶⁹ Max J. Friedlander, *On Art and Connoisseurship* (Lowrie Press, 2008).

performance of the restorers is even more unreliable than that regarding works of art.⁷⁰

Friedländer's point is a salient one for film restoration. The restored film must be recognisably different, bearing the manifest evidence of the work of the restorer. However, both the restored version of the film and the unrestored version must be understood as functionally the same, even identical. Herein lies the paradox of restoration.

In this thesis, I argue that this paradox is, in fact, a key feature of restored film versions. To create a restoration is to successfully marry the past and the future, creating an object that is new, yet yoked to the past. To that end, restorations are dynamic, they signal a film's history, and present important ideas and interventions via the reimagining and re-presenting of that same film title. This argument is perhaps best clarified by German film historian and preservation scholar Enno Patalas:

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.⁷¹

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.

This assertion complicates both Friend's position and the notionally limitless capacities of digital restoration technology.

⁷⁰ Max J. Friedlander, *On Art and Connoisseurship* 1927 (Lowrie Press, 2008), 204.

⁷¹ Enno Patalas, "On 'Wild' Film Restoration, or Running a Minor Cinematheque*," *Journal of Film Preservation*, no. 56 (June 1998): 38.

While Friend argues that the original meaning and character of a film's negative and celluloid cannot be fully preserved during restoration, digital technologies claim to capture extraordinary amounts of this material. However, the open-ended nature of restoration, as highlighted by Patalas, calls both of these positions into question. Friend's rigidity in regards to preservation should be challenged, insofar as technologies have and are improving and iterating in order to retrieve vast and complex amounts of information from a negative. However, the claim that all material can be retrieved is too complex and open-ended to be true. Even if it were possible to retrieve all possible information, image and sound via the restoration process, the final product would still be a new film version. This is because that restoration carries the imprint of all those archivists, restorationists and others who worked on constructing and refining that film version. The tension and paradox at the centre of restoration, I argue, is soothed by the reality that the work of staff who interact with the film becomes detectible in the film itself.

Giovanna Fossati's *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of a Film in Transition* proposes frameworks for examining different approaches to preservation and restoration. These frameworks demonstrate the ability of staff to influence and contribute to the creation of a restored film version. The objective of each framework is to capture the core focus that motivates and fuels efforts towards preservation and restoration. I will explore these frameworks in more detail throughout the thesis. Of key value is that these frameworks describe the extent to which the motivations and processes of restorationists and archivists bleed into the work of the restoration itself.⁷²

The work of film restoration is, by nature, a display of process as much as final product. This means the ultimate product of a film restoration contains evidence of all the

⁷² Giovanna Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel the Archival Life of Film in Transition*, Framing Film (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048510696>.

work, systems and intervention it received. Moreover, these restorations function as lenses through which to investigate the traces of previous versions—vestiges that remain faintly available on the surface and texture of updated versions of a given film restoration.

As Patalas has argued, referencing the work of Giorgio Bertellini, one method of understanding and reading a restored version of a film is to recognise it as a palimpsest of all the versions that came before it. Writing specifically about the restoration history and heritage of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), Bertellini argues:

Within an analysis of the historiographic heuristics of film restoration, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* has resulted in an emblematic text. The dissemination of its different prints and the chronicle of its different critical receptions has shown that the only text to be restored by film studies is not simply a virginal nitrate edition, but rather a 'history of effects'. In this sense, *Metropolis*' 'genealogy' is the history of a palimpsest, where different spectators have scratched their discursive effusions or their violent rejections. At issue, there is no stable heritage to preserve.⁷³

This concept of the 'history of effects' is extremely useful when considered as a device or tool for tracing the cultural memory of a given restored film artefact. In the case of restored film versions at the NFSA, or indeed any film archive, rather than treating the most recent, modern version of the film as a stable and representative iteration, instead we must recognise that the film bears the weight, excisions, changes and adjustments made in the restoration process. The restored film version holds the evidence of restorationists' work on that version, as well as all the versions that came before it.

⁷³ Giorgio Bertellini, "Restoration, Genealogy and Palimpsests. On Some Historiographical Questions," *Film History* 7, no. 3 (1995): 287; Patalas, "On 'Wild' Film Restoration, or Running a Minor Cinematheque*."

Instead of treating restoration as an anachronistic exercise that forces parts of the past to participate in the aesthetic and technological innovations of the present, the actual function and purpose of this kind of restoration might be better described as museal. The restoration is like an exhibited artefact, paired with several materials that direct the viewer to the object's histories and context.

Borrowing Bertellini and Patalas' language, the restored film is a palimpsest, not superseding, supplanting or overwriting its predecessors, but instead functioning as an accumulated whole, one that is still open to revision and addition. The restored film version becomes a dynamic record of all the versions before it. Indeed, the restoration contains not only the revivals, endorsements and distortions of multiple versions of a selected film, but also the traces of the work and processes that went into constructing that restoration.

In sum, restoration is a term that is both fraught and continually evolving. And the newer concept of digital restoration prompts other specific issues about the way material in archives is preserved and remediated for new audiences. Digital restoration will be considered more closely in subsequent chapters. For the purposes of this thesis, I define restoration—the NFSA's restoration efforts in particular—as the act of creating a new film version, prompted by an imperative to return a film to previous idealised state.,. This new version is created in conjunction with processes of preservation and conservation. It is a version designed to be capable of being viewed and re-examined in a modern setting. Moreover, the processes, inputs and ideas of restorationists and archivists become part of the restored film version itself. Similarly, all previous versions also become a part of the restored film.

I now turn to my methodology, which puts these definitions and theories into practice and context.

Methodology

The core contribution to scholarship that my thesis endeavours to make is a new, flexible theoretical and methodological frame for understanding and analysing different film versions of a singular film, within an archival collection – a versional analysis. I do this by drawing on theories and principles from multiple disciplines, working across screen, media, museum and archive studies. I also conducted original empirical and theoretical research towards my versional analysis. I have divided my methodology into two parts. :

1. A comparative analysis of the films, their versions, and the processes (political, economic and cultural) that create them, and
2. Interviews with NSFA Staff and key stakeholders or rightsholders such as film directors, editors and producers.

Part 1: A Comparative Analysis

I. Selecting the films

With the NFSA's cooperation, I selected five films from their collection. Each film, except for *Petersen* (Tim Burstall, 1974) was part of a digital restoration produced by the NFSA. The NFSA held multiple versions of each film and agreed to allow me to select examples from those versions for viewing in the Arc Cinema space one after the other. Because of the scarcity of time and resources available to both myself and the NFSA staff, these screenings were limited to back-to-back sessions of two versions of each film.

I asked the NFSA to facilitate the viewing of the two versions of the following five films: *Wake in Fright* (Ted Kotcheff, 1971), *Petersen* (Tim Burstall, 1974), *Starstruck* (Gillian Armstrong, 1982), *Bliss* (Ray Lawrence, 1985) and *Proof* (Jocelyn Moorhouse, 1991). The films I chose for this thesis span a pivotal and dynamic period in Australian

cinema history, from the 1970s to the 1990s. This era was shaped by changes in film funding systems, shifting priorities between domestic and international markets, and tensions between art and commerce. Below, in section IV. “The Films” I set out in detail the significance of each film chosen and why they offer a particularly valuable insight into Archival practices and the use of versions. Before turning to that discussion however, it is necessary to set out three other components of my versional analysis methodology.

For all but one of these screenings, I selected both an unrestored version and a restored version. There was one exception that I will discuss in my Conclusion that does not form part of my case studies. This choice of restored and unrestored versions was designed to showcase what had been changed to create each restoration, and how that has influenced the understanding of each film . This is also because of the more pronounced visibility of changes available through comparing unrestored and restored versions. This comparative component of my versional analysis was conducted on-site at the NFSA’s Arc Cinema in Acton, ACT. These five sessions, each spent viewing two versions, formed one branch of the methodology I designed for this thesis: the study of versions.

II Versional analysis: more than a comparative reading

One of the key exercises of versional analysis is conducting back-to-back comparative viewings. Equally important is the research and contextual analysis that informs those viewings. Each film version must be understood within its specific contextual realities, including its materiality, public relations narratives around preservation and loss, reception history, financing, archival status within the NFSA’s collection, and the infrastructure shaping the conditions of its future consumption. For restorations, this analysis required continual engagement with the NFSA’s systems and policies, as well as granular reviews of ongoing international debates in restoration, such as the selection of source versions and the

politics and ethics of digitisation.⁷⁴ Similarly, for older versions—such as international, domestic, and theatrical releases—it was necessary to chart their production histories, framing them in terms of originality, authenticity, canonicity, and the cultural dimensions of nostalgia and memory. I argue that the versioning process evidences the constant revision of audiovisual heritage and history in Australia. Consequently, versional analysis extends beyond comparative reading to encompass institutions, governance, politics, commerce and artistry as integral to understanding how film versions are chosen, created and managed within the NFSA’s collection.

III. Viewing the film versions

As noted above the greatest influences on the selection of films for this research were the limitations and restrictions of both my PhD and the NFSA’s resources. To that end, the following description of my negotiations with the NFSA is important to recount, because it gave me insights into the NFSA’s engagement with its clientele as well as researchers who intend to use the institution to locate artefacts and knowledge. These industrial processes of the NFSA form a part of the viewing experiences of these versions, and therefore form a part of the versions themselves. Analysing these processes is, as I have argued above, just as important as conducting my close readings. The staff I liaised with, and the projectionists who exhibited the films for me, are also contributing to the construction and experience of these restored and unrestored versions.

To select and organise the screenings of these films, I corresponded with Elena Guest, a senior curator at the NFSA, who would become my main contact at the Archive throughout my thesis research and writing. Guest agreed that five was a feasible number of films for the Archive to prepare. Through negotiation, we determined that two

⁷⁴ Byrne et al., “The Digital Statement Part III - Image Restoration, Manipulation, Treatment, and Ethics.”

versions of each film would satisfy the comparative exercise I was going to undertake and be manageable for the NFSA to organise for individual screening sessions. This was important, because I was able to use a regular free slot in the schedule of the operation of Arc Cinema, located at the NFSA's Canberra campus, to conduct these screenings, which equated to roughly the length of two feature films back-to-back. I needed to identify visual, aural and content differences between the versions, and this was going to be possible through what was negotiated between myself and the NFSA. It was also explained to me that I would not be charged licensing fees—these would be waived by the archive—but the labour costs of the projectionist would need to be covered by my funding.

This dimension of organising the versional analysis comparative screenings was unique to my research design. I was viewing versions that were often divided across both analogue and digital film media. For these screenings, I required specialised staff who could operate a celluloid projector and digital projector in sequence. While the NFSA does operate a publicly accessible cinema, it is governed by more rules and regulations than typical commercial theatres. For example, projectionists are paid as casual or contracted labour, but as public servants with specialised skillsets who are then awarded additional penalties and bonuses as per the requirements of working outside of work hours. Thus, the industrial processes of projection and archiving form part of the experience of watching these versions and, therefore, impact my analyses. The labour of the projectionist is also enacted onto the versions themselves and, given their specificity, is an important component of my comparison.

These films, and their film versions, then ultimately became the basis for my case study chapters on *Wake in Fright*, *Starstruck*, *Bliss* and *Proof*. My viewing of *Petersen* is considered in the Conclusion.

IV. The films in context

Most of the films chosen for discussion in this thesis are part of the NFSA Restores program or its precursor, the Kodak/Atlab program, with the exception of *Wake in Fright*, which was the NFSA's first digital restoration and falls outside these initiatives. Each film is tied to a distinct restoration process narrative. Themes of loss, memory, nostalgia, nationalism and authenticity are not only embedded in the industrial and cultural contexts of these films, but also resonate with their thematic content, offering insights into the NFSA's values and priorities.

Australian cinema is a complex and multifaceted national film industry and culture. It receives both the benefit of state regulation and funding and continued commercial investment and exploitation. In Tom O'Regan's *Australian National Cinema* (1996), the author describes Australian cinema as a "messy affair", explaining that:

[Australian] film policy... translated [radio policy] into a commercial audiovisual industry dependent on content regulation in television, script development and production investment from state agencies, and a wholly (or almost wholly) publicly supported film culture sector dependent on subsidy and investment. This established a higher budgeted 'mainstream' and a lower budgeted 'minor stream' and all the relations in between.⁷⁵

In this way, it is reductive to simply describe Australia as having an entirely State-funded film industry, but it is the case that the government has been involved in film culture from its inception. Many significant moments and developments in Australian film history can be anchored to governmental changes to policy, the creation of new state-based film financing

⁷⁵ Tom O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema*, Book, Whole (London;New York; Routledge, 1996), 13, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203978078>.

bodies, new cultural and arts agendas, and attempts to use the audiovisual industry to stimulate Australia's economy.

The first film I analyse, *Wake in Fright*, comes from 1971. This is the starting point for my case studies because it captures a moment of tension and upheaval in Australian cinema history. The preceding decade saw a decline in the success and profit of Australian cinema—a hangover effect of economic downturn after the boom that followed the Second World War. This led to an urgent attempt to revive a struggling Australian film industry and, as such, required governmental intervention.

In 1969, prime minister John Gorton was lobbied by a new subcommittee formed under the direction of the Australian Council for the Arts. This committee published the 'Interim Report of the [Film] Committee' and recommended the establishment of both a film and television school and an "experimental and exhibiting fund", both of which were given a wide scope to encourage new developments of the film industry. Gorton pledged to implement these changes, and his government allocated \$300,000 (adjusted for inflation, this is roughly equivalent to \$4.25 million today). As he notes in this statement to the press, the government's agreement to support the industry was, in effect, a kind of acquiescence, relenting to pleas and advocacy that had been ongoing throughout the 1950s and 1960s:

The Government is particularly pleased to be able to provide support for Australian film makers. It is aware of the representations which have been made over many decades for such assistance, and in the 1970's, where film and television will play such a major role in the mass communications of an electronic age, it is proper that

Australian talents and skills should be developed so that the voice of this country may be heard, and its image known abroad.⁷⁶

These recommendations, among other suggestions, chiefly concerned the creation of funds and policies that would actively promote a culture of filmmaking and appreciation within Australia. Tom O'Regan argues that the activism that led to government support was founded on a passion for the legitimisation of film as a medium:

The agitation for a film industry in the 1960s was an agitation for the attention of governments to film: for governments precisely to recognize film as a legitimate art form and a vehicle of popular socialization and the registering of social problems.⁷⁷

The communicative and artistic potential of film and television were key metrics used by advocates to explain why a film industry was not only a significant and important part of a cultural landscape, but a fundamental requirement for participating in global modernity in the second half of the 20th century.⁷⁸ This then laid the groundwork for further investment in the 1970s, including the Whitlam government's establishment of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) and the Australian Film Commission (AFC) in 1975. The AFC is of particular relevance to the NFSA, as the latter absorbed the Commission in the early 2000s. However, the AFC's original function was as a funding body to finance and promote new Australian film works and create infrastructure for further governmental investment in the Australian film industry.

⁷⁶ John Gorton, "RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS FOR 1969/1970 STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. JOHN GORTON," <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-2145>.

⁷⁷ O'Regan, 23

⁷⁸ Albert. Moran and Tom. O'Regan, *An Australian Film Reader*, Australian Screen. (Sydney: Currency Press, 1985), 170–80.

These two new bodies, as well as the momentum produced by the preceding decade of film advocacy, led to the ultimate recognition of the period spanning the early 1970s to the mid-1980s as the Australian New Wave in film. What is particularly important about the films produced during this period is that many were considered the first Australian ‘art films’.⁷⁹ Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka acknowledge that this brand of Australian art-film was defined by the ways it would reject the traditional economic model by seeking older audiences in less lucrative settings like film festivals, with a particular interest in successfully migrating to international markets.⁸⁰

From the early 1970s to the establishment of the AFC in 1975, interest in internationalised Australian films and coproductions increased substantially.⁸¹ A frightening film about a British foreigner who becomes stuck in a purgatorial rural town, *Wake in Fright* is a prime example: a transnational film made with finances and workers from Canada, Britain and Australia. For many years, it was also deemed lost until it was finally recovered by its editor Anthony (Tony) Buckley, in collaboration with the NFSA, in 2004. Both this narrative of loss, and its complex transnational production, contributed to my choosing *Wake in Fright* for discussion in this thesis. It thematically and industrially reflects the international influence on the construction of Australian national culture and heritage, which is of relevant concern to the NFSA.

Starstruck, the second of my case studies, released in 1982 a decade later than *Wake in Fright*, follows singer Jackie and her aspirations to become the next big pop star. It was the first musical ever filmed in Sydney. The previous decade’s experiments with promoting

⁷⁹ Films in this category include *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir, 1975), *Dogs in Space* (Richard Lowenstein, 1986) and *My Brilliant Career* (Gillian Armstrong, 1979) among many others.

⁸⁰ Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema* (Currency Press, 1988), 187.

⁸¹ O’Regan, *Australian National Cinema*, 11,67.

Australian films to an international market influenced this film's exhibition and distribution. Director Gillian Armstrong and producer David Elfick elected to sell the film's international distribution rights to American company Cinecom Pictures. This company then exercised their influence, negotiating and collaborating with Armstrong and Elfick to shorten the film for overseas audiences. This change remained important to the way the film was experienced over four decades later when, in 2014, the NFSA elected to use the shorter, American version of the film for restoration. The different competing geographical interests of *Starstruck*, and its distribution and production across multiple versions, prompted my inclusion of the film in this thesis.

By 1985, the year of release for *Bliss* (the third in my group of case studies) —a surreal film about an advertising executive's near-death experience, adapted from Peter Carey's novel of the same name—the focus on art, social issues and communication as the primary motivators for Australian filmmaking had shifted. The introduction of the 10BA tax incentive in June 1981 which offered significant tax deductions for private investment in film production, created a dynamic where the industry was, for the first time, driven by commercial interests seeking government financing, rather than government interests attracting commercial investment.⁸² Thus, *Bliss* enters at a complex moment of transition, as the Australian film industry's priorities are split between the commercial gain of selling films overseas and the desire to maintain a state-funded industry that supports cultural and artistic development domestically. *Bliss* has multiple versions, including variations made following a controversial debut at the Cannes Film Festival. The NFSA's negotiation of, and decision regarding, which version(s) of the film to restore is why it is included in my thesis.

⁸² Dermody and Jacka, *The Screening of Australia*, 187.

Jocelyn Moorhouse's 1991 film *Proof* is made two decades after *Wake in Fright* and is the last in my series of four case studies. The film follows Martin, a blind photographer who struggles with a deep sense of distrust stemming from his inability to verify others' honesty. It was selected because it sits at the outer edge of the range of years included in the NFSA's restoration initiatives. As of this writing, the NFSA has not restored any films released after 1998 and, according to Gayle Lake, the Archive's former chief curator, there are no plans to extend restoration efforts to films produced beyond the year 2000.⁸³ The reason offered for this decision is that such titles do not merit an urgent effort to digitise them before they begin to decay. The system of triaging at the NFSA, as this thesis will discuss, is complicated, but the rate of degradation is among the highest of determinants for what is and is not preserved, digitised and restored, along with the order in which these treatments are conducted.

Proof has substantial thematic overlap with the act of digital restoration at the NFSA, as the film is about the diminishing returns of seeking authenticity without capacity to validate or verify. It also exemplifies a restored version wherein the greatest change made is the simple act of its digitisation, and the way this technological change, as opposed to content change, has substantial implications for the way its material is depicted.

Finally, in my Conclusion I briefly examine *Petersen*, Tim Burstall's 1974 film about an electrician and rugby player who pursues an arts degree and becomes sexually obsessed with several women at his university. The film represents a distinct moment in the Australian canon, positioned after *Wake in Fright*'s Gothic exploration of rural life, but well before *Starstruck*, the eccentric musical of the early 1980s. merging during a period of intense proliferation in Australian filmmaking, *Petersen* is a lower-budget production that aligns

⁸³ Interview with Gayle Lake & Zach Karpinellison

more closely with the exploitation genre, marked by heightened sexual content, violence, and abrupt tonal shifts between comedy, drama and art film. It is not included as part of my formal case studies as it was not subject to an NFSA restoration. Indeed, while I did formally view two versions held by the NFSA (the Kodak Atlab access print, and a television broadcast version), it is the afterlife of the film outside the Archive that has made it an interesting object of analysis. As noted in my Introduction bootlegged and pirated versions of films are part of the vernacular of the film version and therefore, I offer it at the end of my thesis as an insight into alternate versional systems.

Each of these films, and their multiple versions, have also been selected because they do more than chart parts of Australian film history. Together they contribute to a picture of the NFSA's history. Only by conducting a versional analysis of the processes that created each of these film versions, is it possible to discover the ways in which audiovisual heritage has been tailored and constructed by the NFSA over the past two decades.

V. Viewing and comparing systemic analysis

My sessions at the NFSA took place over many months throughout 2022 and 2023. The NFSA was very cooperative with organising these sessions, which were complex to arrange because celluloid films require additional time and notice to be collected from the NFSA's storage vaults in Mitchell, and then prepared for safe viewing. It was necessary that I be flexible in the management of the timing of these sessions. Sometimes it was not possible to watch the films in the same order across each screening setting (digital restoration or unrestored print first) as that would have required extra time and labour at the end of the session in order to safely manage and use the prints. However, as a result of the inconsistency in the order of screening these versions, I designed a note-taking system flexible enough to record differences between the versions in any order they were presented.

I devised a table to document changes between the different versions. For each version I watched, I would take notes in both tables, tracking a change from one version to another. I used four categories for noting differences between the versions: visual, aural, content and other. As I have alluded to above, I was specifically comparing aspects of each of these categories, seeking to identify changes that would demonstrate patterns or preferences among those working on these versions. The approach had to be flexible and additive because, as I viewed more of these films, more patterns would emerge.

From the outset, changes in colour, lighting and grain were a major area of consideration. These were what the NFSA and other restoration bodies indicated as most in need of change in order to negate the effects of time on celluloid.⁸⁴ In each of the five films I viewed, there was an immediate and noticeable visual difference between versions. The NFSA attributes these changes to the results or effects of using digital restoration tools to “fix” damage caused by aging. I noted all of these visual differences, because these changes can be controversial in restoration discourse. While revisions are supposed to be premised on a photochemical science, competing memories, and nostalgia make that science murky and difficult to apply objectively.⁸⁵ Moreover, acknowledging that individuals working on these restorations would make decisions about the films' visuals provided an opportunity to observe the creativity and artistry involved in shaping these versions.

Similarly, sound was an important category for further investigation, as it can be subject to radical changes that modify the original audio design in order to meet modern digital standards. In some cases, remastering and remixing the audio meant a complete

⁸⁴ Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel the Archival Life of Film in Transition*; David Walsh, “The Restoration Threshold, or When to Apply Grain Reduction,” *Journal of Film Preservation*, no. 88 (April 2013): 21–29.

⁸⁵ Bingham Bryant, “Seeing Eye to Eye: Color Correction Styles Across Today’s Film Restorations | Filmmaker Magazine,” *Filmmaker Magazine | Publication with a Focus on Independent Film, Offering Articles, Links, and Resources*. (blog), December 15, 2022, <https://filmmakermagazine.com/117844-color-correction-styles-film-restorations/>.

overhaul that could, in comparison to the visual changes, be considered more interventionist.⁸⁶ Thus, I considered these sound changes closely, as they represented a different, more acceptable form of interference than that which occurred in the visual dimension of restoration and versioning.

Finally, the ‘content’ and ‘other’ categories were designed to capture the most brazen and complex ways that restoration at the NFSA required substantial changes between versions. When scenes and dialogue were re-edited, excised or added between versions, this was never featured in before-and-after featurettes, and yet would be the most apparent change to an audience member presented with both versions. Content changes also presented another means of accessing the complex decisions made by archival staff in consultation with rightsholders about the versions of the films that would be exhibited to the public. Here is an example of a table from my viewing of the unrestored, long version of *Bliss*:

Visual	Aural	Content	Other
Rain during opening bird’s eye shot is different in this version. It is kind of flattened and serves to desaturate the colour rather than add a new texture.	Dialogue muddier and more difficult to parse than in restoration.	Alex goes to the hotel drunk to talk to Harry – sequence order changed and slightly elongated.	Crop has been changed between the versions.

⁸⁶ Interview with David Elfick, Executive Producer of *Starstruck* [Interview conducted by Author]

These tables were a tool for systematising my observations during the screenings. They also made it possible for me to compare the changes made not just between versions, but between different versioning processes. For example, my exploration of a restoration aesthetic, discussed in Chapter 03 and my analysis of the NFSA's restoration systems, are drawn from evidence of commonalities I observed between these tables.⁸⁷

This data is uniquely valuable because it demonstrates the depth and detail of versioning at the NFSA. By insisting on the value of that detail, it is possible to make further inferences and claims about the NFSA's function and its relationship to the construction of Australian film history and heritage.

VI. The restoration as argument

A major claim of my thesis is that restoration is an argument for a particular version and vision of a given film. Shaped by archival work, restoration aesthetics and the perceived intent of filmmakers, restorations create new versions of films that engage with audiovisual heritage and redefine their place within the Australian film canon.

Thus, when applying the versional analysis methodology, I use theoretical framing from Paul Eggert's work on the scholarly edition to demonstrate that restorations can be understood as arguments put forward by NFSA staff. I draw specifically on Eggert's, assertion that scholarly editions function as arguments. He describes editioning as a process directed toward an audience, presenting a specific position on a work. My thesis adapts and extends this concept to film restorations. Of relevance here is one of Eggert's principles of "versional editing", discussed in his sixth chapter 'The Work, the Version and the Charles Harpur Critical Archive'. He writes:

⁸⁷ See [Page 205](#)

An edition intervenes fruitfully between the archival evidence and an apprehended readership. The edition is an argument about the contents of the archive directed at the readership. Multiple editions may be built on the same archive.⁸⁸

As I will show, The NFSA's restorations demonstrate this act of intervention between archive and audience. Archivists and restorationists mediate between the archive and the contemporary audience, addressing the anachronism of experiencing older films in a modern setting in a digital format. This creative work negotiates the balance between preserving historical authenticity and making films accessible for today's viewers.

It is also essential to address the complexity of "choice" or "decision" in relation to a chronologically linear understanding of versions. While this approach may be anachronistic, I argue that it is beneficial in versional analysis to use language that highlights the differences between versions as evidence of the choices made, rather than framing one version as the original text from which all others are derived. Our understanding of any earlier version is inevitably shaped by the insights gained from later versions.

Further, I will show that restorations operate as palimpsests—afterimages of the various processes that shape them. They are arguments about the archive itself, reflecting both the contemporary status of iconic films and the institutional values of those who create them. By intervening between the archive and the audience, restorations are as instructive about the archival processes and priorities as they are about the films they preserve.

In order to develop this argument, it was necessary to hear directly from those people engaged with the restoration work.

⁸⁸ Eggert, *Work and the Reader in Literary Studies: Scholarly Editing and Book History*, 95.

Part 2: The Interviews

I. Interviews with archive personnel

Versions and their invocation in the restoration and digitisation projects at the NFSA are vital pieces of evidence that demonstrate the NFSA's justifications for both the urgency of archival work, and the uncertain expansion and resourcing of the Archive. Analysing these versions also exposes the Archive's priorities and biases. A versional analysis, when conducted alongside interviews with staff and other key stakeholders, can instruct in, or demonstrate the ways that certain films, filmmakers and archival personnel all engage with versions critically and creatively in pursuit of a particular vision and memory of Australian cinema. My thesis teases out those priorities and identifies the kind of vision and memory being developed. It does this through original empirical work interviewing NFSA staff and their collaborators including key stakeholders such as a film's director, editor or producer. This is the second branch of my methodology.

I conducted nine interviews with staff, contract labourers and filmmaker-rightsholders, approximately sixty minutes in length, focusing on how these individuals theorised and figured themselves in relation to the work of versioning films at the Archive. This approach, when paired with my versional analysis, allowed me to methodically build an argument for what the Archive and its staff's foci and interests were when it came to their history of restoration and preservation.

II. Applying the theory of the modest, deferential and self-effacing staff

Staff members at the NFSA are constantly making choices. These choices are informed by mission statements, policies and archival ethics. In this thesis, however, I argue that to more fully understand these choices and their impact on the creation of film history, heritage and

restorations at the Archive, it is necessary to consider the staff themselves as more compelling expressions of these decisions than the policies that govern them.

To do this, as addressed in my preceding sections on theoretical material, I have invoked the “production culture” framework developed by John T. Caldwell. As noted above, Caldwell’s work concerns workers within the Hollywood film and television industries, not the staff and personnel of film archives, who are the purview of my thesis. Nevertheless, I draw on his theory and approach in two specific ways to enhance my argument about the creative and generative work that underwrites restorations at the NFSA. Specifically, the provocation that the NFSA is a kind of production culture also serves to challenge the static nature of Archival work. It instead suggests that preservation and restoration activities are also creative acts that produce new material.

Firstly, Caldwell’s approach guided my choice of who to interview. He advocates for the value of speaking to workers across the seniority spectrum of Hollywood production cultures. In particular, he argues that speaking to “below-the-line” workers (those who are not “above-the-line” like directors, producers or acting talent) offers a richer impression of the kind of labour and practice that exists within a production culture.⁸⁹ Caldwell seeks impressions of the production culture that reach beyond the media training of certain executives and performers within a given production culture, because this training is designed to feed back into the institutionalised form of the industry, rather than provide an honest account of how the industry works. He writes:

Interviews with and statements by producers and craftspeople in film can be conceptually rich, theoretically suggestive, and culturally revealing, yet we should

⁸⁹ Caldwell, “Introduction,” 14; Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 2008, 113–35.

never lose sight of the fact that such statements are almost always offered from some perspective of self-interest, promotion, and spin.⁹⁰

Thus, by speaking to specific staff who are not given media training, there should be an opportunity to retrieve more specific and technical insights about the way that labour and artistry within a production culture are organised and cultivated. Therefore, my interviews with filmmakers and executive staff are usefully balanced by interviews with workers from other parts of the Archive including conservationists, and collection managers.

For my research, I selectively translated Caldwell's approach not just to my interview recruitment, but also my question design. I take seriously both the actions of all NFSA staff, and how they articulate and theorise those actions. My interview approach was thus designed to find the degree to which staff at the NFSA both reflect institutional values, politics and policies, and demonstrate their own self-theorised understanding of their contribution to Australian audiovisual heritage. Moreover, the NFSA is designed and organised even more formally than Hollywood production cultures, and so it categorises and promotes itself through policy documents and public outreach. To this end, the NFSA is not necessarily engaged in "spin," but the outward facing version of the institution is formalised in ways that obscure the creativity and artistry of its employees. This is also a necessary function of being a governmental institution with a legislated mandate and an expectation of impartiality to uphold.⁹¹

Through my interviews I gained insights by circumventing the promotional and public relations language that otherwise dominates publicly available materials about the Archive. While the executive staff are inclined to offer responses that reflect the political and cultural

⁹⁰ Caldwell, "Introduction," 14.

⁹¹ See [Page 24](#)

ethos of the institution as outlined in those materials, by interviewing staff not in those positions of power, then an opportunity arose to glean information and insights about restoration and versioning processes that are neither apparent nor available through reading materials or speaking to executive staff.

Secondly, Caldwell introduces a series of classifications that serve to group and organise seven different kinds of workers within a Hollywood production culture. For this thesis, I focus on one of these categories that usefully translates to the NFSA's processes: the self-effacing and deferential worker.⁹²

Caldwell describes each of the workers in the Hollywood production culture as “versatile and hybrid theorists”. He argues that, while there is a degree of control over which process narratives they share with researchers or the media, it is possible to identify the ways in which these people also theorise their own labour in relation to the management of existing film versions, and the creation of new ones. Similarly, while the NFSA's processes are deeply compartmentalised and, in some cases, opaque, the staff that are charged with enacting those processes react and relate to the task in different ways. My interviews thus had to be flexible, allowing for different emphases and investments in the restoration process to emerge. One such emphasis was the way staff continually deferred their decisions and labour to the filmmaker's vision and intent, and the policy and best-practice advice of the Archive.

My interview method was designed to capture not necessarily the institutional idiosyncrasies of the NFSA, but the individual and interpersonal relationships to labour that contributed to the production of versions and restorations at the Archive. These interviews, as will be shown, provide a more expressive account of the actualities of practice at the NFSA

⁹² Caldwell, “Introduction,” 20.

than the publicly available documents the Archive uses to explain or capture their work. As Caldwell notes in the introduction to his book:

...most industrial self-theorizing practices seldom live or die by their systematicity, detail, logic, or comprehensiveness. Instead, practitioners theorize in practice—that is, at work, in trade narratives and professional interactions—in a very different manner.⁹³

As such, self-theorisation can offer more insight to the way a particular production culture operates than can the mechanisms designed to inform the broader community about their operations. However, applying this model also presents challenges.

The existence of below-the-line workers in the Hollywood mode is an indication of the profound financial resources available to that production culture. The NFSA is not endowed with comparable resources for employment—in fact, it has suffered substantial job cuts since 2014.⁹⁴ Therefore, in designing an interview methodology I had to consider the logistics of sourcing non-executive participants at the same time as ensuring I understood the NFSA’s infrastructure and the relationship of that participant to that structure.

III. Recruitment

In requesting participants for these interviews, I specifically asked for people in non-executive roles. This led to an eclectic assortment of interviewees provided by my facilitation contacts at the NFSA, Elena Guest and Gayle Lake. My ethics application outlined an intended pool of ten to fifteen participants. Ultimately, nine were made available to me,

⁹³ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 2008, 18.

⁹⁴ Canberra Times, “NFSA Sheds 28 Staff, Cuts Canberra Film Screenings | The Canberra Times | Canberra, ACT,” n.d., <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6143428/nfsa-sheds-28-staff-cuts-canberra-film-screenings/>.

including one of my initial contacts, Gayle Lake, who, at the time of writing, is the now the former chief curator of the NFSA.

My participants were a mix of full-time staff at the NFSA, former staff members, contracted labourers, filmmakers and rightsholders. From the NFSA, my participants were chief curator Gayle Lake, collections registrar Belinda Hunt, senior collections partnership manager Victoria Ramshaw, audiovisual conservation coordinator James Campbell, and senior audiovisual conservator Patrick O'Connor. I also interviewed Meg Labrum, the former deputy director and general manager of the NFSA. Two filmmakers associated with films from the NFSA Restores program also participated: Tony Buckley, editor of *Wake in Fright* and executive producer of *Bliss*; and David Elfick, executive producer of *Starstruck*. Finally, I spoke to Anthos Simon, the contracted restorationist who headed the digital restoration of *Wake in Fright*.

In my ethics application, I modelled my approach to interviewing participants on Caldwell's framework. Caldwell's interview methodology operates under the understanding that those working with film are always anchored by an interest in meaning-making. He contends that these workers are focused on conducting work that can speak for itself, imagining embedded meanings that do not need further explanation or explication. He writes:

Yet filmmakers (unlike theorists) seldom systematically elaborate on these questions in lengthy spoken or written forms. Instead, a form of embedded theoretical "discussion" in the work world takes place in and through the tools, machines, artifacts, iconographies, working methods, professional rituals and narratives that film practitioners circulate and enact in film/video trade subcultures. Rather than simply accepting and legitimizing a studio executive's generalizations from interviews about how film/television works or means, therefore, such explanations should be grounded

within the kinds of contexts that I have schematized...—the material, symbolic, and representational practices of production workers.⁹⁵

Caldwell destabilises and interrupts the promotional spin of studio executives by circumventing their account of the industry. He gives voice to the workers whose labour and trade rituals remain unexamined. My research design was based on this approach and sought to interview staff as a means to examine the Archive and its practices, against the account offered by the NFSA's promotional materials and policies. My ethics application outlined an aim to "collect data from a wide variety of NFSA employees".⁹⁶ Further, I hypothesised that the NFSA is a creative organisation, despite its deference to and appreciation of impartial and objective archival values.⁹⁷ I outlined the aims of my ethics application as:

...to draw a link between the labour of NFSA staff, and the film version. My hypothesis is that the NFSA staff have a tendency to view themselves as technical workers, rather than creative practitioners...⁹⁸

Here, I used the style and approach of Caldwell's model to construct a new study that sought to not only learn more about the staff of the NFSA but also provoke the possibility that the Archive was its own kind of production culture. I similarly modelled my questions on Caldwell's open and inquisitive style, inviting participants to self-theorise and review their relationship to the labour they undertook. For example, Caldwell asks film editor Scott Willingham, "What were the driving objectives or concerns behind your choices in the editing room early in your career?"⁹⁹ In my ethics application, I proposed that I might ask similar questions, such as, "How do you conceive of your role in relation to the NFSA's

⁹⁵ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 2008, 345.

⁹⁶ Quoted from my Ethics Application. Protocol Number: 2022/028

⁹⁷ NFSA, "NFSA Collection Policy 2022."

⁹⁸ Quoted from my Ethics Application. Protocol Number: 2022/028

⁹⁹ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 2008, 41.

screening and distribution programs?” and, “Can you give me some examples of film versions you have encountered or treated while working at the NFSA?”¹⁰⁰

My approach was to ask questions that positioned the employee of the Archive in relation to the work they conducted. I also wanted to invite them to provide their own response or theoretical treatment of terms I had devised like ‘film version’. Ultimately, the recruitment of participants created a different set of interviews than my ethics application had originally envisioned. This was mostly because access to staff at the NFSA was limited, and I had to reassess the wholesale translation of the below-the-line worker to the Archive.

As an institution, the NFSA differs substantially to Hollywood’s industrial structure, and different labour systems create different kinds of employees. While workers in a Hollywood film production culture are primarily contracted and, in many cases, freelance, staff at the NFSA are employed by the government. They are therefore public servants, subject to the security and benefits of those positions. While the NFSA does contract labour for specific roles and jobs, the substantially smaller financial resources available to the Archive mean that much of its technical work is conducted by retained, full-time employees who are often titled with seniority. This means that the ‘below-the-line’ worker, as distinct from ‘above-the-line’ executives in a Hollywood production culture, does not have a neat equivalent in the context of the NFSA. Staff were more amorphous in terms of their status regarding both executive positions and their technically specific knowledge and proficiencies.

Consequently, I recalibrated my approach to the interviews to become more flexible and responsive. I built on methods described in Robert E. Stake’s *Qualitative Research*:

¹⁰⁰ Quoted from my Ethics Application. Protocol Number: 2022/028

Studying How Things Work, which explicitly accounts for adapting to changes that surface during an interview. In a section titled ‘The Science of the Particular’, he writes:

And the more we study human affairs (as contrasted with physical mechanisms), the more we expect that things will work differently in different situations. How a doctor responds to an injury depends on the sequence of events, the resources available, and the triage priorities.¹⁰¹

As my interviews continued, I learned what was important to individuals and the institution. This, in turn, allowed for the refinement of my questions, which evolved in relation to subject and context. This more iterative and adaptable approach helped me locate commonalities between my different participants and meticulously map their relationships to the industrial hierarchies of the NFSA.

Limitations

The overall methodology I practiced in writing this thesis was subject to two limitations. Firstly, there is the problem of the quantity of films I was able to analyse. While the number of films and versions I sought to view was agreed upon by myself and the NFSA, the limited selection of films still placed a greater pressure on the representativeness of these film versions as expressions of the practices at the NFSA. For each of the five films I selected, there are also more than two versions available. A more comprehensive analysis of these different versions would require retrieving each of the iterations and placing them into the context of all other versions.¹⁰² The licensing fees for these films were waived for my

¹⁰¹ Robert E. Stake, *Qualitative Research: Studying How Things Work* (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), 13.

¹⁰² See [LIST OF FIGURES](#)

Figure 1 - Frame from the 'Bliss: Before and After Restoration Trailer' (NFSA Website, 2016)
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fo_VSgIOwSo]206

research, however, it remains unclear whether, if these fees had been charged, they would have been applied per version, or per film.

My method also created ephemeral and singular viewing experiences, because the cost and labour involved in viewing analogue and digital films in the same session meant that it was not possible for me to revisit any of these film versions. This created a problem, as it is difficult, though not impossible, to conduct granular analysis of the differences between two versions of films when only one screening has been available.

Secondly, versional analysis also refers to the study of process, financing, governance and labour, but I was limited in the kind of information I could access from the NFSA about each of these elements. In some instances, it was necessary to infer and speculate, using publicly available resources such as the NFSA's websites.

These limitations have not prevented me from conducting this research, however, I have made sure to keep them in consideration when applying and revising my research design and methodology.

Figure 2 - Frame from the Starstruck: Before and After restoration Trailer (NFSA Website, 2016) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VfYRC3N4dM]	206
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Chapter Outline

To respond to the questions my research poses, the chapters that follow this introduction each offer a specific case study. Each case study is of film held by the NFSA, and in turn demonstrates different aspects of my argument about restoration, staff and versions at the NFSA.

Chapter 01—*Wake in Fright*: Language of Loss

The first case study of this thesis concerns the NFSA's digital restoration of Ted Kotcheff's 1971 rural gothic horror film *Wake in Fright*. It is an adaptation of the novel of the same name written by Kenneth Cook. The film is a disturbing and frightening examination of a British born expatriate who has lived in Sydney but then finds himself stranded in an isolated Australian rural town.

In this chapter, my versional analysis consists of a close comparison of the unrestored and restored versions of the film, alongside a broader examination of the context in which each version was created and the narrative shaping that process. This allows me to derive important insights about the way this transnational coproduction represents Australian identity on screen. It also allows me to discuss the way this Australian identity has been reimagined and reconfigured via the act of digital restoration.

This chapter leverages a versional analysis of the history of the story of *Wake in Fright*'s original picture negative being lost for over forty years, before being found again and prompting the digital restoration. This loss and discovery, I will argue, is a key narrative that informs the way the film was restored. Here, I draw on my interview with the film's editor Tony Buckley, as well as my discussions with lead restorationist Anthos Simon.

The restoration of *Wake in Fright* makes an argument for a fluid and evolving understanding of its transnational status. The extent to which the film is Australian, Canadian or British has ebbed and flowed over time, and the digital restoration makes this a live and complex issue. *Wake in Fright*'s restoration, I argue, demonstrates that for the NFSA the assumed position of films in the Australian canon is changeable, regardless of their historical or cultural prominence—or periods of loss and recovery.

Chapter 02—*Starstruck*: Australian-American

The second chapter of this thesis concerns the NFSA Restores version of Gillian Armstrong's 1982 film *Starstruck*. This film is a quirky and disjointed musical about fame and pop music in 1980s Sydney. As with all other films in this thesis, I compared this restored version with the unrestored Australian theatrical release. These two films have substantially different runtimes, as the restored version was created using the shorter American cut of the film. In this chapter, I explore the implications of the decision to use the American version and ask further questions about the way this choice impacts the NFSA's fostering of a specific national film identity and heritage.

My interviews with the film's executive producer David Elfick, as well as various staff at the NFSA, investigates the hierarchies of decision-making inside and outside the Archive. The interviews also explore the extent to which these kinds of interventions affect the film's genre and cultural specificity. *Starstruck*'s vibrant portrayal of Sydney is central to its identity, regardless of the version screened. However, the intensity and texture of this expression shift depending on which version is foregrounded.

I argue that the restoration positions itself as a negotiation between competing influences: Sydney's local specificity, a broader Australian context, and the demands of the

international market. This compromise demonstrates the fluidity of a film's cultural identity, and the NFSA's active role in mediating these influences through restoration.

Chapter 03—*Bliss*: Achieving Bliss

Chapter 03 compares the unrestored and restored versions of *Bliss*, the 1985 film directed by Ray Lawrence and executive produced by Tony Buckley. In *Bliss*, Barry Otto stars as Harry Joy, an ad man who suffers a near-death experience and begins to perceive the world around him as a kind of surrealist purgatory. The versions I compare are haunted by the film's walkout of 400 patrons at Cannes in 1985, which triggered negative press.

In this chapter, I examine the sensationalist coverage of the initial release of *Bliss*, and how this extreme response continues to inform even the most recent version: the restoration. I also argue that, because the restoration recalls a number of different versions of the film, it is an exemplar of my claim that restorations are palimpsests and arguments. The restored film version of *Bliss* does not just present the film anew, but also contains the traces of its legacy and its process. This is further demonstrated through my interviews with staff, as well as returning to my interview with Tony Buckley.

When viewed in conjunction with the previously discussed restorations of *Starstruck* and *Wake in Fright*, this restoration of *Bliss* demonstrates what I call a 'restoration aesthetic'. The visual and aural similarities between these three restorations warrant further investigation, as explored in this chapter.

Chapter 04—*Proof*: Proof of Concept

My final case study examines the restoration of Jocelyn Moorhouse's 1992 film *Proof*. The film follows Martin (Hugo Weaving), a blind man who is dangerously obsessed with veracity, and the attempts of his new friend Andy (Russell Crowe) free him from that fixation. This chapter investigates how the transformation of *Proof* during its digitisation

radically alters elements that were unique to its analogue form. By foregrounding these shifts, I reveal how the digitisation process not only redefines the film's materiality but also resonates with its thematic exploration of the truth claims of photographic media.

This chapter also highlights the unique aspects of versional analysis that extend beyond close comparative reading. By examining the process and narrative behind *Proof*'s crowdfunded restoration—the only instance of such funding for an NFSA restoration—I argue that this initiative provides crucial insights into the institution's evolving priorities and its broader conceptualisation of digitisation.

Drawing on interviews with NFSA staff, this chapter underscores the live nature of audiovisual records within the Archive, framing *Proof* as an example of how institutional and public perceptions shape restoration practices. As the final case study, I use this chapter to reflect on all the films analysed in this thesis, theorising alternate approaches to understanding film records at the NFSA. Drawing on contemporary museum and heritage studies—including radical archiving, records continuum theory, and intangible heritage—I position *Proof* as a focal point for rethinking the relationships between archival labour, technology, and the versions of films that emerge through restoration processes.

These chapters illustrate the ways in which archival practice at the NFSA is deeply entangled with creativity and argument. The staff and personnel of the Archive efface much of their own artistry as a response to the role that Australian filmmakers continue to play in directing the remembering and reception of their films long after their release. These staff mask and demote their efforts out of a perceived deference to the elevation of the history, nostalgia and heritage of Australian audiovisual culture. Yet, my thesis demonstrates that, buried beneath the surface of this effacement, are the inscriptions of these staff members' process and work upon the many versions of films held in the collection.

CHAPTER 01 *WAKE IN FRIGHT*: LANGUAGE OF LOSS

Introduction

Canadian director Ted Kotcheff's 1971 film *Wake in Fright* imagines rural Australia as purgatorial. Adapted from Kenneth Cook's 1961 novel of the same name, the film follows protagonist John Grant (Gary Bond) on his way to a holiday in Sydney.¹⁰³ After stopping overnight in the fictional town of Bundanyabba, he finds he cannot escape both its violence and thrall. This narrative strangely mirrors the life and legacy of *Wake in Fright* after its release in the 1970s. When the original picture negative (OPN) was lost, the film could only be seen via rare, low-quality VHS transfers—and later, even rarer conversions of the VHS to DVD.¹⁰⁴ The film never ceased to exist, but its inaccessibility and consequential obscurity changed its cultural value and position in the Australian canon. The material, archivable film-object of *Wake in Fright* was also stuck in purgatory.

Eventually, after almost forty years, the OPN was located. This led to a groundbreaking digital restoration effort from the NFSA, which resulted in the 2008 rerelease of the film—as a new film version—to a wide domestic and international audience. The story of *Wake in Fright*'s near erasure, rediscovery and revival is well documented in scholarship and popular media.¹⁰⁵ In this chapter, my aim is to illuminate the cultural and archival

¹⁰³ Kenneth Cook, *Wake in Fright* (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin Books, 1980).

¹⁰⁴ Tina Kaufman, *Wake in Fright* (Australia: Currency Press, 2013); Simon Caterson, "The Best Australian Film You've Never Seen," *Quadrant*, 2006, Gale Academic OneFile.

¹⁰⁵ Hilton Ambler, "Lost and Found: Looking Back at 'Wake in Fright,'" *Metro*, no. 163 (February 21, 2022): 126–28, <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.913227221674134>; Jacqueline Kent, "'You Will Have a Drink with Me': The Story of 'wake in Fright' and Its Afterlives," *Meanjin* 78, no. 1 (March 23, 2019): 146–50; Paul Risker, "Terror of the Times: In Conversation with Ted Kotcheff on *Wake in Fright*," *Film International* (16516826) 12, no. 3 (September 2014): 123–28, https://doi.org/10.1386/fiin.12.3.123_7; Gregory Marks, "'That's Not Us!' 'Wake in Fright' and the Australian Nightmare," *Overland*, no. 247 (2022): 3–17.

implications of the film's reemergence and restoration as a new film version. I will use a versional analysis to demonstrate that, during the forty years in which the OPN was missing, *Wake in Fright's* status as an obscure Australian film not only created an excellent story for the promotion of the new restoration, it also changed the contemporary experience of *Wake* as a digitally restored film version. It is a film version that exists not in spite but because of the loss of the source materials.

The first part of this versional analysis examines the historical and cultural context from which the restoration arose, along with the significance of loss. Many publications that wrote about the restoration upon its release in 2008 described *Wake in Fright* as a "long-lost film". Regardless of how difficult the film was to access, and the quality of the versions available in the past, this descriptor 'long-lost' was new. Ironically, the film could only be described as "long-lost" after it had been found. This then became a crucial part of its reception and understanding as a restored film version. Such emphasis on loss imbues the restoration with a number of complex social and cultural layers of understanding, each of which is premised on the idea that this new film version is the consequence of the older version being lost.

As explained in the Introduction, my thesis contends that restorations are arguments, as made by film archivists and restorationists, which position and advocate for a certain understanding and experience of a given film. They become live and continuous records of Australian audiovisual history. *Wake in Fright* is no exception. The NFSA's digital restoration of *Wake in Fright* is an argument for the film's relevance and value in the 21st century. In this first case study, I will show how the NFSA's archivists and restorationists needed to carefully negotiate different impulses towards nostalgia, technological determinism, and excavation—particularly in the context of bringing into relief previously unseen material. These interventions are a normal part of archival and restorative practice.

However, as I alluded to, there is still a pragmatic and conceptual imperative on the part of the archivist and restorer to present their approach as modest and impartial in relation to the custodianship of Australian audiovisual culture. This more clinical, neutral account of archival practice is an expectation of the NFSA's institutional function.¹⁰⁶ As I will show through my interviews, NFSA staff efface their labour, deferring to the expertise and artistry of the filmmaker (living or dead) as the ultimate decision maker and justifier for all interventions.

I propose that the digital restoration of *Wake in Fright* is the creative argument of the NFSA about what the film should be in its restored film version. Functionally, however, the decisions about restoration are re-attributed, by both NFSA staff and the institution itself, to the general ethos and sense of its 1971 filmmakers Kotcheff and Buckley. To illustrate the institutionality of this effacement, I use Caldwell's production culture theory to review and analyse my interviews with various NFSA staff members as well as the head restorationist on *Wake in Fright*, Anthos Simon.

In this chapter, I also analyse the intersecting impetuses of nostalgia, creativity and technology. I consider the ways in which these pressures and concepts trouble *Wake in Fright*'s already complex transnational status. The NFSA's experimentation with the digital film version of *Wake in Fright* changes the film's relation to Australianness and its canonicity. I do this by drawing on and critiquing existing scholarship, which is particularly invested in the challenge of locating the film's genre and anchor country.

I will begin my versional analysis with an overview of the history of *Wake in Fright*'s restoration, including new discoveries I made during my research. Next, I will present my

¹⁰⁶ Randall C. Jimerson, *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice* (Chicago, Ill.: Society of American Archivists, 2009).

findings from close comparative readings of the film's unrestored, original theatrical version and the digital restoration produced by the NFSA in 2008. My reading is then paired with interviews I conducted with members of the NFSA's staff and contracted labour, and the film's editor Tony Buckley. These interviews together with my close reading demonstrate the creative and generative work of archivists and restorationists at the NFSA. Moreover, they lead me to reassess *Wake in Fright*'s categorisation as a transnational film, and to explore the role nostalgia, technology and national identity play in the modern experience of *Wake in Fright*.

History: “lost” and “found”

In 2009, the NFSA's restoration of *Wake in Fright* joined Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1960) as one of only two films ever to screen at the Cannes Film Festival twice. The first of *Wake*'s two outings at Cannes was in 1971, when the original analogue version screened. Almost forty years later, the justification for a second screening in the main program was not simply the film's status as a restoration—one that had been digitised and repaired, with enhanced audiovisual components—but that it had once been lost, and now it was found. The NFSA's digital 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.¹⁰⁷

Its obscurity for so many years justified its reemergence as a new film version to be screened for the first time. This is a crucial piece of information for any historical retelling of the film's restoration. It demonstrates the cultural cachet and capital assigned to the idea that

¹⁰⁷ “Waking after Hours: Ted Kotcheff's Influence on Martin Scorsese,” BFI, August 22, 2017, <https://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound/features/waking-after-hours-ted-kotcheffs-influence-martin-scorsese>; Raffaele Caputo, “Wake in Fright: An Interview with Ted Kotcheff—Senses of Cinema,” December 17, 2013, <https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2009/feature-articles/ted-kotcheff-interview/>.

the film was gone and had finally resurfaced. But this was and is not an accurate account. Since its release in 1971, the film has always existed in some form. The digital restoration, however, made the film available to a substantially larger audience. *Wake in Fright* has at no time, been a lost or long-lost film.

This distinction between a lost film and a film that benefits from the narrative of having been lost is not just superficial. In Ray Edmondson and Andrew Pike's book *Australia's Lost Films* (1982), in which the authors explain and advocate for Australia's many lost nitrate films, they define lost films as "films of which copies are not known to survive today or of which only fragments remain."¹⁰⁸ Since 1971, copies of *Wake in Fright* have existed, in non-fragmentary forms. It was the original picture negative that had disappeared.

In an interview I conducted with the NFSA's senior audiovisual conservator, Patrick O'Connor, he explained the specific technical and physical dimensions of the OPN:

When a film has been [shot], they'll have a film in the camera that shoots the scenes, and that gets made into what's known as 'original picture negatives.' So that's the original negative that's in the film camera and then spliced together. using an ultrasonic splicer. You can tell whether you're dealing with an original picture negative because the perforation shapes on the stock are slightly different: they're more rounded, as opposed to a positive stock, which is more square.¹⁰⁹

The OPN is the most original and raw version of the material available. The NFSA's ethics of film archival preservation, as outlined in my Introduction, derive from the institution's

¹⁰⁸ Ray Edmondson and Andrew Pike, *Australia's Lost Films: The Loss and Rescue of Australia's Silent Cinema* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1982), 9.

¹⁰⁹ Patrick O'Connor, interview by Zach Karpinellison, September 27, 2022.

membership in the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF).¹¹⁰ These principles point to the OPN as the best possible material for archival practice. But the OPN is not the only material that can be used. The following account of *Wake in Fright*'s material history reveals how the loss of the OPN became erroneously synonymous with the erasure of *Wake in Fright* for all future generations. This 'loss' is also central to promotional narratives around the film's digital restoration. As I will show, this focus on the film's almost-loss shapes the viewer's experience of the film itself, and this, in turn, has broad implications for the ways in which nostalgia and history operate in relation to the restoration.

Australian Gothic

The film versions of *Wake in Fright* follow the travails of John Grant, a middle-class schoolteacher working in rural New South Wales, as played by English actor Gary Bond. Grant decides to travel back home to Sydney for his school holidays but is waylaid in a small, fictional town called Bundanyabba (or just "the Yabba"). While spending a night in the Yabba, Grant is seduced into a perilous game of two-up at the local pub. Before long, he has lost all his money and is plunged into a drunken limbo state. Without the financial means to leave, Grant is stuck in the Yabba, where he is forced to endure its violent characters and terrifying drinking culture. By the time the credits roll, Grant has been subjected to all manner of torture and has even been co-opted into enacting violence himself. *Wake in Fright* resists being part of any specific genre. It is sometimes understood as part of Australian gothic, but it also straddles both social realism and horror.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Camille Blot-Wellens et al., "The Digital Statement Part II Scanning for Preservation," <https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/E-Resources/Digital-Statement-part-III.html>.

¹¹¹ Gregory Marks, "'That's Not Us!' 'Wake in Fright' and the Australian Nightmare."

Industrial History

The film was funded and produced by several domestic and international companies. Group W Films, a division of Westinghouse Electric Corporation, formed the UK and USA arm of production, while Neary Limb Tinker (NLT) was the Australian production company involved. *Wake in Fright* was the second film in what was intended to be a ten-film partnership between the two companies.¹¹² However, it was the last film ever made through this partnership, as Group W Films dissolved in 1973.¹¹³ Distribution rights and copyright ownership transferred to MGM and United Artists (MGM/UA) later in the 1970s.¹¹⁴ Those rights lapsed in 1991 and the OPN was lost.¹¹⁵

In 1996, Jack Neary and Bobby Limb, of the now deregistered NLT Productions, sought advice regarding the status of their rights ownership of *Wake in Fright*.¹¹⁶ As part of this effort, they began lobbying the filmmakers—namely director Kotcheff and editor Buckley¹¹⁷—for their help in locating the missing OPN.¹¹⁸ According to Buckley, Limb sought a meeting and enlisted the editor to help find the OPN. At this point, in 1996, their goal was to find the negative and produce a high quality VHS release of the film so that “the public [would] have access to the film once more”.¹¹⁹ (However, they did not anticipate that by the time the OPN would eventually be found, and the restoration completed in 2008, technology would have significantly advanced beyond VHS, with new digital formats

¹¹² Anthony Buckley, *Behind a Velvet Light Trap* (Australia: Hardie Grant Publishing, 2009).

¹¹³ Tony Buckley, interview by Zach Karpinellison, Recording, May 11, 2022; BFI, “Group W Films | BFI,” accessed February 17, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200428140438/https://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b94639323>.

¹¹⁴ Buckley, *Behind a Velvet Light Trap*, 150–52.

¹¹⁵ Kaufman, *Wake in Fright*.

¹¹⁶ Buckley, interview; Kaufman, *Wake in Fright*.

¹¹⁷ While an editor is not automatically considered a filmmaker, here I use the term to capture Buckley's large role against the smallness of *Wake in Fright's* production. Moreover, his advocacy for the film that I detail in this chapter, also demonstrates his close relationship with the director and his sense of ownership over the film.

¹¹⁸ Buckley, *Behind a Velvet Light Trap*, 150.

¹¹⁹ Buckley, 150.

available.) Buckley agreed to this mission and mounted a search to find the negative.¹²⁰ All the while, Limb continued to pursue the position that the executives of the former company NLT Productions retained a legal claim to the film's rights.

Following this initial meeting, Buckley spent eight years searching for the OPN. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, there were several near misses, wherein Buckley identified the location of the OPN, which had been "returned to the film's producer George Willoughby. Willoughby lodged the materials with Lancair, a bonded warehouse in Heathrow".¹²¹ However, this bonded warehouse (where fragile goods are stored) had gone into liquidation. The negative disappeared again before Buckley could access it. This precarious position was the result of the film's uncertain copyright, which did not incentivise creditors and caretakers to reunite the materials with the correct owners. Buckley also named other instances during this period when the OPN was within his grasp but disappeared again due to corporate negligence.¹²² In my interview with him, he attributed much of this difficulty to the mismanagement of the Australian government's 10BA tax incentive scheme for filmmaking. "It was all very well giving people the money to make the film," he said, "but then they forgot about it after it was released, and it got on to other places."¹²³

After the failed attempt to retrieve the film in London, it was another four years before further progress was made. During this time, Buckley briefly handed his search over to the NFSA, hoping that their industry skills and network would prove more fruitful than his

¹²⁰ Buckley, 150.

¹²¹ Buckley, 150.

¹²² Buckley, 151–52.

¹²³ Buckley, interview.

individual efforts. However, he retook the leadership of the search as he felt dissatisfied by the pace of the NFSA's approach.¹²⁴

In Tina Kaufman's short guide to *Wake in Fright*'s history and restoration, the author describes Buckley's crucial breakthrough: finally locating a key executive who had information about the *Wake in Fright* OPN's location.

He finally succeeded in tracking down Harvey Rappaport at the US TV network CBS (which had inherited much moving-image material when it merged with Westinghouse, the original parent company of the film's co-producer, Group W).¹²⁵ This contact with Rappaport, the operations chief at CBS, would become a multi-year cooperative arrangement with Buckley, who eventually wrangled the return of the OPN to its Australian home. In our interview, Buckley explained:

Now, Harvey Rappaport is a man I've never met. And I drove him insane for about five years. He went up to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where the Mountain is—where all Hollywood's negatives are kept for safety because the temperature never changes. And he found some 60mm processed prints. I said, "Well, that's all very well, but they're not good enough! We've got to find the original negative, and all the ancillary parts to it. It's not just a ten-reel film we're looking for. We're looking for over 200 reels and soundtracks and everything for the mix."¹²⁶

Finally, in 2004, the OPN was found in the Iron Mountain vaults, where CBS held much of their overflow and discarded collection. In this vault, all 263 cans of the film were found in a

¹²⁴ I note this because it was important to the eventual promotion of the restoration of *Wake in Fright*, that this search was inspired by a sense of urgency. However, this urgency and fear of losing the OPN deserves further scrutiny. See Buckley, *Behind a Velvet Light Trap*, 151.

¹²⁵ Kaufman, *Wake in Fright*, 65.

¹²⁶ Interview with Tony Buckley

bin that had been, according to Buckley, “marked for destruction”.¹²⁷ However, this narrative put forward by the editor and the journalists with whom Buckley spoke—i.e. that, had the NFSA and Buckley not intervened, the OPN was at imminent risk of destruction—was not entirely accurate.

In 2003—CBS sent an initial pallet of materials, which Buckley believed would be the long-awaited original picture negative. On the NFSA website, in an article titled ‘Wake in Fright: 2008 Restoration’, Peter Galvin explains:

In 2003, the eagerly awaited first batch of *Wake in Fright* materials arrived in Australia. Upon close inspection it was quickly apparent that the two pallets of material were mainly beaten up, cut-down TV versions of the film, and of little use. This was a great disappointment for all concerned as CBS stated that they had delivered all the material known to be held.¹²⁸

This detail is omitted from each of Buckley’s accounts of retrieving the OPN, including my interview with him. Buckley instead repeatedly gestures to the last-minute rescuing of the material from a bin that was scheduled for destruction. Indeed, in an interview with *The Age*, Buckley claims that the final successful retrieval was a close call. “The air-freighting of those materials occurred in September 2004, probably within hours of them going to the tip.”¹²⁹

But there were ongoing negotiations between Buckley and Iron Mountain after the initial retrieval of sub-standard materials the prior year. Buckley’s persistence was certainly a key motivator for staff at the vault to continue their search among materials labelled for

¹²⁷ Buckley, interview.

¹²⁸ Peter Galvin, “Wake in Fright: 2009 Restoration and Re-Release | National Film and Sound Archive of Australia,” National Film and Sound Archives, June 24, 2021, <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/latest/wake-fright-2009>.

¹²⁹ Sacha Molitorisz, “Finding the Lost Footage,” *The Age*, June 25, 2009, sec. Movies, <https://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/movies/finding-the-lost-footage-20090625-ge7yae.html>.

eventual disposal, but the urgency with which that exercise needed to happen appears to be, if not exaggerated, confected.

I raise this discrepancy not to discredit nor undermine Buckley's memory and account of events, but instead to draw attention to the way in which *Wake in Fright*'s wholesale loss became a crucial dramatic point in the journalism and scholarship that followed the public announcement of the NFSA's restoration. In many newspaper and journal articles written about the digital restoration, the film is described as "lost".¹³⁰ Each telling and retelling of this narrative informs every new version of the film produced from this exercise.

After the OPN was finally delivered to Australia in 2004, work immediately began on the NFSA's restoration. Buckley recounts that then-director of the NFSA, Paolo Cherchi Usai, was only able to allocate \$150,000 to perform the restoration. These funds were to support a traditional, chemical restoration, which would be incredibly labour intensive, and likely to cost well in excess of the designated budget.¹³¹ Nevertheless, the chemical restoration work began.

Concurrently, the OPN was shared with Anthos Simon, who was working at the film processing laboratory Atlab. Staff there performed a test on the negative using their scanning and digitising tools. They presented the results to the NFSA and Buckley, who found them extremely promising and shifted their approach accordingly. As a completely new and untested technique in Australia, it turned out to be even more costly than chemical restoration. However, the head of Atlab, Murray Forrest, proposed that Simon lead a team on the digital restoration for very little money. As Buckley explained, Forrest "looked at the

¹³⁰ Gregory Marks, "'That's Not Us!' 'Wake in Fright' and the Australian Nightmare"; Ambler, "Lost and Found"; Kaufman, *Wake in Fright*; John Patterson, "Wake in Fright: The Almost-Forgotten Film That Kickstarted the Aussie New Wave," *The Guardian*, March 3, 2014, sec. Film, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/mar/03/wake-in-fright-john-patterson>.

¹³¹ Buckley, interview.

value of the film itself, which he said was a missing and important part of our social history, and of a certain type of way of life in the Outback”.¹³²

Thus, as this history of *Wake in Fright*’s retrieval and road to restoration demonstrates, the fear of losing the film—and the opportunity presented by reviving it—become the greatest motivators for those working on the digital restoration. Indeed, this fear and opportunity, I argue, lay the foundations for the creation of this new version of *Wake in Fright* by archivists and restorationists. The NFSA is emboldened by the technological expansion that the unique case of *Wake in Fright* enables and justifies. The restorationists contracted by the Archive are, in turn, driven by their steadfast belief in the cultural value and memory of this film.

To this end, the differences between the unrestored, original theatrical version of the film and the digital restored version produced by the NFSA in 2008 reflect all of the process and transformation that *Wake in Fright* has undergone in the ensuing forty years. This component of my versional analysis therefore demonstrates that, regardless of the truth, claims about the film’s precarity—that the excitement, financing and narrativising around the loss and discovery of the OPN—activate a nostalgia and deference to heritage in the archivists and restorationists. This necessarily informs the ultimate character of the restored version. The story of the missing OPN not only increased the film’s perceived cultural value, it also imbued the restoration process with an urgency to retrieve and re-present the film in a form that reflected the act of unearthing.

¹³² Buckley.

The changes: old, new and old again

Turning now to a comparison of the two versions, I will demonstrate that the exercise of unearthing the OPN informs the way that the restoration was and is approached. A focus on excavation and retrieval transforms the digital restoration into a live and dynamic object that honours the memory of *Wake in Fright* and shares the extraordinary interventions and possibilities of digital film restoration technology. Further comparing and analysing the differences between the unrestored, theatrical release print of *Wake in Fright* (hereafter, the release print) and the digital restoration of the film completed in 2008 (hereafter, the restoration) reveals that the restored version is an argument for a particular account of Australian film heritage. As explained in my Methodology, I viewed both versions of the film in a single, continuous session and took detailed notes. I have also supplemented these notes with repeat viewings of the Blu-ray edition of the restoration, guided by interviews and oral histories with Kotcheff, Buckley and Simon about the restoration.

I conclude that the changes made between the two versions reflect the investment by NFSA and its contracted labourers in the rescuing of *Wake in Fright* from a state of loss. The narrative of the negative's near-loss influences the restoration process, transforming the goal of realising a digitised, flagship edition of the film into an effort to illuminate and retrieve seemingly latent and buried aspects of the material. Rather than simply cleaning and digitally updating the format so that it could be reintroduced to audiences, the restorationists and archivists approached their task as though they were performing an archaeological excavation. They used the digital technology to reveal details that were previously invisible in the analogue version, and which had never been seen by original audiences. This resulted in the digital (re)creation of parts of *Wake in Fright* that had never before been visible. This approach and the drives behind it are difficult to define. One explanation is that the restorers were informed by nostalgia. Svetlana Boym's concept of "restorative nostalgia" leads her to

describe the “ache of temporal distance and displacement,” a sentiment that echoes the narrative of *Wake in Fright*’s loss and discovery.¹³³ This restorative nostalgia proposes to manage both the temporal distance and displacement:

Distance is compensated by intimate experience and the availability of a desired object. Displacement is cured by a return home, preferably a collective one...Even in its less extreme form, restorative nostalgia has no use for the signs of historical time—patina, ruins, cracks, imperfections.¹³⁴

As I will show, in the case of *Wake in Fright*, the restorationists’ technological interventions reflect this approach. They sought not just to preserve the film, but to uncover and display details that were previously obscured or subdued. The NFSA’s technological interventions are justified by the urgent need to provide an Australian audience with a new experience of this once unavailable film. Moreover, the reversal of the film’s loss, which responds to its sense of temporal displacement and distance, permits the removal of the evidence of age and damage to the film because the goal is to construct a past experience, rather than simply represent it.

Finally, it is important to recognise that this reconstructive, restorative process is necessarily selective. The restorationists’ paramount goal is to collapse the distance between the history and memory of the film and the modern Australian viewer. Restoration is not entirely guided by a clinical adherence to historical realities, but it is deeply influenced by the impetus to restore the nebulous concept of the past, and whatever version of that past can be elucidated through digital technologies.

¹³³ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Book, Whole (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 44, <https://go.exlibris.link/sCgQXvIB>.

¹³⁴ Boym, 45.

Comparing the versions

I. Colour

The most immediately obvious difference between the two film versions is their colour. The release print has a softer, cooler colour palette than the digital restoration. The release print also bears signs of the celluloid's age, with a faded magenta wash bordering the frame throughout the film. My subsequent discussion of this print will ignore the magenta wash, but it is important to note that its persistence and visibility contributes to the material sense of the analogue object's age, and its indexical, tangible history. The magenta wash can be overlooked, but the age of the film stock cannot.

While the colours of the release print are more muted than in the digital restoration, this older, analogue version presents a much clearer, stronger distinction between the colours of indoor and outdoor settings. Deep blues, greys and dark greens reflect the grotesque and uninviting nature of interiors—mostly homes and pubs—in the Yabba. Conversely, the outdoor heat is represented by a completely different colour scheme: pink hues and very bright yellows, oranges and reds. This release print, according to Kotcheff, reflected his original inspiration, as drawn from the real-world colours of Broken Hill, the country town in New South Wales where the film was shot.¹³⁵ This experience of Broken Hill is filtered through Kotcheff's vision of Dante's *Inferno*.¹³⁶ To this end, the searing heat of the red dirt and sun outside is portrayed in the original release version with a limited selection of warm colours that evoke a relentless and enduring discomfort. The heat cannot be avoided, and the release print's colour also clearly demonstrates the normalcy of this climate in that place. Indoor sequences then serve as a counterpoint to these scenes, offering faux refuge from the

¹³⁵ *Oral History with Ted Kotcheff*, n.d.

¹³⁶ *Oral History with Ted Kotcheff*.

heat. While visually darker and cooler, indoor settings are dank and dreary with muddled colours. The effect reflects the film's purgatorial plot: it is unpleasant to be both inside and outside in this film version.

By contrast, in the digital restoration, these colours are both intensified and standardised. While the heat is represented similarly with brown, red and yellow tones, indoor sequences are also plotted along this colour spectrum. The cool colours of the release print are replaced with darker versions of the colours of the Yabba's outdoor streetscapes and dry land. Instead of blues and greys, the inside of the pub and the hotel where Grant stays, for example, are now depicted with oranges, browns and a kind of lurid yellow-green tint that blends the indoor and outdoor colour palette. This gives the effect of bringing the heat from outside into the interior spaces. In the digital version of the film, all settings are organised around a consistent visual language, the colours are sharper and more intense, but also more limited. In this version, the hellishness of the Yabba is the same everywhere Grant goes, indoors or out.

There is a clear and immediate logic to the uses of colour in each of these film versions. In the release print, colour operates naturalistically, though it is also used to show two distinct environments that evoke discomfort. In the digital restoration, the unrelenting heat of the Yabba is also represented through colour, but it is more pervasive, penetrating indoor settings as well. Rather than sharply distinguishing between indoor and outdoor environments, the restoration blends all settings into a consistent colour spectrum, creating a new but equally confronting sense of inescapability.

This initial comparison demonstrates how even small changes can significantly alter a given version. In both versions, colour effectively represents the oppressive and unrelenting character of the Yabba, but the means through which that atmosphere is conveyed differ. The

decision to colour the restoration in this way is especially compelling when considered alongside Kotcheff's comments about colour. In his oral history, recorded by the NFSA in early 2008, the director emphasised the importance of "earth tones" in the film. "I didn't want any cool colours," he said. "I told the crew no blues at all! Only hot colours: yellow, brown, orange and red."¹³⁷ He repeated this sentiment in his 2009 interview with Raffaele Caputo for *Senses of Cinema*, reflecting on his memory of the film's production and his desire to use colour to match the heat and climate of the Australian outback.¹³⁸

Though perhaps hyperbolic, Kotcheff's recollection is important because it highlights a tension between memory and historical fidelity. While the release print does prioritise earth tones, it still includes cooler, bluer colours to delineate indoor and outdoor spaces. The restoration, however, appears to realise a more extreme version of Kotcheff's vision, with blues almost entirely removed from the film.

This discrepancy invites speculation about the consequences of focusing on the film's loss as a foundation for its restoration. Kotcheff's memory of the film informs the way that restorationists, who sought his approval and sign off, approached the exercise. Once the restorationists began digitally manipulating the scan of the OPN, they had the option to change the film to align with the vision described by Kotcheff. In this way, his memory and preferences become instructive, actively superseding what appears to be the film's historical look. These become critical points of reference when acknowledging that the restoration process requires substantial judgement and choice with respect to colour. Giovanna Fossati explains:

¹³⁷ *Oral History with Ted Kotcheff*.

¹³⁸ Caputo, "Wake in Fright."

The biggest obstacle in a colour restoration, whether it is carried out digitally or not, is usually the lack of reference for restoring the original colours: in most cases all original elements of a film have suffered the same sort of colour deterioration and, as a result, a truthful benchmark for reconstructing the original colours no longer exists. As a consequence, film restorers often need to guess (this should of course be a well-educated guess) what colours are to be restored.¹³⁹

The degree to which choice of colour influences the total experience of a film version is further demonstrated in another key sequence. Late in the first act, John Grant drinks with policeman Jock Crawford (Chips Rafferty) in the local pub. In the release print, the pub is depicted with dark and cool tones—murky browns and blacks, and dark navy blues—creating a shadowy respite where the patrons blend into the walls. When the raucous noise falls silent for the recitation of the Ode of Remembrance (a stanza from Laurence Binyon’s poem ‘For the Fallen’), the sudden shift to a bright red light is visually jarring, intensifying the contrast between the drunken chaos and the solemnity of the moment. The red light acts as a visual alarm, signalling a brief but intense shift in atmosphere.

In the digital restoration, however, this moment feels less abrupt. The restoration’s colours have already prepared the viewer for a heightened level of intensity, making the transition to the red light solemn and less stark. Instead of offering a sharp contrast, the restoration presents a more continuous visual experience, where the intensity of colour remains consistent throughout the film.

This difference reflects the restorationists’ backward-looking, nostalgic lens. In my interview with lead restorationist Simon, he described the restoration process as an effort to return the film to an idealised moment in the past: “A restoration copy is something that is

¹³⁹ Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel the Archival Life of Film in Transition*, 90–91.

worked on, specifically to bring it back to its former glory.”¹⁴⁰ The concept of ‘former glory’ is central to the digital restoration. Every element presented on screen is steeped in history—a history that was once feared lost. The restoration seeks to present the film as richly and carefully as possible, honouring its historical significance. However, this approach homogenises the film’s visual language, particularly in terms of colour intensity. By bringing every frame up to a specific digital standard, the restoration enhances the images’ visibility and clarity, at the expense of the range and variety of colours and lighting that originally helped convey shifts in tone and atmosphere.

This raises intriguing questions about the restoration’s implications. For example, in the digital restoration, the historical recitation of the Ode might be perceived as part of a unified visual language shared by all images in the film. This moment of patriotism may blend into the broader strangeness of the men’s isolation in their hyper-remote rural environment. While the restoration deepens the textural and historical representation of this kind of Australian identity, the release print offers a different experience: the recitation of the Ode is marked by a striking shift in colour and visual material, creating a jarring and surprising effect. This contrast adds a new dimension to their patriotism, reflecting the protagonist’s outsider perspective.

In both versions, the men are disturbing, and the recitation is unsettling. However, the digital restoration frames this scene as an excavation—affirming an historical impression imbued with age and specificity—while the release print presents it as a moment of heightened disruption within the film’s narrative and atmosphere.

¹⁴⁰ Anthos Simon, Interview with Anthos Simon - Conducted by Zach Karpinellison, Audio Recording, June 8, 2022.

This capacity for colour to radically alter the way a film version engages with memory is supported by Ute Holl's essay 'Nostalgia, Tinted Memories and Cinematic Historiography: On Otto Preminger's *Bonjour Tristesse* (1958)'. In it, Holl discusses the concept of colour as a tool of history and memory. She argues that one of the purposes of colour, particularly with respect to film restorations and new films set during specific historical periods, is to "trigger" memory and nostalgia in the viewer. Colour, she demonstrates, forms a specific relationship between a visual marker and a time and place. She writes:

Colour perception is relational, linked to temporal and spatial environments, even if these are imaginary or virtual. Colour in cinema is a matter of giving consistency to a fictional world, as Stanley Cavell asserts. Memory as triggered by colour is linked to a historical and culturally moulded spectrum on the one hand, and on personal reminiscences on the other... Acting as parasites on colour-memory... films create a sense of 'pastness' through stylistic connotations.¹⁴¹

The NFSA restorationists ultimately evoke this 'pastness' through their deployment of colour in the digital restoration, driven by a desire to serve the interest of Kotcheff and his influence over the film. At the same time, they are responding to a sense of nostalgia that somewhat ironically encourages the unearthing of new past material. This leads them to make all aspects of the film more visible and discoverable even if the things revealed were not visible in the original release print. This is best demonstrated by what is arguably the restorationists' most direct intervention: the digital manipulation of lighting and exposure to reveal images caught on the negative, but not visible to the original audiences.

¹⁴¹ Ute Holl, "Nostalgia, Tinted Memories and Cinematic Historiography: On Otto Preminger's *Bonjour Tristesse* (1958)," in *Media and Nostalgia, Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*, ed. Katharina Niemeyer (Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, 2014), 161.

II.. Can you see the target? Lighting and the dartboard

The digital restoration of *Wake in Fright*, alongside another digital restoration project (*The Wrong Side of the Road*), was the NFSA's first foray into the use of digital technology and software to create a distributable, exhibitable film version from an old and damaged negative. In my interview with Simon, who was contracted by the NFSA to lead the restoration at Atlab (now Deluxe Australia), he explained the necessity of exploring non-photochemical options:

I arranged for the negatives to come to Atlab. I had a quick look at a couple of the reels and there was a certain percentage of shrinkage. The physical deterioration on the negative was extensive. Some of the splices of the film were very thin to essentially breaking. I sort of realised this is not going to be a straightforward exercise. And I said to the managing director at the time, Murray [Forrest], that this is not a straightforward photochemical preservation project. This is going to be something new.¹⁴²

In other words, digital technology that was able to circumvent the complex and physical labour of traditional photochemical methods was necessary for the different use case of repairing this severely damaged original picture negative. Because this was the first instance of such a restoration, the NFSA outsourced much of the digital work to Atlab. While the possibilities were both novel and impressive, the technology was still in its nascent stages, meaning even more manual intervention was required than if the film was simply colour timed or graded using photochemical restoration and preservation processes. In my interview with Simon, he explains the level of detail and meticulousness in this early digital approach:

¹⁴² Simon, Interview || Anthos Simon & Zach Karpinellison.

We looked into software that would clean the footage but no software that we tried was able to clean up in an automated sense. So, it had to go back to what we called our “dust-busting team”. These were the people tasked with clicking on approximately 127,000 frames—removing all the scratches and dust manually. We had to do it individually, frame by frame. It was a massive, massive job.¹⁴³

It is clear that a labour-intensive human input was needed to offset any kind of sterility or error that would come from an artificial and automated approach. This is an important starting point as it challenges a common assumption that software and digital approaches remove aspects of the craft in favour of highly technical and unfeeling solutions.¹⁴⁴ If we compare this to approaches that would neither sustain nor host this level of granular detail and attention, we again see the level of productive and creative work that goes into a restoration. This is evident in the kind of work undertaken by O’Connor, senior audiovisual conservationist at the NFSA. The approach he takes is limited to physical and chemical tools for cleaning and maintenance.¹⁴⁵ While such work is associated with fastidiousness and surgical precision, physical preservation work is limited by the ways in which the material can be handled without causing further damage.¹⁴⁶ A frame-by-frame approach is possible, but the ability to isolate, zoom and scrub tiny details off individual frames is simply not possible via traditional preservation methods.¹⁴⁷

Simon’s digital process, however, establishes a standard that invites more intervention at a deeper level than other forms of restoration and preservation work. This is borne out by

¹⁴³ Simon.

¹⁴⁴ Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel the Archival Life of Film in Transition*, 215.

¹⁴⁵ O’Connor, interview.

¹⁴⁶ Michael Binder, *A Light Affliction : A History of Film Preservation and Restoration* (USA: Lulu, 2014), 14–17.

¹⁴⁷ Friend, “Film / Digital / Film.”

what Simon goes on to say about the capacities of digital technology as opposed to analogue methods:

In the old days of film grading, all cinematography was shot. The labs processed the negatives, 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!¹⁴⁸

This explanation (offered by Simon in rather excited terms) demonstrates the extent to which digital technologies resolve many of the problems and limitations that were present in exclusively manual and analogue methods of preservation and restoration. He continued:

...and that was the difference. We were able to do some dynamic grading within some of those scenes to bring out details that they could never see—like a dartboard on the wall—because the exposure was so dark. [Kotcheff] would never have seen that in the past, because they would have just done a density and RGB pass. We were able to do that, plus the dynamic stuff. And that's really the secret to all of this: you are able to rectify things that you couldn't in the past. Some archivists were 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 all cinematographers that sat next to us for the last twenty years would have always wanted that scene adjusted."

We made the decision to go that extra mile. That's why I don't think Ted said once, "No, this doesn't look right."

¹⁴⁸ Simon, Interview || Anthos Simon & Zach Karpinellison.

Framed here as an act of fixing a shortcoming of the original and endorsed by the invisible approval of two decades of cinematographers, this is perhaps the most radical change made during the restoration of *Wake in Fright*: the exposure on the film was adjusted to illuminate features and details that were previously unseen to both the filmmakers and audiences.

When discussed by those close to the project, continual reference is made to the unearthing of this dartboard that was previously obscured by deep black shadows. The revelation of this dartboard comes to symbolise the restoration's power, leading Buckley to note:

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—even see a dartboard 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.¹⁴⁹

Here, Buckley inadvertently raised a complex philosophical question that is perhaps too easily overlooked by those excitedly working on the restoration. Buckley's choice of words—"seeing more than was even there"—indicate that digital restoration can retrieve from the film latent information that has a contentious existential status. Did the dartboard exist in previous iterations of *Wake in Fright*? Or did the digital process create this dartboard?

The dartboard emblematises the potential and power of digital intervention to make live and porous something old and inert. Perhaps for the filmmakers, and those physically in the same place and environment as the camera, these objects did exist. But for viewers of the film, they did not. The act of restoration has now taken a turn towards something different—

¹⁴⁹ Simon.

something more generative. The act of digital restoration becomes the act of creation, using computers and software to build, as it were, the dartboard from murky, deep blacks chemically imprinted on celluloid. Again, this reflects Boym's concept of restorative nostalgia, where the obsession with reconstructing the past becomes more instructive than a concrete concept of what the past is.

Creating new images through the digital process also has implications for the tone and Australianness of the film. In addition to the dartboard, other props and details were revealed through the digital restoration process. Take, for example, the film's opening sequence, in which Grant packs his bag for his trip. In the release print, his room appears drably and lightly decorated. A close up of a picture of his girlfriend receiving her university degree is clear and visible, likely presented to signify that he is ultimately trying to get back to Sydney to see her. Other details, such as posters on the walls and his record collection, are obscured by shadow and not legible.

In the restoration, these details were enhanced via the same processes described above, and the set dressing and props are clearly seen within the frame. One example is Grant's poster of The Beatles' album *Abbey Road* on the wall. Another is a large format poster of a photograph from Greece. Without these details, Grant's status as an outsider is still communicated through the ceaseless tortures to which he is subjected in the Yabba. However, in the restoration, the inclusion of these details provides further texture to Grant's cultural and class differences. He is well travelled and has encountered a much larger world than what is contained in the Yabba.

These new images and details further demonstrate the restorationists' impetus to continue salvaging buried and obscured elements of the image, in service of both showcasing the digital tools available, as well as recreating not only the 1971 experience of the film but

also the detail and texture of making the film. As I will discuss, due to the effacement of the labour of these restorationists and archivists, much of the digital manipulation is premised on the idea that the filmmaker's intent and vision are accessible and replicable. More than that, it is seemingly constructed by these digital technicians.

III. Change continued

Across the versions, there are significant differences in exposure and brightness. The dartboard is one example of the effects of changing light and exposure, but there are many objects and images that are radically changed through this process, bringing into relief details that were very difficult to see previously.

In the film's first act, Maggie Dence plays a hotel receptionist who briefly interacts with Grant. In the release print, their initial transaction is a dark, austere image. The receptionist acknowledges Grant's request for a room and says, "That'll be four dollars." Grant then reaches into his wallet and extends his hand, holding a bill. The receptionist accepts that bill, and there is then a pause. It becomes apparent that Grant is waiting for change. Recognising the meaning of this silence, the receptionist explains that one additional dollar is kept as a deposit on the room key. In this version, the brief exchange offers texture and atmosphere to Grant's lodgings. The lobby is dark and uninviting. Dence's performance of monotone dialogue foreshadows a series of miscommunications, and the inevitable imprisonment of Grant in the Yabba.

In the digital restoration, this short sequence plays quite differently. Here the image has been digitally manipulated to become illuminated and clear. Not only is Dence's receptionist extremely visible, but now the hotel itself reads as bright, if drab, rather than dark and moody. Moreover, when the \$5 bill is exchanged, the adjusted exposure, brightness and contrast make it clear that it is a \$5 bill. These changes alter the scene's function. It now

offers a gentler entrance into the stakes and situation in which Grant will soon find himself. Rather than building textures of dread and anticipation paired with a claustrophobic sense of routine, the restored, brighter and clearer version is more comical and dryly witty in its presentation of rural Australian life as boring and uneventful.

The brighter image also conveys a sexuality in Dence's performance that is not as easily perceived in the release print. When Grant first approaches the desk, Dence's receptionist is focused on slowly rubbing an ice cube up and down her neck while leaning into the air blown by a small fan on her desk. This moment of sensuality foreshadows Grant's eventual sexual experimentation and violence while he is trapped in *The Yabba*. There is a clear relationship established through this movement: the intensity of the heat affects people's sexual desires. While Dence's movement is still visible in the release print, the darkness of the image makes her movements seem less deliberate.

Another important aspect of this change is that the visibility of the \$5 note also assists in transforming the digital restoration into an historical object. Contemporary Australian audiences can now use the film as a window to the past, observing what a \$5 note looked like in 1971. In addition, the amplified colour points to a specific Australian cultural product: the \$5 note is a distinctive pink not found in other currencies. The note then becomes a tiny, fleeting symbol of the film's place in Australian history, and where it is located in time and space. This is a direct outcome of interventionist changes made through the digital restoration process.

Simon described these lighting changes as "rectifying" things from the past. This language is informed by his working closely with cinematographers over many years. Changes that shed literal light on the film—illuminating aspects that may not have been visible to those working on the film at the time of its production—provide insights as to

which characteristics restorers deem important to draw out from the image; or, in another interpretation, actually create inside the image.

This is further emphasised when we consider some of the production history that contributed to this particular lighting scheme. In my interview with Buckley, he recalled that the film's cinematographer Brian West, a British man, upon touching down in Broken Hill jokingly complained that "this country is one stop over-exposed".¹⁵⁰ This could be dismissed as a humorous anecdote about Australia's intense heat and sunlight, compared to West's home in England. But if we do put stock in this complaint, we can see how West separated the visuals of Australia from elsewhere, entering Broken Hill as an outsider, witnessing the harsh contrast between the dark and brooding interiors of local pubs and businesses versus the blinding, white-hot sunlight outside on the red earth. For West, this vision, translated in the colours of the original release print, renders a real representation of his genuine difficulty with the Australian landscape.

By contrast, the digital technology emboldens a sense of restoration as excavation—or, rather, restoration that is driven by an archaeological impulse to retrieve from the dormant film version new insights and ideas. But in exposing these changes and distinctions—and the kind of principles and interventions that governed these decisions—we can begin to view the restoration not only as a notionally superior version of the film, but as a hybridised object: at once a carefully maintained and enhanced version of an important Australian film and a form of history, which shares the process of discovering and restoring a once lost film.

As noted in my Introduction, one of the central arguments of my thesis is that the NFSA's restorations are a form of palimpsest. They are legitimate instances or film versions of a given film, but they also bear the traces of all the processes and work that went into

¹⁵⁰ Buckley, *Behind a Velvet Light Trap*.

creating that object. As such, they do not just present a different version or experience of a selected film. They actually direct the viewer to see what has been retrieved, saved and changed.

This is demonstrated by the fact that the kinds of interventions described by Simon are not applied in totality. In the restored version, certain sequences retain the deep, black, enveloping shadows of the release print. In particular, one of the film's most famous sequences, of an orderly but intense two-up game, is almost identical across both the release print and the restoration. The decision to represent the two-up game using the same visual language seen in the release print implies a subjective, curatorial and selective approach to the act of restoration. This supports my broader claim, then, that interventions, regardless of intent, are inevitably creative, and generative.

IV. Translating culture: changes to content

Thus far the changes I have detailed concern visual distinctions or technological changes that affect the exhibition and format of the film. However, there is another crucially important category to consider: changes to the content. I will take this category up further in subsequent chapters, as the other films I examine have more significant examples than *Wake in Fright*, but it is important to briefly note some small content changes that occur between the release print and the restoration. This is because they relate to the way the restoration is positioned as an opportunity to bridge the gap between the history and memory of the film and the modern Australian viewer.

The release print of *Wake in Fright* I viewed at the NFSA in 2021 was actually the American recut of the original Australian theatrical release. This version, retitled *Outback*, included a few minor content changes made for cultural translation when the film was adapted for American audiences. It was also the only intact and available release print in the

NFSA's collection, which is why it was the version screened for me. While these changes might seem inconsequential, they are important to note here because the NFSA decided that the restoration process required digitally and physically reconstructing the film to align with the 1971 Australian version, as recalled by Buckley and Kotcheff.¹⁵¹ In effect, the American release print had to be overwritten in specific ways to reverse those changes and bring the restored version back in line with the original. Comparing the American release print to the restoration reveals the subtle but meaningful adjustments made for different cultural contexts and how these were deliberately undone during the restoration process

As part of the restoration, Buckley visited Atlab to supervise the lining up of the Australian soundtrack, which was also slightly different to that of the American version. The Australian soundtrack included culturally common terms such as “slag” (to describe a pregnant dog) rather than “slut”, which was used in the American version.

Moreover, halfway through the film, a sequence depicting full-frontal male nudity was replaced in the American release print with a shot of the same character now wearing underwear. These details are small and do not impact the narrative in a major way. Yet the decision was made to restore the (apparently) Australian version of *Wake in Fright*. I will return to this decision when I discuss the film's fluctuating transnational status later in this chapter.

Restoration and labour: working the past

As my close reading above demonstrates, the labour of the restorationists had a substantial impact and influence over the way the digital restoration of *Wake in Fright* operates in terms of tone, nostalgia and history. I now invoke Caldwell's production theory to explore the way

¹⁵¹ Buckley, interview; Buckley, *Behind a Velvet Light Trap*; Kaufman, *Wake in Fright*.

restorationists self-theorise, and the complex relationship between their modesty, effacement and creativity.

It is important in my appraisal of the restoration of *Wake in Fright* to consider the extent to which the exercise broke new ground for all the involved parties. This is because the novelty and newness of the digital restoration served to demonstrate the power and potential of these digital technologies for future work at the Archive. In my interviews with NFSA staff members, it was clear that part of what was so unique and important about the *Wake in Fright* restoration was that it was successful in using digital tools that had not been used before to treat, repair and enhance the film. Up until this point, this practice was not only cost prohibitive, but it had been achieved by few archives around the world. Most had not managed to achieve the same standard and quality that the NFSA and its collaborators would ultimately produce.¹⁵² The continuation of the NFSA Restores program is, in part, a result of the success of this restoration effort, because the digital treatment of *Wake in Fright* demonstrated the institution's capacity for industry-leading digital restoration.

In my interview with the NFSA's senior audiovisual conservator Patrick O'Connor, he explained that digital technology has been framed as a solution to the problem of historical archival negligence and the issue of missing films. He said:

Recently, the Melbourne International Film Festival wanted to screen this film called *In Search of Anna*. All we have is release prints, right? And they're all colour-dye faded; *high* colour-dye faded. Now, that's pretty bad. You just can't screen it, because everything's red. However, you can get that print scanned, and the colour can be reinstalled, digitally. You can make yourself an adequate DCP [Digital Cinema

¹⁵² Buckley, interview.

Package] that can be screened and has gotten rid of all the fading and restored the colour.

When asked whether digital intervention is a last resort, he responded:

Yes. We ask, “How can we save this film without those original materials?”

Especially because the idea of archiving a film didn’t really take fruition until probably the early 80s. And that’s why we’ve lost so many films over the years.

Especially in the 20s and 30s, because the idea was not to keep a film for posterity. It was all about making money and moving on. So that’s why a lot of our films—our earlier films—are lost. I don’t like to use the term ‘destroyed’ or ‘gone’. I hope they’re somewhere out there. But life goes on. And if something’s not stored correctly, it’s going to decompose.¹⁵³

O’Connor demonstrates the extent to which modern tools of conservation, preservation and restoration allow for a kind of reset, where film objects that otherwise may have degraded and been lost can continue to exist into the future. The significance here is that O’Connor’s explanation presupposes a continuity for these films. Moreover, he theorises his own position in relation to this labour of creating a continuity for these films as necessarily but essentially non-interventionist. His view is that these films should have been saved from the beginning, so he is simply doing his best to undo the negligence, not create a new thing. Within this labour structure, O’Connor notably views his role as less influential. He told me:

It’s labour intensive to fix up film, check the leader, fix up all the perforations, fix up the splices, note down how many scratches it has, if it’s shrunk and things like that.

Because they’re things you have to pass on to the person doing the chemical or digital

¹⁵³ O’Connor, interview.

restoration. So, we're the conduit before it gets to the other sections that do the sexy work. We're the ones that do the grind work.

O'Connor's response reflects what Caldwell has framed as the unintentional and effacing below-the-line worker in a production culture. He writes:

Below-the-line workers seldom talk of imposing their will or vision upon filmed material or the footage they've been given. Even prestigious film editors... refuse to discuss their specialty as a preconceived art form; they sometimes refer to it as craft, but frequently discuss it as a very unremarkable form of physical work.¹⁵⁴

This describes a particular kind of worker for whom the object and product of the film is, itself, instructive. Rather than being driven by a desire to imprint their own touch on a film, these staff view themselves as meticulous and reflexive—able to react to what the material demands rather than what they feel it needs. Despite this self-belief, their work is fundamentally generative and creative. Just as the work of a curator is inarguably imaginative, creating art by way of collating and collecting material in service of a cohesive vision, so too is the exercise of cleaning and selecting certain raw materials of footage to then be treated in other parts of the organisation.

This appraisal of O'Connor's work and his modest self-theorising demonstrates that preservation and restoration work exist in a culture and environment that often obscures the intervention of that work upon the art that is the original film version. This apparently invisible work is created by an environment in which significant changes made to film versions in service of the restoration goal are easily explained by staff as either simply responding to the will of the materials themselves or conforming to the vision of the original

¹⁵⁴ Caldwell, "Introduction," 20.

filmmakers. Given the involvement of Kotcheff and Buckley in the restoration of *Wake in Fright*, it is hardly surprising that the restorers pay deference to the original vision of how the film should or could look.

This was also evident from my interview with Simon. He explained that every technical change he made was with Kotcheff in mind. He said:

It was always about making sure that the spirit of the filmmaker [Kotcheff] was preserved. When I look at *Wake in Fright*, what I see above all else is the story. But all the other stuff that I see—like the dark, the colours, the scratches, the horrible hissing on the audio, all of that—most people don't notice. And they shouldn't! So, it's part of that filmmaking experience.

Simon's response suggests that the restoration of *Wake in Fright* always existed as a continuation of the film's trajectory. Rather than being a project necessitated by the film's rediscovery, the restoration is framed as an inevitable extension of the film's existence. The changes Simon and his team made are justified by their familiarity with the film's history and creators. One interpretation of Simon's position, it could be argued, is that he believes Kotcheff himself made these changes, and that he simply provided a technological conduit to extend the director's initial vision into the present and future.

The archivists and restorationists at the NFSA thus become the agile, careful self-theorisers that Caldwell identifies in production cultures.¹⁵⁵ These staff theorise the value of their labour in creating new restorations. They consistently defer to the filmmaker's intent.¹⁵⁶ But, these technicians are also deeply creative and engaged, making significant changes to the films they work with to serve the ultimate goal of restoration. It became clear through my

¹⁵⁵ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 2008, 113.

¹⁵⁶ This is partially a necessity driven by legal considerations that require keeping filmmakers and rights holders satisfied to continue using their films See also: Chapter 2 (Starstruck)

interviews that, to balance these competing interests, staff practice a kind of institutional modesty, always adhering to archival principles and avoiding any suggestion that their work on the restoration is tied to their own artistry or interest in the source material. This creates a complex dynamic for those interpreting their work.

In the case of *Wake in Fright*, the story of the original negative's loss, and the ensuing restorative nostalgia, both contribute to the kind of restoration the NFSA team produced. The restoration argues for a specific version of the film, one that highlights the rich material buried deep within the object, which only these restorationists could bring into relief. To achieve this, they must constantly efface their labour and defer to the inherent value of the film and its original creators.

Thus, the restoration of *Wake in Fright* is, itself, a complex text and film version that transforms the film for new audiences in the 21st century. It has become a dynamic record of Australian history, and a controlled instance of nostalgia, as I have shown. I will now examine the film's relationship to transnationality.

Transnationality

In the previous section, I explained how the restored version of *Wake in Fright* reversed the changes made to the Australian release version by the American release version, thereby restoring its Australianness. In so doing, I demonstrated that the differences between the release print and the restoration of *Wake in Fright* show that the latter operates as a complex historical record of its transnational identity. It is my further contention that this changing and nostalgic record of Australian audiovisual history is also complicated by the transnational origins of its makers.

Wake in Fright has been celebrated by critics for its authenticity. It has sparked debate over whether the confronting honesty with which it depicts Australia is the result of Canadian

director Kotcheff's foreignness.¹⁵⁷ For some scholars and critics, *Wake in Fright*'s challenging material was achieved by virtue of Kotcheff being an outsider uninterested in protecting the reputation of Australian culture. But others, such as Gabrielle O'Brien in her essay 'Dreaming of the Devil: Revisiting Ted Kotcheff's *Wake in Fright*', contest that Kotcheff's invocation of symbols and ideas of Australia are perversions of stereotypes, rather than blisteringly accurate. She says:

The director's outsider's gaze offers an irrational space that takes up cultural imagery—the XXXX beer can, the cajoling Aussie mate, the blazing sun, Anzac remembrance rituals, the boxing kangaroo—and distorts their signification.¹⁵⁸

Jane Mills suggests there is something so specific about the international and local dynamism of a film like *Wake in Fright* that it deserves new terminology.¹⁵⁹ For this particular transaction between local and foreign culture, she suggests "sojourner cinema".¹⁶⁰ Mills says the film "reveals uncomfortable truths to the host nation about their country". This claim challenges scholars and viewers of Australian cinema to free up the boundaries of the Australian canon, creating space for films directed by non-Australians about Australia.¹⁶¹

While scholars and critics have reflected on Kotcheff's unabashed truth-telling about the rural Australian experience, just as relevant are the analogous aspects of his Canadian background. Along with his experiences shooting on location in Broken Hill, memories of his

¹⁵⁷ Mark Kermode and Observer film critic, "Wake in Fright—Controversial Ozploitation Thriller," *The Observer*, March 9, 2014, sec. Film, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/mar/09/wake-in-fright-kermode-kotcheff>; Ambler, "Lost and Found"; Gregory Marks, "'That's Not Us!' 'Wake in Fright' and the Australian Nightmare."

¹⁵⁸ Gabrielle O'Brien, "Dreaming of the Devil: Revisiting Ted Kotcheff's *Wake in Fright*," *Metro Magazine*, no. 193 (June 22, 2017): 92–98.

¹⁵⁹ Jane Mills, "Sojourner Cinema: Seeking and Researching a New Cinematic Category," *Framework* 55, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 147.

¹⁶⁰ Mills, 147.

¹⁶¹ Mills, 147.

working-class upbringing in Canada also served as inspiration.¹⁶² In an oral history provided to me by the NFSA, Kotcheff discusses at length the way his perceptions of Australia were deeply analogous with the isolation and hypermasculinity of rural Ontario.

Meanwhile, in Simon Caterson's 2006 article 'The Best Australian Film You've Never Seen', he considers that the film is so well observed that it was too confronting and became necessary to neglect into erasure.¹⁶³ He writes:

I don't know why it was not preserved, but it is tempting to speculate that a kind of unconscious self-censorship—a sort of cultural amnesia—has allowed *Wake in Fright* to all but disappear while other, “nicer” films of the period such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Walkabout* have been cared for and canonised.¹⁶⁴

The transnational status of *Wake in Fright* is also key to the circumstances of its rediscovery, which then led to the creation of the film's new, restored version. As discussed, the search for the film was in part prompted by the fact that, despite Australian company NLT Productions being involved with the film's production and distribution, the copyright was, for the first three decades of the film's life, believed to be held exclusively by the international shareholders.¹⁶⁵ And the film's transnationality extends further still.

Evan Jones, the screenwriter who adapted Kenneth Cook's original novel, was a Jamaican-British man, and George Willoughby, the chief financier, was Norwegian, based in England. The film's cinematographer Brian West was also English, as were two of the principal performers, Gary Bond and Donald Pleasence. However, many of the extras, some with speaking parts, were street cast from Broken Hill, and the film was edited by Australian

¹⁶² *Oral History with Ted Kotcheff*; Adrian Danks, “Bliss,” *Metro : Media & Education Magazine* (St Kilda: The Australian Teachers of Media Inc, 2021), 147.

¹⁶³ Caterson, “The Best Australian Film You've Never Seen,” 86.

¹⁶⁴ Caterson, 86.

¹⁶⁵ Kaufman, *Wake in Fright*; Buckley, *Behind a Velvet Light Trap*.

Tony Buckley. This series of creative contributors from around the globe is key to defining *Wake in Fright* as a transnational film. Whether or not the release print version of *Wake in Fright* is ultimately determined to be a transnational film, it is arguable that the restored version is more Australian than its counterpart.

In contrast to the transnational crew that made the release version, the film's restoration—though the result of freighting and delivering original components from overseas—was carried out by people who identify as Australian, working in and for an Australian cultural institution, and located in Australia. In channelling nostalgia and history to revive the film, their goal was to reintroduce an important part of the Australian film canon that had purportedly been missing for four decades.

Changes made as part of the restoration point to the restorationists' and archivists' knowledge of Australian culture. For example, Simon's claim that he was able to "rectify" much of the film's high contrast, high exposure style—as used by outsider cinematographer Brian West to depict the Australian outback—is a consequence not only of years of technological improvement, but also of his familiarity with the local climate and terrain. Knowing how to expose, frame and colour Australian heat is something at which Simon and his team are evidently experts. As they adjust these aspects of the film, more and more detail becomes legible and they are praised by Kotcheff and Buckley for the incredible details unearthed. Their interventions bring the restored version into line with what might be understood as an institutional restoration aesthetic. This aesthetic reflects the backward-looking but digitally adjusted gaze of the Australian restorer.¹⁶⁶ In this way, the creation of the restoration is also the creation of an explicitly Australian version of this film.

¹⁶⁶ See [Page 205](#)

The restored version reinstated some Australian elements that had been removed from the release print. I have also noted the efforts to enhance and clarify details, like the pink \$5 note, accentuating the film's quintessentially Australian visual components. Similarly, the pathos around the sensationalised narrative of the OPN's loss and rediscovery in an American warehouse, and its recuperation in Australia via its restoration, also add to the story of its Australianness. Finally, the involvement of the NFSA, an institution charged with the stewardship of Australian audiovisual cultural heritage, in rescuing the film from obscurity solidifies its position as an Australian film.

It is clear then that the restoration signals a shift for the film from the transnational to the national, as it is guided by the NFSA and its staff to specific Australian emphases. If more proof was needed, an interview with Tony Buckley recorded in 2009 and posted to the NFSA's website as a set of 'Curated Assets' promoting the film, begins: "I'd class it as an Australian film. You can call it a film made in Australia if you really want to."¹⁶⁷

Conclusion

The NFSA's restoration of *Wake in Fright* is an argument made by the Archive and restorationists. It advocates for the revaluing of a film, once presented as lost, and now revisited with new cultural insights and sensibilities. It also heralds the interventions of modern technology, and the resulting film version looks different. It is brighter, and even reveals new detail previously inaccessible within the image. However, these changes and this argument are subtly masked by a layer of institutional modesty and the self-effacement of the archivists and restorationists. The restoration process becomes a palimpsest, where the contributions of these workers are embedded as hidden traces within the film itself.

¹⁶⁷ Tony Buckley, *Tony Buckley on Wake in Fright*, Audio Recording (NFSA, Canberra, 1993).

The restoration also functions an act of restorative nostalgia, looking back to present a history not only of Australian audiovisual culture, but also of how *Wake in Fright* might have contributed to that culture, had it not disappeared. Choices made during the restoration served these aims, providing their justification.

And yet the act of restoration remains open-ended. In 2024, a new 4K restoration of *Wake in Fright* was announced by Umbrella Entertainment, a private company and film distributor. In this version, a new language of correction and backward-looking nostalgia is foregrounded. The colour of *Wake in Fright* remains central to its value as an important Australian film. In promoting this upcoming restoration, Umbrella noted a problem with the 2008 NFSA restoration's colour, stating:

The 2009 [completed in 2008] grade had a green and yellow hue that didn't correspond with the look of the surviving release prints. The grade on this new restoration has replaced these hues with a far more natural and earthy aesthetic—capturing the Australian landscape in all its sweltering, sun-soaked colour.¹⁶⁸

Colour me intrigued.

¹⁶⁸ Umbrella Entertainment, "Wake in Fright 4K Restoration," May 19, 2024, customerservice@umbrellaent.com.au.

CHAPTER 02 *STARSTRUCK*: AUSTRALIAN-AMERICAN

Introduction

In both the Australian theatrical release version of Gillian Armstrong's *Starstruck* (1982) and the 2015 NFSA Restores version, Sydney's central business district is recognisable to audiences familiar with the city. Early in the film, Angus Mullens (Ross O'Donovan) and his cousin Jackie (Jo Kennedy), who is an aspiring pop star, stroll down busy King Street, exchanging playful barbs. Angus, in his sharp, nasal Australian accent, quips at a storefront window displaying a mannequin's legs, "She'd be good for a shag." Jackie, her voice equally harsh, shoots back, "As if you'd know how!" Soon after, they are enticed by a neon red kangaroo costume, and the scene cuts away, transitioning to Jackie performing at the Lizard Lounge.

A closer examination of this brief sequence highlights how deeply Sydney's urban fabric is embedded in *Starstruck*'s imagery. This is significant, as although this particular sequence is preserved in later versions, other efforts to represent Sydney are removed, making the city feel less integral to the restored version. For example, in this aforementioned sequence, behind Jackie and Angus, cars speed past in both directions—something no longer possible, as King Street is now a one-way thoroughfare, and includes a bike lane. Along the edges of the frame, scaffolding foretells of endless revisions to the cityscape via construction that continues well into the current decade. A pentagonal style of rubbish bin, now retired, is adorned with the slogan 'Do the Right Thing', as per the famous 1980s anti-litter

campaign.¹⁶⁹ When Jackie and Angus peer into the store window, three flamboyantly dressed figures sit on a blue bench behind them, with the words ‘Public Transport Commission NSW’ stencilled along the central beam. The Public Transport Commission (PTC) was in operation from 1972–80, so this bench similarly anchors the film in this era of Sydney, where the cars are older, the roads are wider, and there is an absence of public digital advertising. The colloquialisms Angus and Jackie use are also yoked to 70 and 80s, with Jackie using vernacular like, “I might crack it!” At the same time, there are links to present-day Sydney, with many pubs, hotels and red-and-beige building facades remaining today.

These images, sounds and symbols found throughout the film lend contemporary viewers the sensation of accessing a time capsule. Sydneysiders watching *Starstruck* today will notice familiar architectural lines, which can serve as a reference point to construct a Sydney past. While *Starstruck* is not the only film of its decade to feature Sydney’s CBD on screen, the Australian theatrical release version is an important record of the city’s history, because it alone makes Sydney the centrepiece, offering a vivid and comprehensive portrayal of the cityscape at the dawn of the 1980s.¹⁷⁰ This version is an unparalleled snapshot, highlighting Sydney’s distinctive geography and, specifically, the proximity between the harbour and the urban streets.¹⁷¹ This centring of 1980s Sydney in *Starstruck*’s Australian theatrical release version raises a key question: why did the NFSA, along with the film’s producer and director, select the American version for restoration —a version where the specificity of Sydney is less pronounced?

¹⁶⁹ Advertisement, [N.S.W. GOVERNMENT LITTER REDUCTION CAMPAIGN TV ADVERTISEMENT : DO THE RIGHT THING : 1981] (Australia, 1981).

¹⁷⁰ Other examples include *They’re a Weird Mob* (1966), *Goodbye Paradise* (1983), *Howling III: The Marsupials* (1987) *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Muriel’s Wedding* (1994), *Two Hands* (1999), and *Looking for Alibrandi* (2000).

¹⁷¹ This opinion is informed by the 25 years I spent living in Sydney.

In 1982, *Starstruck* director Gillian Armstrong and producer David Elfick, along with the US distribution team, decided to revise the film for American audiences by removing certain scenes, thereby reducing the run time. In this chapter, I argue that the film's depiction of Australianness, including its depiction of Sydney, was changed (though not necessarily compromised or reduced) through its restoration. As an experimental musical, the film's relationship to genre is also affected by choices made in the restoration. Of course, as I argue throughout this thesis, any restored version of a film is always in conversation with other versions. In *Starstruck*'s case, using the American cut as the basis for the NFSA Restores version alters the film's allure and status as not just Australian, but Sydney-centric. In so doing, the restoration changes the understanding and recollection of earlier versions.

Starstruck exemplifies my broader argument that restorations are more than just modern film versions—they are arguments that can actively reshape how earlier versions function and are perceived, particularly in the context of representing Australianness. To explore this, I return to Paul Eggert's treatment of the book edition as a site of crisis. I argue that *Starstruck*'s restoration, using American materials, signals the ongoing instability and flux of this restored film version. Eggert writes, "The differences revealed by the edition always lend us a certain leverage on the text, since every moment of its copying is a crisis point in its history."¹⁷²

These crises, as Eggert terms them, represent moments when archivists at the NFSA must intervene and recontextualise a film, effectively creating it anew. Such crises require justification for the act of versioning: why does a new version exist, and what necessitated its creation? In the case of *Starstruck*, the restoration more directly engages with this crisis due to the deliberate choice of which account of the film's history to preserve. This act of

¹⁷² Eggert, *Work and the Reader in Literary Studies: Scholarly Editing and Book History*, 41.

selection contrasts with other restorations, where the changes between versions are less pronounced. By engaging in dialogue with earlier versions, the restoration continually reshapes the film's legacy and each version's place within its evolving narrative.

Versioning *Starstruck*

Starstruck features Jo Kennedy and Ross O'Donovan as Jackie and Angus Mullens, respectively. The film, in all its versions, follows the teenaged cousins who dream of becoming pop music sensations. They stage stunts and impromptu performances with the aim of gaining fame and recognition. When that fame is finally achieved—Jackie gets a big break performing on a televised talent showcase—the pair is forced to come to terms with the reality of show business. Jackie leaves her cousin behind, trading her glam-rock guerilla performances for something more saccharine and commercial, selling out by performing covers of existing pop songs and ballads. By the film's end, the pair reunite, restoring the edgy and disruptive tone to their music.

Starstruck was directed by Gillian Armstrong following the success of her first feature film, *My Brilliant Career* (1979). After it was selected for the Cannes Film Festival and won seven AFI awards, Armstrong was “invited to Hollywood to develop feature films but chose to return to Australia” to work on *Starstruck*.¹⁷³ The film was Armstrong's first and only collaboration with producer David Elfick, whose success began in the early 70s with *Morning of the Earth* (1972) and *Crystal Voyager* (1973). He also produced *Newsfront* (1978), which would be restored by the NFSA in 2013. Through these productions, Elfick built a network of capable Australian filmmakers and technical specialists, many of whom contributed to *Starstruck*. Of particular note is Australian music icon Ian “Molly” Meldrum, whose

¹⁷³ Julie James Bailey, *Reel Women : Working in Film and Television* (Sydney, New South Wales: Australian Film, Television and Radio School, 1999), 208.

proximity to Elfick in the entertainment industry led to his involvement in *Starstruck* as a soundtrack producer.¹⁷⁴ Elfick would ultimately go on to become the film's copyright holder.

Elfick and Armstrong made *Starstruck* on a shoestring budget, and carefully used their limited resources to produce a unique independent feature that is an homage to—and, in some cases, a satire of—the American musical. It is also an ode to the Australian city of Sydney, brashly demonstrating its idiosyncratic artistic style and talent. However, these aspects of the film, which are arguably foundational to *Starstruck*'s identity, were subject to remapping once the film was sold to American distributors.

Several months after the film's Australian release in 1982, US distributors from Cinecom Pictures approached Armstrong. They offered to fund an international run, plus a brand new audio mix, as long as they could negotiate some changes that would, per Elfick, “make [*Starstruck*] more accessible to an overseas audience”¹⁷⁵ Armstrong and the American distributors collaborated very effectively: not only did they agree on what should be changed for the international, American version, the distributors also fully financed a revamped sound mix. The final product was a shorter version, with a runtime of 95 minutes compared to the Australian theatrical release's 105 minutes. Though the US version did not feature the Australian version's elaborate opening sequence, its second-act ballad, or the short bridging scenes focused on Jackie's mother Pearl (Margo Lee) and Nana Mullens (Pat Evison), it benefited from the audio's remix to Dolby Stereo, Hollywood's gold standard at the time.¹⁷⁶

The choice to partner with American distributors—a decision made partly due to the potential for upgrading the film's audio—situates *Starstruck* in strange commercial and

¹⁷⁴ NFSA, “David Elfick Portrait on ASO - Australia's Audio and Visual Heritage Online,” n.d., https://aso.gov.au/people/David_Elfick/portrait/.

¹⁷⁵ David Elfick, Interview with David Elfick - Conducted by Zach Karpinellison, Audio Recording, October 26, 2022.

¹⁷⁶ Elfick, Interview

archival contexts. It begs the question: what is exchanged, traded and lost when revising an Australian film for an American audience?

The Australian film industry has produced many films that have proven popular and commercially successful in the United States. Here, the government-funded industry is often viewed pedagogically and culturally as a space for arthouse film, independent of commercial incentives. Indeed, its existence is defined against the behemoth of Hollywood.¹⁷⁷ I have chosen *Starstruck* for this case study precisely because it sits outside of this framing. It represents an extraordinary opportunity and example of what, if anything, is to be lost or gained by interpreting an Australian film artefact through the finances and technological capacities of Hollywood. At the same time, *Starstruck* is important to consider because, after its transformation into a Hollywood-Australian hybrid was complete, the film returned to Australia for institutional celebration by way of the NFSA Restores program. These three versions of *Starstruck* can be used to examine Australian and international cinema heritage, and to address how the NFSA chooses to represent and protect that heritage.

The Versions

In light of this chapter's argument that the versioning of *Starstruck* has been conditioned by its depiction of Australia, particularly Sydney—which, in turn, informed its revision for American distribution—here I analyse two versions of *Starstruck*: the 1982 Australian domestic release (105 minutes) and the 2015 NFSA Restores digital version (based on the international or American version, 95 minutes). The relationship between these two versions highlights three key factors that influenced the restoration:

1. how *Starstruck* operates as an Australian film, both as a product of its time and in relation to its heritage—in other words, its national identity;

¹⁷⁷ O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema*, 72.

2. the implications of the adjustments made to *Starstruck* for its American release—that is, its international identity; and
3. the film’s commitment to genre and generic conventions, including the line between experimental cinema and mainstream appeal—its internal identity.

Restoration decisions do more than make technical adjustments—they shape a particular interpretation of the film. In *Starstruck*’s case, the restoration process engages with the three concerns of national, international, and internal identity. The NFSA’s restoration, which chose the American version, prompts critical questions about the cultural priorities embedded in this decision. It might be argued that this choice reflects a preference on the NFSA’s part to align with the interests of influential Australian filmmakers and rightsholders (in this instance, *Starstruck*’s producer and director) who lobbied for the American version to be used, rather than preserving the ‘Australianness’¹⁷⁸ tied to the original domestic release. However, it is not clear that the Australianness is underserved by the chosen version, either.

While *Starstruck*’s status as an important Australian film shifts depending on the version privileged by restoration, that shift does not necessarily undermine the film’s presentation as Australian. *Starstruck* is still an authentic example of Australian culture and art, but the process of restoration reveals the myriad ways in which that concept of authenticity and Australianness can be presented to contemporary and historical audiences.

My case study of *Starstruck* shows that the NFSA protects and preserves Australian film history, but they also create, revise and determine that history. This second role, which is both productive and interventionist, is not easily accepted by the Archive, though its presence is a key finding in my empirical research. I will return to this below when I undertake my

¹⁷⁸ “Australianness” is of course, of itself a fraught term that is difficult to define. But the concept of representing Australian audiovisual culture, in whatever nebulous form it might take, is key to the NFSA’s mission and remit as outlined in their policy documents which are discussed later in this chapter.

close reading and comparison of the film versions, but first, it is vital to understand some of the ways in which the act of restoration itself is problematised.

This key tension in the act of restoration is examined in Leo Enticknap's 2004 article on the problem of using critical discourse and theory to make sense of versioning and interventions in the material. He writes:

If a film had been changed by a studio against the wishes of its director or other individuals concerned with its production, which of the two versions should we regard as definitive? The film as released, as that was what the public actually saw, or the unmodified cut, on the grounds that it is a more faithful representation of the author's intention?¹⁷⁹

Enticknap wrote this piece during a surge in the production of restorations in late 90s Europe. In it, he begins to place pressure on the linearity of film versions, recognising that the concept of the original is unstable, and that attempts to restore that experience of originality are fraught. He also observes that academic discourse is ill-equipped to manage this problem, because of the convenience afforded to teaching and scholarship by simply collapsing different versions into an accessible and shared single text.¹⁸⁰ Yet his reference to “definitive” and “faithful” versions betrays the uncritical assumption that a restoration can produce a singular, authoritative version of a film. I argue that it is less important to determine whether a ‘definitive’ restoration is possible, and more crucial to examine how restoration creates a new version at the same time that it reframes the other versions—historical film objects—and alters their meaning. The act of restoration, then, is not simply about recovering a past

¹⁷⁹ Leo Enticknap, “Some Bald Assertion by an Ignorant and Badly Educated Frenchman: Technology, Film Criticism, and the ‘Restoration’ of *Vertigo* (1996),” *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 4, no. 1 (2004): 33.

¹⁸⁰ LEO ENTICKNAP, “Some Bald Assertion by an Ignorant and Badly Educated Frenchman: Technology, Film Criticism, and the ‘Restoration’ of *Vertigo* (1996),” *Moving Image (Minneapolis, Minn.)* 4, no. 1 (2004): 140, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mov.2004.0006>.

version. It's about reorganising and destabilising the very concept of what is correct or definitive.

In *Starstruck*'s case, tensions between the film's status as an Australian cultural product and the filmmakers' desire to appeal to the American market became central to the restoration process. Rather than settling the question of what *Starstruck* is or was, the restoration initiates a new phase of interpretation, wherein the terms of understanding the film shift as soon as the restoration begins. This was partly facilitated by the NFSA's Collection Policy, which attempts to balance the importance of collecting Australian audiovisual history against the obligation to address (and redress) relevant international materials.

"Our focus is on Australian audiovisual material," the policy reads. "We [also] selectively collect international material to provide context to historical Australian audiovisual production."¹⁸¹ The policy also reflects the Archive's intention to represent Australia through the collection. It says a guiding pillar for the NFSA's work is "content that represents Australian culture, histories, viewpoints and perspective in the audiovisual context."¹⁸² With these important policy directions as context, the choice to privilege the American revision of *Starstruck* over the Australian original release places pressure on these guiding principles.

It is worth clarifying that, unlike *Wake in Fright*, *Starstruck* is not a transnational production per se, though there is an inevitable hybridity or transnationality to even the Australian theatrical release. That is because the singularly Australian elements of the film have, since its earliest stages of production and exhibition, been presented through the distinctly American lens of the Hollywood musical. Both the film's initial international

¹⁸¹ NFSA, "NFSA Collection Policy 2022."

¹⁸² National Film and Sound Archive, "NFSA Collection Policy 2022," Policy Document (National Film and Sound Archive, 2022).

distribution in the 1980s and the eventual restoration in the 2010s trade a degree of Australian specificity and content in service of amplifying the film's American aspects, bringing them out of a state of latency and into a much more overt presentation.

Nevertheless, by excising aspects of the film that represent an historical Australian experience, the film's cultural specificity is changed. In reviewing the versioning process, we must reckon with the film's adjusted heritage and history, which now reflects a series of international interests as well as domestic ones and does not simply preserve Australianness.

Archival Starstruck

Starstruck and the other films I discuss in thesis are live, unstable items in the NFSA's collection. Their instability is the result of their continuing, dynamic existence within the collection, further complicated by the proliferation and management of many film versions for each film title. My thesis advocates that this web of versions is a legitimate and profound record of the way in which audiovisual heritage is charted and understood in Australia. While this is not the way the NFSA chooses to articulate its systems of managing the collection's liveness, Gabriella Giannachi argues that this is a pathway towards the "production of permanence". In her book *Archive Everything*, she writes:

No archive is ever completely stable, closed. Rather, archives ... are unstable, open to re-interpretation, re-ordering, re-enouncing. [T]he archive is where our presence and identity are generated and transmitted. In this sense, the archive is about the production of our permanence, but to produce this permanence, the archive must remain in a state of unrest.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Gabriella Giannachi, *Archive Everything: Mapping the Everyday* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 29.

In Giannachi's account, instability is a desirable trait giving way to agility and adaptability. Her ideal archive resists finalisation or rigid configuration, allowing it to continue archiving indefinitely. This paradox—of producing permanence while remaining changeable—reflects a complex institutional paradigm. For the NFSA, these dual aims are often navigated by deferring to the influence and vision of filmmakers, ensuring that their intentions guide the collection's evolving form.

Similarly, film restoration exemplifies this tension between permanence and instability. Restoration, particularly when conducted within the archive, aims to create a version worthy of its predecessor: one that brings the past into the future while introducing changes that constitute a new film version. This newness often positions the restored version as the default, not only because it reflects the archive's most recent attempt to “produce permanence”, but also because it is typically more accessible than earlier iterations.¹⁸⁴

Starstruck's instability within the collection is further complicated by its dual American and Australian origins. The NFSA has addressed this by deferring to the film's producer and director, who played significant roles in restoration decisions. This collaboration ensures that *Starstruck*'s evolving legacy is shaped by those most closely tied to its creation, allowing the NFSA to continue governing how the film is experienced well into its third decade. The restoration of *Starstruck* is constantly aware of, and gestures toward, this legacy.

¹⁸⁴ Importantly, this ease of access is also facilitated by the negotiation of rights that takes place as part of the restoration process. Digital restoration not only revisits and changes film objects, but also necessarily reactivates legal arrangements in relation to the exhibition of those film objects. This is discussed later in this chapter in brief, through my reference to Claudy op Den Kamp.

In order to properly understand that legacy, it is necessary to review the way it was received by both American and Australian audiences when the different film versions were first released in each location.

Domestic (Australian) Reception, 1982

In Martin Peers' 1982 review of *Starstruck* in *The Tribune*, he called the script "awful—seemingly manufactured to fit the occasional bursts of music and the occasion of a good idea."¹⁸⁵ This pointed critique the film as a chaotic and contrived assemblage of music and choreography. This excerpt is representative of Peers' entire review, which expresses frustration with the film's thin plot, yet acknowledges the quality of its soundtrack. Peers is interested in comparing the film to its contemporaries, citing Elfick's previous feature *Newsfront* (1978) as a triumph on an even smaller budget, yet more coherent and plot-driven. Similarly, Peers wavers between pride and disgust that a "poor quality" Australian film like *Starstruck* might emulate the success of similar "poor" American films that make substantial box office returns in Australia.¹⁸⁶ Peers' review assesses *Starstruck* via the successes and failures of its engagement with the American filmmaking tradition.

The international, American version omitted two slower and repeated musical numbers, plus three bridging scenes, in favour of centring only the most "polished"¹⁸⁷ music and performance from the film. While this would not have resolved all of Peers' issues with the film, it helps to make the film's ideas clearer and more consistent. It sacrificed some of

¹⁸⁵ Martin Peers, "Reviews STAR STRUCK," (Sydney) *Tribune*, May 19, 1982, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article259561040>.

¹⁸⁶ Peers.

¹⁸⁷ Elfick, Interview || David Elfick & Zach Karpinellison.

the causal logic of the plot by removing bridging sequences, but in so doing, prioritised the remaining musical numbers.¹⁸⁸

In a 1982 *Canberra Times* review by Dougal MacDonald, the film is lauded for its sharp wit and entertaining set pieces, though again its evasive genre, plot and national identity causes some degree of confusion. MacDonald writes:

That the material from which the film is fashioned is slight does not detract from its effectiveness. The talent of the young performers is manifest and major, especially Jo Kennedy. The music is adequate of its kind and once or twice excellent. And there are enough meaty ideas to be found in the script to lift the film above the epithet of mindlessness.¹⁸⁹

Similar to Peers' review, MacDonald—as well as Neil Jillet from *The Age*¹⁹⁰ and Robyn Ferrell from *The Sydney Morning Herald*¹⁹¹—finds the film entertaining and clever, despite being puzzled by its motivations and the thinness of its ideas.

Ferrell highlights *Starstruck*'s capacity for “satire”, and its leveraging of popular Australian musicians in the peripheral cast. Indeed, for Ferrell, the “great charm of *Starstruck* is its unpretentious exuberance”. The film elastically moves between iconic figures and symbols of the late 70s and early 80s music scene and the melodramatic excess that satirises these hyper-specific local elements.

¹⁸⁸ I will argue in subsequent sections of this chapter, that this decision may also be interpreted as a choice to strike a different tone than the more mixed and varied approach of the domestic release. This new tone perhaps exists as a middle ground between other Hollywood musicals of the same moment such as *Grease* (1978) and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975).

¹⁸⁹ Dougal MacDonald, “CINEMA Having Great Fun Avoiding Hazards,” *Canberra Times*, May 12, 1982, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article126895226>.

¹⁹⁰ Neil Jillett, “‘Starstruck’ Is Armstrong’s Brilliant Satire,” *The Age*, December 4, 1982, sec. FILMS.

¹⁹¹ Robyn Ferrell, “Rags-to-Riches with an Aussie Drawl,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 11, 1982, sec. PICK OF THE DAY.

The inclusion of Australian and New Zealander music icons such as Tim Finn (Split Enz) and Molly Meldrum (host of *Countdown*, a program on the Australian national broadcaster that could make or break a musician in the 80s) in Ferrell's review, though not in others, also shows how the film's Australian specificities are otherwise overshadowed by the genre conventions of the Hollywood musical. Though I describe this version as the 'domestic Australian' release, the film had, even at this stage, a hybrid identity in dialogue with American and Hollywood cultural conventions.

Peers, for example, questions the extent to which Armstrong showcases Australianness in the film, suggesting that the director prioritises the "emulation"¹⁹² of American films rather than celebrate its Australian performers.

By the end of 1982, *Starstruck*'s legacy had grown more complex, with the release of its American version. Ironically, in the United States, the film was received as distinctly Australian—even if it was attempting something in the Hollywood mode.

American Reception, 1982–84

Unlike the Australian critics' response to *Starstruck*, the American response was decidedly less uniform. While Australian critics were puzzled by the film's dual allegiances, American critics were confounded by the remnant Australianness in the international, American version.

The New York Times critic Janet Maslin was mostly intrigued by *Starstruck*'s foreignness, registering it as a "dizzy, impudent, highspirited" brand of Australian

¹⁹² Peers, "Reviews STAR STRUCK."

filmmaking.¹⁹³ As the film “doesn’t have much of a plot”, she wrote, “it tries to get by mostly on charm, and its charm is of a singular and limited sort”.¹⁹⁴ She concluded:

Starstruck is an original, and an energetic and funny one at that. It reveals a new side of Australia to anyone whose principal film memories are of the Outback. And now that *My Brilliant Career* has established Miss Armstrong’s talent, this one demonstrates her versatility in no uncertain terms. She may be an original, too.¹⁹⁵

Thus, as much as the film’s American version attempted to tone down its Australian idiosyncrasies, the positive American critical reception centres its Australianness, to the extent of perceiving its oddness—its unique tone and sense of humour—as a particularly Australian phenomenon.

At the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Jim Davidson was similarly impressed by the film’s refreshing nature, though he was much more sceptical of its merit. Davidson did not give the film Maslin’s reprieve when he wrote:

Starstruck is all surface. Director Gillian Armstrong, coming back from a four-year hiatus after *My Brilliant Career*, settles for a winsome tone and doesn’t try and explain her characters’ psychology or account for their zany stunts.¹⁹⁶

Prior to *Starstruck*’s US release, Cinecom Pictures urged Armstrong to make changes that would improve the film’s plotting, logic and structure. These cuts did not appear to pay off in the film’s reception, which often noted *Starstruck*’s lack of logic and narrative cohesion. Interestingly, both Maslin and Davidson recognise this as something distinctly Australian and

¹⁹³ Janet Maslin, “‘STARSTRUCK’ DOWN UNDER...,” *The New York Times*, November 10, 1982.

¹⁹⁴ Maslin.

¹⁹⁵ Maslin.

¹⁹⁶ Jim Davidson, “‘Starstruck’ Shines Brightly at Times,” *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, May 27, 1983.

foreign about the film. However, Davidson does begin to recognise some aspects of the international, American version's engagement with American iconography. He writes:

Most numbers are on the saccharine side, and many look as if they were engineered especially for the MTV network on cable television. The segments are brief, colorful, full of quick and jarring cuts, and basically empty—just like the videos on MTV.¹⁹⁷

I note specifically the use of the word “engineered” because, whether intended or not, it betrays the extent to which Davidson's response to the film was informed by its success in emulating certain cultural markers of the United States. “Engineered” implies intention, design and construction, all in service of making the film converse with populist American sensibilities and commercial trends. The comparison to MTV is also interesting, as it echoes Peers' sentiment that Armstrong was attempting to emulate a contemporary American music aesthetic. What makes *Starstruck* a foreign and Australian film for these critics is its failure to actually become an American film. It stands out as a film interested in Americanness, but unable to shed its Australianness.

Alan Stern of *The Boston Phoenix* and Richard Freedman of *The Spokane Chronicle* are less convinced by the film's notional charm, and outright suspicious of its intent. In a review titled ‘A Star is Stillborn’, Stern writes:

Most of the songs, like the costumes and choreography, recall the ‘Time Warp’ number from *Rocky Horror* (production designer Brian Thompson also worked on that midnight classic). But the movie's piece de resistance—a water ballet with 20 gay men paddling in Busby Berkeley formations while a school of inflatable sharks encircles them—was inspired by that even campier extravaganza *Can't Stop the*

¹⁹⁷ Davidson.

Music. The big surprise is that this dreck was directed by Gillian Armstrong, who reportedly waited two years for a script that would provide a worthy follow-up to her first film, *My Brilliant Career*. Whatever you thought of *Career*, you had to give it credit for intelligence and stylishness—two words that bear no relation to *Starstruck*. What both films have in common, however, is a willingness to bend plausibility in order to accommodate the heroine's naive fantasies. If Armstrong has trouble finding a subject for her next movie, she might want to try filming her own life story. She can call it *My Bungled Career*.¹⁹⁸

In this scathing review, Stern—rather than attempt to understand *Starstruck* as a dialogue between Australian and American musical influences—positions the film as a failed derivation of ideas from existing international successes.

Despite this level of negative criticism, the NFSA ultimately supported Elfick and Armstrong's choice to restore the film from the international, American version's components. Evidently, this kind of American response did not change the institutional view that the film was worthy of inclusion in the NSFA Restores canon as a significant example of Australian audiovisual heritage. However, the legacy of this criticism becomes embedded in the restoration itself. The film's complex negotiations between its international and Australian focuses leave palimpsestic traces that shape the final product.

While Freedman finds the film much more palatable and interesting, he still has issues that stem from a broader fascination with Australian movies as participating in a national genre that needs differentiation from Hollywood films. He writes:

¹⁹⁸ Allan Stern, "A Star Is Stillborn," *The Boston Phoenix*, March 8, 1983, 4.

As in many Australian movies of less than the first rank, though, *Starstruck* goes slack from time to time. Ebullient as it is, director Armstrong could have tightened up its meandering, inconsequential plot considerably. Still, it boasts one lovely touch not likely to appear in American movies. When Jackie does her stuff in the pub, old barflies as well as youths join in the resulting production numbers. Apparently in Australia, rock—even punk rock—is not seen as a grim challenge thrown in the faces of a disapproving older generation by their scruffy descendants. As in most of this cheerfully chaotic movie, everybody has a good time.¹⁹⁹

These reviews highlight a preoccupation with *Starstruck*'s national identity, both in Australia and overseas. Each review attempts to negotiate the distance or overlap between Australian and American identities, and that becomes baked into the act of restoring the film. Even though the actual film components for the restoration come from the American version, both versions and both reception histories are embedded in the process of restoring *Starstruck*. This focus on national identity and heritage aligns with the mission of the NFSA Restores program, particularly with respect to *Starstruck*.

The restoration: why the American version?

An entry on *Starstruck* on the NFSA Restores website states that the version for the restoration is shorter than the original domestic theatrical release. The entry reads:

Producer David Elfick, cinematographer Russell Boyd and director Gillian Armstrong all contributed to the restoration process. It was complicated as there were two versions of the film: a 105-minute Australian version and a 95-minute international one. The NFSA did not have complementary picture and sound components, but with

¹⁹⁹ Richard Freedman, "Punk-in-Cheek Starstruck Sparkles," *The Spokane Chronicle*, August 10, 1984, sec. The Spokesman Review.

the assistance of Mr Elfick, we were able to source the international soundtrack to match the interpositive we have in the national collection.²⁰⁰

Foregrounded in this paragraph, labelled ‘Summary’, are two key pieces of information: the restoration is the 95-minute international, American version, and David Elfick’s involvement in the restoration was essential. It is therefore apparent that the NFSA is interested in communicating to its audience the specific interventions made to construct this film as a restoration, rather than a simple reproduction of its original form.

Further, the summary is written in first-person plural, bringing the reader into the “we” of the NFSA, which in turn pays deference to Elfick’s involvement. There is also a tone of excitement conveyed by the opportunity afforded through his involvement to improve a collection of materials that can then be utilised as part of the restoration process. By aligning the reader with the NFSA’s enthusiasm for the intervention by Elfick, the Archive assumes that the dialogue between the public institution and the filmmaker is a positive component of the process. At the same time, without the rightsholders’ involvement, the Archive may find itself limited in what it can do to create the restored version. The permission of the copyright holder limits, to some extent, the decision-making regarding restoration at the archive.

Claudy Op den Kamp writes:

In general, a public-sector archive can collect, preserve, and provide on-site access to films that have third-party rights holders, but cannot distribute them commercially or engage in other projects without the specific permission of the rights holder.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, “Starstruck: Before and after Restoration,” other (National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, October 29, 2021), <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/starstruck-and-after-restoration>.

²⁰¹ Claudy Op den Kamp and Project Muse, *The Greatest Films Never Seen The Film Archive and the Copyright Smokescreen*, 2020, 54, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/66446/>.

As Op den Kamp explains, in all instances inside the archive, when a film is intended for restoration and screening for the broader public, permission must be sought and gained before any intervention is made into the film. This results in curators, those working in acquisitions and even technicians at the NFSA, abiding by archival principles, while maintaining the favour of the rightsholder throughout the process.

In my 2022 interview with Elfick, he explained how he and Armstrong were particularly interested in using the American version of *Starstruck* as the foundation for the restoration. Elfick reasoned that, above all other concerns, the audio could be vastly improved. Given that the film is a musical, and “has very witty dialogue”, the fact that its original, muddled stereo mix had yet to be enhanced was the main problem for restoration to solve. However, there is little connection between this claim and the choice to use the American version of the film, as this audio restoration could have been completed using the available domestic version of the audio in the collection, regardless of which film version was used. Nevertheless, in my interview with Elfick, he made it clear that his reason for choosing the American version was the focus on fixing the audio:

We were never happy with the mix of the Australian version. So, we had the Dolby Stereo mix from the American version, then we get to the point of the restoration, and we want to go with the American version, because we think it sells the story. And it's a better version of the film. Also, one could always get the scenes that were taken out—there's two songs taken out. 'Starstruck' is cut [the opening song that shares its name with the title of the film] but its reprised later in the film anyway. And there's

another little slightly schmaltzy ballad in the middle. We thought, ‘They can always be put on DVD deleted scenes or something if people want to see them.’²⁰²

This excerpt demonstrates that the American version, at least in part, was accepted as the default version of the film. Elfick’s readiness to progress to a lengthy and detailed discussion of the film’s audio restoration conveys a lack of interest in dwelling on the sequences removed from the earlier version. Moreover, the two musical numbers he refers to were not the only parts of the film excised for the American version and restoration. They were significant, but so too were the shorter vignettes that took place either side of those songs. Later in this chapter, I will discuss the idea of the DVD’s ‘deleted scenes’ feature as a refuge for the excised materials, but suffice it to say, Elfick felt that the removed scenes did not service the film’s narrative. They were not erased, but simply siloed into another setting where they could be accessed by those who wish to see them, so long as they know about them.

Restoration as palimpsest

The NFSA Restores version of *Starstruck* is more edgy, esoteric and experimental than the domestic release version because of the way scenes were excised without regard to narrative cohesion. Though the cut material did not deepen the narrative, nevertheless, by removing these scenes—which service plot and guide the film towards a more conventional narrative and aesthetic—something paradoxically additive happens. Omitting these scenes generates a new mode in which the film operates. It is no longer just a niche film from the 1980s. Instead, it now enters the realm of experimental Australian filmmaking that emerged at the end of the 70s and continued through the 80s.²⁰³

²⁰²Elfick.

²⁰³ O’Regan, *Australian National Cinema*, 185.

In *Starstruck*'s restored version, the jarring cuts, strange costumes and oversaturated colour palette are not simply kitsch or camp indicators of the film's historical moment. They are now signifiers of the film's position in experimental cinema. This assessment of the film as experimental speaks to the way in which film restoration is a display of process as much as final product. A central tenet of my argument is that the ultimate product of a film restoration contains evidence of all of the work, systems and intervention that went into that restoration. As stated in my Introduction, film restorations are palimpsests: objects that, when examined, bear the traces and inscriptions of previous versions and processes.²⁰⁴ Moreover, restorations function as a lens through which to investigate the traces of previous versions.

In the Introduction, I consider the utility of Enno Patalas and Giorgio Bertellini's treatment of the restoration and version as an "open process" and a "history of effects".²⁰⁵ While *Starstruck*'s restoration represents the most recent iteration of the film, it should not be read as a finalised or complete film version. Instead, it exists as the continuation and record of all the versioning of the film that preceded the restoration. It also signals a future for the film that can anticipate and develop new revisions and interventions. Restoration is process-laden, and this is particularly evident in *Starstruck*, given that the restoration plays out the same exercise in excision and modification that occurred when the film was first domestically released and then changed for international distribution. Thus, it is crucial not to simply analogise the American release version of *Starstruck* with the NFSA Restores version that uses the same content. Instead, we must re-examine the choices made across all these versions as part of the restoration process, contributing to what Bertellini describes as "discursive effusions" created and preserved through restoration.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ See [Page 24](#)

²⁰⁵ See [Page 33](#)

²⁰⁶ Bertellini, "Restoration, Genealogy and Palimpsests. On Some Historiographical Questions," 287.

I now turn to my close analysis of the two versions, which I viewed back-to-back as described in my methodology. This close analysis aims to determine the function of the changes made from the domestic to international to restored versions, both in terms of commercialisation for an international market as well as the cultivation of a unique and Australian form of experimental art cinema.

Comparing the versions

When American distributors agreed with *Starstruck*'s producers and Armstrong to reduce the film's runtime to 95 minutes, they believed that the resulting "tighter" version would better focus on its most engaging elements.²⁰⁷ This edited version was then used for broader international distribution. In 2005, when Australian company Umbrella Entertainment released the film on DVD, they also used the shorter, international, American version, distributing it both domestically and internationally in that form. This further solidified the shorter cut as the widely recognised version of *Starstruck*.

By the time the NFSA began the film's restoration, under the guidance of Armstrong and Elfick, it was unsurprising that they opted to use the international, American version. This cut had become the default, having been synchronised with the international audio track, making it the practical choice for restoration. It had also become the dominant version in circulation, both domestically and internationally, following its home video releases. This was not a radical decision, but it was an important choice. As a result, the longer, original domestic version, with its additional material, is virtually inaccessible today outside of the NFSA, where special viewing permission is required.

²⁰⁷ Elfick, Interview || David Elfick & Zach Karpinellison.

The opening sequence

The entire opening sequence, lasting four minutes, was cut from the American version of the film, and by extension the restoration. In the broader context of the plot and style, this sequence served two functions. Firstly, it provided a musical framework, establishing the crucial role of song, dance and performance. That, in turn, introduced the film's tone, shaped by the extent to which characters recognise the performances taking place inside their reality. In Jill Terry Rudy's chapter from *The Routledge Companion to Media and Fairy-Tale Cultures*, the author writes:

The transition to singing in a musical often occurs without commentary on anything extraordinary happening, yet it still involves something remarkable with singing itself. Louis Biancolli notes that "in a standard musical, you're not surprised when talk suddenly modulates into song".²⁰⁸

Rudy notes that there are various musical subgenres, including those that attempt a kind of meta commentary, in which the songs themselves are about singing. Another, more specific term for this kind of musical is the backstage musical which Peter Doyle succinctly describes as "in which the characters 'put on a show'".²⁰⁹ This is as compared to the integrated musical which allows for the seamless and consistent "...integration of the spoken, musical, danced, and scenic dimensions of a musical."²¹⁰ Each of subgenre, however, undergoes a moment of transition in which the rules of the given musical are made clear to the audience.²¹¹ Though

²⁰⁸ Pauline Greenhill et al., *The Routledge Companion to Media and Fairy-Tale Cultures* (Milton, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 767, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/anu/detail.action?docID=5331777>.

²⁰⁹ Doyle Peter, "Reverb, Acousmata and the Backstage Musical," in *The Routledge Companion to Screen Music and Sound*, ed. Miguel Mera, Ronald Sadoff, and Ben Winters (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 47–60.

²¹⁰ Geoffrey Block, "Integration," in *The Oxford Handbook of The American Musical*, ed. Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf (Oxford University Press, 2011), 0, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195385946.013.0008>.

²¹¹ Greenhill et al., *The Routledge Companion to Media and Fairy-Tale Cultures*, 769.

viewers are still required to suspend their disbelief, these transitory moments help to frame the extent to which characters in the film are aware that singing and dancing are commonplace in their reality. With *Starstruck*, this is a crucial requirement, given that there are sequences in which characters perform as pop singers for an audience, and others wherein they break into song as per the integrated musical format. The opening sequence, which is absent from the restoration, provides the clearest indication that the film is and will proceed as a backstage musical—one about singing, showbusiness and fame.

The domestic release version opens with Angus, a high school student, sitting in class and daydreaming about his cousin Jackie's potential rise to stardom. His fantasy is interrupted when the teacher asks the students what they aspire to be after school. Angus, only half paying attention, responds, "...be dazzling. Those pop stars and film stars who aren't like anyone else—someone must help invent them". This line establishes Angus' role as the imaginative force behind Jackie's quest for fame, positioning him as a dreamer who sees himself as her creative architect.

After answering the teacher's question, Angus slips back into his daydream, which begins to blur the lines between imagination and reality. He envisions himself performing in a surreal musical number, complete with fantastical imagery. Elements from the classroom seep into the sequence: Angus's scrapbook, filled with pictures of Marilyn Monroe and Marlene Dietrich, comes to life as dancers dressed as the two Hollywood icons appear. A pasted image of a Rolls-Royce in his scrapbook also materialises, crashing through the classroom wall and triggering the performance of the film's titular song, 'Starstruck'. This elaborate introduction, including the classroom scene and musical number, spans approximately four minutes. However, these opening moments are notably absent from the restored version of the film, which omits this sequence entirely.

In the NFSA Restores version, the omission of this sequence means the first musical set piece is Jackie's performance at the Lizard Lounge, a fictional live music venue on Bondi Beach. Without the initial context provided by Angus' daydream, the genre conventions of the musical feel less defined, particularly given the blurring of diegetic and non-diegetic perceptions of performance and song within the film. The fact that Jackie is performing in a setting where she should sing means that audience recognition of the film as a musical is deferred until later performances and scenes can confirm what is and is not reality within the film. This change, initially made at the request of American distributors to standardise and speed up the film, creates a less logical narrative structure. Ironically, given the intent of the distributor to make the film more accessible, the result is a shift towards a more subversive and experimental approach to genre.

In the domestic release version, the opening sequence does more than introduce the rules of this musical film. By giving Angus additional screen time, it centres his interests and illustrates his stakes, framing his desire for (proximity to) fame as fundamental to his person. The sequence makes these character traits very clear, and even could be derided for spoon-feeding the viewer an explanation of his wants and needs. In the absence of this scene, Angus' inner world does not reappear, framing Jackie as the film's singular protagonist. Angus' narrative function as a driving force who moves both characters from one part of the plot to another, all in service of gaining access to fame, becomes more opaque and difficult to perceive. In other words, the simple removal of this opening scene makes the plot less coherent. Its absence then fundamentally alters the film's engagement with musical genre conventions. It also plays a critical role in positioning the film's national identity.

The cut sequence offered a particular image of Australianness missing in other versions of the film. Angus' public high school has beige interiors and monotone teachers: universally accepted symbols of boring high school experiences. However, the student base

and their costuming convey Australian specificities, dressed in pale blue uniforms that are individually stylised to match the personalities of specific students. A mix of beach grommets and punk rockers, their uniforms are a canvas for expressing their identity. The impact of omitting this sequence is made more complex by the fact that the expression of surf culture among Australian teenagers has, since the 1960s, always been a dialogue between Australian and American subcultures.

In *Sydney Beaches: A History*, Caroline Ford writes that, “as surfing grew in popularity during the early 1960s it became closely associated with a subculture that, defined through music and film, had a broad appeal among teenagers and young adults”.²¹² American surf music and film—both of which, Ford explains, largely came from California—“captured and contributed to the mood of the period” in Australia.²¹³ But, she continues:

Home-grown surfing culture had its own unique elements and was gaining international fame... This new surf culture was bigger than the beach. Through surf music and films, non-surfers identified with a youth culture that glorified the beach, the surf and the freedom of youth itself...The ‘surfie’ teenager had arrived.²¹⁴

Thus, the costume choice for these customised uniforms, working in combination with the very specific geographic conditions of Sydney’s public high schools, conveys a particular youth identity that is at once hyper-localised to Sydney and its beaches, while also invoking the importance of American music and film influences on surf and beach subculture. Angus’ inner-city school, where students dress in half uniform, half swimwear, and where hot, bright light pours in through the windows, implies proximity to the beach.

²¹² Caroline Ford, *Sydney Beaches: A History* (NewSouth, 2014), 198.

²¹³ Ford, 198.

²¹⁴ Ford, 198.

The film takes place predominantly at Milsons Point, a harbour-side suburb of Sydney. The students at this school are some distance from the nearest true ocean beach, but the proximity to water taps into the cultural influence of the beach and its associated clothing and trends. This, in sum, creates a portrait of Sydney teenagers as being influenced by global trends in music and fashion, but also anchored to their local experience of life in Australia. These textures and images are not essential to the plot, nor does their omission have any bearing on the narrative arc of the rest of the film. But a key component of any film chosen for NFSA Restores is its connection to Australian film heritage. In this way, the decision not to use the Australian release version, with this opening sequence intact, for the restoration changes how that restored version purports to be an artefact of Australia's and, specifically, Sydney's audiovisual history. Removing these details changes the way the restored film version functions as a record of Sydney's history and memory.

NFSA Restores Starstruck: opening sequence

In the absence of the original opening sequence the NFSA Restores version of *Starstruck*, begins *in medias res*, with Jackie and Angus walking down King Street in the CBD, as outlined in this chapter's introduction. In my interview with Elfick, he said the original opening sequence—the four minutes prior to the King Street scene—slowed the film down. Yet the opening sequence of the international, American version does not assist the audience to learn about the characters or the rules of the film. It is hurried and clipped, opting to let the audience infer what is happening as the film unfolds, rather than directing them from the start. However, historically and culturally significant Sydney iconography is built into the opening of the restored version, too, meaning it still operates as a time capsule of a bygone era. But the archetypal Sydney high school is no longer present, significantly altering the context in which the two protagonists operate.

In my interview with Elfick, he also directed me to a small continuity error in this opening. Before Jackie and Angus arrive at the Lizard Lounge, we see a brief shot of the pair already inside the venue. Though Elfick was not entirely sure how this happened, he explained that the error was only present in the American version, and was thus carried over into the NFSA Restores version. “We couldn’t get rid of it without also changing the improved audio,” he explained. “This was the price we paid for the re-cut, but it hasn’t stopped people’s enjoyment of the film.”²¹⁵

Viewing this error as deliberate rather than accidental allows for a different interpretation of the restored version. As an artistic decision, it can be perceived as a deliberate distortion that shifts the film into a more experimental, avant-garde mode. For viewers of the NFSA Restores version, who lack access to the original domestic release, this continuity error may indeed be interpreted as an intentional artistic choice.

This small moment opens up the possibility of other readings, informed by the way such a break in continuity and standard editing style destabilises the film’s commercial viability and mainstream appeal. Indeed, the restored version of *Starstruck* has a slightly faster pace generally, leaning into harsh cuts, with a more experimental style. However, my close reading of the film does not align with the perspectives of the international distributors who requested these adjustments, or of those creatively involved, namely Armstrong and Elfick, who enacted them. They all viewed these changes as a way to streamline and clarify the film for a broader audience. By contrast, my analysis reveals that, although the changes economise some of the film’s longer, dispensable sequences, they also weaken the causal relationships between scenes, disrupting the plot’s overall logic.

²¹⁵ Elfick, Interview || David Elfick & Zach Karpinellison.

Nevertheless, I contend that these excisions and resulting errors cause the restoration and the original domestic release version to enter a kind of dialogue. Regardless of any enhancements envisioned by the filmmakers and restoration team, when the film is made available for a new generation without the context of the domestic release version, it will be conceptualised as intentional. When the two film versions are screened back-to-back however, they start to speak to each other. This kind of comparison, which I had the privilege to undertake for the purpose of this thesis, offers both an alternate account and a more expansive, generative chronicle of Australian audiovisual history and heritage.

What occurs in the restoration can be understood as a continuity error, in light of the more causal relationship between shots in the domestic release version's opening sequence. Another reading is that the restoration renders the domestic release version more basic and narrative-driven, rather than art and form-forward. Essential to my broader argument is that restorations do not only indicate significant interventions and changes away from earlier iterations, but that the production of restorations causes the original or earlier versions to change and operate differently. When viewed together, both versions force alternative ways of understanding the other.

Ballad

The other major change to the American release and restoration is the removal of a ballad in the middle of the film. This omission seems intended to improve the pace and flow of the story. The ballad is a melancholy song lamenting the pain of ambition and passion, which Jackie performs for one of her romantic interests, whose courtship is otherwise brief and peripheral. . However, this scene occurs shortly before another major sequence, found in all versions of the film, wherein Jackie attempts to woo her new investor and supporter, Terry (John O'May), before discovering that he is gay and not romantically interested in her.

In the domestic release version, the ballad demonstrates the flippancy of Jackie's declarations of love, as she willingly places herself in a love triangle of her own design in order to propel her towards new and exciting experiences. However, removing the ballad from the restored version deprioritises Jackie's other interests and passions beyond her pursuit of fame, recognising that these facets of her personality are a small part of the film's ultimate plot: to see Jackie confront her dream of being a celebrity. The men in her life, whether she succeeds in courting them or not, have no lasting impact on her skill and aspirations as a singer and performer.

This scene is far less lavish and grandiose than the film's other musical numbers. It is a quiet part of the film, with few cuts, only two performers, and blocking and staging repeated from other scenes. The ballad takes place in Jackie's family's pub, and it sees her laying and walking on the bar top (as seen in earlier songs) while slowly serenading her love interest. There are no additional cast members present, which itself generates a particular intimacy and sentimentality. However, as Elfick mentioned to me, this sequence does not add depth to the narrative, ultimately slowing down the film's momentum for an exchange that has no bearing on the remaining scenes.²¹⁶

Elfick also expressed that the omission of these sequences was no great loss, as they could be retrieved and celebrated as "deleted scenes" on DVD and other media releases. However, "deleted scenes" is a very specific piece of terminology and evokes something other than what Elfick is describing. A deleted scene is one removed from a film before its theatrical release because it is deemed to detract from the film's general momentum.

In this context, however, the scenes in question were deleted after the fact. They were part of the original theatrical release, then cut for subsequent versions. In other DVD and

²¹⁶ Elfick.

physical media contexts, the resurrection of these sorts of scenes are described as ‘alternate’ cuts, which show you how the scenes operated in context. However, the DVD released by Umbrella in 2005 (which is now out of print) did not contain the entirety of the scenes excised for the restoration. Without the archival access I was granted, at this stage it is not possible for members of the public to see these scenes in context.

Even if these scenes were accessible in the way Elfick envisions, it remains important to consider their position relative to the restored version. These sequences are not included in the NFSA’s flagship restoration. By existing outside of this restoration, and outside of the most prominent earlier version of the film (the American release), the material of these scenes becomes parenthetical, complicating their relationship to the film’s current legacy.

Although traces of these omissions remain visible through the layers of the restoration—reinforcing its nature as a palimpsest—what becomes most striking is the new effects created by their absence. In the NFSA Restores version, these scenes are truly deleted, buried beneath layers of versions, recoverable only through comparative readings of earlier versions, or by drawing on cultural memories of the film’s domestic release in Australia.

The restoration of *Starstruck* continues to reshape the film and its future in ways that converse with and manage all previous versions of the film. The restoration, chiefly informed by the American version, still produces a different rhythm and narrative focus, and this reconfiguration of material—which has, itself, been iterated and reconfigured—underscores the weight of the decisions around what material was selected and what was not.

A note on the film’s sound

In my interview with Elfick, he noted that, above all else, the sound was the biggest area of concern in all versions of the film. In 1982 the Cinecom Pictures distribution deal presented the first opportunity to revisit the sound mix:

I was very unhappy with the mix of the film. When the opportunity came to do the international, American version, it meant—because it was a recut of mostly the first reel—that I could go to Screen Australia and say, “Okay, give us some money, and let’s do a remix of the whole thing.” So, I got Roger Savage [sound editor, designer and mixer] in to do the remix. The remix for the American Dolby Stereo version is infinitely superior, and it is a musical.²¹⁷

To this end, the sound is the most markedly different aspect of the NFSA’s restoration. When I asked about this audio overhaul, Elfick explained:

Stephen MacLean, the writer, is a very witty guy. There’s a lot of witty dialogue, which was very hard to hear in the Australian version, and a bit better on the international Dolby Stereo version. Because Roger had mixed it before, and we had all the sound stuff from the Archive, we had all the elements. With the digital version, he went back and did a 5.1 stereo mix of the film, and he was able to really separate the dialogue so that you could hear it with much more clarity than ever before.

This emphasis on sound clarity also contributes to a different aural experience of the film.

In previous versions, ambient noise had been decreased as much as possible in order to make the dialogue audible. This had the unintended effect of creating an eerie, ethereal soundscape, wherein characters would be talking on busy, bustling streets, but the soundscapes did not match the visuals. A noticeable example is when Jackie and Angus are on King Street. In the domestic release, this sequence is strangely quiet, and yet the dialogue is muddled. In the international, American version, the dialogue is enhanced, but the

²¹⁷ Elfick may have erroneously referred to Screen Australia, when intending to name the Australian Film Commission. Screen Australia was not officially founded until 2008, but the other details provided to me from Elfick suggest this first audio revision was regarding the original 1982 American recut. Interview with David Elfick.

background audio remains suppressed. Finally, in the restoration, Savage managed to recreate a much fuller sound environment, constructed exclusively from the original audio recordings, but remixed into 5.1 channels. Changes to *Starstruck*'s audio have been a key focus throughout the history of the film's versioning. Even the NFSA's most recent overhaul for the 2015 release, continued to prioritise improvements in sound design and dialogue.

When writing a profile of the *Starstruck* NFSA Restores release in 2017 for *The Guardian*, Kate Jinx articulated the bombastic, abrasive quality of *Starstruck* as intended and key to its character and quality. She writes:

The film is a neon lightning bolt wrapped up in a gaudy tourist tea-towel and decoupage with love letters to a skewiff memory of Hollywood. Now that it's been reborn, I can only hope that the character of Jackie Mullens will go the way of that other archetypal Australian Muriel Heslop, and her story will be transformed into an all-singin', all-dancing' [sic] stage show. It's what Angus would have wanted.²¹⁸

Jinx characterises *Starstruck* as a film that deliberately nods to other titles and genres, assembled intentionally to create something new. Interestingly, she seeks to celebrate the film as an Australian work, fantasising about the creation of a stage show to cement its domestic legacy. This reinforces my argument that, through the process of creating this more experimental version as the restored version of the film, certain key signifiers of its Australianness have been downplayed. Jinx's humorous plea to immortalise the film with an Australian stage show—and to heroise the protagonist as an important Australian figure—suggests that these aspects may have been suppressed by the restoration, because, as I have

²¹⁸ Kate Jinx, "Rediscovering *Starstruck*: Gillian Armstrong's 80s Rock Musical Extravaganza," *The Guardian*, July 31, 2017, sec. Film, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/aug/01/rediscovering-starstruck-gillian-armstrongs-80s-rock-musical-extravaganza>.

shown in my comparative analyses, these elements were more present in the original domestic release version.

Starstruck's multiple versions reflect varying intensities of Australianness, different engagements with the musical and experimental film genres, and pay deference to the filmmakers' most acute desire to revisit and upgrade the audio. The specific choices made in producing the official NFSA Restores version of the film reflects *Starstruck*'s complex history as an Australian feature then parsed by international distributors and finally returned to take a place in Australian audiovisual heritage through the NFSA Restores program.

Starstruck the restoration: the theory and the method

The NFSA Restores version of *Starstruck* is an argument. It is an argument for a celebration of the internationalised, music-forward version of the film. It is an argument for a version that trades some sequences and iconography of Australia in exchange for international familiarity and recognition. All of this is navigated while maintaining its quirky, punk rock tone. However, the restoration-as-argument is complicated by the NFSA's deferential and modest attitude to its role as restorer. In other words, the NFSA does not want to be perceived as making an argument. Rather than taking ownership of the interventions made into the film, the archivists, restorers and contractors necessarily and regularly efface themselves from the process, instead citing the oversight and stewardship of the rightsholders and filmmakers as paramount.

John T. Caldwell's production culture theory can again be used to determine the implications of this kind of effacing and deferential self-theorisation of labourers within the archive. In Caldwell's chosen context of Hollywood and US television production, the category of effacing staffer is used to describe workers whose intent and creativity in their labour is obfuscated when put into practice. Caldwell cites, for example, visual effects

workers, who are trained by public relations staff to describe their efforts, in behind-the-scenes featurettes and other paratextual materials, with words like “magical” as opposed to “technical”. In this linguistic transformation, the labour of technical staff, which is complex and multi-faceted, is collapsed into something impenetrably creative and slick. This lays the groundwork for executives and advertisers to translate this elevated technical work into something proprietary and company-specific (for example, Disney’s ‘Imagineers’).²¹⁹

In the context of archival restoration, however—especially for a government institution like the NFSA—there is no financial or corporate incentive to reduce or simplify technical labour in order to transform it into something the public can recognise as “magical”, or the specific proprietary technique of the NFSA. Instead, the NFSA invites audiences to recognise the deep, complex processes involved in producing the restoration. The Archive takes great pains to remind the public that the restoration was a result of filmmaker and rightsholder endorsement. This is a position I have evidenced in other sections on the restoration as palimpsest.²²⁰

With respect to the observance of the strict, technical dimensions of this kind of restoration practice, NFSA staff theorise their roles in terms of the specific expectations of their professions. For example, Victoria Ramshaw—who, at the time of our interview, was the senior manager of collection digitisation—described to me the NFSA’s generous but rigorous approach to engaging with significant stakeholders like rightsholders and filmmakers. Speaking directly to the potential for Gillian Armstrong to intervene too closely in *Starstruck*’s preservation and restoration, Ramshaw said:

²¹⁹ John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, Console-Ing Passions: Television and Cultural Power (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 380.

²²⁰ See [Page 51](#)

We're not invested in any one version or the other. To us, all versions have value. And, as an archive, you keep all of them because you never know when they're going to be needed. You're keeping a record of what *was*, and being authentic to the time it was experienced. That gets into, you know, more difficult questions around the creatives, and the example you gave with Gillian Armstrong. Were some creatives to say, "Wipe that version—that was never what I intended. I want this version!" we would say, "No, we're keeping that version," because that is our role.²²¹

It is evident that Ramshaw's focus is on the Archive's technical function and responsibility. From Ramshaw's perspective, the Archive's role and institutional responsibility is to preserve and collect history, and this responsibility must go unimpeded, regardless of which version of the film is selected for NFSA Restores. To this end, the technical and difficult work of these archivists exists in a microcosm, one that sees their efforts to collate and protect the many versions and artefacts of Australian film history as paramount—regardless of the access afforded to private individuals and the general public. In this way, selecting *Starstruck*'s international, American version for restoration was made possible by the NFSA archivists' perception that all versions hold equal standing within the institution's collection.

Ramshaw has held sixteen discrete job titles at the NFSA since she was first employed as a Public Affairs Officer in January 1997. Her familiarity with the Archive is comprehensive. This further serves to entrench the effacement of the worker in the Archive. I argue that a key feature of these staff is their ability to navigate disconnected and often distinct departments, which in turn enables them to justify their actions as adhering to the

²²¹ Victoria Ramshaw, Interview with Victoria Ramshaw—Conducted by Zach Karpinellison, Audio Recording, September 27, 2022.

global principles and functions of the entire institution. This is achieved without turning to reductive language that attempts to disguise the complexity of the work.

Part of what enables the effacement of staff intervention in the process of creating a restoration is that the work of the staff is not operating inside one contiguous whole. At the NFSA, unlike on a film set, there is no singular object or product at the end of the process to which everyone can attach themselves. This means a staffer can interact with an archival object or artefact, or part thereof, and never come into contact with that object again in the same or a different form. This disaggregated process contributes to the deferential and modest attitude of the archival actor, who contributes to the restoration, but is disconnected from the ultimate outcome of that restoration.

This was also evident in my interview with senior audiovisual conservator James Campbell. Though not working on the conservation of original components for *Starstruck*, he has contributed to work on materials ultimately used for NFSA Restores. His work exists entirely out of phase with other facets of the restoration process. I asked Campbell about the moment he receives a film object versus the final moment of exhibition. It was clear that there are often significant gaps or even complete disconnects.

Zach Karpinellison: So, you've gone through your process, it moves on to other departments, and by the time it arrives to be screened, do you feel like you can see things from your end of the process? Or is it too far removed at that point?

James Campbell: Look, it hasn't happened often—because I haven't necessarily always been personally involved in things that have been screened—because it depends on who's working on that job. But I do remember, we did a screening of the Corrick films, and I remember repairing one of them. I remember sections that were

missing, which they didn't correct, because they wanted it to be authentic.²²² And I remember seeing that and being like, "Oh my God, I remember that section of the film," because there's just this massive section where there's some damage. And you're like, "Oh, my God." So, in that case, yes.²²³

Campbell's response qualifies his "in that case, yes" with a number of key details about the flows of labour around the Archive. He relies on his memory, using it to assemble links between his input into the repair or treatment of the film object and the ultimate product, along with all the decisions that were made completely independent of his actions. He clarified his approach further when I asked about the specific timeframe between his team's treatment of a film and its eventual exhibition:

Once [the other teams have] finished their steps, they start talking to our engagement team about when and if they're going to do a screening, or when they're going to give it to whoever they needed to supply it to...And obviously for us, until that stage, sometimes we might not know about it. Part of that might just be that we're busy in our own world, working on our own things.²²⁴

Campbell's response indicates the self-theorisation of this type of worker at the NFSA. The work done by these actors often exists as a satellite operation some distance from the main process. It may not have an intimate link to other departmental labour in the Archive. Instead, connections must be explicated, identifying the movement of the film around the institution,

²²² What Campbell is describing here—is the decision to not attempt to repair sections of damage or sections that might be located elsewhere, because his supervisors decided that this damage and absence was itself a part of the work, and therefore not necessarily something to be resolved.

²²³ Campbell, Interview with James Campbell- Conducted by Zach Karpinellison.

²²⁴ Campbell.

and the technical archival workers who must respond to these movements. Campbell made this clear when I asked about the way his team actually viewed and perceived the film versions they work on:

Karpinellison: And so, as part of your process, do you view the film in motion?

Campbell: Well, no. I mean, that's the thing. You're sitting at a bench winding through film, and it's like, you're seeing it frame by frame. It's twenty-four frames per second, so not a lot is happening. And you'll check back later, and you'll be like, what's going on?²²⁵

It is apparent that there is a decoupling of film exhibition and film object, which itself cleaves to the dividing lines that compartmentalise labour and practice inside the Archive.

Campbell's process and work is necessarily piecemeal. He must view the film object as a series of component parts to which he can apply his treatments in order to then prepare that object for viewing as a whole piece of art. He also told me that some work on very damaged films might involve repairing or even constructing the perforations on film stocks that have been damaged or shrunk to the point that they can no longer be relied on for the scanning.

Campbell: So, for us, obviously, we don't actually do much to the image. We try not to touch the image. That's more digital's job. But for us, it's the *physical carrier*. We want it to get over that scanner. So, we've got to repair anything that might tear.

²²⁵ Campbell.

We've got to repair anything that might prevent it from being able to be scanned visually.²²⁶

In this quote is an understanding that Campbell's team's work will ultimately impact the image and art that is extracted from the object, but his separation of the team's labour from the ultimate motion picture indicates the way archival materials are viewed as dormant in the lead up to the eventual assemblage of what the public will receive as a restored or access version of the film.

Film versions produced for the NSFA Restores program are thus the result of a careful negotiation of competing interests, personalities and responsibilities. Each of these facets interact but are crucially disconnected from the individual work of specific labourers and archivists at the institution. This separation appears to be intentional, as workers are siloed into specific roles that, while valuable, remain distinctly isolated. Throughout this chapter, I have shown how the restoration of *Starstruck* exemplifies this dynamic.

There is not currently a scholarly framework for understanding the productive energy that this negotiation of labour and restoration involves. This is one contribution my thesis makes to contemporary scholarship. However, an author whose work was particularly helpful in developing this model is Catherine Russell. Her book *Archiveology* deploys new terminology and language to account for a specific genre of filmmaking that creates new works of film from archival footage: archiveology. This kind of filmmaking has compelling overlaps with restoration. Russell defines this kind of film practice as one that "draws on archival material to produce knowledge about how history has been represented and how

²²⁶ Campbell.

representations are not false images but are actually historical in themselves and have anthropological value”.²²⁷

Russell’s term is a new category through which to make sense of filmmaking that uses old material to do something both new and engaged with history. Applying this term to film restoration, it is clear that the footage used by the restorer—footage found in the NFSA’s collection—is being reconstructed and reconstituted with the new context of historical knowledge. Russell calls archiveology an important means of instructing or teaching audiences about the construction and artifice of history. “If history breaks down into images,” she writes, “archiveology is a means of engaging and indulging those images to construct collective memories from which new futures can be known.”²²⁸

Russell’s focus on the kind of film that juxtaposes different parts of archival history, synthesising new understandings and memories, is one way of engaging with the curation of audiovisual history. The restoration fundamentally performs the same exercise: historical footage and material is located in a collection and then processed (with present-day sensibilities and technologies) to allow for a renewed experience of historical images. In the case of *Starstruck*, the NFSA Restores version of the film “indulges” the American treatment of Australian material, producing a new work. In turn, all the labour that goes into the production of this new version is engendered with a kind of creativity fuelled by this indulgence of memory and history, and the spectre of the filmmaker’s vision.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I claim, based on an adaptation of Paul Eggert’s theory, that film restoration is a kind of argument. Film restoration as a concept is constantly subject to scrutiny and

²²⁷ Catherine Russell, *Archiveology: Walter Benjamin and Archival Film Practices*, A Camera Obscura Book (Durham London: Duke University Press, 2018), 27.

²²⁸ Russell, 29.

redefinition. This scrutiny has created the foundations for an institutional approach at the NFSA that is agile, cautious and effacing with regards to restoration and the degree of permitted intervention.

To do this, in this chapter, I have put multiple versions of *Starstruck* into conversation. Each of these versions represents a waypoint in the film's industrial and commercial history and signals a new attempt to fix or improve some aspect lacking in the previous iteration. However, each version is also a showcase of artistic and stylistic choice—demonstrating the degree to which the film can successfully decoupage American subcultures, or construct the ultimate Australian pop star, or simply invoke a unique and experimental genre of filmmaking. Lastly, each version is an argument for a particular kind of cultural identity. While some versions of the film bring its Australianness to the fore, others amplify its apparent homage to (and satire of) American musical traditions.

By exploring each of these different emphases and aspects of the multiple versions of *Starstruck*, I have demonstrated how the film's transformation over time led to a series of choices and decisions that then form its restored edition. The restoration examined in this chapter is, therefore, the assembled result of an argument for a specific version of this film. However, the staff and employees of the NFSA bear only an implicit relationship to this restoration-as-argument. Indeed, the role of the rightsholders (specifically David Elfick and Gillian Armstrong) and their influence has loomed large in the negotiation of the restoration of the film towards the use of the American version.

The influence of the filmmakers, the effaced input of the archival workers and the commercial interests of the American distributors have all contributed to the version of the film that is now celebrated as part of the NFSA Restores catalogue and preserved as part of Australia's audiovisual heritage. The argument that this most recent version of the film makes

is complex. On the one hand, there is an argument for a kind of transnational film history diplomacy, wherein the American influences that were always a part of *Starstruck*'s original materials have taken a greater hold on the film in its older age. On the other hand, there is an argument for the strength of the film's enduring Australian images, voices and iconography.

In the film's final scene, Angus rolls down the very real, purple-carpeted interior stairs of the Sydney Opera House, locked in a kiss with an usher. This sequence is intercut with shots of Jackie performing on a fake Sydney Opera House stage, which is really a garishly set-dressed amphitheatre at the Seymour Centre, a smaller commercial theatre space in the inner city. This collision of real and fake versions of iconic Australian performance venues is perhaps an apt metaphor for the ways that restoration, not unlike filmmaking, requires not only the construction of an image, but a degree of suspended disbelief. The true argument of *Starstruck*'s restoration is that in the spaces between sincere efforts to represent Australian culture and music exists the opportunity to fake both the local and the foreign. The restoration seeks to exaggerate and emulate not only the cultural specifics of American popular filmmaking, but also to emulate, exaggerate and fake the specifics of Australian entertainment. The result is a film that, across its versions, can both skewer and appreciate the cultural influences it has both shunned and embraced.

CHAPTER 03 *BLISS*: ACHIEVING BLISS

Introduction

On 19 September 1985, *Bliss*—a surrealist adaptation of Peter Carey’s novel, co-written and directed by Ray Lawrence, and produced by Tony Buckley—screened to a sold-out Sydney audience. It would go on to gross over \$1.3 million domestically.²²⁹ However, the version shown during its successful Australian run was a revised cut. In fact, there are three distinct versions of *Bliss*, with the first two released in 1985, each with notable differences.

The first was the 130-minute director’s cut, which debuted at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1985, where it quickly became infamous for a much-publicised walkout of 400 audience members.²³⁰ This incident, sensationalised by the media, disproportionately shaped the film’s reputation, with headlines focusing on the apparently offensive content.²³¹ Often omitted from these reports was the fact that the remaining 1600 attendees stayed throughout the screening, and their reception of the film was far more positive.

The second version is the domestic theatrical release, which premiered in Australia later that year, trimmed down to 107 minutes. Finally, the third version is the NFSA Restores release from 2016. While this version shares a runtime with the theatrical cut, it embodies significant differences. I argue that each of these three versions is a distinct film object, shaped by its context and production, and deserving of analysis.

By applying my method of versional analysis—examining the sociocultural context, production and archival treatment of the versions, as well as the differences between them—

²²⁹ Buckley, *Behind a Velvet Light Trap*.

²³⁰ *Bliss - Restoring the 1985 Classic*, Digital Video Featurette (Canberra, Australia, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fo_VSgIOwSo&list=PL03vmVO_lQa35PaAKmB0nOvoZPhu6-w80&index=2.

²³¹ Danks, “Bliss.”

this chapter uncovers the evolving history and legacy of *Bliss*. In particular, it highlights how the restoration process inflects ideas of memory and heritage. The NFSA Restores version of *Bliss* actively engages with the film's controversial screening history at Cannes, capturing and addressing this history before re-presenting and reimagining the film for present and future audiences.

The NFSA's approach to negotiating the different versions of *Bliss* demonstrates that restoration is not simply an extension of preservation, or a kind of repair, but instead a creative and generative process guided by an imperative to produce something new that signals something old. This restoration is, like the other films explored in this thesis, an argument for a specific, contemporary version of *Bliss* made by archivists and restorationists.

In this chapter, I also suggest that, while unique restoration choices are made to produce each NFSA Restores title, the restoration version of *Bliss*, like the other films discussed in this thesis exhibits the NFSA's 'restoration aesthetic'. The term 'restoration aesthetic' is drawn from Bingham Bryant and will be explored later in this chapter. In the context of NFSA restorations, I note the continued and consistent use of heavily saturated colour, deepened shadows, and a preference for a "clean" look that decreases the level of grain. Each of the NFSA Restores titles examined in this thesis cumulatively contributes to the shared characteristics I identify here as the NFSA's restoration aesthetic.

Furthermore, substantial changes occur when introducing the material and content of the film to digital media and formats. Thus, the work of the restoration team, as well as the involvement of both NFSA executive staff and filmmakers, is inventive and innovative, deploying modern tools to remediate the film in a new context, with new understanding.

In this chapter, I will consider *Bliss*' complex industrial history and sociocultural context, situating the film in terms of its commercial and critical impulses in 1980s Australia.

I will then consider the first two versions of the film, closely comparing the changes between the longer, international release and the revised, domestic cut. This process illuminates the longer version's more sustained interest in protagonist Harry Joy (Barry Otto) and his capacity as a storyteller. The shorter, domestic version favours a faster pace, trimming the montage to formally mirror the descent into chaos and madness that Joy experiences over the course of the film.

Bliss does not neatly belong to any one genre, or even market. Despite initial hesitation in the Australian and international film markets, it managed to succeed and capture commercial and critical attention. It is possible to understand the unlikely success of *Bliss* through a consideration of its different versions. In fact, by considering the film's production and distribution, I argue that the justifications and motivations for what was changed between the long and short versions can be deduced.

Later in this chapter, I consider the NFSA Restores version of *Bliss* by exploring what was changed through the restoration process. I argue that *Bliss* evidences the NFSA's restoration aesthetic, and I consider the implications of this restoration aesthetic when positioned against the generalised effacement of the contribution of Archive staff, as well as the input from filmmakers Lawrence and Buckley throughout the process. I will also further examine the extent to which the restoration was itself a response, nearly four decades later, to the Cannes backlash.

Bliss is an important and remarkable Australian work, one that was commercially and critically successful despite initial distaste. The NFSA Restores version asserts its position in the Australian film canon by the mere fact of *Bliss* being selected for institutional restoration. The Restores version thus becomes an opportunity to test whether the film has merit when appraised in the absence of its initial difficulties, and to determine whether the film gains a

new meta narrative of redemption that, in turn, becomes crucial to its understanding. It is evident that, despite the corrective impulse underpinning efforts to digitally restore the film, this act of correction—of attempting to contextualise and respond to the controversial Cannes screening—becomes an indelible element of *Bliss*'s history and cultural memory that is foundational to its restoration.

Australian film in the 1980s: where does *Bliss* fit?

Bliss stars Barry Otto as Harry Joy, an advertising executive who suffers a heart attack that briefly causes him to die before being revived. He is renowned as a successful businessman and extraordinary storyteller, but these facets of his personality are forever changed by his brush with death.

Following his near-death experience (NDE), Harry believes himself to be in Hell. He becomes delusional, seeing his family and friends as immoral narcissists who seek to torture and conspire against him as punishment for his contribution to the evil of the advertising industry. Meanwhile, Harry's family and friends are, in fact, plotting against him. His wife Bettina (Lynette Curran) is having an affair with Harry's business partner Joel (Jeff Truman), and they intend to commit Harry to a mental asylum, steal his business and flee. Harry continues to distrust his reality, believing he may still be in Hell, which causes him to question the morality of his previous work as an ad-man. He then falls in love with a sex worker named Honey Barbara (Helen Jones) and ultimately decides to escape to the bush with her. These themes of morality, spirituality and the failures of Australian capitalism reflect a moment of industrial and cultural shift in Australian film production.

By 1981, after two decades of commercial and cultural volatility for the Australian film industry, the landscape for producing and distributing a film had changed. The introduction of the 10BA tax incentive recalibrated the economic and cultural dynamic within

the Australian film industry. For the first time in Australia's history as a filmmaking country, commercial entities led the pursuit of government funding, seeking tax relief via financing films. Previously, Australia's national film industry, which was largely government-funded, needed to find both commercial financing and commercial interest. This meant that films made after the 1981 tax changes were projects of domestic and transnational corporations keen to see returns on their mostly tax-free investments. They distributed films to wide international audiences, aiming to massively increase their profits.²³²

The amendment of the Taxation Act in 1981 created a condition allowing "...150% of [an] investment to be tax deductible and requiring investors to pay tax only on 50% of the profits."²³³ This meant there was virtually no financial risk involved in making a film, and that investors could offset any expenditure against their larger tax debts. This extraordinary support for filmmaking created a boom in the Australian film industry. However, in order to protect the national interests of the scheme, the concessions were offered with the caveat that films must be Australian. The metrics for this Australianness were complicated and subject to change. It eventually fell to the Department of Home Affairs to assess applications for the concession. According to Dermody and Jacka, a film's Australianness might be measured against a range of indicators, including "subject matter, locations, nationality of personnel, copyright-holders, owners of shares in the production company, and source of finance".²³⁴ Under these conditions, filmmakers sought to produce demonstrably Australian blockbusters that were explicitly designed to penetrate international markets. The two most notable

²³² This was of course not a universal outcome. Many attempts to exploit this tax incentive for maximum profit failed and ultimately harmed the financial structures of the Australian film industry.

²³³ O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema*.

²³⁴ Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema* (Currency Press, 1988), 146.

examples are *Mad Max 2* (1981) and *Crocodile Dundee* (1986). In this context, *Bliss* is a strange bedfellow for these totemic, hugely successful films.

Bliss is an experimental and satirical modern tragedy. Despite accessing the same financial support systems as its blockbuster contemporaries, it trades their spectacle and causal logics for a much more unconventional approach to genre and form. This is the direct result of attempts to translate the most challenging parts of Peter Carey's novel.²³⁵ Bruce Woodcock describes Carey's approach as crossing from "satirical realism into fantasy."²³⁶ These sharp transitions take advantage of his "clipped prose" to conjure images of lewd acts, like Harry's daughter Lucy fellating her brother David while he is dressed as a Nazi.²³⁷

The film presents these images as surreal and lurid fantasy sequences. They run the gamut from the aforementioned act of fascist-tinted incest to cockroaches crawling out of Harry's chest cavity. They are used in the film (and the book) to skewer the immorality of the advertising industry, along with the consumerist drive that upended the Australian nuclear family. *Bliss* is unashamed in its subversion of filmic norms, presenting disturbing material alongside its characters' more conventional narratives of love, betrayal and introspection.

Bliss is also an example of industry savvy. At each stage of the production and distribution, key creatives Lawrence, Buckley and Carey took great pains to demonstrate the film's mainstream appeal and viability.²³⁸ *Bliss* was made on a small budget, and the filmmakers pitched to investors like the Quantum Group, requesting modest production resources (to be offset by the tax incentive scheme) in exchange for overseas exposure at the

²³⁵ Anthony Buckley, "A Landmark Australian Film," in *Behind a Velvet Trap*, by Anthony Buckley (Hardie Grant Publishing, 2009), 252.

²³⁶ Bruce Woodcock, "Bliss (1981)," in *Peter Carey*, ed. Bruce Woodcock (Manchester University Press, 2003), 39, <https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719043604.003.0003>.

²³⁷ Peter Carey, *Bliss*, 1st Vintage International Edition (NSW: Hogarth Press, 1996), 43–45.

²³⁸ Buckley, "A Landmark Australian Film," 252–56.

Cannes premiere.²³⁹ There is a particular irony, or perhaps reality, in making a film about the pitfalls of being seduced by profit, while simultaneously using the prospect of financial returns as a key motivator for bankrolling the film.

Like other major Australian film productions of the 1980s, *Bliss* focused on the international market, yet it offered a more complex portrait of Australia than did many of its contemporaries. *Bliss*' reputation as something of an outlier in Australian national cinema was forged in the critical response to the film. *Los Angeles Times* film reviewer Kevin Thomas wrote:

Although not without precedent, *Bliss* (rightly rated R) represents a bold departure from the genteel traditionalism of mainstream Australian movies. We'll never be able to think of Australia or its cinema in quite the same way again.²⁴⁰

Thomas puzzles over *Bliss*' context, invoking the broader category of "mainstream Australian movies" in an effort to locate the film. *Bliss*' as a new voice in Australian filmmaking tradition warrants further attention.

In some ways, *Bliss* unintentionally reflects the trials of its own making and distribution. Lawrence and Buckley collaborated with Carey to adapt his complicated novel for the screen. In the years before production began, Carey had optioned his book overseas, with Gillian Armstrong slated to direct.²⁴¹ However, the screenplay was not written by Carey and had not secured funding. Carey approached Ray Lawrence, a friend and former colleague

²³⁹ "A Landmark Australian Film," 248-49

²⁴⁰ Kevin Thomas, "MOVIE REVIEW : 'BLISS' IS OFFBEAT BUT RIGHT ON TARGET," *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1986, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1986-02-21-ca-10486-story.html>.

²⁴¹ Buckley, "A Landmark Australian Film," 246.

in the advertising sector, to see if some better arrangement could be found for an expedited, and more faithful, production.²⁴²

Lawrence took the idea to Buckley, who confessed to having been deeply affected by Carey's book, and he immediately agreed to help advance production. It is worth acknowledging that, at this time, both Lawrence and Carey had very limited experience in both filmmaking and film financing. Buckley had produced several films throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, but the funding bodies and changing tax arrangements raised new challenges.

Once Buckley finally managed to option the rights from a British producer who had let the film lay dormant, Carey and Lawrence "commenced work breaking down the book in preparation for writing the first draft of the screenplay".²⁴³ Together, the three men formed a production company called Window III. While the rights were now secured, there was still a significant funding shortfall. Lawrence's inexperience as a film director proved an obstacle for prospective investors. To convince distributors and other private corporations to invest in the film, Buckley, Lawrence and Carey prepared a small scene as a proof of concept, hoping this would reassure those doubting Lawrence's capacity. Though not particularly effective with private investors, this effort did reassure the NSW Film Commission, which eventually decided to back the film. Once the Commission signed on, other investors followed.

Buckley, Lawrence and Carey viewed their film as a sort of underdog, ill-suited to the Australian film industry. This is demonstrated by Buckley's account of interacting with a colleague who did not believe *Bliss* was capable of being made:

²⁴² Buckley, 252–56.

²⁴³ Buckley, 247.

I was at the offices of the Australian Film Commission when I encountered Errol Sullivan, [the] unit manager on *Caddie*...He was walking towards me and said, with a smile of incredulity, ‘Tony, you haven’t really optioned *Bliss* have you?’ I nodded. ‘I’ve read it,’ Errol said, ‘you can’t make a film out of it!’ I said, ‘One most certainly can—wait and see.’ He walked past, shaking his head. This encounter illustrates graphically how two filmmakers can read the same book and/or screenplay yet see it so differently. It is one of the wonderful challenges of being a producer and why *NOBODY KNOWS NOTHIN*’.²⁴⁴

Thus, this unadaptable book was paired with two advertising executives turned creative artists. Lawrence was a first-time director, and Carey, a first-time screenwriter. Buckley recalls that, upon finally communicating to Lawrence that the film had been successfully financed, the director replied quietly, “I won’t let you down.”²⁴⁵

But there were difficult reshoots, mostly as a result of Buckley and Lawrence fearing that the film’s opening had to be perfect, otherwise investors—who had stipulated they see a final cut—might pull the necessary distribution funding.²⁴⁶ There was a sense that the film was guilty until proven innocent. It had to earn the respect and financing of its investors, and overcome the presumption that *Bliss* was unfilmable.

It is important to establish this initial period of difficulty for the film’s production and its makers, as this precarity leaves a trace on the film itself. Its subsequent versioning reflects the task of refining *Bliss* for the right audience. The shorter version is still attempting to account for the unwieldy, apparently offensive material that made it difficult to secure financing in the first instance.

²⁴⁴ Buckley, 246.

²⁴⁵ Buckley, 249.

²⁴⁶ Buckley, 253–56.

In June 1985, the film had its world premiere at Cannes and was met with over 400 walkouts less than twenty minutes into the session. The Cannes version had a running time of 130 minutes. However, by the time the film returned to Australia for its domestic debut, Lawrence had recut the film to a more economical, audience-friendly 107 minutes. I argue that *Bliss*, and the subsequent position it holds in Australian cinema history, are the after-effects of this perceived international failure, as articulated by Australian journalists. This shorter version of the film was used in 2015–16 as the source material for the NFSA Restores version of the film.

Bliss asks questions about the nature of reality, morality and divine punishment. These questions become entangled with the story of *Bliss*' development, difficult distribution and promotion following its premiere at Cannes.²⁴⁷ Importantly, *Bliss* is also about the power of storytelling and, to that end, the dangerous potential of advertising to persuade and dissuade. *Bliss*' versioning is contextualised within a media and press environment of apprehension. Consider Richard Glover's article on the Australian reception of the Cannes controversy. Headlined 'Media Slaughters Good Chance for *Bliss*', Glover interviewed Buckley, who said, "I think a reviewer has every right to rip into a film, but I don't think it's right to be torn to shreds by the general press before we've even had an Australian screening."²⁴⁸ Glover wrote this piece as an impassioned defence of the film, specifically challenging commentators like *The Daily Telegraph*'s Dorian Wild, who defamed *Bliss* without having seen it.²⁴⁹ Glover writes:

While they were away, *Bliss* had been slaughtered by the Australian press. The chief executioners had not been to Cannes and had not seen the film...Many of those

²⁴⁷ Richard Glover, "Media Slaughters Good Chance for Bliss," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 10, 1985, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=IL5f5cZgq8MC&dat=19850610&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>.

²⁴⁸ Glover, "Media Slaughters Good Chance for Bliss."

²⁴⁹ Glover, "Media Slaughters Good Chance for Bliss."

reports cited the film's reception as further evidence of the decline of the Australian film industry...But there was also ammunition for the view that *Bliss* had excited the critics, especially the Anglo-Saxon critics, at Cannes. This evidence has gone unreported.²⁵⁰

Lawrence had always envisioned a shorter version of *Bliss*, but the deadline for the Cannes submission left insufficient time to refine the film's length.²⁵¹ The Cannes walkout, and subsequent confected media frenzy, gave Australian distributors pause. This uncertainty and pressure renewed Lawrence's focus on shortening and refining the film for a local audience.²⁵² By the time of its domestic release, a 107-minute version had been completed, addressing criticisms of bloat and excess that had surfaced in reviews by some French and North American critics.²⁵³

The decision to produce a shorter version illustrates how *Bliss* was shaped by external pressures and public perception, with the Cannes controversy catalysing a re-evaluation of the film's pacing and structure. In this sense, the two versions that briefly coexisted in 1985 represent different stages of the film's evolution: the Cannes cut, an ambitious but sprawling vision; and the domestic cut, a tighter, more streamlined iteration, created with knowledge of the international, American version's fraught reception. *Bliss'* narrative of moral reckoning parallels the broader industrial context of Australian filmmaking during a time of shifting economic and cultural agendas.

²⁵⁰ Richard Glover, "Media Slaughters Good Chance for Bliss," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 10, 1985, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=IL5f5cZgq8MC&dat=19850610&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>.

²⁵¹ Buckley, "A Landmark Australian Film," 248–51.

²⁵² Uncertainty regarding the film's classification and ticket sales caused Lawrence and Buckley significant anxiety ahead of the domestic release of the film. Ultimately, these fears were unfounded as the classification did not impact the not insignificant ticket sales. "A Landmark Australian Film," 249–250

²⁵³ In Glover's article he cites journalists at *Paris Soir*, which is likely a misattribution given that *Paris Soir* shuttered in 1944 on grounds of collaborationism.

Comparing the versions

At the NFSA's Arc Cinema in 2022, I was given access to screening copies of both the longer, Cannes-release version and the NFSA Restores version of *Bliss*. In addition, a DVD release of the film from 2005 contains a digital transfer of the original domestic version. The NFSA Restores version, though digitally revised, retains the runtime and core content of the domestic release. In the following section, I compare the Cannes release—called the “Director’s Cut” by the NFSA and DVD liner notes—with the shorter Australian domestic release, to explain the choice to base the restoration on the latter. I will then turn to the third version—the restored version.

Bliss v. Bliss

The changes made between the Cannes screening and the domestic release of *Bliss* are substantial. A key aspect of *Bliss*' complex versioning is that these differences are not limited to excised scenes. The shortened version is not just the longer version cut back. Both versions of *Bliss* follow the same plot, but new material had to be added to the shorter version to manage issues raised by changing the film.

In my previous chapter, I considered the implications of removing sequences from the domestic release of *Starstruck* and presenting a new version of the film as the restoration.²⁵⁴ In that case, the only changes were deletions, meaning that when the sequences were excised, no new material was added to account for their removal or explain the disjointed sections. But when sequences were similarly removed from the longer version of *Bliss*, voiceover narration, performed by Otto, was altered to accommodate the shortened version. In other

²⁵⁴See [Page 132](#)

words, the changes made between the versions of *Bliss* are both subtractive and additive, as new material shapes and moulds the way old material has been erased and re-presented.

For this reason, *Bliss* presents a distinct set of complexities as a case study in this thesis, expanding and refining my versional analysis methodology. In the following section, I will provide close readings of the different versions of *Bliss*. This close reading is an interpretive lens that I use to target aspects and elements that are shared across versions, and unique to each. This allows me to register tonal shifts, thematic emphases and formal variations across the different versions, and then directly map them to the changes introduced during the versioning process and specifically into the restoration. Identifying and analysing these changes offers insights into the way that each version of the film engages with concepts like the conventions of genre, the way the audience is positioned in relation to challenging material, and even how the film functions as an archival object.

In order to further expand on each of these concepts, I return to the paratextual materials (discussed earlier in this chapter) that accompany each version of *Bliss*. The original press coverage and interviews from the 1985 release, and more recent publicity material produced by the NFSA for the restoration, are two examples of this kind of paratextual material, which can provide context to the changes made between versions and the implications of those changes.

Opening Sequence and Changes to Speed

In this section, my versional comparative analysis will show that the different length of shots in the Cannes and domestic versions of *Bliss* has a dramatic impact on how the film is received by audiences. This comparison allows me to examine how particular decisions made in the course of the versioning process have a narrative and thematic impact, even when those changes are subtle, and the audience is not conscious of that difference.

The opening sequence of Harry Joy's near-death experience remains mostly unchanged between the Cannes and domestic release versions of *Bliss*, as its significance to the plot likely made it essential to preserve. However, the pacing of the crane shot depicting Harry's sudden death differs between the two versions: in the Cannes version, the shot is faster, while in the domestic release, it is slower. This subtle adjustment alters the tone of the sequence. The faster pacing in the Cannes version offers little time for audiences to adjust to the surrealist, experimental style signalled by this moment. By contrast, the domestic release's slower approach is more patient and deliberate, gently easing audiences into the slippages between genres, modalities and styles that define *Bliss*.

This analysis also offers a lens through which to retroactively understand what might have been confronting and controversial about the Cannes version of the film. In this version, the faster pacing of the opening sequence—despite the longer duration of the film overall—contributes to a harsher, more anxious tone, which heightens the unsettling impact of Harry's nightmarish fantasies that recur throughout the narrative.

As later parts of this versional analysis will demonstrate, the changes made for the domestic release version were not exclusively subtractive. To this end, it is a reasonable assumption that, in slowing down the pace of these early shots, frames of previously unused material were added. This would serve to slow and lengthen the shots in question.

Alternatively, it is possible that the rate at which these frames played per second was also adjusted to amplify the effect of certain shots in certain scenes. While full details of these alterations are unavailable, the industrial and historical context—particularly the challenges of adapting *Bliss* and the filmmakers' concerns about securing revenue—makes it evident that deliberate choices were made.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the film's opening sequence was subject to numerous reshoots. Buckley and Lawrence felt this sequence was especially important, as investors might retract their funding if it did not capture their attention and imagination.²⁵⁵ Whether the changes were a reaction to the controversy surrounding the film's Cannes premiere, or a strategy to balance the pacing within the domestic release's shorter runtime, I argue that the deliberate pace of the crane shot is evident, as shown by the ongoing revisions made in the lead up to the first test screenings.²⁵⁶

This minor change is significant because it results in a manifestly different opening scenes. It is an example of the small but controlled ways in which the domestic release and the Cannes version of *Bliss* are distinct. The Cannes version is the sum of a series of filmmaking decisions. There is care and intention in the way that the final product was constructed. Each version is a legitimate object that, when compared and treated as such, can unveil the historical trajectory and emphases of the film over a thirty-year period.

For the first thirty minutes of the film, there are many similar minor adjustments to shot speed and length. The two versions slip in and out of synchronisation for large parts of the first act. In the domestic release version, apart from the more languorous crane shot, there is a broader tendency toward tightening sequences. Shorter shots and faster cuts are used in the depiction of Harry's heart surgery, one of the film's recurring nightmare sequences. Interestingly, the truncation of this scene may reflect reactions at Cannes, where cockroaches emerging from Harry's chest were cited as a reason for audience walkouts. While the Cannes version lingers on this unsettling moment, the domestic release hastens it, potentially reducing its discomfort. This variance in pacing—slowing certain moments while accelerating others—signals deliberate choices in the process of versioning, demonstrating

²⁵⁵ Buckley, *Behind a Velvet Light Trap*, 252.

²⁵⁶ Buckley, interview.

that the two versions do not follow a one-size-fits-all approach to adjusting their runtimes. Rather, they each reflect conscious efforts to craft coherent and distinct versions.

Another minor adjustment appears during the film's first extended surrealist moment. Harry's wife Bettina is shown having sex with Joel on a table at a restaurant full of patrons who act as if they do not register the intimacy taking place right behind them. This scene, depicted as a sort of self-reflexive nightmare, serves two purposes. The first is to demonstrate that Bettina and Joel are unconcerned with maintaining secrecy about their relationship, acknowledging that their own selfish impulses are far more robust than the fragile yet unassuming worries of Harry Joy. The likelihood of discovery is dismissed, both by the characters and the film itself, as something that could take place in plain view of others without causing alarm. The second purpose of this sequence is to introduce another minor character, the restaurant manager Aldo (Jon Ewing). In fourth-wall-breaking asides, Aldo confides his disgust with the fornicators, aligning him with the film's protagonist and portraying him as sympathetic to Harry's poor treatment.

Both the depiction of Bettina and Joel's brazenness, and Aldo's introduction, remain intact in this two-minute scene across both versions of the film. But, once again, adjustments in speed and pacing produce different emphases. In the earlier Cannes version, the slow, lingering pace creates a distinct unease, amplifying the sense of violation inherent to witnessing such a public display of intimacy. Buckley and Lawrence again cite this sequence as one that caused Cannes audience members to leave the theatre.²⁵⁷

In the domestic release version, there is an overall acceleration of this sequence. The speed gives expression to the scene's crassness by making it more frenzied. Rapid cuts that reverse back and forth between a medium shot of Aldo looking displeased, and intense close

²⁵⁷ Buckley, "A Landmark Australian Film," 255.

ups of the couple moving towards climax, create a jarring and shocking tension. These quicker cuts in the domestic release reduce the time viewers spend with these confronting images, potentially moderating the controversy by making the scene feel more like a fleeting shock. The elongation or truncation of these shots experienced by the audience at Cannes. Changes the tone demanding a slower processing of the uncomfortable action. Though only speculation, it is possible that part of the appeal of the shorter version for the restoration, as will be shown later, is that it avoids these controversial moments that repelled some members of the Cannes audience. In the first act of both versions of *Bliss*, speed, shot length and pace are all adjusted, creating manifestly different effects. It is possible that the construction of the domestic release version is responding to the way in which the Cannes version was received, serving to make the film more palatable and less controversial. .

The Police Station Sequence

In both versions of *Bliss*, the conclusion of the first act sees Harry Joy crash to a new low. He is arrested for driving his unroadworthy car on the highway—a car that was earlier deformed and compressed when an elephant sat on it. This arrest triggers another scene that is, in part, shared between the two versions. Harry, dishevelled and wet from driving a roofless car in the rain, is interviewed by two police officers who intimidate and bully him. After Harry is hit a few times by the officers, and is slumped on the ground, the two versions diverge.

In the Cannes version, Harry's interrogation is much longer. He tells the police a lengthy story—a tale that both captivates and disturbs them—before he is finally allowed to leave. The domestic release version truncates the scene: after Harry is hit and slumps to the ground, this version cuts to him driving down the highway, accompanied by narration explaining the now unseen events (previously visible in the Cannes version) that took place in the police station.

I will first consider the longer, Cannes version of the sequence. The police and Harry occupy a large, dimly lit room at the station. The scene continues with a shot of the officers leaning against a large wooden table, towering over Harry who is slumped on the floor against the wall in the background. In this version, the colours are pale, and the scene appears naturally lit by diffuse sunlight coming through an offscreen window. The tone is cold and blue, voices are hollow and echoey, and there is a soft thrum of rain in the background.

Harry has just been knocked to the ground, as the police were dissatisfied with his explanation that an elephant sat on his car. They repeat the phrase, “Stop telling old stories” three times. They imply that the elephant story is so absurd, it must be wildly hyperbolic like the “The dog ate my homework,” story. The police are nevertheless hypnotised by Harry’s evocative storytelling, pressing him to “tell [them] something original”.

Harry, still shell-shocked, begins a story. This shifts the room’s power dynamics, and who controls who becomes muddled. The medium shot in which the police stand over Harry cedes to a slow zoom into Harry’s face. This remaps the shot’s focal point, as the engrossing quality of Harry’s story becomes powerful enough to completely invert the relationship between his bullies (the police) and his vulnerability. As an advertiser and storyteller, Harry is so capable that the officers’ boorish and violent behaviour is dwarfed by the immense creativity and clarity of his tale.

In a low, rumbling tone, Harry begins to improvise a story about a boy named Little Titch, whose mother won a competition for being the shortest woman. Despite this proximate claim to fame, Little Titch himself gains no celebrity. Instead, he is relentlessly bullied by his classmates, both for his own short stature and for being the offspring of someone so short. He seeks the comfort and protection of a violent horse named Billy Boy, who he believes will save him from the relentless cruelty he suffers from his bullies. Harry narrates:

Billy Boy was standing there and there was Little Titch, his arms clasped tightly around Billy Boy's huge rear legs, his little face buried in the furry warmth of his hock. "Come here, Little Titch. Come here at once!" But Little Titch didn't have to do anything at all because the bastards couldn't touch him and that's the end of the story.

Barry Otto's performance emphasises the story's surprising turns. He raises his eyebrows and takes long pauses as he reveals new details. For the entire story, the camera stays trained on Harry, continuing the slow zoom in until he is framed in a close up. Off-screen, someone enters the room, and the officer asks a question, yet the camera remains fixed on Harry and does not cut. This long take mirrors the mesmerising quality of Harry's storytelling, with nothing able to divert the camera's attention.

While convoluted, the story highlights the strangeness of the concept of the family unit. It also parallels Harry's own fractured family. Having had his morality, ethics and sense of self challenged by his near-death experience, Harry no longer trusts, or feels trusted by, his family. His sense of belonging is shattered, and he becomes entirely convinced that he walks among malicious actors who would all benefit from his pain and demise. The story of Little Titch mirrors Harry's concerns that he will be harmed by his family—not to mention the police—but the role of the violent yet protective horse is less clear. Little Titch clings to the horse's leg because it shields him from his pursuers. This odd combination of violence and protection could serve as an allegory for the advertising industry—a world in which prosperity and security come through duplicity and immorality—with which Harry is beginning to reckon.

Regardless of the extent to which Harry's story reflects his own life, Lawrence's decision to include this scene in the Cannes version, but cut large portions for the domestic release, highlights the distinct role this scene plays in the former. The scene underscores

Harry's extraordinary abilities as a storyteller, revealing that this aspect of his personality remained intact after his near-death experience. It also provides crucial context for Harry's declining mental state, illustrating the tenuousness of his belief that he is in Hell or that his life has become hellish. The longer version of this scene suggests that there is no urgency or pressure to resolve the perceived threats to Harry's life and sanity. Instead, both the protagonist and viewer are led to believe that Harry will continue to discover more about himself and the people around him.

Among the additional material only present in the Cannes release are sound effects that punctuate Harry's story. The buzzing of flies, the dripping of rain, and music drawn from Peter Best's score create a disconcerting soundscape, which reinforces the hypnotising quality of Harry's speech. As Harry's story ends, and the police tell him to "piss off", the voiceover narration returns, picking up the scene as Harry drives down the highway, smiling widely. "Harry didn't know quite what he'd done. But oh, it doesn't matter," the narrator observes. "He'd done something good. His old optimism flowed through him. It warmed him like gravy. The structures of Hell towered around him, but they no longer seemed unconquerable."

This dialogue attends to the idea that Harry is operating in an environment where, in his trance-like, post-death state, his stories and ideas are tools of navigation. Using his words, he can survive in this hellscape because his work in advertising required using narrative and bad faith to manipulate people. The police station scene implies that, as much as Harry has begun to evolve beyond his former immoral self, he is extremely capable and comfortable deploying the language and toolset of his previous life, even if this manipulation is intended to communicate his alienation from his family and friends. As I will explain below, this is a much clearer appraisal of Harry's social and moral status than that found in the domestic

release version, wherein this scene functions as much more of an aside or tangent than a development of his character.

The domestic release version of this scene is six minutes shorter than in the Cannes version. It also shows the police officers violently throwing Harry around the room and, as in the Cannes version, they reject his explanation that an elephant sat on his car. This is where the similarities end. In the domestic release, the police, dissatisfied with what they take to be Harry's lie, are then depicted in a series of high angle, over-the-shoulder shots, which emphasise their large frames as they tower over and intimidate Harry. After he receives few punches to the stomach, Harry slumps to the ground, out of frame. Focus returns to the police officers, who gleefully confiscate a bag of marijuana found on Harry's person. At the end of the domestic release version of the scene, Harry tries to get up from the floor as the police station crossfades into footage of Harry driving down the freeway, accompanied by church organ music and the narrator's voice. The domestic release version entirely omits the Cannes version's long story about Little Titch. In the domestic release version, the voiceover narration that follows the police station scene is also different, explaining that "Harry had misunderstood the police. He thought they let him go because he'd been good. This misunderstanding comforted him and, in spite of everything, gave him confidence."

This shortness of this scene in the domestic release version has several implications for understanding Harry Joy and *Bliss* itself. Up until this point, there have been several depictions of Harry hallucinating, whether finding himself in an ethereal church, or perceiving cockroaches crawling out of his chest cavity. Thus, when Harry explains that an elephant sat on his car—an explanation notionally supported by characters in the previous scene—Harry's hold on the distinction between reality and the imaginary is thrown into doubt. This shapes more than just the film's depiction of Harry's mental state. It also

implicates the reliability of the film itself, asking the audience to distrust what is being shown to them.

The truncation and removal of Harry's story for the police engenders the domestic version with a strict focus on maintaining momentum to propel the narrative forward. This version neither dwells on nor make sense of the events inside the police station, which mirrors the confusion and delirium Harry experiences, having been arrested. Consequently, the later revelation that Harry must reject his family and society to personally atone for his failures is accelerated by the harshness of these changes. This acceleration is both literal—given that the domestic release is shorter than its Cannes counterpart—and conceptual, as the audience is presented with a more visceral account of Harry's spiralling interior world.

Following *Bliss*' premiere at Cannes in 1985, French journalists called attention to the film being “lamentable in its pretentiousness”. Lawrence was affected by this particular insult (which, per Richard Glover and Buckley, the director wanted to print on a t-shirt and wear with pride).²⁵⁸ However, as discussed earlier, the press material likely informed decisions made in the versioning process. It is possible that removing Harry's long, freewheeling story from the domestic release version came in response to this early accusation of pretentiousness.

While the longer Cannes version suggests that Harry's storytelling ability—so palpable that its power even eludes Harry—is what defused the conflict at the police station, the domestic release version, with adjusted narration, implies that the police simply exchanged Harry's marijuana for his freedom. This creates a vastly different moral outcome for the sequence. In the domestic release version, Harry is depicted as bumbling, unsure how

²⁵⁸ In Richard Glover's article the full quote that Lawrence wants on his shirt is: “lamentable in its pretentiousness, idiocy and coarseness.” Glover, “Media Slaughters Good Chance for Bliss.”

to navigate his continued persecution. In the Cannes version, however, Harry's skill of storytelling is returned to him, which then sets up the film's second and third acts, in which Harry manages to stabilise himself, having adjusted his priorities, wants and needs based on all of his internal discoveries. These small changes dramatically affect the film's thematic emphases and logic. One interpretation is that, in the Cannes version, Harry is presented as a magnificent orator who must wrest himself free of the demons of greed and the people who seek to abuse his skills. He is framed as a tragically misunderstood figure who is finally interested in living a more moral life.

The domestic release version of the film emphasises Harry as a misguided, (formerly) selfish character whose life is in steep and rapid decline. In this version, the pace and urgency with which Harry's problems are presented suggests they can only be repaired through dramatic intervention. Many of the details between these two readings remain the same, but the way the central character is presented, vis-à-vis his moral outlook, is framed very differently across the two versions.

Removing Harry's story from the domestic release version also limits the audience's capacity to interpret Harry as a tragic figure. Instead, the immediacy with which the scene ends—that is, by cutting to what might be described as flippant narration about Harry's naivety and positive feeling, and with no explanation of what occurred at the police station—contributes to a more chaotic and purgatorial tone, hastening his descent towards failure.

Framing Advertising and Morality

The changes described in this section reflect efforts to negotiate the immorality of Harry's work as an advertiser. In the Cannes version, there is an emphasis on exposing Harry's former life and its consequences. Meanwhile, in the domestic version, increased momentum brings Harry's old life into collision with his new one. Following the end of the police station

scene in the Cannes version of *Bliss*, the narrator returns, bridging Harry's successful release with the next scene:

Today, as usual, Alex Duval would write his second set of conference reports. These reports are what an advertising agency dispatches to its clients after a meeting. They document very fully all decisions that are made. Not only that—it says who made them. And every Saturday, for the last ten years, Alex Duval had sat at his desk and written a second set of conference reports in which he said all the things he wished he'd been brave enough to say in the first place.

This narration plays as the camera slowly introduces the office space that Alex and Harry share. The space is painted a lurid yellow, shown through a long pan across the glass entryway of their office. While panning, the camera tracks gently through the leaves of various indoor plants, emulating the act of weaving through dense shrubbery or jungle foliage. This creates the effect of peering in on Harry and Alex while hiding behind the plants and glass, framing the scene with a surveillant, voyeuristic lens. Likewise, the spying eye of the camera, as it observes Alex and Harry's meeting, reflects the pair's greedy, manipulative advertising work—an intrusion on people's everyday lives.

This narration is not present in the domestic release version of the film. In fact, the entire scene, in which Harry and Alex discuss the morality of advertising, is truncated. In the domestic release version, the opening narration and introductory slow pan is removed in favour of immediately showing Alex sitting at his desk as Harry walks up to talk to him. This edit, again, is a deliberate intervention in the narrative and tone of the film. It is possible that this was another area in which Lawrence and the filmmakers felt the film could be tightened to maintain pace and momentum. But, as I have demonstrated above, each of these changes has an effect on the way the content of the film is portrayed.

Without the framing device of the narration, the sequence's action and dialogue must work harder to explain the context, motivations and moral quandaries of Alex and Harry. Again, I speculate that this choice, as made by Lawrence, increases the film's momentum, which in turn reduces the tragedy of Harry's character, instead making him seem more frantic as he attempts to find meaning in his corrupted world.

In both versions of the film, this scene culminates in the revelation that Harry's advertising agency has backed a product that is causing cancer. The Cannes version's narration and voyeuristic camerawork implicate the audience in this revelation as well, asking us to consider our relationship to Harry as a protagonist and his obligations to remedy his moral wrongdoing. By contrast, the domestic release version treats this sequence as simply instructive, equipping the audience with detail about Harry's former life as an advertising executive, and framing that information for the remainder of the film.

Thus, the divergences between versions demonstrate that each one is a legitimate, complex object born of decisions made by those involved in its making. This means the process of deciding which version to restore is not a neutral one. It shapes the way in which this film enters the canon and becomes part of Australia's film heritage. I will turn to the NFSA Restores version of film below, but before I do, it is necessary to explore the film's third act, which also changed from the Cannes to domestic release versions.

The film's third and final act features another major change between both versions. In order to escape the mental asylum, Harry is forced to revisit his advertising talent and help his wife with her own advertising ambitions. The two meet in their living room to review her recently designed advertisements. In the domestic release version, the scene is very straightforward. Harry announces that the advertisements are very impressive, and they should sell well in most settings. This then leads to something that approaches an amorous

connection between the two, as Harry grabs Bettina's shoulders, reiterating the fantastic quality of the designs. The camerawork in this scene is mild and unobtrusive, gently moving back and forth between the framed designs carefully layered on a couch, and the increasing excitement of Harry and Bettina. Also in this scene is a very brief close-up shot of Joel—Bettina's lover and Harry's former business partner—who looks anxious and depressed at the prospect of a revived relationship between Harry and his wife. The scene then ends, transitioning to a shot of Honey Barbara walking down the street.

In the Cannes version, this scene is slightly longer, as it features an extended focus on Joel. Envious of Bettina and Harry's collaboration, he intends to derail their connection by causing some kind of shocking incident. Intercut with the exact same shots described above in the domestic release version is a brightly coloured shot of an explosion, seen through nearby trees outside. A large burst of flames in centre frame is accompanied by Joel's stifled shriek.

When the camera returns to Harry and Bettina, they have no reaction to the loud explosion and continue talking about the prospects of selling their advertisements. The implication is that the explosion happened far enough away that they did not hear it. I argue, however, that this is not an error of continuity or space, but instead an overt decision to return to the surreal imagery and broken rules set up earlier in the film, where fantasy, and a looser relationship between cause and effect, are allowed to enter the frame. This surreal experience also marks the return of the motif of Harry's hallucinations coinciding with his fear of hellish punishment. The fact that this surreal filmmaking returns at the exact moment in which Harry compromises his integrity by agreeing to once again work on an advertisement seems pointed and deliberate. Moreover, as the proposed designs advertise petroleum, Harry's inability to register an explosion again points to the blindness of the greed required to make this kind of campaign.

The long version of the scene continues with conversation between Bettina and Harry, again interrupted as a wide shot depicts a smoking and blackened Joel entering the living room. He begins to tell a story about how a young Greek boy was covered in gasoline by his mother, and then an old man approached with a cigarette and the two were engulfed in flames. Joel continues to explain how he extinguished the flames by hurling himself at the boy and the old man. Just as Harry's moral sense is weakening, Joel fabricates his own moral goodness, presenting himself as a sacrificial hero. However, Bettina and Harry quickly debunk Joel's story, to which he replies, "Alright, it's bullshit. You didn't have to say it was bullshit. I know it's bullshit—but Harry didn't know it was bullshit."

This additional material, which is not present in the domestic release version, is strange and confounding. However, it sets up other parts of the film and adds further depth and detail to the competing selfish impulses of those in Harry's orbit. It also foreshadows the fiery denouement of Bettina's story, when she blows up the petrol executives during her pitch meeting. These narrative pieces, which are only in the longer Cannes version, reflect a methodical and deliberate approach to constructing *Bliss* as a slow and surrealist feature film.

NFSA Restores *Bliss* & The Restoration Aesthetic

The NFSA's restoration of *Bliss* can be understood as a marshalling of different archival and artistic impulses, each of which is guided by different people and motivations. It is important to recognise, as I have argued in other chapters, that the exercise of restoring a film is not just a chemical process or a labour-intensive technical task. It is also a contest of competing personalities and interests, all while adhering to the maintenance of archival principles. In this section, I will reflect on the decision to use the domestic release version and other changes made to *Bliss* as part of the restoration process and introduce interviews with various NFSA staff and the film's producer Tony Buckley. In this way, I will provide an account of

the guiding lenses and materials that were instrumental in constructing the NFSA Restores version of *Bliss*.

As in other case studies in this thesis, it is my contention that staff at the Archive continue to be governed by a kind of effacement or modesty, which centres the filmmaker's vision while attempting to objectively apply archival principles and values. This was made immediately apparent in my interview with the former general manager of NFSA collections, Meg Labrum, who told me:

I remember Ray Lawrence, with *Bliss*, he was blown away by the whole [restoration]. *Bliss* was one of the first films that we did [for NFSA Restores], so the notion of the Archive actually picking up and running with, investing in, and making what we think of as 'old films' new again was a revelation. I actually think it looks better than it looked in the first place, which might set off a slight alarm bell. Except I mean it in the sense that, I think, you know, the argument is, it's simply looking like the most cleaned-up version of the original that you could get.

This quote illustrates the competing and sometimes paradoxical nature of the NFSA's restoration processes. Labrum articulates both the intent to restore the film to an initial quality, describing this as "simply looking like the most cleaned-up version of the original you could get". However, this is paired with the statement that this restored version actually exceeds the visual fidelity and quality of the "original", creating a new object that is "better" than what was previously available. This implicates the NFSA in a kind of paradox. Restorers must focus on returning the film version to something that faithfully captures the image and impression of the original object. Yet they must also intervene in that object, constructing a new version that retrieves the film from damage, which may have even been present during the initial 1985 screenings. I return here to art historian Max J. Friedländer, whose work on

art restoration is cited in the Introduction. On the historian or enthusiast's reaction to restoration, Friedländer writes, "It is precisely the successful re-integration that is distasteful to him: the unsuccessful one he, of course, detects easily and can make allowance for."²⁵⁹

Friedländer's point is a salient one for film restoration. The restored film must be recognisably different, bearing the manifest evidence of the work of the restorer. However, both the restored and unrestored versions must be understood as functionally the same, even identical. Here again is the paradox of restoration. As Labrum says, the exercise is making something old new again. But this, too, is an effect—a new-old effect—wherein the history of the object cannot, or perhaps should not, be lost. Therefore, the restorer's task is to hide their inputs and disguise the influence of their handiwork, while also announcing and celebrating what has been achieved and changed, thereby justifying the act of restoration.

In the case of *Bliss*, this is an especially complex task. Two versions of the film exist with international and domestic histories. Thus, at the very beginning of the restoration process, it was already necessary to make an overt decision as to which version of the film would be restored. Maintaining the balance between the intervention into, and reproduction of, the original object is therefore highly problematised by that initial choice.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the domestic, shorter cut of *Bliss* had long been the default version most frequently seen. Restoring and preserving only the material that forms the shorter version was perceived as more or less uncontroversial.

The NFSA's deference to this earlier choice made by the filmmakers and rightsholders is unspoken but understood. Buckley and Lawrence regularly refer to favouring the shorter version of the film, as per Buckley's book,²⁶⁰ along with short documentary

²⁵⁹ Max J. Friedlander, *On Art and Connoisseurship* 1927 (Lowrie Press, 2008), 204.

²⁶⁰ Buckley, *Behind a Velvet Light Trap*.

vignettes about *Bliss*' restoration on the NFSA website.²⁶¹ At no point does there seem to have been any suggestion that the material in the longer version would or should be considered for restoration. This is not to advance an opinion that the longer version's material should have been included, but instead to argue that, despite the fact that the NFSA had and has the skill and resources to source the additional footage seen in the Cannes release, its inclusion in the restoration process was never considered. This makes clear the prevailing hierarchy of *Bliss*' versions, even if filmmakers like Buckley do not see the significance of their influence. In fact, in my interview with Buckley, he said, "I think a producer and a director should keep out of the restoration process unless you're asked to be involved."

There are many decisions made in the restoration process that are seemingly insignificant and remain unexplained or unjustified. They are simply regarded as part of the requisite mechanical process of restoration. These are decisions about sound, image, fidelity and history. However, just like the changes to pacing described earlier, even small changes are significant, because they are the visible endpoint of many layers of changes that hide in acts of invisible deference and obligation to persons and entities that loom over the restoration process.

In this way, it is clear that filmmakers and rightsholders are key to restorations, just as archivists are. The ability to proceed with a restoration is, as discussed in other parts of this thesis, contingent on these individuals and groups giving their permission and, by extension, support for the restoration. To this end, changes to elements like colour, sound, grain, aspect ratio and the repair of damage, all as part of the restoration process, should be considered meaningful. They reflect the sensibilities and preferences of both the Archive and those who oversee this process by having an historical connection to the films.

²⁶¹ *Bliss - Restoring the 1985 Classic*.

Buckley's stance that a producer and director should only become involved at the behest of the archive is complicated by the reality that restoration requires the filmmakers' permission and input. But his phrasing is important, as it reflects the extent to which filmmakers see their role as invited rather than required. They receive the deference of the archive without necessarily viewing it as the NFSA's requirement or obligation. Just as the changes made in restored versions of films are choices, producers and directors become involved in restorations under the broad perspective that they do so through choice—either their own or the NFSA's. Victoria Ramshaw, senior manager of collections partnerships at the NFSA, raised this specific point.

She explained to me that the NFSA treads a “fine line” balancing the principles and obligations of archival practice against the expectations and personalities of the filmmakers whose works are held in the collection. She referred to the Archive as a kind of custodian:

It's a balancing act, it's a fine line you have to walk between, you know? We are a government-funded agency, funded by the public, so, we're not about indulging egos. We're about what is significant. What does the Australian public want to see? What is best practice? And I think it's not just about the consumption, or the popularity, or the commercial value of a film. It's a whole bunch of other things. You can see this through the documentaries we've done, or with some of the smaller films, looking at their significance. But all of that said, you also have to deal with creatives, who are a force to be reckoned with. We are the custodians of their films, too.

For Ramshaw and the NFSA, part of restoring a film is bringing the basic aims of the Archive into line (or compromise) with the relevant filmmakers or rightsholders' wants and needs. For the purposes of this thesis, and especially in response to *Bliss*, this process necessarily involves *versioning*.

The decision to base the NFSA Restores version of *Bliss*, as released in 2016, on the shorter version of the film is a compelling example of how the Archive balances its obligations. On the one hand, the choice to use the shortened version reflects the desires of Buckley and Lawrence, who had long championed this version as the ideal version of the film. In fact, as early as Richard Glover’s defence of *Bliss*, it is noted that Lawrence wished the shorter cut had been ready for the Cannes premiere.²⁶²

My interview with Patrick O’Connor, senior conservator at the NFSA, further confirmed information reported on the NFSA’s website—that the best available components for restoration were interpositive prints. The Archive did not (and does not) have access to the original picture negative in their collection. The page on the website dedicated to *Bliss*’ restoration reads:

Unable to locate the negative, the NFSA Restores curators went hunting for the interpositive print instead. An interpositive is a print made from the edited negative and is the next best choice for restoration work.

There were three interpositive versions of *Bliss* to choose from—the two-hour behemoth that originally screened at the 1985 Cannes Film Festival (prompting many members of the audience to walk out), a shorter theatrical version which was released in Australia to great acclaim later that year and an international cut which screened overseas. It was decided that the 110-minute Australian theatrical version would be restored, as this was the one most positively received in 1985.²⁶³

²⁶² Glover, “Media Slaughters Good Chance for Bliss.”

²⁶³ *Bliss - Restoring the 1985 Classic*. Note that in my research a third, international cut was not made available to me. My reasoned assumption based my interview with Buckley, is that this separate international interpositive simply refers to the international distribution of the domestic release version.

The language in this entry demonstrates the extent to which the restoration process is selective and driven by filmmakers and their historical attitudes towards the film's release. Within two sentences, the Cannes version has been framed as controversial, while the domestic release is presented as "positively received".

The interpositive that the Archive sourced matches the runtime that Buckley and Lawrence prefer. From a curatorial perspective, this is the best available source material for restoration work. As discussed in my earlier chapter on *Wake in Fright*, the original picture negative (OPN) has the greatest chemical depth. When the OPN is unavailable, a different material format may be required. In this case, the interpositive is a high-quality master print that houses the film's chemically transferred, edited version. To this end, using *Bliss*' shorter version as the basis for an NFSA Restores version meets the Archive's obligations, as described by Ramshaw. It is the best available version (per the Archive's triaging approach) and therefore the only option for restoration. It also accedes to the expectations and desires of the living filmmakers who offer their input on the project.

I provide this detailed account of the intersection of these two obligations because it demonstrates the useful alignment of expectations and aims between archivists and filmmakers. However, this does not occur in every restoration exercise. Consider my previous chapter on *Starstruck*: both the OPN and the longer, Australian version were held in the NFSA's collection, but the decision to use the shorter, American version was to meet the requests of director Gillian Armstrong and producer David Elfick. In fact, in *Starstruck*'s restoration, there were missing components—the composite audio—that had to be sourced at the behest of Elfick and Armstrong, explicitly for the creation of the NFSA Restores version, again suggesting that the Archive's technical obligation is still functionally deferential to the wants and needs of the filmmakers.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ See [Page 132](#)

Bliss is an interesting outlier in this thesis because it represents a broadly successful alignment of the NFSA's technical approach and the creative directives of the filmmakers. However, I also raise this point to demonstrate that this further entrenches the categorising of NFSA staff as technical labourers. It effaces their creative inputs in favour of attempting to technically realise or re-realise the filmmaker's vision. I now turn to what the restorers did to achieve the NFSA Restores version of *Bliss*.

Firstly, the NFSA contracted labour from both FilmSound and Frame, Set and Match—two post-production houses that had previously collaborated with the NFSA on restorations. Tom Meares, who was the colourist for the restoration, is interviewed in the NFSA's short video featurette on the creation of the NFSA Restores version of *Bliss*. Filmed in his dark workspace, Meares uses a flat tone of voice to describe the choices and adjustments he made to the digital colouring and exposure of the film. Meares reconciles the reality that his job is to navigate a kind of middle-space between new and old technology, offering:

There's always a trade-off between what you could make it now and relatively speaking, what it looked like at the time. And that's what restoration is supposed to be: a record of what it was at the time.²⁶⁵

Referring specifically to the film's colour, he reflects on the tools available to him and their ability to manage the incursions of damage, scratches and "colour biases", which can be adjusted wholesale or with extreme precision. Colour bias is a technical term for the bleed of pigment between different colours, creating a hue that muddies the distinction between two different colours. However, much as restorers like Meares regularly reference these biases—as well as general desaturation of colour, and mistimed colour schemes—there is a heated discussion in the study of restoration as to whether or not these technical changes based on

²⁶⁵ *Bliss - Restoring the 1985 Classic*.

historical materials are actually influenced by the creativity or style of the restorer.²⁶⁶ For example, the filmmaker Bingham Bryant advances a professional opinion in *Filmmaker Magazine* that some restoration companies and institutions have recognisable “house styles”. These styles betray the extent to which restorers are guided by a true science or photochemical history, and Bryant accuses them of “homogenising” restored film by repeatedly reapplying one aesthetic palette informed by an institutional memory and image of the past.²⁶⁷

Given that many NFSA Restores films rely on the same contracted labour for restoration, it is possible to observe certain stylistic consistencies that suggest an artistic or creative decision is being presented as a technically- or historically-informed one. Consider the following two images, taken from NFSA restoration featurettes for *Bliss* and *Starstruck*. In both instances, the colour has been saturated and tints removed, creating higher contrast images.

²⁶⁶ Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel the Archival Life of Film in Transition*, 91.

²⁶⁷ Bryant, “Seeing Eye to Eye.”



Figure 1 - Frame from the 'Bliss: Before and After Restoration Trailer' (NFSA Website, 2016) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fo_VSgIOwSo]



Figure 2 - Frame from the 'Starstruck: Before and After restoration Trailer' (NFSA Website, 2016) [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VfYRC3N4dM>]

As stated, the colours in the NFSA Restores version of *Bliss* are significantly changed. Bright colours are saturated and deepened. The colours are also schematised more dramatically. The cold blues of the police station sequence, for example, have been adjusted such that they stand out, no longer blending with the surrounding colours, creating sharp demarcation points between the pallid blue walls and the harsh whites of the natural light filtering into the room. Similarly, the blacks of shadows are deeper and richer, creating a higher contrast, more striking image.

In all of the NFSA Restores titles I have observed, pockets of black and shadow are always adjusted to become rich, thick and deep. Exposure is also consistently adjusted in favour of the revelation of more detail in the digital image. Where an area in an image is dark, but not a shadow, restorers have the digital tools to increase the exposure, revealing in a more legible light what was hidden in the dark. As I discussed in detail in regards to *Wake in Fright*, this is perhaps the most provocative act in the digital restoration process, as new visual information appears on screen that was never visible previously.

In his interview, Meares discusses the careful process of “de-graining” the film. He explains:

De-graining is an option we have in Baselight for taking some of the grain out.

Unfortunately, de-graining is always a bit of a compromise between sharpness and grain. The more you de-grain something, the softer it will get, so that’s a bit of a compromise.²⁶⁸

Interestingly, despite the rare use of some emotive language (“unfortunately”), Meares does not actually account for the extent of the de-graining process in *Bliss*. Instead, after explaining that this process involves compromise, the featurette cuts back to Ray Lawrence, who proceeds to discuss a different, unrelated aspect of the film. Perhaps the implication here

²⁶⁸ *Bliss - Restoring the 1985 Classic*.

is, rather than explicating the exact approach Meares took, it is necessary instead to signal his care and attention to detail, while acknowledging the limitations of a restoration. However, the accompanying comparison footage that is paired with this interview again matches the aesthetic of other NFSA Restores releases I viewed for this thesis. The grain is reduced, and the clarity of the image is favoured over the sharpness that comes with celluloid. In the below image, I have circled one area where, despite the heaviness of the grain in the unrestored version, lines are sharper and more distinct.

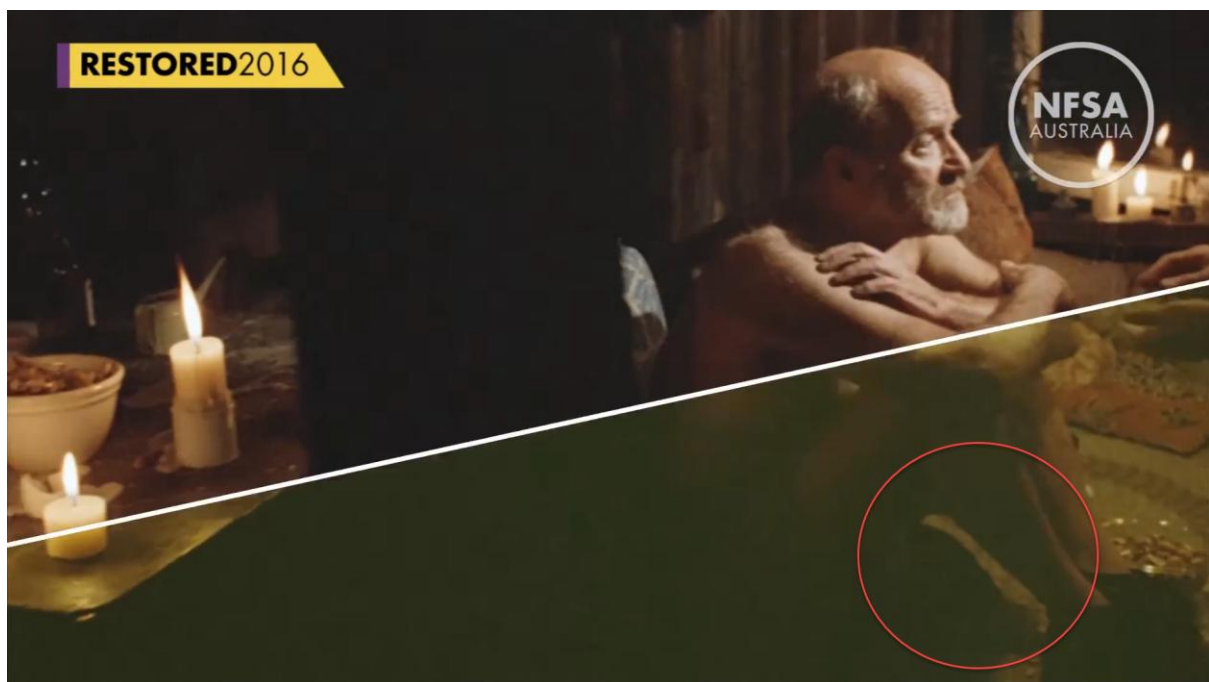


Figure 3 - Frame from the *Bliss*: Before and After Restoration Trailer, with red circle added (NFSA Website, 2016) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fo_VSgIOwSo]

Scratches and dust were also judiciously removed from *Bliss*. This is almost always the first enhancement demonstrated in NFSA Restores featurettes, and it serves to reinforce Labrum's view that the NFSA Restores version is the "better" version of the film, by virtue of it being "clean". Cleanliness is a metric that restorers do not see as implicated in the creative, artistic or interventionist approach. Together, each of these changes form not only the visual language of *Bliss*' "clean" version, but also the style of all the NFSA Restores

releases. These tools and their changes become a kind of hallmark, or indeed style of the NFSA Restores process.

This raises challenging questions for cinephiles and filmmakers like Bryant. For those dedicated to restoration as an exercise in trying to represent the past carefully and correctly, the question becomes: is this an accurate representation of the way the films appeared in the 1980s? I contend, however, that it is more important to ask whether or not accuracy is a useful metric of the success of a restoration initiative. A counterargument to the allegation of a “house style” might be that consistency between different NFSA Restores titles—though it evidences and exposes the choices and tools of the restoration team—also constructs a visual code or palette of the scientific or “historical”. Regardless of the ability of these restoration teams to legitimately and inarguably ground their approach in accepted science and history, this restoration aesthetic becomes the template for what an old film can look like when attempting to balance its age against contemporary sensibilities and technologies.

This restoration aesthetic also functions as an institutional safeguard, discouraging excessive intervention by filmmakers or rightsholders during the restoration process. Indeed, in Meares’ section of the *Bliss* featurette, brief mention is given to Ray Lawrence’s official sign off. Meares recalls:

It’s a bit nerve-wracking working with some of these directors. A lot of them are, you know, legends like Ray. He’s been in the industry for years. It’s very nice getting the final sign off and he was fairly happy. He only wanted to do a few little tweaks here and there. And yeah, he seems very happy with the process.²⁶⁹

The shared stylistic choices of the restoration team are consistent evidence that there is a threshold that a filmmaker cannot cross nor influence. Despite the small tweaks Lawrence requested, the matching stylistic details between *Bliss* and other NFSA Restores titles suggest

²⁶⁹ *Bliss - Restoring the 1985 Classic*.

that Lawrence could not so radically intervene as to change the process itself. However, it is interesting to consider again the language of deference to the filmmaker. It seems that Meares does resist handing over total control of the process to a filmmaker like Lawrence. He just conceptualises his decisions as all being in service of the greater project of the film and its maker. Again, Meares represents the effacement of the restorer and, by extension, the NFSA. Yet, as I have articulated in other chapters, this act and its pursuant choices form a kind of argument for how the Archive chooses to represent the past.

John T. Caldwell, writing on the non-top-line staff in a production or film company, suggests that such effacement must be scrutinised:

Even as creative practitioners assume their formulaic but effaced “it-was-nothing” posture, many of the films and series that these [personnel] have produced have generated immense amounts of critical...[work] that expose the dense cultural and intellectual intertexts that form the very fabric of many productions.²⁷⁰

In other words, while the effacement might be functional, even crucial to the operation of the Archive, the actual contributions of restoration and archive practitioners are vital to academic and cultural understandings of, and access to, Australian cinema history.

This seems especially relevant given the thematic and narrative material of *Bliss*. The film considers the moral repercussions of the unthinking and unfeeling world of advertising. The protagonist, following his near-death experience, is forced to question his own role as a storyteller. He suddenly comprehends his construction of myth, as both a controller and influencer of capital as well as life and death. Harry Joy is, ironically, not unlike the archivist who has, for so long, effaced themselves for the express purposes of deferring to a higher, justifiable order that is the true driver or motivator of decisions and choices.

²⁷⁰ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 2008, 318.

Returning then to the NFSA's decision not to seek out the materials that form the longer version of *Bliss*. While this decision conveniently aligns with the Archive's available options, as well as the filmmakers' wants and expectations, it is important to consider the implications of absolving the NFSA of responsibility over this choice. My argument here is not that the NFSA should suddenly be held accountable for any and all of its interventions into these restoration projects without relying on the nebulous justification that "it is what the filmmaker would have wanted". Instead, I argue that the acknowledgement of archival choice, of restorer input, of intervention, or even of a "house style" is not a violation of principles. It is a valuable and useful tool for understanding the Archive's contribution to Australian film history.

Rather than situating restoration in a discourse or debate about the accuracy or fidelity of the practice, I instead conceive of the application of versional analysis—in this case, comparing the restoration to the versions that came before it—as a method or system for illuminating the NFSA's argument about a given film.

As I discussed in the beginning of this chapter, *Bliss* is considered by some Australian scholars to be a misfit in the Australian cinema canon.²⁷¹ The film's surrealist style, paired with its loose relationship to genre, which invokes aspects of drama and comedy, along with its complicated adherence to the contemporaneous Australian novel, all contribute to this challenging yet compelling confluence of Australian storytelling and iconography from the 1980s. In Adrian Danks' piece for *Metro Magazine*, he argues that the film's chequered production history and pure difference from other films of the period are what has made it a difficult film to locate and situate in Australian cinema history. He writes:

Part of the reason that the film stood out when released in the mid-1980s was its palpable lack of obvious connection to the developing traditions of Australian cinema,

²⁷¹ O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema*; Dermody and Jacka, *The Screening of Australia*.

particularly the period and ‘landscape’ forms closely associated with the so-called ‘AFC genre’, Ozploitation or the social realism of contemporaneous films like *Fran*.²⁷²

It is in this strange outlier setting that the NFSA’s decision to restore *Bliss*, even in the context of all the effacement I have discussed, proves an intent or motivation to argue for the position of *Bliss* in Australian cinema history. This is made especially evident by the fact that all NFSA materials associated with the promotion of the restored version mention the controversy at Cannes.²⁷³ There is an unacknowledged tone of redemption in the exercise of restoring this film.

Conclusion

In my previous chapters on *Starstruck* and *Wake in Fright*, I analysed decisions about which versions of films were to be used for restoration, with a specific focus on Australianness.²⁷⁴ I also claimed that changes made to these restored films were a form of argument. They are the restorer’s argument for this film’s continuing value and, on a more granular level, for the components and materials of the film most worth celebrating. In the case of *Bliss*, the domestic release version was the preferred choice for restoration.

The decision to restore the shorter, Australian cut of the film, when viewed as the NFSA’s argument for the inclusion of *Bliss* in the Australian canon, is important. The NFSA Restores version becomes an argument for the redemptive and canon-changing power of a successful marriage between archive and filmmaker. In so doing, it has a profound impact on Australia’s film heritage.

²⁷² Danks, “Bliss,” 113.

²⁷³ *Bliss - Restoring the 1985 Classic*; TmqsmNuMCdj, “Find Your Bliss at the Sydney Film Festival,” Text (National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, June 8, 2016), <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/latest/bliss>; Danks, “Bliss.”

²⁷⁴ See [Page 87](#) and [Page 127](#)

The NFSA Restores version of the film uncouples *Bliss* from the notoriety of its Cannes release by acknowledging the controversy, then imploring new viewers to recognise that controversy as historical, in the context of their newly-restored viewing experience. The mere fact that the film has been restored is evidence of its value, as per the NFSA's charter and the project of the NFSA Restores program. My hope is that this thesis advances the visibility of archival restoration work, without exposing it to risk. Instead, I offer that the restorers of a film like *Bliss* have earned their creative choices, their interventions and their changes, as the restored film is a legitimate third version—one that achieves its paradoxical aim. It is, at once, old and new.

CHAPTER 04 *PROOF*: PROOF OF CONCEPT

Introduction

In Jocelyn Moorhouse's 1991 film *Proof*, authenticity and veracity are presented as key concerns of photographic media. The blind protagonist Martin (Hugo Weaving) uses photographs as externally verifiable artefacts of the world around him. If Martin takes a picture of something he cannot see, and someone else can agree or prove that the content of the photograph is what he suspected it to be, then he has a framework for legitimising the structures and realities of the world around him. In the end, Martin must accept the necessary degree of uncertainty in his process, as both the images and people he relies on are fallible, offering versions of reality that are contestable and even capable of dishonesty. The narrative and philosophical thrust of *Proof* is also relevant to a question that has recurred throughout this thesis: Does the restored film version bring into existence things that did not exist before? This question is both answerable and unanswerable.

On the one hand, that which was recorded by the camera at the time of the film's making categorically existed. On the other, the way it is represented and seen is changed by the restoration. As I have argued throughout this thesis, restoration is the result of interventions from multiple sources: economic, political and cultural, as well as creative applications of technology. These must be considered in my versional analysis alongside a comparative viewing of the film versions themselves in order to reveal the multiple layers that are part of that restored version. These layers then make up the argument for *Proof*'s position in the NFSA Restores catalogue as the new flagship version to view (for now, at least).

In the case of *Proof*, the shift from analogue to digital not only impacts the film version itself, but also the photographs depicted within the diegetic world of the film. These 35mm stills, taken by the protagonist as part of his art and documentary practice, occupy a space between art and evidence. However, in the restored version, the medium specificity of these photographs—analogue or digital—shifts, altering their perceived nature. The restoration process has flattened and sharpened these images, saturated and darkened their colours, and smoothed their grain and texture. Though they remain analogue objects within the diegesis, they are now visually transformed by the digital restoration. This transformation reflects more than a technological shift. It illustrates how the indexical relationship between what was originally documented and what is now presented digitally has been altered.

In this chapter, I will consider the NFSA's restoration of *Proof* as an exemplary expression of the larger goals of the NFSA Restores program. The film's thematic interest in the existence of truth, and its provability through visual representation, dovetails with the NFSA's mission to preserve and restore older films to usher their existence into the present. This is why I have chosen to close my case studies with this film.

Using contemporary digital technologies, the NFSA endeavours to make these films ready for the future, guaranteeing longevity. However, the act of digitisation re-presents the film with a particular look and feel that is markedly different from the original.²⁷⁵ In this way,

²⁷⁵ Outside the remit of this thesis are the ongoing and passionate debates occurring in fandoms and hobbyist communities over the visibility of changes wrought by the digitisation process. Self-described 'Fan Restorationists' have begun to valorise the '35mm Scan', despite this being an ambiguous term. The language around this kind of fan restoration is odd, with advocates often distinguishing a 35mm scan from 'digital versions'. In reality, a 35mm scan is still a kind of digitisation. This thesis hopes to generate future research questions about the moralising language deployed by cinephiles and passionate restoration advocates regarding the differences between digital and analogue. See also: Andrew Pollack, "Digital Film Restoration Raises Questions About Fixing Flaws," *The New York Times*, March 16, 1998, sec. Business, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/16/business/digital-film-restoration-raises-questions-about-fixing-flaws.html>; Alexander Horwath, "The Old Life. Reframing Film 'Restoration': Some Notes," *Journal of Film Preservation*, no. 96 (April 2017): 27–33; Soham [@SohamGadre], "THE SHINING—35mm Scan" <https://t.co/VCLw26ispQ>, Tweet, *Twitter*, August 3, 2024,

a version of the past selected by curators and restored to contemporary standards by a cultural institution validates the fact that the film existed in the first place, just as the photographs taken by the film's main character prove the existence of the world around him. It also proves the value of the institution itself and its role in the maintenance of Australian cultural heritage. At the same time, the restored version is a different film object with different sensibilities attached. In other words, when the NFSA digitally restores a film like *Proof*, it aims to capture both contemporary standards and historical relevance for the public it serves.

The concept of a film's potential future value is key to understanding digital restoration and its relationship to modern archival practices. 'Future-proofing', as practiced by the NFSA, is only as good as the available technology, and is therefore subject to anomalies and technological obstacles. All the while, public access to these films via the Archive is subject to technological limits, though they are less present in the restored versions because of the way digitisation democratises access.

However, as with the photographs in *Proof*, and as I have argued in previous chapters, the NFSA is creating new, digital objects that are also artefacts of the past, designed for an open-ended and unknowable future. But the Archive is not just helpfully migrating historical objects to the present. It is undertaking digital restoration work that is both exploratory and constructive. *Proof*'s restoration, from the NFSA's perspective, authorises that the essential experience of the film once existed, and meets an understood obligation to future generations who might one day appreciate the film via digital exhibition.²⁷⁶ But more than this—and beyond the official remit of the NFSA Restores program—this reimagining of the film for

<https://x.com/SohamGadre/status/1819840990678548822>; Peter NC-17 [@NCseventeen], "That above Is the 35mm Scan" <https://t.co/N2fWyBGoQV>," Tweet, *Twitter*, June 23, 2024, <https://x.com/NCseventeen/status/180468502032320160>.

²⁷⁶ "Authorizing Institutions of Heritage," in *Uses of Heritage*, by Laurajane. Smith (London ; Routledge, 2006), 106, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203602263>.

future and present generations is, as I have argued in my other case studies, a deeply creative act.

Chapter Structure

Unlike *Wake in Fright*, *Starstruck* and *Bliss*, *Proof* does not present an obvious problem-narrative that precedes its restoration. It did not have multiple release versions, was not lost, and was generally well-received by critics and audiences alike. This neutral starting point changes the way the restoration operates, with no need for the NFSA to justify changes through a corrective narrative against past errors. Instead, *Proof*'s digital rendering was the primary intervention, highlighting the distinct role that digitisation plays in the NFSA Restores program as an act invested in securing the institution's future, both technologically and financially.

My analysis will first focus on the context in which the various versions of *Proof* were produced. I will revisit the main ideas and arguments covered in earlier chapters about the NFSA Restores program, this time focusing on the implications of digitisation in film archives. This discussion will include the major risks and challenges associated with the modern digital film archive, situating developments within radical archive theory, authorised heritage discourse and restoration theory. I will address the infrastructural fragility of digital archiving, highlighting the risks of regular digital migration and the accepted degree of unavoidable loss in digital archives. Drawing on original interviews with NFSA staff, I will also examine the ways in which analogue film objects are problematised by digitisation, given the difficulty of quantifying or qualifying the exact status of the digital object.

I will then compare two versions of *Proof*—the original release and the restoration—through back-to-back viewings. I will analyse the extent to which the NFSA's restoration of

Proof reveals the Archive's priorities in terms of controlling and facilitating access to the past for the future. This section opens with an account of the decision-making process behind the restoration of *Proof*, including the unique mechanisms, such as the crowdfunding campaign, that set it apart within the NFSA Restores program. Unlike other films in this thesis, *Proof* exhibits no content changes between its unrestored and restored versions. As aforementioned, the digital transformation itself was the primary intervention, significantly impacting the film's aesthetics, tangibility and indexicality. I will draw attention to how the digital restoration blurs the line between 35mm still and moving image photography, creating implications for how the film is presented and preserved.

This chapter concludes by positioning *Proof's* digital restoration as a case study for more radical approaches to archival practice. I argue that these more radical theories shift collecting institutions away from essentialised heritage towards participatory heritage.

Heritage, NFSA Restores and the implications of digitisation

The NFSA Restores program is one of the organisation's major public-facing projects. It demonstrates the Archive's institutional view of the value and virtue of Australian film heritage beyond the remit of keeping, preserving and storing the film objects it collects. This is not to say that the NFSA has given up on the idea of the heritage object as sacred, in and of itself. Despite the modernisation of the Archive's preservation and restoration processes, its approach is still somewhat premised on a more traditional understanding of heritage, one that ensures the restoration is as close to the 'original' as possible.

The implicit obligation of state-funded cultural archives to approach their work technically and impartially remains an underlying justification for all activities and

expenditures within those institutions.²⁷⁷ But as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, many audiovisual collecting institutions like the NFSA have, since their founding, broadened their remit and reexamined their role within the cultural heritage of their nation state.²⁷⁸ Consequently, the way archives grow towards new forms of curation, exhibition and restoration is in clear conflict with the expectation that its actions are justified within an historical frame of reference: as a necessary, scientific act, servicing ostensibly neutral missions of preservation and conservation. To manage this tension at the NFSA, new initiatives (like a wide-scale digitisation project) are justified both as important cultural developments for the organisation and as necessary, urgent interventions that use new technology to maintain old objects into the future.²⁷⁹

In this way, institutional digitisation becomes sutured to its justification: an immediate and ongoing high-tech solution designed to capture and store the essential matter of a film object, interrupting its degradation and allowing it to exist into the future.²⁸⁰ One implication of this approach is that it risks essentialising Australian film and its heritage to a locatable, identifiable and innate quality that can be maintained in the conversion of analogue to digital media. This is not only a narrow lens for expressing and experiencing Australian film culture—it is also at odds with the transformative impact of digital preservation and restoration. The net effect of the modernisation of national film artefacts is generative, producing a version that is not exactly the same.

²⁷⁷ See [Page 24](#)

²⁷⁸ See for example, “NFSA Statement of Reflection | National Film and Sound Archive of Australia,” <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/about/our-story-and-vision/nfsa-statement-reflection>.

²⁷⁹ NFSA, “NFSA Strategic Direction 2022-2025.”

²⁸⁰ This is, in effect, my critical definition of the way digitisation is deployed within audiovisual archives. This is informed by my visits to overseas audiovisual archives like the Irish Film Archive, and the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive, as well as my research undertaken at the NFSA. This definition is not designed to be cynical but instead to recognise that digitisation serves a specific aim and is supported, both financially and institutionally, by existing frameworks of triaging for urgent decay and loss. This definition is also guided by the work of Giovanna Fossati, Lina Bountori, Paolo Cherchi Usai, and Barbara Flueckiger

Throughout this thesis I have argued that the NFSA Restores program relies on archivists effacing their creativity and paying deference to (what they understand to be) the filmmaker's vision. They do so on the premise that they are obliged to archival principles, which require archivists and restorers not to intervene beyond what is absolutely required, so as to preserve the sanctity of collected objects²⁸¹. As seen in my earlier case studies, my interviews with restorers show that they hold to the view that, when they have made substantive changes in the restoration process, such changes are justified as either representative of the filmmaker's vision or as necessary compromises given the limitations of technology, resources and time. This case study is different. The changes made to *Proof* were not to its content or run time, but to the overall technology of the film and the impact on its aesthetics.

In this last case study chapter, I will consider a more radical school of thought about restoration and preservation that, contrary to the view described above, values intervention—specifically, the kind of inevitable change that digitisation brings. In brief, the position I will advance is that restoration can be expansive and generative, rather than merely conservative.

Changes made to these restorations are explained by the Archive in technical terms only, justified by their reduction to chemistry and history. In other words: film breaks down, whereas digital renderings do not, so it is necessary to convert these films to a digital format.²⁸²

I argue to the contrary that these digital restored versions should be embraced as creative and productive. This would transform restoration into an exercise in interactivity and

²⁸¹See [Page 24](#) & [73](#)

²⁸² The extent to which digital materials are in fact exempt from degradation will be discussed later in this chapter. But, broadly speaking, there is utility for the NFSA to the argument or position that digital objects are more stable and reliable than their analogue counterparts.

change—and, in turn, acknowledge the live nature of these film artefacts rather than continuing to anchor them to an unattainable static and innate quality from ‘the past’.²⁸³ Although this change would require a cultural or policy adjustment for the NFSA, the shift may simply involve moving away from framing restoration in purely technical or corrective terms. Instead, it could embrace a broader language that acknowledges the altered interactions and textures of film versions, treating them as creative engagements with the past rather than static preservations of it. My thesis proposes that one way to explore such a shift may not arise from within the institution itself but through the critical work of scholars examining these transformations and their implications. By doing so, we might foster the idea of restoration as an ongoing and dynamic process, enriching both institutional practice and the way these artefacts are understood.

I have noted in previous chapters that the film version, especially the restored film version or restoration, is an embedded argument, as made by those undertaking the preservation and restoration, for that version of the film as containing all the versions that came before it. This is my transposition of Paul Eggert’s claim (that a scholarly edition is an argument made by those who collect and “re-present” an existing, historical text) to audiovisual archival objects. Here, I consider another facet of this claim: that the scholarly edition is also an argument because it addresses an audience. Eggert writes:

If the edition is to be seen as an argument, then it is necessarily one that is addressed to an audience in respect of the documents gathered and analysed for the editorial project, usually documents deemed to witness the textual transmission. If the edition is an argument addressed to a readership, then it must anticipate the needs of that readership. This transactional view of things places the editor in a medial or Janus-

²⁸³ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 1st ed. (Florence: Routledge, 2007), 299, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203602263>.

faced position, looking in one direction towards the relevant documents and looking in the other towards the audience. To edit is to mediate, to come between.²⁸⁴

In this passage, Eggert articulates this process only to then reckon with how translatable it will be to a suite of digital tools for an incoming era of digital scholarly editions. For the NFSA, however—and this has implications for my argument that film versions and digital restorations can themselves be understood as arguments in Eggert’s sense—these digital forms already exist. They serve as ambitious means of editing, mediating and, to borrow Eggert’s term, addressing the space between audience and film. For the case study films in this thesis, this act of mediation is perhaps even more complex because it navigates not two but three different axes: the audience, the film and the filmmakers.²⁸⁵

In putting forward the digital restoration of *Proof* as an argument for that version of the film, director Jocelyn Moorhouse retains an influence over the process that must also be managed. Indeed, former chief curator Gayle Lake described this balance in an article published by the NFSA to commemorate her legacy with the Restores program. She is quoted as saying, “This is not a process where you can fix what you couldn’t afford to fix back then.” And yet, as my chapters on *Bliss*, *Starstruck* and *Wake in Fright* have demonstrated, the influence of filmmakers over the process is still substantial.

As I will show through my versional analysis of *Proof*, digital restoration undertaken by the NFSA is an argument that uses creativity and change to occupy the space between audience, filmmaker and the digitally-scanned analogue object. Moreover, the NFSA Restores program is focused on a modern audience that exists in a new technological environment, one that has fostered new modes of viewing. There is substantial literature

²⁸⁴ Eggert, *Work and the Reader in Literary Studies: Scholarly Editing and Book History*, 82.

²⁸⁵ Importantly, when the filmmakers or rightsholders are deceased, this navigation is still taking place, but in those instances the deference is paid to the historical concept of the filmmaker rather than their living self.

attempting to identify and classify some of these new viewing experiences. For example, media studies scholars Francesco Casetti and Stephen Monteiro grapple with the conceptual and artistic implications of user intervention in the act of watching digital media. Casetti hypothesises a modern pair of viewers, writing:

Their viewing experience would be much more discontinuous: on the home television, it would be interrupted by the continual insertion of other material, while on DVD it could be voluntarily suspended and picked up later, partially watched again, paused on a single frame, or skipped ahead to the end.²⁸⁶

Meanwhile, Monteiro explains that watching films on digital devices, due to their substantial variation and interactivity, changes the relationship between images and their bounds on the screen. The digital medium creates a live audiovisual object that continues to shift and adapt, negotiated between the stability of the original frame and the discretion of the viewer's interaction. In this way, the digital restoration (or any digital film media) reconfigures the relationship between filmmaker, viewer and object, with each viewing mode subtly reshaping how the film is perceived and understood. Monteiro writes:

Whenever an image dragged across a touchscreen 'rubber-bands' upon release to fill the frame, or a television cycles through display options that stretch, contract and crop the image as the user scrolls through the menu with a remote, one is constantly reminded of the frame's continuous, guiding presence... Certainly features that resize or crop the image to fit its frame conspire to adulterate the screen image by disfiguring or abridging internal formal relationships in systematic ways.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ Francesco Casetti, "3. Assembly," in *The Lumière Galaxy: Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come* (New York, UNITED STATES: Columbia University Press, 2015), 70, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unsw/detail.action?docID=1922316>.

²⁸⁷ S. Monteiro, "Fit to Frame: Image and Edge in Contemporary Interfaces," *Screen* 55, no. 3 (September 1, 2014): 268–70, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hju021>.

This dynamism stems not only from the transformation of analogue into digital but also from the audience's familiarity with the flexible, rapidly changing digital environment, which primes the digital object with new viewing possibilities. While most NFSA Restores films are screened in cinema environments by the institution, they do not need to be, and this is the complex and adaptable context of digital film objects. Such fluidity invites a versional approach, as my analysis across this thesis demonstrates. Examining restorations in light of their historical and contemporary conditions allows us to appreciate them as process-laden palimpsests that can be reviewed and revisited by modern audiences.²⁸⁸ Here, I will focus on how these film restorations can be creative, new and dynamic acts, as realised through digitisation.

Digital frailty in rigid archives

Digital restoration requires significant resources, labour and technology. But by bringing a film artefact to the most technologically advanced state available, restoration presumes to ensure a film's life and security into the future. This is evident in the language of the NFSA Restores program, as seen in a request for donations to the digital restoration of *Proof*: "*Proof* can't be kept alive for future audiences to experience on the big screen, as it was intended unless we can digitally restore and preserve the fragile analogue film."²⁸⁹ The act of restoration is not just to conserve, or enhance, or even to make films visible again, but to render them compatible with the latest digital technology. In this way, they marry the historical object with the contemporary medium.

At the same time, the NFSA Restores program is implicated in what Laurajane Smith terms 'Authorised Heritage Discourse' (AHD).²⁹⁰ In her book *Uses of Heritage* (2007), Smith

²⁸⁸ See *Starstruck Chapter*

²⁸⁹ "Help Restore the Film Proof | National Film and Sound Archive of Australia," <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/asset/96757-help-restore-film-proof>.

²⁹⁰ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*.

defines AHD as a mode of heritage management controlled by powerful, often elitist institutions that regulate how heritage is defined, valued and preserved. Central to Smith's argument is the view that institutional heritage practices often revolve around defining an object's historical value as innate. For the NFSA, certain films must be restored so that their innate value can be digitised. Their essential history and heritage can be captured by the digitisation process, then presented to new audiences. This concept of innate value emphasises the contemporary understanding of an object's historicity as so significant that it must be brought into the future. Indeed, the present becomes implicated in the maintenance of an object's past, bound by a perceived duty to preserve its pastness for future generations. This responsibility shapes contemporary interactions with the object, ensuring its integrity as an inheritance to be safeguarded and passed on. She writes:

This sense of inheritance promotes the idea that the present has a particular 'duty' to the past and its monuments. The duty of the present is to receive and revere what has been passed on and in turn pass this inheritance, untouched, to future generations.²⁹¹

While Smith is right that an institutional practice like restoration is explicitly interested in the re-creation of a remembered and idealised past—and, in the specific case of digital film restoration, is preoccupied with the maintaining and perpetuating a past experience of a film, which could be argued to be its essence or its innate value—there is a key dimension to restoration that complicates that goal. Specifically, the interventions required to perform a digitised restoration are necessarily transformative. They challenge the sanctity of an object's pastness by wresting it from its position in time to bring it into the present and future.

²⁹¹ Laurajane Smith, "1. The Discourse of Heritage," in *Uses of Heritage*, by Laurajane Smith, 1st ed. (Florence: Routledge, 2007), 19, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203602263>.

Fundamentally, then, digital restoration at the NFSA is twofold. It simultaneously engages institutional fixation on innate and essential value and heritage, while at the same time applying creative methods to the film object to ensure its presentation and future. I have argued throughout this thesis that creative restoration work is effaced by the Archive workers who engage in it, as they instead pay deference to filmmakers and rightsholders, while also aligning themselves to the Archive's obligations (or, more accurately, aspirations) to impartiality and non-intervention. In other words, the language and expectations of what Smith identifies as AHD clearly underpin the way in which value and heritage are derived and defined at the NFSA. Nevertheless, the creative, argumentative and generative aspects of restoration are a challenge to this system.

In what follows, I will continue to refer to the relevance of AHD to the NFSA Restores program, while acknowledging that digital restoration is, in reality, not cleaved to a representation of the past.

The NFSA and innate value

The NFSA Restores project is complicated by its dual aims: to return previously inaccessible and damaged films to “the big screen”,²⁹² and to create digital preservation masters²⁹³ for future visitors to the Archive. As Smith writes on the interaction between archival objects and heritage:

Heritage, according to the AHD, is inevitably saved ‘for future generations’ a rhetoric that undermines the ability of the present, unless under the professional guidance of heritage professionals, to alter or change the meaning and value of heritage sites or places.²⁹⁴

²⁹² Stephen Groenewegen, “NFSA Restores,” Text (National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, October 28, 2016), <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/about/our-mission/nfsa-restores>.

²⁹³ *Bliss—Restoring the 1985 Classic*, Digital Video Featurette (Canberra, Australia, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fo_VSgIOwSo&list=PL03vmVO_lQa35PaAKmB0nOvoZPhu6-w80&index=2.

²⁹⁴ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 29.

This justification of the NFSA Restores program, offered by the claim made about the urgency of *Proof*'s restoration (as per the earlier quote), is evidence of the NFSA's broader approach to heritage and archival responsibility—one that yokes Australian films to the past while insisting that they are significantly hindered by the lack of digital compatibility with the present.²⁹⁵ This is an example of AHD in that the act of restoration implies that heritage can be confined to an innate, detectible cultural value that is sutured to a specific historical object, site or place.²⁹⁶ For NFSA Restores, this inherent, inalienable cultural value can be located in the original analogue objects that are now being digitised and treated for a contemporary setting. Yet, while the NFSA idealises the retrieval and maintenance of the analogue object's film-ness throughout the digitisation process—a goal shared by many restoration initiatives worldwide—the practice itself deviates from this ideal.²⁹⁷ As I have shown throughout this thesis, digitisation and restoration necessitate, encourage and inspire creativity and intervention. These processes do not simply preserve the past but reconfigure it, translating and transforming film-ness in ways that align with contemporary viewing contexts and expectations, reframing the restored films as the best they have ever been.

In the NFSA's Digitisation Strategy 2018-2025, digitisation is presented as the means through which to free the cultural value imprisoned in deteriorating analogue containers, ensuring its preservation for the future. The NFSA Restores program is a public-facing instance of this, and saving the film for future generations is the justification for all digitisation taking place at the Archive.²⁹⁸ Digitisation is framed as a salve for the fragility of celluloid film, which has a limited lifespan. Digitisation also proposes to extract from the celluloid the requisite visual information that can then be reconstituted into a watchable and

²⁹⁵ "Help Restore the Film Proof | National Film and Sound Archive of Australia."

²⁹⁶ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 29.

²⁹⁷ "Theorizing Archival Film," in *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition*, by Giovanna Fossati, Framing Film (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 131.

²⁹⁸ NFSA, "NFSA Digitisation Strategy 2018-2025."

experienceable video file or Digital Cinema Package (DCP). This principle reflects that duty to past objects, as described by Smith.²⁹⁹ However, by virtue of creating digital versions of film artefacts, significant concessions are made that shift the film away from its earlier analogue identity.

One such concession is the loss of the specific material quality of analogue, celluloid film. Comparing celluloid and digital, Paolo Cherchi Usai suggests that the essential experience of a film is, in fact, its frailty and decay. Writing in 2001 on the imminent shift to an entirely digital experience of film, Usai argues:

Given the physical and chemical phenomena at the heart of the process of decay [IV], a process that can be contained or decelerated but not altogether avoided, the viewer is an unconscious (sometimes resigned, in any case impotent) witness to the extinction of moving images that nobody cares to preserve, either because they are deemed unworthy [XXXVIII] or unsuitable for the purposes of further commercial exploitation.³⁰⁰

Usai articulates a normative “resignation” from audiences entering a digital age that ascribes finality and deterioration to the core experience of watching celluloid film. To this end, if an essentialised approach to heritage were to be observed strictly, this would imply that preservation would have to capture the finite experience of celluloid. It would, ironically, need to preserve a lack of interest in preservation. Usai here demonstrates the paradox and anxiety of film archiving. In the first lines, he recognises that decay cannot be “altogether avoided”, then begins to describe an “extinction of moving images that nobody cares to

²⁹⁹ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*.

³⁰⁰ Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 17.

preserve”. There is, at once, the inevitability of loss, and the institutional and cultural failure of being unable to prevent it.

However, that “loss” quality of celluloid is deemed by archivists to be inessential and divorced from the broader archival responsibility and heritage goal of preserving the content of that celluloid. The International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF), of which the NFSA is a member, stipulates in their best practices document that conservation is “the safeguarding and protection of original materials from damage, decay and loss,” and that preservation is “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”.³⁰¹ This language presupposes that the damage and wear of time is not, itself, an innate quality of photographic media. Instead, the Archive approaches loss and decay as threats to be neutralised. If digital copies of film artefacts are produced, then they are not subject to those same physical and temporal obstacles. In addition, the same approach can be identified in non-celluloid image and video preservation. These are also forms of media that similarly degrade over time. For example, videotape and other magnetic tape media have an array of long-term storage problems, such as ‘sticky shed syndrome’, in which the visual information held on magnetic particles becomes unbound and the tape becomes unplayable.

Digital claims to offer an immediate stability and reprieve from the urgent threat of loss. This is something the NFSA advertises with respect to its digitisation initiatives. The Archive’s aforementioned strategy document begins with the statement, “The time to digitise is now, before our national audiovisual history is lost forever.”³⁰²

³⁰¹ FIAF, “Film Preservation.”

³⁰² NFSA, “NFSA Digitisation Strategy 2018-2025.”

NFSA Restores: about digitisation

From its inception, the NFSA Restores digitising mission has been celebrated as proof of the results made possible through the use of digital and software solutions. While this link has not surfaced explicitly in my interviews, it seems apparent that the NFSA's investment in digitising restored films influenced the 2021 announcement that the Archive would receive \$41.9 million over four years to digitise their collection of magnetic tapes and safeguard audiovisual material as part of a project called Deadline 2025.³⁰³ That the NFSA Restores program is a publicly visible digitisation initiative is both important and complex.

In my interview with Gayle Lake, we discussed the implied interdependency of the NFSA Restores program and other digitisation efforts at the Archive.

Zach Karpinellison: And given that, unlike Koda/AtLab [the previous print-to-print access initiative], where there was a 75-title run, for Restores, is the plan that it just goes on indefinitely?

Gayle Lake: Well, there were some budget constraints over the last few years. And, you know, there was a big decision to make, in terms of reallocating money to the broader collection for digital preservation. So sometimes you have to bite the bullet for any restoration program—it's costly. But, unsurprisingly, it's probably the premium sort of restoration activity for archives, because it garners the most attention for the *work* as well.

Apparent in this response is the admission that there is a perceived cachet in what is included in the NFSA Restores program. In this response, "high-profile" films have been tasked with

³⁰³ Treasury Ministers, "Preserving Australia's at-Risk Collections with \$47 Million | Treasury Ministers" (Treasury Ministers, December 3, 2021), <https://ministers.treasury.gov.au/ministers/josh-frydenberg-2018/media-releases/preserving-australias-risk-collections-47-million>.

representing themselves as key instances of Australian film culture, while also encouraging investment in the greater archive.³⁰⁴ These well-known features are a key way for the NFSA to engage with the public, thus creating a kind of interactivity that also services a very specific heritage agenda. While the restored films represent a reasonably diverse sample of Australian cinema history, the process of restoration—framed as urgent and essential—often does not translate into long-term, easy access for audiences. Instead, these films remain bound by constraints such as copyright restrictions and the lack of active distribution, limiting their availability to those outside the Archive or without special access to its holdings.³⁰⁵

The historically restrictive nature of analogue film archival practice has continued to govern and influence the NFSA's approach to access. The digital present, through its cultural ubiquity—it can be found, used and manipulated easily on mobile phones, computers and other personal devices—is more inclusive than the analogue past, which required specific mechanical training, expensive projection and skill barriers. Craig Robertson writes about the democratising effect of digital archiving, noting:

The relationship between the archive, history and popular memory has been further complicated as archival practices have increasingly become part of everyday life. The will to archive (and curate) is integral to the use of digital media and has turned archiving into an important form of consumption and therefore exposed archives to the time and logics of the market.³⁰⁶

As with my discussion of Monteiro and Casseti, this quote demonstrates that the technological change has also led to an audience change. The ability to interact with media

³⁰⁴ At the time of submission, there have been 39 films in the NFSA Restores program.

³⁰⁵ See also: Claudy Op den Kamp and Project Muse, *The Greatest Films Never Seen The Film Archive and the Copyright Smokescreen*, 2020, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/66446/>.

³⁰⁶ Craig Robertson, "Introduction: Thinking about Archives, Writing about History," in *Media History and the Archive*, ed. Craig Robertson, 1st Edition (Routledge, 2011), 5.

digitally—whether collating and editing personal photographs or building a ‘watchlist’ on a streaming platform—signals the democratisation of the skill of using and storing media, as well as bearing witness to the vast amounts of media that exist. This makes the continuing expectation of passivity among those who view digital restorations unreasonable and unsustainable. The assumption that audiences should remain passive consumers, with no capacity to engage with or manipulate the image, no longer aligns with the current landscape of media interaction. This shift has necessarily changed the social and cultural meaning of what it is to hold a film object in an institutional setting.

To know that it is easy, in terms of skill, to watch a film on Netflix places a kind of pressure on organisations like the NFSA to demonstrate or articulate why the public’s grasp of digital media transliteracy cannot simply be applied wholesale to the NFSA’s collection. In other words, if a member of the public is comfortable navigating digital devices and accessing vast libraries of content, why can they not easily access films that the Archive has digitised? This expectation, shaped by the ubiquity of digital platforms, frames access to archived films in a similar light, creating a natural assumption that navigating the NFSA’s collection should be just as intuitive.

The NFSA Digitisation Strategy 2018-2025 answers this question, but does not dwell on the issue, because the strategy is much more reliant on inspiring urgency and strong motivation to act now rather than ensuring access once the digitisation is done. The document states, “Digitisation must increase inclusiveness and access. All material that is digitised will be made available online for use as far as rights and access restrictions allow.”³⁰⁷ These access restrictions are the actual barrier to entry for most members of the public, due to legal and financial requirements.

³⁰⁷ NFSA, “NFSA Digitisation Strategy 2018-2025.”

Accessing footage incurs costs and requires the permission of rightsholders.³⁰⁸

However, as Robertson explains, non-archivist members of the public have a greater understanding of digital film access and have been encouraged, in the context of late capitalism, to view digital media as ubiquitous and available despite financial and legal realities.³⁰⁹ Perhaps digitisation can be the means through which to democratise the archive, rather than the ends after the archive has been democratised.

In this environment, it has become incumbent upon the NFSA to create (at least the perception of) a more participatory archiving process. This has created an obligation in documents like the Digitisation Strategy to account for inclusion and access. However, the NFSA has not flagged an interest in dedicating time and resources to exploring legal and financial solutions to making films in the collection more accessible.³¹⁰ Other state-funded film archives, like the National Library of Scotland's (NLS) Moving Image Archive and the Toronto International Film Festival's Film Reference Library (TIFF Library), have worked to reach agreements with various rightsholders to make parts of the collection visible for free to visitors of the archive, so long as they watch the material onsite.³¹¹ While this is an imperfect solution, it represents a different approach to and focus on access than what has historically been the case with the NFSA. That said, the Archive's new digitisation and rebranding as a "cultural experience platform" does signal an interest in sharing more of the collection with the general public.³¹² It is also relevant to note that both the NLS and TIFF collections are

³⁰⁸ "Access Fees and Conditions of Use | National Film and Sound Archive of Australia," <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/using-collection/access-fees>.

³⁰⁹ Laura U. Marks, "Let's Deal with the Carbon Footprint of Streaming Media," *Afterimage* 47, no. 2 (June 1, 2020): 46–52, <https://doi.org/10.1525/aft.2020.472009>.

³¹⁰ NFSA, "NFSA Digitisation Strategy 2018-2025."

³¹¹ Learned during my visit to these archives in 2023.

³¹² NFSA, "NFSA Strategic Direction 2022-2025."

substantially smaller than the NFSA's and can thus direct a larger portion of their resources and funding to making their materials accessible.

Also pertinent is that some items inaccessible to the public are also a source of revenue for the NFSA, as clients who hold the copyright to certain titles held in the collection will pay to retrieve their materials and use the NFSA's suites and services. This was explained to me by senior conservator Patrick O'Connor:

We do screenings for external clients, and we do external scanning for other films for clients, so they can make DCPs. They're more your client base jobs, where a producer wants it done for commercial reasons. So, they'll pay for us to work on the film. And we'll even hire a production company, either in Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney, for it to be scanned.³¹³

This kind of external client work is core to the NFSA's operations, so finding ways to make copyrighted content available to the general public would deny a certain amount of revenue otherwise earned from those rightsholders.

However, the expectation of public engagement is accounted for, I argue, through the NFSA Restores program. The project represents a response to the democratisation of digital skill, and the social and cultural appetite for participation in institutional heritage, specifically when that heritage has been digitised. The NFSA Restores program, while adhering to the generalised modesty and effacement I have noted in previous chapters, does consider the creation of an ethos and culture that invites understanding and makes visible archival process in ways that should compel the public, and specifically those who use the Archive, to

³¹³ Interview with Zach Karpinellison & Patrick O'Connor

understand the complexity and fragility of that work. Returning to the fraught nature of the inaccessible archival object in the digital era, Robertson writes:

To archive “documents” constitutes a pact with the future formed in a historically specific moment. The complex relationships between present, past, and future determine the nature of that pact and therefore what is collected. What the present chooses to save in this pact produces the basis for our future understanding of the past.³¹⁴

This is important and contemporary thinking in the disciplines of archive and museum studies. In analysing an archive, the objects are not necessarily as important as who chose to collect them, and why.³¹⁵ It is also necessary to consider how the temporal pact influences facilitation of, and responsibility over, the objects held in the collection. In effect, by securing a future for a film object at the NFSA, the film object is tasked with outliving the archivists that provided that security. Then the institution itself must remain robust enough, financially and culturally, that it can sustain a future of workers, technologies and resources that maintain the future of the film object. This institution must, therefore, be cared for by the public who, in turn, work to secure its future. However, the drive to ensure the archive’s perpetual function inevitably comes at the cost of making it accessible and relevant to the present. The allocation of resources and labour to large-scale digitisation en masse diverts attention from legal and institutional interventions that could make more of the already digitised collection readily available to the public.³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Robertson, “Introduction: Thinking about Archives, Writing about History,” 5.

³¹⁵ Elizabeth Yale, “The History of Archives: The State of the Discipline,” *Book History* 18, no. 1 (2015): 332–59, <https://doi.org/10.1353/bh.2015.0007>.

³¹⁶ See also: Rick Prelinger, “Archives and Access in the 21st Century,” *Cinema Journal* 46, no. 3 (2007): 114–18.

Thus, when this large-scale effort of care and responsibility is directed at a specific film within the archive, there is a regular transfer of care between various actors: the archivist, the institution and the public. This is especially pronounced in the context of digital film archiving, where files must be regularly migrated to new technologies to prevent them from becoming obsolete. This dynamic creates an ongoing responsibility for all parties involved to maintain the film's preservation, ensuring its continued access and relevance to both present and future generations.

Consider, for example, that each new form of digital storage might not be compatible with the last, and so to ensure longevity for these objects, regular migrations occur. It also occurs because, despite the cultural narrative that digital files are impervious to damage unlike their analogue counterparts, they are, in fact, subject to loss, damage and corruption, especially through migration.³¹⁷ In Lina Bountouri's *Archives in the Digital Age*, migration is discussed as a required but deeply flawed part of modern archiving. Bountouri writes:

For example, how can a migrated digital object be considered authentic? Several digital preservation specialists claim that migration, and especially the continuous migration, cannot guarantee the authenticity and integrity of a digital resource.

Unfortunately, data loss in data migration processes is one of the most usual phenomena in this strategy, while periodical migration of data costs money and effort.

In order to deal with this issue, archives should define specific criteria, such as the degree of loss that can be accepted during migration and how the information loss between various migrations can be discovered and documented.³¹⁸

³¹⁷ Amanda Kay Rinehart, Patrice-Andre Prud'homme, and Andrew Reid Huot, "Overwhelmed to Action: Digital Preservation Challenges at the under-Resourced Institution," *OCLC Systems & Services* 30, no. 1 (February 4, 2014): 28–42, <https://doi.org/10.1108/OCLC-06-2013-0019>.

³¹⁸ Lina Bountouri, *Archives in the Digital Age: Standards, Policies and Tools*, Chandos Information Professional Series (Cambridge, MA Kidlington: Chandos Publishing, 2017), 42.

As Bountouri articulates, loss is an understood part of the migration process. This is significant because, while analogue objects are liable to degradation and damage, they are not actively damaged as *part* of the intended preservation process. In fact, the fear of damage to analogue objects is the primary driver of preservation and digitisation efforts. This is also important because the invocation of digital technology and the digitisation imperative is always as a solution to the problem of analogue formats' finite lifespans. Digitisation as a means of saving or "rescuing"³¹⁹ analogue films relies on the expectation of digital permanence. This is simply not supported by the realities of digital archiving. Franziska Frey, speaking to this temporariness of digital, writes:

It involves a number of complex questions and assumptions about the collection's materials, their values and purpose in the institution and in broader culture, and whether or not digital information can be considered to be "permanent" at all.³²⁰

If digital information is as fragile and fleeting as analogue carriers and media, then the NFSA's interest in digitisation might be attributed to other influences and interests. In my interview with Gayle Lake, the former chief curator stated that the NFSA Restores program is premised on both the objectives of restoration and the essential creation of very high-quality digital materials to be used by archivists and non-archivists into the future. She spoke of the program's inception:

I'd said to Meg Labrum, former head of the NFSA, "We've come this far. Why aren't we producing Digital Cinema Packages for the future?" At that point in time, there was some money around to actually take films through digital preservation as well as

³¹⁹ FIAF, "International Federation of Film Archives," n.d., <https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/Community/FIAF-Manifesto.html>.

³²⁰ Franziska Frey, "Digital Imaging as a Tool in Preservation," n.d., 182.

the photochemical preservation. And that's kind of where Restores started, because we actually were producing digital deliverables.³²¹

Thus, the Restores program is structured around the creation of materials that reflect the archival responsibility to have these artefacts exist into the future. To do so requires financial infrastructure to ensure the Archive continues to exist into the future. In order to resource and outfit the NFSA with the capabilities to perform digital preservation and restoration, the Restores program raised funding, interest and awareness by focusing on high-profile, important Australian feature films. Lake continues:

And yes, whilst we have twenty-eight streams for video digitisation, to produce JPEGs for mag media for video, which is incredibly important work considering we're going to lose that original material and the ability to play it back over the next little while, it's the more high-profile feature films that actually garner attention.³²²

The digital materials, as well as the digital restorations of films in the NFSA Restores catalogue, thus become crucial symbols and flagships of the Archive's modern capabilities. The visibility of these digital restorations even trumps specific media. While the injection of funding that supports the Deadline 2025 goal of mass digitisation specifically targets magnetic tape, the NFSA Restores initiative raises the profile of the act of digitisation, regardless of the medium concerned.³²³ The Restores program might, in this way, be described as an advertisement for what digital restoration can do. This is demonstrated further by the production of paratextual materials, specifically the before-and-after videos I have written on in previous chapters.³²⁴ It seems clear that the process of restoration and

³²¹ Interview with Zach Karpinellison & Gayle Lake.

³²² Interview with Zach Karpinellison & Gayle Lake.

³²³ "Deadline 2025 PDF | National Film and Sound Archive of Australia," <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/asset/83142-deadline-2025-pdf>.

³²⁴ See [Page 206](#)

digitisation must be visible to the public through the work produced by NFSA Restores so that further digitisation projects, the longevity of the Archive, and the requisite funding can be justified.

Digital restoration is also a useful exemplar for the broader digitisation process because it encourages experimentation. It signals what further work might be possible to do to revive and restore films in the future. This creates another imperative for continued and increased funding of the Archive. Lake explained the open-endedness of digital scanning to me in our interview:

Originally, we looked at 2K for 35mm, but really, we need 4K digital preservation of the original files, the lossless DPX sequences. This will futureproof us for a little while, even though people are talking about, you know, 8K and 16K experiences.³²⁵

Lake recognises the role of the Archive in responding to and managing the rapid pace of digital technological development. The Restores program becomes not just a backdoor digital preservation initiative, but a justification for enhanced technology, such as the capturing of high definition (up to a certain standard) images of films in the collection so that they may be used beyond the current remit of the NFSA Restores program. In this way, the digital restoration system instantiates the need for the Archive to outlive its archivists.

Looking towards the future of digital technology actually reinforces the importance of preserving rawer, analogue versions of past works. As technology evolves, there is renewed incentive to revisit digitisation and restoration processes—accessing the original analogue object again and attempting to re-perform, even out-perform, earlier digitising efforts. This complicates a natural assumption of the digitisation process: that, once digitised, it may be

³²⁵ Interview with Zach Karpinellison & Gayle Lake.

appropriate to discard or dispose of original materials. In my interview with collections manager Belinda Hunt, she explained that, even as more of these high-quality digital files are created, there will likely remain an incentive to keep analogue objects in the collection:

A lot of people do think, “Why do you need analogue storage when you’re digitising all of this?” The first rule of archiving is- what *I* was taught is: you keep the original. You know, who is to say that, in thirty years, you wouldn’t re-digitise an analogue film and get a better result than what you can get now? And you’d want to go back to the original to do it.³²⁶

Despite the language used throughout the Archive’s policy documents about imperilled and time-limited analogue media, modern archival principles and responsibility have created an institutional culture in which storing and maintaining both analogue and digital materials from the past is essential to the Archive’s future existence. In this way, the NFSA as a modern, digitally-capable institution is fixated on creating a future sustained by digitisation and re-digitisation, while also ensuring a brick-and-mortar existence that stores the earlier technological forms. However, this modern and technologically proficient archive is, as I have shown above, still governed by the conservatism of AHD and a tunnel-visioned fear of loss. In this model, the NFSA Restores program exists to perform high-profile digital restorations that showcase technological development and justify increased allocation of resources towards digitisation.

NFSA Restores *Proof*

In my chapter on the 2009 restoration of *Wake in Fright*, I discussed editor Tony Buckley’s reaction to the exposure of darker scenes. Digital interventions illuminated dark walls in the

³²⁶ Interview with Zach Karpinellison and Belinda Hunt.

pub, and upon seeing posters and framed paintings, Buckley described it as seeing something “new”.³²⁷ This neatly captures one of the strange outcomes of restoration: restoring a film can actually involve reaching beyond the past. Using new technologies, restorers can breach the parameters of the original object and render aspects that, while arguably always present in the photochemistry of the image, were previously illegible. If they were not visible at the time of the film’s release, did they therefore not exist until they were made visible? This is the same question that troubles Martin in *Proof*. If the photos he takes are not seen by sighted people, is the content of those images an actual document of reality?

This premise in *Proof*, of a blind photographer taking pictures to document and validate reality, reflects the NFSA’s advocacy for a digitised, restored, future-proof collection. The past and history in the Archive, entombed in decaying analogue supports, is seen as only retrievable and valid if it can be ‘rescued’ and converted into a digital format that will last indefinitely.³²⁸ In particular, as I articulated above, the urgency of this salvage mission is publicised to stakeholders, including the general public, as something that only immediate resourcing and action can ensure. To this end (and to the extent that NFSA Restores is a flagship, public-facing initiative), the restoration of a film like *Proof* becomes a high-profile exercise in demonstrating the potential of forestalling loss and securing the film for future generations. *Proof* represents a compelling case study for this thesis as it is distinct from other restored films I have examined in two key ways.

The Campaign: Restoration? Prove it.

Proof was and remains the only instance in which crowdfunding has resourced the digitisation and restoration of a film at the NFSA.³²⁹ Using Australian crowdfunding platform

³²⁷ See [Page 107](#)

³²⁸ FIAF, “International Federation of Film Archives.”

³²⁹ Gayle Lake, “E-Mail Correspondence with Gayle Lake: NFSA Restores—Proof,” January 31, 2024.

Pozible, the Archive created a campaign to raise the requisite financial resources from donors and philanthropists to perform the digital restoration of the film in 2015–16. This involved disseminating videos that featured both director Jocelyn Moorhouse reflecting on her fondness for her debut film, as well as celebrity film critic and NFSA Ambassador Margaret Pomeranz imploring donation on the basis of celebrating such an important Australian film. These videos invite potential donors to understand the “crucial” role they can play in contributing to the digitisation and restoration of *Proof*. Moorhouse spends her brief screentime reflecting on how the film is like her child: “a film kid”. She acknowledges its significance and enduring value as something precious and important to her. Later in the video, she reappears with a quizzical expression. “I haven’t seen it in a pristine version in a very long time,” she says. “But I remember when it first came out, it was beautiful.” Again, the intent is to convey *Proof*’s important historical value. Moorhouse demonstrates the NFSA’s imperative to return to the essential, prior and superior experience of the film, and this is the basis of requesting funding from the broader community.

Meanwhile, Pomeranz offers two ways of thinking about *Proof*’s restoration. On the one hand, she cites herself as a “major supporter of *Proof*”, recognising its contribution to Australian cinema as a debut feature from both a woman director and producer. The brief history she surveys ends with her pausing and finally stating that the film “explores trust”. This section of the video is meant to engage Pomeranz’s status as a respected critic and film historian and confer upon the restoration exercise her approval or blessing for the choice of film. The other position given by Pomeranz is to articulate the risk of not performing this digital restoration on *Proof*. Pomeranz looks directly into camera and says with a grave tone, “If we don’t preserve our film history, even our recent film history, it’s going to fade and

die.”³³⁰ This final sentiment is the campaign’s main tool to encourage donations. The written copy echoes ideas around the film’s fragility and the need to act immediately. At the bottom of the campaign page, the text reads:

WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON’T RESTORE *PROOF*?

It can’t be seen in today’s digital cinemas and, over time, the 35mm film will deteriorate.

Now is the time to bring *Proof* into the 21st century, so spread the word and encourage your friends and family to support the NFSA in our endeavour to breathe new life into *Proof*.

We work in collaboration with the filmmaker where possible to bring their original vision back to life, frame by frame.

By pledging money (any amount you can), you are helping us keep a masterpiece alive. You’re not just supporting this film; you’re helping preserve and celebrate Australian classic and cult cinema.

Together, let’s make film history.³³¹

This inclusion of a section in the campaign on what inaction will mean is particularly revealing in terms of the NFSA’s sense of priority and how they want donors and the public to engage with their digitisation and restoration mission. The decision to use language like, “you are helping us keep a masterpiece alive” attaches *Proof*’s existence to this digital restoration effort and implies that, if the restoration does not take place, the degradation of the 35mm is certain and unavoidable. In reality, as I explored above, no digital restoration to

³³⁰ *Why I Support the NFSA: Margaret Pomeranz*, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dC_ZoQS8Jvo.

³³¹ FIAF, “Help Restore the Film *Proof* by National Film and Sound Archive of Australia,” Pozible, July 1, 2016, <https://www.pozible.com/project/205542>.

date has meant that standard archival care of 35mm objects has ceased. In fact, as Hunt explained, the rapid pace of innovations in digital technology is a key reason to continue maintaining and preserving analogue media. However, the public needs to be enveloped by this sense of urgency with which the Archive justifies its fundraising initiatives, as well as its broad planning for the future, in order to secure support.

The language about life and death is also telling. The campaign asks you to consider bringing “their original vision back to life, frame by frame” while also asking you to “breathe new life” into this “Australian classic”. At once, the analogue version of *Proof* is dying, dead and undead. It is sufficiently dormant and protected, but also so rapidly decomposing that the Archive must implore the prospective donor to act with haste and revive this dying film. This emotional language is, at best, creative and inspiring—at worst, misleading and manipulative. It also betrays the extent to which digitisation is necessarily interventionist, albeit for the perceived greater good. By “breathing new life” into a dying object, the object is changed but is allowed to survive.

The NFSA’s Pozible campaign offered donors incentivising perks, tiered in relation to the donation amount. Among them was the Cinefile tier, which offered (in exchange for a donation between \$100 to \$500) “exclusive online access to *Proof* goodies from the NFSA collection: stills, posters and original publicity material from 1991”.³³² These rewards are also implicated in the difficulties of digital archiving. What does the nebulous phrasing “exclusive online access” actually mean? A website maintained by the NFSA to hold these items exclusively for supporters to visit on demand, in perpetuity? A specific page using the NFSA’s server would be required for this to be the case. If it is, what obligations is the Archive under to keep this site available? Is this exclusive access to be indefinitely policed?

³³² FIAF.

Or has the NFSA managed to resolve copyright issues in order to provide supporters of this tier with personal, digital copies of these items?

The highly impermanent quality of these kinds of digital storage and access offers is already demonstrated on the Pozible campaign site. While the page remains viewable eight years after the campaign concluded, various assets on the website are no longer functional. For example, appended to a section titled “WHY *PROOF* MATTERS” is an embedded YouTube video that now displays the static screen: “Video unavailable. This video is private.” The videos attached to the campaign do appear to still exist, as visiting the NFSA’s YouTube channel reveals the videos I have described above but accessing them as part of the campaign website is no longer possible.

One additional *Proof* campaign video is still kept on the NFSA YouTube channel. This video was produced as one of the rewards for the campaign and sees Pomeranz personally naming and thanking those who contributed to the Film Conservator tier, at \$1000 or more. The video is only thirty-seven seconds long and is titled, ‘Thank you for helping us restore *PROOF*: Margaret Pomeranz’. It begins with Pomeranz thanking all 266 supporters for their contribution to the restoration. She then explains the campaign site, and the specific perk for the tier described above. She names each of the five people who contributed that sum, and the video promptly ends. This video is worth acknowledging because it is the NFSA’s direct ‘thank you’ to donors, and it has only been viewed approximately 300 times. Since part of the campaign’s promise was to include these donors in the narrative of saving Australian audiovisual heritage, it is worth considering that, bar one other mention on the NFSA Restores page,³³³ this video is the only record of the campaign’s success.

³³³ Stephen Groenewegen, “NFSA Restores.”

Proof remains the only digital restoration at the NFSA to have sought public donations. I asked Lake why this was the case and, in her email correspondence with me, she explained that running the campaign was ultimately too costly and not worth the financial gains. Still, as a case study in the Archive's engagement with the public, and in sharing the responsibility of heritage with them, the Pozible page reveals some disconcerting trends. Rather than focusing on the new and updated ways that *Proof* could be experienced by present generations, particularly those who had not been exposed to the film previously, the marketing rhetoric relies on a narrative of impending loss. The public is asked to rescue the film from obscurity and make it available for speculative future audiences. The ability to see the restored film in the short-term is presented as a reward for preserving it for the long-term, rather than making it a public right. While the digital masters now exist in the NFSA's digital archive, the question of who can access them, when and how remains entirely uncertain and legally murky.

Tangible existence: flattening the image and medium specificity

Proof was a commercial and critical success upon release in 1991. The film won a Golden Camera at Cannes and six Australian Film Institute awards. It was Moorhouse's debut feature and was cited by the Pozible site as the film that launched the careers of stars Hugo Weaving and Russell Crowe. It also began what would become an ongoing thematic concern in Moorhouse's films: to consider and represent disability on screen.³³⁴ The film's efforts to sensitively portray blindness and its ironic relationship to photography was recognised in reviews written at the time of the film's release.³³⁵ Robert Horton, in an article for *Film Comment*, wrote:

³³⁴ See also: *Muriel's Wedding* (PJ Hogan, 1994) and *The Dressmaker* (2015)

³³⁵ Of note however, is that these were non-disabled, sighted critics making this assessment of the film's depiction of blindness and disability more broadly.

...her actors are superbly handled, her eye is good, her ear is fine—the soundtrack is important in a film about a blind man who pours his after-dinner drinks by listening to the level of the liquid in his glass. It's a mature directorial sensibility that can create and resist explaining a scene such as Martin's photographing a leaf placed on the grass in the park.³³⁶

Horton has observed in these examples Moorhouse's command of the various layers of her filmmaking. He recognises the clarity and confidence with which Moorhouse uses these different technical aspects in concert, carefully balancing her complex premise with her complex characters. This, I argue, is of particular relevance to the restoration because the critical recognition of Moorhouse's attention to detail is key to its historical appreciation. The restoration's engagement with each of these aspects of the filmmaking is important to consider.

Comparing the versions

The NFSA Restores version of *Proof* does not make any changes to content. The runtimes of the two film versions are identical, and the content is unchanged. However, in my viewing of the unrestored and restored versions of the film, I observed three major differences. These changes were made through the process of digitisation and affect the way the film is represented in a new and modern environment.

The first was changes to the film's sound. While Horton comments in his assessment that the film's sound is fine and careful, the audio on the unrestored version of the film is not as clear as the remixed and remastered digital version in the restoration. In the unrestored version, the dialogue has been given priority above all other aspects of the soundtrack, and

³³⁶ Robert Horton, "Proof or Dare -- Proof Directed by Jocelyn Moorhouse," *Film Comment* 28, no. 2 (March 1992): 29.

non-dialogue sounds are often muddled and muffled. The restoration's audio, by contrast, is much more balanced, with dialogue, music and sound effects given equal footing and legibility. This arguably presents a more complete account of Martin's auditory world, as he hears and feels small details that are otherwise obscured. However, it is important to note here that I bring to my viewings of these unrestored and restored films a contemporary ear and eye trained towards the higher levels of fidelity and definition that are normalised nowadays. Notably, Horton was able to detect that level of detail in his experience of the film in 1991. This is exactly why my versional analysis does not simply compare but insists on acknowledging context and personal history in appraising how the versions of the film have changed over time.

Similarly, the restoration's colour is vastly different to that of the unrestored version. *Proof's* unrestored version has a greenish tint in keeping with many other unrestored 35mm films in the NFSA's collection. This is, in part, a result of the accelerated degradation of the cyan layer of colour on the film. Because this layer is the first to degrade, the leftover magenta and yellow tones tend to shift the film's colour towards green. However, the extent to which this is a chemical reality is complex. Many of these films—when transferred to VHS or DVD after their theatrical release, or simply in their original colouring—are also tinted towards warm yellow-greenish tones. For this reason, cultural memories of films seen on VHS (as opposed to in cinemas) differ.³³⁷ To this end, claiming that the green wash is a reversible chemical reality is problematic, because it does not necessarily reflect the actual historical life of the film. Also, as I noted above, scholars like Usai argue that this transformation of colour and degradation is actually a key aspect of the celluloid medium itself.

³³⁷ Julia Gilmore, "Be Kind Rewind Navigating Issues of Access and Practising an Ethics of Care for Magnetic Media from Vulnerable Communities," *Archivaria* 96 (Fall 2023): 70–95.

The restoration removes this green tint and adds a dark palette of blues and blacks to the image. It is also more saturated, with colours appearing brighter and more pronounced. The deepening of darker colours and shadows, as well as the saturation of bright colours, also locates this film in the same restoration aesthetic that I identified in *Bliss* and *Starstruck*. There is a continuity to the way these films are being restored, and this, I argue, further adds to the palimpsestic quality of NFSA Restores films by sharing resources and labour between them, and making the process of restoration an identifiable feature, if you view these films in sequence.

Finally, the last change I observed was the material differences between analogue and digital formats of the unrestored and restored versions. Moorhouse integrates the film photographs taken by Martin into the film itself. In the celluloid version of the film, these photographs are essentially projected and rendered as per their original format, replicating the photochemical exercise but in static form. In the unrestored version, the photographs appear as examples of a visually distinct medium. Both the photographs and the film itself were shot on 35mm stock, but each bears its own specific qualities. In the digital restored version of *Proof*, these photographs are rendered in a way that makes their texture and tone indistinguishable from the rest of the film. The depth and focal length of the photographs is flattened, and the two media appear identical when represented digitally. The only difference is that the photographs are, momentarily, still.

The digitisation no longer capturing this depth and medium specificity is something that D. N. Rodowick explores in his book *The Virtual Life of Film*. He writes:

First, as constituted through digital capture or synthesis, the image is always “montage,” in the sense of a singular combination of discrete elements. Even an unaltered digital still is already a work of montage in this respect. Second, as I have

already related, digital conversion is a one-way street: the output from digital capture can write movement back into the image, but it cannot restore duration to a projected film, for the continuity of automatic analogical causation is broken.³³⁸

Here Rodowick articulates the way that digital films are always duplications and assemblages. A “digital capture” is montage, by virtue of the way it is reconstituted from layers and layers of data that must be interpreted in order to display images. Thus, in the digital version of *Proof*, the still photographs are (re)constructed. They are built from the high-resolution scans taken of the original picture negative during the restoration and preservation process. These still photographs, already contained within the visual material of another medium, are again condensed into a final digital format that has no need to distinguish between the textural qualities of motion and still photography.

Although the photographs seen in the projected, unrestored 35mm version of *Proof* are static, the flicker of the projector running at the requisite twenty-four frames per second gives them some slight motion and effect. This movement is judiciously removed in the digitisation process, with the stills now appearing frozen and perfectly motionless. This is a small change, yet it has a profound effect. I do not draw this distinction to imply that the celluloid version of the film is superior because of its ability to capture multiple layers of medium specificity. Rather, I simply draw attention to the different ways in which each medium, be it digital or analogue, creates different meaning out of the same base materials.

While the difference between 35mm still and motion photography is observable in the unrestored version, the extreme stillness of the digitisation may allow a viewer to look more closely at Martin’s photographs. Both versions encourage audiences to engage with a particular curiosity regarding how a blind man might perceive and document the world.

³³⁸ David Norman Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007), 166.

However, I argue that the static quality of the digital version potentially renders these photographs more evidentiary than artful. Cassetti, Rodowick and Monteiro each contend that digital images engage contemporary viewers in complex ways. Modern audiences, familiar with the conventions and aesthetics of digital photography, may instinctively relate Martin's blurred, truth-affirming images to their own pragmatic digital snapshots, viewing them as records rather than artistic compositions.

Meanwhile, the 35mm presentation of *Proof* positions these photographs within a cohesive aesthetic, merging the expressive qualities of still and motion photography. This artistic coherence suggests a visual language shared between Moorhouse's carefully constructed scenes and Martin's own photographic practice, implying that, just as Moorhouse's work is beautiful and careful, so too is Martin's documentary photography. In turn, this has implications for the presentation of Martin's perhaps surprising passion, given his specific disability.

In the digital restoration, he is a blind photographer simply performing the exercise of recording evidence to be verified, or so the narrative suggests. The flattened digital images represent this endeavour earnestly and efficiently. Moreover, the blurry photographs, with their unusual composition, often resemble accidental snaps taken on a modern digital device. In this way, there is a kind of interpolation of the modern viewer into the act of photography within the film, but an accentuation of Martin's blindness as an obstacle to more conventionally satisfying photographs.

In the 35mm unrestored version, aesthetic continuities between cinematographer Martin McGrath's shot composition and the photographs taken by Martin represent his character differently. While his disability means he is unable to see what he is shooting, the depth and texture of the stills imbues them with intention, as confirmed by their merging with

the film's wider aesthetic palette. Martin's disability, in this version, does not preclude him from creating art. This is only possible because of the shared relationship between 35mm moving image and still photography.

This argument is subjective, and other readings may disagree with my distinction between the evidentiary and the artful. My broader point here is to demonstrate that, on a fundamental medium level, small changes can recalibrate large philosophical and narrative aspects of the rest of the film. This is why my versional analysis advocates for an expansive position. Being able to view and compare both versions allows me to chart a history of the different ways in which the film may have registered with audiences over its analogue and digital lives. Only by accepting and reviewing both versions of the film is that made apparent.

Ultimately these images, whether still or flickering, are a metaphor for the argument of the film *Proof* itself. Images are not to be trusted, because they are neither stable nor static objects. They change over time, just as those who view and witness them change over time. Authenticity is unattainable, and it will not be found deeply embedded in the information of an image. Again, only by advancing an expansive approach of reading multiple versions against each other, and examining their historical and sociopolitical context, is it possible to try and assess these changes and, in turn, determine what they might mean.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to provoke the idea that deeply creative work is already underway in restoration initiatives like the NFSA Restores program, but that it is difficult to see this work when it is masked behind modesty, effacement and perceived institutional obligations to objectivity and impartiality. I have also argued that, by taking an expansive approach to considering multiple versions of films, including restored and

unrestored versions, it is possible to begin to identify this creative work and the palimpsests and layers it occupies within the NFSA.

In this final case study chapter on *Proof*, I have sought to demonstrate that, even when the restoration process does not require a negotiation of different content between different versions, other changes—including small and subtle adjustments to colour, and even the process of digitisation itself—can have profound effects. By situating these subtle yet impactful changes within a framework that considers restoration’s broader implications, I aim to contribute to discourse on archival theory. These theories, point toward a vision of archival practice that embraces change and ephemerality. This perspective acknowledges the inherent dynamism of collections, emphasising that archives, like the works they preserve, evolve over time rather than remain static.³³⁹

Proof’s restoration as part of the NFSA Restores program is thus a live, dynamic record of not only the Australian film canon, not only the unrestored 35mm version of the film, but also of the very nature of digital restoration as a practice, and the resources required to enact it. Throughout this thesis I have argued that versional analysis allows us to uncover the creative and generative work of film archival practice and restoration at the NFSA. I now turn to my final chapter, where I conclude by framing the continuing evolution of this creative practice, and exploring the specifics of its institutionality. Consider, for example, that different kinds of versioning exist outside the archive, motivated not by heritage nor national image, but by other focuses and impulses, for example, piracy.

³³⁹ Joanne Evans, Sue McKemmish, and Greg Rolan, “Critical Archiving and Recordkeeping Research and Practice in the Continuum,” *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (June 22, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v1i2.35>; Joanne Evans and Jacqueline Z. Wilson, “Inclusive Archives and Recordkeeping: Towards a Critical Manifesto,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 24, no. 8 (September 14, 2018): 857–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2018.1428671>.

CONCLUSION

Notional Film and Sound Archive

In June of 2020 YouTube user ‘Supreme Wizard of Jahanism’ uploaded the entirety of *Petersen* (1974, dir. Tim Burstall) to their channel. Within two years of this upload, the video had surpassed 3.5 million views. This was surprising, given that the channel had 9000 subscribers and every other video uploaded by Supreme Wizard of Jahanism related to motorcycle repair. Stranger still was the fact that this lesser-known Australian film, garnered international attention almost half a century after its theatrical release. In fact, this bootlegged version of the sexually violent drama starring Jack Thompson as an electrician who decides to pursue an arts degree, has now been seen by millions of YouTube viewers around the world. The act of viewing this film on YouTube, it appears, has also been an act of versioning. Indeed, the high levels of viewership for *Petersen* indicate the piecemeal way in which a version of the film has been consumed online as softcore pornography.

In 2022 – the peak in the video’s viewership - most were a simple string of numbers, for example: “12:28” or “58:37.”

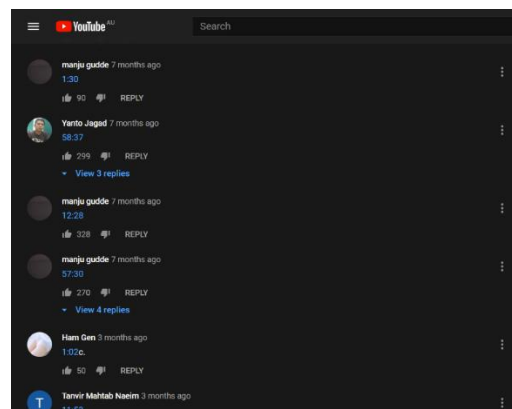


Figure 4 - YouTube comments on *Petersen* Bootleg Upload

Each of these numbers was automatically converted by YouTube into a hyperlink that jumped to the relevant timecode in the video, and each one, when clicked, took the user to a sex scene. Moreover, each of these sex scenes featured full-frontal nudity and sexual acts - both of which are expressly forbidden on the YouTube platform. In Google's 'Nudity & Sexual Content Policy' this is addressed under 'Examples.' The policy prohibits:

- Clips extracted from non-pornographic films, shows, or other content in order to isolate sexual content (real world or artistic)
- Groping, kissing, public masturbation, "upskirting", voyeurism, predatory exhibitionism, or any other content that depicts someone in a sexualized manner without their consent
- Content that depicts sexual acts, behaviors, or sex toys that are meant for sexual gratification

Note: The above are just some examples. If you think content might violate this policy, don't post it.³⁴⁰

The upload of *Petersen*, at least initially, managed to circumvent these rules. This may be because the explicit acts were not presented as extracted clips but were embedded within the film as a whole. But the viewers, who are perhaps better described as users, reconfigured the film so that the explicit material was foregrounded, as its own version of *Petersen*. As I stated in my Introduction, film versions shape and recreate our understanding of a film. The copyrighted version, the internationally distributed version, the restored version and the pirated version are formed in the context of political, financial and cultural imperatives that

³⁴⁰ Google, "Nudity & Sexual Content Policy - YouTube Help," n.d., <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2802002?hl=en#zippy=%2Cother-types-of-content-that-violate-this-policy%2Cmore-examples>.

both delimit and enfranchise creative and productive practices. Thus, the bootleg and pirated version of *Petersen* offers a way to think about the archival artefact of that film and the restorations of my case studies. My thesis has demonstrated the creative and generative practice that exists at the NFSA that is otherwise obscured by mission statements, governance and obligations to impartiality – all of which I describe as institutional modesty. The bootleg versioning of *Petersen* represents a rebuke to modesty, instead reimagining and reframing the film as a means or tool of showcasing nudity and sexual content on a platform that typically forbids such material.

The YouTube upload of *Petersen* is another kind of versioning and collecting process that exists outside the NFSA. When an Australian film exists in this way, the interventions of altruistic YouTubers, and invested viewers do something not unlike restoration. Using video editing software and YouTube's suite of tools, they modernise and revise a film to present it as a new version. In this particular case, the participating users create not just one film version, but many (broken into smaller clips) as organised through a common interest in sexually explicit imagery.

Petersen is an apt choice for such an unorthodox archival approach to digital restoration. Dermody and Jacka describe it as director Tim Burstall's:

...anti-intellectual, anti-middle-class stand [which] typifies elements in Australian culture which have left deep marks on the films and the film-cultural environment.³⁴¹

It is not surprising then that *Petersen*'s material thrives outside of the constraints of a national, cultural institution. Based on the online comments it is, in fact, the anti-establishment sexual material in the film that garners the most attention for a willing

³⁴¹ Dermody and Jacka, *The Screening of Australia*, 120.

YouTube audience. However, this upload does not meet the standard definition of restoration – the film versions created by Supreme Wizard and his viewers are not traditionally enhanced or repaired versions of the film. Indeed, the sole focus of this act of sharing a film with a wider YouTube audience is to mediatise that film using contemporary technology. Rather than prioritising an update to the visual and aural quality of the film, its colour accuracy, and the replication of a filmic quality, this non-archival, unauthorised version of the film is free to access, and available instantly. Nonetheless, despite these differing priorities, there are parallels between the aims of digital restoration at the NFSA and the YouTube uploaded versions of *Petersen*.

These pirate uploaders create a punk version of *Petersen* that is expansive. It is a kind of versioning project that can navigate and recalibrate the complex media environment Australian film occupies in the 21st century. On YouTube, for the uploader, there is no hesitation, or modesty that masks the creative value of this expansion. By contrast in official or national archives, such as have been examined throughout this thesis, the creative work of digital restoration is buried beneath layers of institutional anxiety.

This thesis has argued that the kind of creative and productive versioning practice seen in *Petersen* on YouTube, does exist at the NFSA. But it is difficult to appraise and to perceive because it is obscured by institutional principles and practices of archiving. My thesis has sought to demonstrate that a method for understanding and reckoning with the value of this creative practice is to apply versional analysis and compare the film versions within the collection. Only by reading them against one another and considering both the contexts in which they were created and the staff who contributed to their creation, is it possible to see these changes. This analysis then reveals the palimpsestic texture of the restoration—the interconnectedness of film versions and the way each iteration engages in dialogue. Indeed, my thesis explores and acknowledges the key forms of generative and

creative labour that are already underway that serve to enrich and deepen Australian audiovisual heritage.

National Film and Sound Archive

At the time of writing, the NFSA has celebrated its 40th birthday. In those 40 years the remit and scope of the institution and its personnel has continued to evolve. New strategic direction documents advocate for a broader interpretation of the archive's remit and collection. This new language (terms like “identity, curiosity and form” and “cultural experience platform”) is a result of the shift towards modern corporate branding and governance at the NFSA, but also signals a legitimate interest in redefining the labour and output of the Archive.³⁴² My thesis has seized upon this moment of redefinition to argue that the specific potential of the NFSA as a state-based, national cultural institution, is to not just leverage the resources, technology and expertise at its disposal to create new film versions, but to advocate for – and share the extent to which – its staff actively and expertly participate in the creative revision and construction of new film versions. Moreover, I argue that this process is ongoing.

“I don’t do any of the sexy work.” – Patrick O’Connor, senior conservator

Throughout the thesis, I have drawn on John T. Caldwell’s argument in his book *Production Culture* to explore ideas of self-theorisation and self-effacement. These concepts illustrate how workers at the NFSA are deeply creative and thoughtful, but frequently make themselves invisible under the weight of archival principles, and the imperative to faithfully represent a filmmaker’s vision. Caldwell’s work investigates and explicates the cultural dimensions of Hollywood filmmaking labour. He re-examines Hollywood as an amorphous entity encompassing smaller, equally compelling “production cultures.” Within these structures, hundreds, if not thousands of workers contribute to creating art and commerce, yet creativity,

³⁴² NFSA, “NFSA Collection Policy 2022”; NFSA, “NFSA Strategic Direction 2022-2025.”

vision, and intent are selectively attributed to “above-the-line” talent, such as actors, directors, and producers.

While Archives are not Caldwell’s focus, I have argued in this thesis that restoration at the NFSA functions similarly to a Hollywood production culture in this respect. As a large organisation, the NFSA relies on compartmentalised labour when producing a restoration, but ultimately defers to the perceived vision of the original creator and copyright holder. In Hollywood, that creator is typically an actual presence. At the NFSA however, the filmmaker haunts the restoration and archiving processes in one of two ways. They may be absent, their presence evoked through the staff’s deference to their reputation, legacy, and an imagined vision for the film. Alternatively, they may haunt as a physically present figure, actively involved in the process—consulting with staff, reviewing their work, and approving the restoration based on their personal history and memories.

The filmmaker’s vision and the copyright holder’s permission remain primary influences around which the restoration is configured at the NFSA. To uncover the creative work existing beneath this archival “deference”, I have treated restorations as palimpsests – arguments made up of layers and highlights of other versions. My approach reveals the processes and artistry at play in a restored version. These are elements that can challenge or complicate the institution’s official language, which tends to favour memorialising the filmmaker’s vision. Again, Caldwell’s approach offered valuable insights for my methodological approach. In his conclusion Caldwell reflects on the importance of speaking to below-the-line workers:

Addressing film/television work as cultural negotiation and self-representation dramatized for me fundamental changes in industry vividly and very differently than did abstract generalizations about corporate economic practices.³⁴³

Similarly, one of the most illuminating parts of the methodological process of this thesis were the interviews I conducted with NFSA staff. I interviewed them after having watched the film versions they worked on. My versional analyses have demonstrated that restorations provide fertile ground for uncovering embedded acts of interpretation and curation that shape our audiovisual heritage. In so doing they explore the hidden capacities of archivists and restorers to engage - whether unwittingly or deliberately - in creative acts of film production.

In my interviews it was evident that archival staff expressed deference to the notion of a filmmaker's original expression of their film. Further, they appeared to advocate for the "original" expression as the ethical goal of restoration. The contradiction inherent in this claim to deference to the filmmakers' vision while continuing to create and change the film in line with a restoration aesthetic reflects some of the higher-order debates and tensions in scholarly treatments of restoration. Giovanna Fossati, whose book *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition* has also informed this thesis, describes the way those working on restoration must reconcile different emphases. She writes:

I have argued that human mediation can be [a] carrier of the authenticity from an original film artifact to its restoration. In view of the remediation concept, the task of a film restorer is that of finding the subtle line between immediacy (be true to the artifact) and hypermediacy (be true to the medium). In other words, the restorer can choose immediacy, making the viewer forget the medium of restoration (either photochemical, digital or a mix of the two), or hypermediacy, reminding the viewer of

³⁴³ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 2008, 342.

the restoration process... Most restorers, however, will aim for something in between immediacy and hypermediacy, depending on their framework of reference.³⁴⁴

For Fossati, in this particular approach to restoration, archivists and restorers are negotiating a compromise between “medium” and “artifact.” In effect, Fossati concedes that process will inevitably be visible in every restoration. However, she also argues that striving for the experience of immediacy, and the sensation of being returned to the original experience of the film helps to justify the act of restoration. My findings, however, have determined that this negotiation or compromise is weak at best. It is not the case that restorers and archivists strive to allow only a limited amount of process to bleed into the experience of the restoration. Instead, the hypermediated response is unavoidable, and is, I argue, intrinsically linked to, and informs and shapes, the immediate response. The restoration cannot recreate an authentic nor original experience because that experience never existed in any pure form. As this thesis has demonstrated, versioning occurs even when watching a film in its original release window.

In 2023, Martin Scorsese’s *Killers of the Flower Moon* had a modified theatrical release in Australia. The version that screened in cinemas was missing approximately three seconds of footage cut from the international release version. Those three seconds would have earned the film a restricted MA15+ classification, but by removing them the film was lowered to an unrestricted M classification which allowed for a potentially larger market share.³⁴⁵ Active members of the Australian branch of the blu-ray.com forum, decried this change, with some even posting that they would boycott the theatrical release and await a

³⁴⁴ Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel the Archival Life of Film in Transition*, 139.

³⁴⁵ Australian Classification Board, “Killers of the Flower Moon,” Text (Australian Classification, October 12, 2023), <https://www.classification.gov.au/titles/killers-flower-moon-0>.

streaming or physical release that contained those additional three seconds.³⁴⁶ If, in 40 years' time, *Killers of the Flower Moon* was restored, then retrieving the original experience of "immediacy" for Australian audiences would prove problematic. The restoration effort would require a careful negotiation of the context in which different audiences saw the film, and audience perspectives on what constituted the "original" version.

What I aim to illustrate with this contemporary example is that in order to offer an experience of immediacy to a modern audience, this audience must also be invited to understand the specific context that underpins a given restoration. In this way, the space between hypermediacy and immediacy that Fossati imagines, does exist - not as a compromise, but as a fruitful dialogue that teaches audiences about the technological and industrial histories of the films they are revisiting. The most enriched restored version is one that offers purchase on the feeling of returning to older experiences of the film, while also scaffolding the process that makes that simulation of experience possible.

At the NFSA, this negotiation of process and content is, I argue, the primary space for creative work that is undertaken by their staff and personnel. However, because of their obligations to principles of technical archival practice, and deference to the filmmaker's vision, this creative work is masked. In order to unmask that work I have further argued each restoration should be viewed as an argument for that version of the film. I have drawn on Paul Eggert's analogous framing of the book edition as argument, throughout the thesis, to further illustrate this idea.

In Eggert's concluding chapter, he muses on the potential of digital literary spaces and archives to continue to expand the argumentative potential of the edition. He writes:

³⁴⁶ Blu-ray Forum, "Killers of the Flower Moon Censored in Australia - Blu-Ray Forum," n.d., <https://forum.blu-ray.com/showthread.php?t=366933>.

As I see it, because the work unfolds over time it can, in principle, never be completely comprehended editorially. In this special sense ‘workediting’ is never fully achievable. Instead, editors survey the process – usually only part of it, typically the versions from the author’s lifetime – and then intervene editorially. Such editions-as-argument about the constitution of the work’s text or texts, selected from one or more parts of its history, are perfectly feasible. Each of them operates under the sign of the work, a fact that the electronic work-site or workbench – where one draws on the digital archive of the work and where editorial operations may be performed with tools provided or called up for the purpose – will make more and more obvious to us. A more expansive capturing of the work’s journey through time becomes feasible.³⁴⁷

Indeed, this is the most compelling part of treating editions or film versions as arguments: they can continue to evolve and change. Restoration is regularly burdened within and without cultural institutions with the framing of being “definitive” or “ultimate.”³⁴⁸ But this expansive approach of viewing versions and restorations as arguments allows for a continued, and open-ended discourse that regularly revises and reshapes the way we understand these films and their relationship to audiovisual heritage. This is what I have aimed to demonstrate throughout this thesis. Each case study is designed to explore the different creative and generative ways that versions of films in the NFSA’s collections expand and interrogate core concepts of Australianness, materiality and heritage.

Unrestored version of this thesis

Each chapter in this thesis has contributed to a broader argument that I have been making: only an expansive and evolving approach to reading multiple versions of films against one

³⁴⁷ Eggert, *Work and the Reader in Literary Studies: Scholarly Editing and Book History*, 174.

³⁴⁸ Entertainment, “Wake in Fright 4K Restoration.”

another, locating the creative and generative labour of staff, and situating these processes within their broader cultural, political, and institutional contexts—including funding structures—can serve to chart the relationship between a cultural institution like the NFSA and the dynamism of Australia’s audiovisual heritage.

In my first chapter, I examined the NFSA’s pilot efforts to digitise and restore *Wake in Fright*, demonstrating that the restored film version was shaped as much by the technical labour of repairing and reworking analogue materials as it was by the creative interventions of staff at all levels.³⁴⁹ This restoration was deeply informed by the film’s history of near-loss and rediscovery, which infused each step of the process with a sense of urgency and significance. Between the unrestored and restored versions, I analysed the archivists and restorationist’s arguments, as they shifted and remapped the film’s emphases on nostalgia, national cinema identity, and history.

My interviews with Buckley and Simon revealed the nuanced relationship between restorer and filmmaker. Simon’s decision to “rectify” visual material that had previously obscured details was guided by his belief that every restoration choice was anchored to the filmmaker’s original vision. For the NFSA and its staff, the association of *Wake in Fright* with its near-loss profoundly influenced how the film was and is now perceived and understood. The urgency to restore the film and the relief at its rediscovery shaped the restoration narrative as much as the technical process itself.

Chapter 1 also explored how cultural institutions like the NFSA configure themselves to produce restorations like *Wake in Fright*. While much of the chapter compared the unrestored and restored versions of the film, I also examined how the narrative surrounding

³⁴⁹ I use the term pilot here, based on the indication from my research that the restoration of *Wake in Fright* broke new ground – and facilitated the eventual NFSA Restores program. However, importantly, the NFSA does not refer to the restoration of *Wake in Fright* as a pilot for the NFSA Restores program.

the film's restoration and its technical processes influence how both the old and new versions are now represented. Evidently, the NFSA's restoration, and the recent second restoration undertaken by Umbrella Entertainment, demonstrates that *Wake in Fright* will continue to be versioned into the future.³⁵⁰ The film will continue to be revised, its status as a transnational production, and national film, will change its meaning for present and future generations.

My second chapter, on the restoration and versioning of *Starstruck*, examined the NFSA's management of the film's multiple histories, and how selecting for one of these histories would affect the perceived Australianness of the restored version. I presented the restoration of *Starstruck* as a site of crisis, via the theoretical framing provided by Eggert. *Starstruck*'s restoration makes interventionist decisions that challenge and reconfigure the role Australia and, specifically, Sydney play in the broader context of the film. In this way the restoration acts as a diplomatic bridge between the shorter American version and the extended length Australian theatrical release. This negotiation of the material relies on a robust relationship between the NFSA and the film's two key creative figures, director Gillian Armstrong, and producer David Elfick.

The decisions made in response to the preferences of Armstrong and Elfick create their own new fertile ground from which other workers are able to intervene and engage critically with the material. Modesty and self-effacement continue to disguise that work, as does the infrastructural design of the Archive. But as my interview with James Campbell, senior conservator illuminates, the compartmentalised aspects of archiving do as much to minimise the labour and creativity of these workers, as they do to provide the requisite justification and lack of scrutiny to encourage creative work.

³⁵⁰ See [Page 125](#)

The restoration of *Starstruck* is an argument for the American version's material, but it also, by extension, then informs the way the earlier Australian version's material operates into the future. Images and iconography of Sydney in the 1980s are vivid across both unrestored and restored versions of the film. But the excision of certain specific material for the restoration recalibrates the experience of the film towards something more streamlined and generic. Only by taking an expansive view, and considering all versions of the film in concert, is it possible to see the influences of the NFSA on *Starstruck*'s enduring contribution to audiovisual heritage.

My discussion of *Bliss* in Chapter 3, similarly analyses the management of multiple international and domestic versions of a single film. In this instance however, the NFSA becomes engaged in redemptive work. The NFSA's focus on the difficult premiere screening of *Bliss* at Cannes has impacted the film's legacy. The Restores program's capacity for the dialogue between hypermediacy and immediacy allows the Cannes controversy to become historical, and while important, it is no longer the critical frame through which to view the film in the 21st Century.

This chapter investigates the structures and language of the Archive and its representation of a kind of cultural mode or performance. My invocation of the NFSA's "restoration aesthetic" in this chapter serves to demonstrate the continuities between each of the case-studies in my thesis. The NFSA is, via *Bliss*, building a shape and palette for how its Archival restorations look and sound across their entire collection. The distinct audiovisual elements of their digital restoration cohere around a house style that shares traits across all NFSA Restores titles. This, I argue, helps in fashioning a response to the paradox of restoration that I also articulate in this chapter namely that in order to return to the past, you must create something new. The pressure to resolve the distance between something being old and new, can only be relieved I argue, by embracing the creative work that continues at

the NFSA. The palimpsest of restoration allows the visibility of process and choice to sit on top of the celebration and memorialisation of iconic films from the Australian canon.

In my final case study chapter on *Proof* I argue that even subtle changes made for the restoration, have substantial and profound effects on the way that digital restoration can be read and understood into the future. The restoration of *Proof* represents an anomaly in the NFSA Restores catalogue as it directly engaged the public to crowdfund resources for restoration services. The NFSA's framing of digitisation through a language of urgency through this public-facing method created a symbolic narrative whereby digital restoration became a visible means to rescue fragile material from obscurity. NFSA Ambassador Margaret Pomeranz implored the public to help "save" the film. This framing, I argue, inevitably also perpetuates the effacement of creativity by presenting digital treatments as necessary acts of salvation, rather than as obvious opportunities for artistry.

This final case study also positions the NFSA Restores, and its restored versions, against the backdrop of movements toward an alternative archive theory. I argue that in order to further foreground the generative work of archivists at the NFSA it is necessary to recognise film versions and objects in the collection as dynamic and continuous.³⁵¹ Moreover, the chapter invokes Smith's discussion of Authorised Heritage Discourse to challenge an essentialised account of versioning and restoration practices.³⁵² The conclusion drawn is that the material from which the restoration of any film at the NFSA is derived, must not be understood as inherently valuable, instead it is the act of connecting the analogue to the digital, and the archivist to the object that creates and nurtures heritage.

³⁵¹ See also Evans, McKemmish, and Rolan, "Critical Archiving and Recordkeeping Research and Practice in the Continuum."

³⁵² Smith, *Uses of Heritage*.

The restoration of *Proof* becomes a film not just digitised from analogue material, but itself an audiovisual narrative about the indexicality and authenticity of different mediums throughout the history of cinema. Process and art merge, creating something new and only possible via the decision making of staff working on the restoration.

Zach Karpinellison restores his thesis

I have endeavoured in this thesis to advocate for a more expansive and critical understanding of film versions, and restorations. I believe that these concepts are constrained by an expectation of institutional modesty and overcommitment to the clarity and sustainability of a filmmaker's vision. The NFSA Restores program, and the programs that preceded it like Kodak AtLab, have created a catalogue of new versions of classic Australian films. This is evident not only in the films considered in this thesis, but in other restorations. The recent restoration of PJ Hogan and Jocelyn Moorhouse's *Muriel's Wedding* (premiered 4th of December 2024) is saturated with electric colours that celebrate the film's fun, whimsy and intensity. Meanwhile, the meticulous lighting and exposure adjustments in the 2023 restoration of Peter Weir's *The Cars that Ate Paris* represents a significant change to the way rural Australia has been represented by the NFSA since their digital restoration of *Wake in Fright* 15 years ago. But these newer restorations, and all those that came before, are not presented through this lens of compelling interventions and changes made in service of representing a new version of Australian cinema history.

Instead, every choice and every change is housed within a language of justification that routinely dismisses the artistry of personnel at the archive, in favour of the pedestalled copyright-holder and filmmaker. Of course, it is important to note that the NFSA is not unique in deferring to the authority of the filmmaker. This is the default practice of many archives, and private imprints that do restoration work. At the NFSA this deference is also

legally enshrined by the requirement for permission from rightsholders and filmmakers before undertaking a restoration.³⁵³ Moreover, the NFSA has legislative mandates that shape the language it can use and it is a member organisation of several international bodies that also govern the way restoration work, and all conservation and preservation work, must take place, and be documented.³⁵⁴

This leaves my thesis in a strange position. I am claiming that creative work does exist at the NFSA, despite restrictions and constraints. In some ways the NFSA has developed a delicate framework that allows this work to continue, while arguably disguising and protecting it behind layers of governance and executive management. My research has shown that the staff who restore and care for these films are contributing to the look, shape and feel of Australian audiovisual heritage. Rather than seeing this as a negative however, it is clear that their interventions into these digital restorations are arguments for a new way to see films from the Australian canon in a contemporary setting. They resist reducing the films to essential matter, and instead make decisions and selections about parts of those films that they want to adjust and accentuate for restoration. But they are also compelled by the legal and policy mission of the NFSA to efface their labour, so as not to infringe upon the integrity and consistency of the filmmakers whose work they restore.

As I come to the end of this research, my argument has begun to evolve away from attempting to imagine a new structure or theory for the NFSA that would nurture this creativity. Instead, I advocate for a form of scholarship and criticism that can develop the tools I used in this thesis to identify and analyse this hidden creative work from outside the institution. As scholars we are uniquely positioned to conduct versional analysis and to speak

³⁵³ *National Film and Sound Archive Act 2008* (Cth) s6

³⁵⁴ *NFSA Act 2008*

to employees at all levels of an organisation, to gain insight into the people and films that are literally and dynamically changing our history every day. My hope is that this research could be adapted to consider other state-based film archiving institutions, or cognate cultural institutions around the world. Comparing the versions of objects that archivists work on becomes a productive exercise in charting and mapping how these institutions both inform and read contemporary and historical society.

In my interview with former NFSA Director Meg Labrum she described the Archive as still in an ongoing and nascent stage of development. For Labrum the NFSA has and will always be attempting to redefine itself:

The bottom-line question for the archive, is always: “What do you actually want from us?”

In this thesis, I have made the case that the answer to that question is always “what do you actually want us to want?”

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APPENDIX

[illegible]

BLISS	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2015]	1:50:00	Digital	Quicktime Movie [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2015]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2015]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2015]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2015]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2015]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2015]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2015]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital		Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	eXtensible Markup Language [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	Material eXchange Format [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	eXtensible Markup Language	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	MPEG-4 Video	Access/Browsing copy
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Digital	Quicktime Movie	Access/Browsing copy
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	SNB&WOVAA	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	PP{C}CA	Access Copy
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	PP{C}CA	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	PP{C}CA	Preservation Material

BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	PP{C}C1.33A	Access Copy
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	PP{C}C1.33A	Access Copy
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	PP{C}C1.33A	Access Copy
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	PP{C}C1.33A	Access Copy
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	PP{C}C1.33A	Access Copy
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	DN{C}DA	Duping/Working Copy
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	SNB&WOA	Duping/Working Copy
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	DN{C}DA	Duping/Working Copy
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	IP{C1}D1.85:1A	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	MAGNAMMA	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	PP/W{C1}CA	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	FMAGNAMMA	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	DN{C1}A	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Film	SNB&WA	Duping/Working Copy
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Tape (Audio)	REEL102E24	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Tape (Audio)	REEL102E24	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Tape (Moving Image)	1C1	Preservation Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Tape (Moving Image)	DBC1/2	Duping/Working Copy
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Tape (Moving Image)	DBC1/2	Duping/Working Copy
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
BLISS	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:50:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
BLISS	[REHEARSAL]	0:22:40	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
BLISS	[TELEVISION VERSION]	1:44:00	Digital	Material eXchange Format [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[TELEVISION VERSION]	1:44:00	Digital	eXtensible Markup Language [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[TELEVISION VERSION]	1:44:00	Digital	eXtensible Markup Language	Preservation Material
BLISS	[TELEVISION VERSION]	1:44:00	Digital	MPEG-4 Video	Access/Browsing copy
BLISS	[TELEVISION VERSION]	1:44:00	Digital	Quicktime Movie	Access/Browsing copy
BLISS	[TELEVISION VERSION]	1:44:00	Tape (Moving Image)	1C1	Preservation Material
BLISS	[TELEVISION VERSION]	1:44:00	Tape (Moving Image)	DBC1/2	Duping/Working Copy

BLISS	[UNEDITED VERSION]	2:20:00	Digital	Quicktime Movie [ARC]	Distribution/Broadcast Copy
BLISS	[UNEDITED VERSION]	2:20:00	Digital	eXtensible Markup Language [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[UNEDITED VERSION]	2:20:00	Digital	Portable Document Format [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[UNEDITED VERSION]	2:20:00	Digital	Material eXchange Format [ARC]	Preservation Material
BLISS	[UNEDITED VERSION]	2:20:00	Digital	MPEG-4 Video	Access/Browsing copy
BLISS	[UNEDITED VERSION]	2:20:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Preservation Material
PETERSEN	[EDITED M RATED VERSION]	Not in Mediaflex	Film	DN{C1}A1.37:1A	Preservation Material
PETERSEN	[EDITED M RATED VERSION]	Not in Mediaflex	Film	SNB&WA	Duping/Working Copy
PETERSEN	[EDITED M RATED VERSION]	Not in Mediaflex	Film	MAGNAMMA	Preservation Material
PETERSEN	[EDITED M RATED VERSION]	Not in Mediaflex	Film	SNB&WA	Duping/Working Copy
PETERSEN	[EDITED M RATED VERSION]	Not in Mediaflex	Film	PP{C}CA	Access Copy
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Digital		Preservation Material
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Digital	Broadcast WAV Format	Preservation Material
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Digital	Quicktime Movie [ARC]	Distribution/Broadcast Copy
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Digital	MPEG-4 Video	Access/Browsing copy
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Disc (Audio)	MODUKO	Preservation Material
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Disc (Audio)	CDR6500	Preservation Material

PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Disc (Moving Image)	DVD120mmO	Access Copy
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Film	OPN{C1}A	Preservation Material
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Film	MAGNAMMA	Preservation Material
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Film	IP{C1}A	Preservation Material
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Film	SNB&WA	Duping/Working Copy
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Film	DN{C1}A1.37:1A	Duping/Working Copy
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Film	SNB&WA	Duping/Working Copy
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Film	PP{C1}CA	Archive Projection Copy
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Film	SNB&WA	Duping/Working Copy
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Tape (Audio)	DTRSCART8mmE	Preservation Material

PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Tape (Moving Image)	DBC1/2	Duping/Working Copy
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
PETERSEN	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:43:35	Tape (Moving Image)	HDC1/2	Preservation Material
PROOF	[DVD WITH SPECIAL FEATURES]	1:24:00	Disc (Moving Image)	DVD120mmO	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Quicktime Movie [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Quicktime Movie [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[NFSA RESTORED VERSION. 2016]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Digital		Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Digital		Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Digital		Distribution/Broadcast Copy
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Digital		Preservation Material

PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Disc (Moving Image)	DVDO	Access Copy
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Film	MAGNAMMUK	Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Film	DN{C1}A	Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Film	SNB&WA	Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Film	IP{C1}A1.37:1A	Duping/Working Copy
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Film	OPN{C1}A	Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Film	SNB&WA	Duping/Working Copy
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Film	DN{C1}A	Duping/Working Copy
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Film	PP{C}C1.85:1A	Access Copy
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Archive Projection Copy
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Tape (Audio)	RLSPL2A24	Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Tape (Moving Image)	DBC1/2	Preservation Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Tape (Moving Image)	DBC1/2	Duping/Working Copy
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
PROOF	[ORIGINAL RELEASE]	1:24:00	Tape (Moving Image)	DBC1/2	Duping/Working Copy
STARSTRUCK	[NFSA RESTORES]	1:32:47	Digital	Quicktime Movie [ARC]	Preservation Material
STARSTRUCK	[NFSA RESTORES]	1:32:47	Digital	Quicktime Movie [ARC]	Distribution/Broadcast Copy

STARSTRUCK	[NFSA RESTORES]	1:32:47	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
STARSTRUCK	[NFSA RESTORES]	1:32:47	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
STARSTRUCK	[NFSA RESTORES]	1:32:47	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material

STARSTRUCK	[NFSA RESTORES]	1:32:47	Digital	MPEG-4 Video	Access/Browsing copy
STARSTRUCK	[NFSA RESTORES]	1:32:47	Digital	MPEG-4 Video	Access/Browsing copy
STARSTRUCK	[NFSA RESTORES]	1:32:47	Digital	Quicktime Movie	Access/Browsing copy
STARSTRUCK	[NFSA RESTORES]	1:32:47	Tape (Moving Image)	HDCSR	Preservation Material
STARSTRUCK	[USA VERSION]	1:32:47	Digital		Preservation Material
STARSTRUCK	[USA VERSION]	1:32:47	Digital		Preservation Material
STARSTRUCK	[USA VERSION]	1:32:47	Digital	Broadcast WAV Format	Access/Browsing copy
STARSTRUCK	[USA VERSION]	1:32:47	Digital	Broadcast WAV Format	Access/Browsing copy
STARSTRUCK	[USA VERSION]	1:32:47	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
STARSTRUCK	[USA VERSION]	1:32:47	Film	PP{C1}CA	Preservation Material
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Digital		Preservation Material
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Digital		Preservation Material
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Digital	Broadcast WAV Format	Access/Browsing copy
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Digital	Broadcast WAV Format	Access/Browsing copy
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Deaccessioned Material
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Film	SNB&WA	Preservation Material
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Film	OPN{C1}A1.37:1A	Preservation Material
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Film	IP{C1}A	Preservation Material
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Film	DN{C1}A	Duping/Working Copy
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Film	SNB&WA	Duping/Working Copy
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Film	PP{C}CA	Access Copy
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Tape (Moving Image)	1C1	Duping/Working Copy

STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Access Copy
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
STARSTRUCK	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:45:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
STARSTRUCK : [VIDEO CLIP]	TITLE VERSION	0:03:16	Digital	Material eXchange Format [ARC]	Distribution/Broadcast Copy
STARSTRUCK : [VIDEO CLIP]	TITLE VERSION	0:03:16	Digital	eXtensible Markup Language [ARC]	Preservation Material
STARSTRUCK : [VIDEO CLIP]	TITLE VERSION	0:03:16	Digital	Material eXchange Format [ARC]	Preservation Material
STARSTRUCK : [VIDEO CLIP]	TITLE VERSION	0:03:16	Digital	Windows Media Video	Access/Browsing copy
STARSTRUCK : [VIDEO CLIP]	TITLE VERSION	0:03:16	Tape (Moving Image)	2H2HB	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008 : FRENCH RELEASE BOX SET]	1:49:00	Disc (Moving Image)	BR120mmO	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008 : FRENCH RELEASE BOX SET]	1:49:00	Disc (Moving Image)	DVD120mmO	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008 : FRENCH SUBTITLES]	1:49:00	Disc (Moving Image)	DVD120mmO	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008 : FRENCH SUBTITLES]	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Digital		Distribution/Broadcast Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Digital	Quicktime Movie [ARC]	Distribution/Broadcast Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Digital	TAR - DPX 2k [ARC]	Distribution/Broadcast Copy

WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Digital	TAR - DPX 2k [ARC]	Distribution/Broadcast Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material

WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Digital	MPEG-4 Video	Access/Browsing copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Disc (Audio)	MODUKO	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Disc (Moving Image)	DVDO	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Disc (Moving Image)	DVDO	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Disc (Moving Image)	DVDO	Deaccessioned Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Disc (Moving Image)	DVDO	Deaccessioned Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Film	SNUKOVAP	Duping/Working Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Film	DN{C}P	Duping/Working Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Film	PP{C}CP	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Film	PP/T{C}AP	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Film	PP{C}CP	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Film	PP{C}CP	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Film	PP/T{C1}CA	Reference Only
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Film	PP{C1}CA	Archive Projection Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Film	PP{C1}CA	Archive Projection Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Film	IP{C1}AA	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Tape (Moving Image)	DBC1/2	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Tape (Moving Image)	DBC1/2	Duping/Working Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Tape (Moving Image)	DBC1/2	Duping/Working Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Tape (Moving Image)	LTO4	Preservation Material

WAKE IN FRIGHT	[RESTORED VERSION 2008]	1:44:32	Tape (Moving Image)	LTO4	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Digital	Broadcast WAV Format	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Digital	Broadcast WAV Format	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Digital	Broadcast WAV Format	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Digital	Broadcast WAV Format	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Digital	Broadcast WAV Format	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Digital	Broadcast WAV Format	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Disc (Moving Image)	DVDO	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	MAGNAMMA	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	OPN{C}A	Preservation Material

WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	DN{C1}A	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CP	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CBA	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CBA	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Access Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	SNB&WA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	R(I)N{C1}AA	Registration

WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	MAGNAMMUK	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	SNB&WA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	MAGNAMMA	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	PP{C1}CA	Deaccessioned Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	OPN{C}A	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	SNB&WA	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	MAGNAMMA	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Film	MAGNAMMA	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Tape (Moving Image)	1C1	Duping/Working Copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Tape (Moving Image)	BA1/2O	Deaccessioned Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Tape (Moving Image)	[Unknown]	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Tape (Moving Image)	[Unknown]	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Tape (Moving Image)	VA1/2	Deaccessioned Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Tape (Moving Image)	[Unknown]	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Tape (Moving Image)	[Unknown]	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Tape (Moving Image)	[Unknown]	Registration
WAKE IN FRIGHT	ORIGINAL RELEASE	1:49:00	Tape (Moving Image)	[Unknown]	Registration

[illegible]

WAKE IN FRIGHT : [TALKING BOOK]	TITLE VERSION	Not in Mediaflex	Digital	MPEG-1 Layer-3 Audio	Reference Only
WAKE IN FRIGHT : [TALKING BOOK]	TITLE VERSION	Not in Mediaflex	Digital	Broadcast WAV Format	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT : [TALKING BOOK]	TITLE VERSION	Not in Mediaflex	Tape (Audio)	TBMCCART1/4E	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT ; SUNSHINE	TITLE VERSION	Not in Mediaflex	Disc (Audio)	LP7V	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT ; SUNSHINE	TITLE VERSION	Not in Mediaflex	Disc (Audio)	ST7V	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT. PT 1	TITLE VERSION	1:24:08	Digital	Quicktime Movie [ARC]	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT. PT 1	TITLE VERSION	1:24:08	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT. PT 1	TITLE VERSION	1:24:08	Digital	Windows Media Video	Access/Browsing copy
WAKE IN FRIGHT. PT 2	TITLE VERSION	1:26:34	Digital	Quicktime Movie [ARC]	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT. PT 2	TITLE VERSION	1:26:34	Digital	Tape Archive File - TAR [ARC]	Preservation Material
WAKE IN FRIGHT. PT 2	TITLE VERSION	1:26:34	Digital	Windows Media Video	Access/Browsing copy